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In the Spotlight

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The flamboyant pop star Filipp Kirkorov has dominated the tabloids this week after he reportedly hit a director's assistant at a concert rehearsal. She showed off a large bruise on her thigh, while in a bizarre twist, Kirkorov complained he suffered from "fits" and fled to a psychiatric hospital in Israel.

Kirkorov, a towering figure with a taste for black eyeliner and flashy Roberto Cavalli outfits, has never left the headlines since marrying the nation's favorite pop diva Alla Pugachyova in 1994, although they divorced in 2005.

His most memorable ballads, delivered with oodles of showmanship, also date back to those years. "I Lift My Glass" and "My Little Hare" are engraved on the memory of anyone who lived through the 1990s, whether they like it or not.

He has had several public temper tantrums, including one when he told a journalist that he did not like her "tits," but this is the worst by far.

Marina Yablokova, a director's assistant for the Golden Gramophone song contest, told the

Tvoi Den tabloid on Monday that Kirkorov hit her on the face, then kicked her and dragged her by the hair. She rolled up her dress to reveal a bruise on her thigh.

Moscow police confirmed on Tuesday that they were investigating the incident, and Yablokova's lawyer said Thursday that she had filed a suit at a magistrates' court.

In a very odd message posted on his web site on Tuesday, Kirkorov wrote that he wanted to apologize to Yablokova "personally and publicly" and called his behavior "inappropriate."

He blamed some unspecified malaise. "Probably I am seriously ill," he wrote. "Twice a year I have serious fits, as a result of which I don't remember anything and don't realize what I'm doing."

"Only now do I realize that I need serious treatment," he said.

Kirkorov's press secretary told Gazeta.ru on Thursday that the singer was in a psychiatric hospital in Israel.

Lawyer Leonid Olshansky told Komsomolskaya Pravda that a possible defense in such cases is that the client could not control his actions. He added that Kirkorov would have to be pronounced mentally unbalanced by Russian psychiatrists, something unlikely to go down well with his fans.

The incident happened as Kirkorov rehearsed with Anna Netrebko, the Mariinsky soprano, who is taking ill-advised steps into the world of pop.

Kirkorov complained about the lighting and argued with Yablokova before attacking her, the show's director, Andrei Sychev, told KP.

Singer Valery Meladze told KP that Kirkorov broke an unspoken rule that the stars should respect behind-the-scenes staff. "No one is allowed to humiliate another person," he said.

Only Netrebko told Komsomolskaya Pravda that Yablokova "was lying" and she saw no fight. She has recorded a warbling duet with Kirkorov called "The Voice," a somewhat ironic choice given Kirkorov's frequent use of lip syncing.

Periodically, people come forward to say Kirkorov has treated them badly — usually staff in the provincial theaters where he tours.

In the most notorious case in 2004, Kirkorov abused a journalist in Rostov-on-Don who asked him why he sang so many cover versions. "I'm sick of your pink top and your tits," he said.

The bad publicity could hardly come at a worse moment for Kirkorov. The New Year's holidays are the time for pop stars to earn money, lip syncing for television extravaganzas and performing at big companies' Christmas parties.

Other pop stars have distanced themselves from Kirkorov.

Singer Valeriya told Tvoi Den that she was "horrified" by what she called a crime.

“Kirkorov has done everything to ruin his career. The public is unlikely to forgive his beating a woman,” pop-opera singer Nikolai Baskov told Tvoi Den.

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