

Sergei Mokhnatkin

(Spent almost 2 years in prison)

The jam session.

When you're on day ten or thereabouts of a hunger strike and you're banging with your fist for an hour or an hour and a half on the door of the ShIZO [*penalty isolator—Trans.*] cell that they had put you in precisely because of your hunger strike, you understand that that it won't be the door, but your fist, that is going to swell up. To take people out for an exercise walk twice – one time all the ShIZO-niks, and another time just the hunger striker – is clearly not a bummer for the trash [*prison staff, guards, etc.—Trans.*]. Solitude does have its advantages of course, but it's also got its minuses. If they do end up taking you out for your exercise after all, the floor in the narrow little cement yard is going to be swept clean, and there won't be even a single cigarette butt lying there.

You don't always have a wooden floor in a ShIZO; here, you could say, I've lucked out. Under the little window in the cell are pipes, through which warm water flows. Winter is not summer, that's why the windows doesn't shut and the panes have been knocked out. On the contrary, in the summer they is going to be battened down and panes will be put in. The narrow crevice under the cell door sucks in a bit of a draft, but if you throw one of the towels they haven't yet taken away onto your head, then it's excellent, and all the more so if you even manage to find something to put on the floor. There is already a report for such a violation, so everything's ready for the next ShIZO. One more report isn't going to change the weather. Nor is it going to make the spring come.

And you sit down on the floor, pressing your back against the pipes.

Time to call your friends.

The first to come floating by are Satchmo and Ellachka Fitz, then the Duke, Count Basie, and Dorothy Donnegan. Skawroński is going come running up out of breath and all apologies. The Dooley Family and Pink Floyd are going to come tumbling in in full force - a bit too many, of course, but we'll scoot over. The last to come are Steve Wonder and Ray Charles, completely in the positive as always. Even Paul Robeson is here somewhere.

And we don't pass the time badly, nobody's bothering us. And we don't make much noise at all. Our little session is exclusively for us and us alone, not for the public. In a couple of hours the daytime orderly is going to be pounding away again, demanding together with the trash that the hunger strike cease, poking the stinking porridge into the little window, pressing on a bundle of nerves. But for now we need to try out a new chord in what would seem to be such old things.

My back has warmed up, my head stops spinning, and everything is coming into complete order.

In a week the trash are going to promise something and I'll get out into the detachment.

And I'll say goodbye to my "friends". But we'll still be seeing each other around.

We're going to trick the trash one way or another anyway.