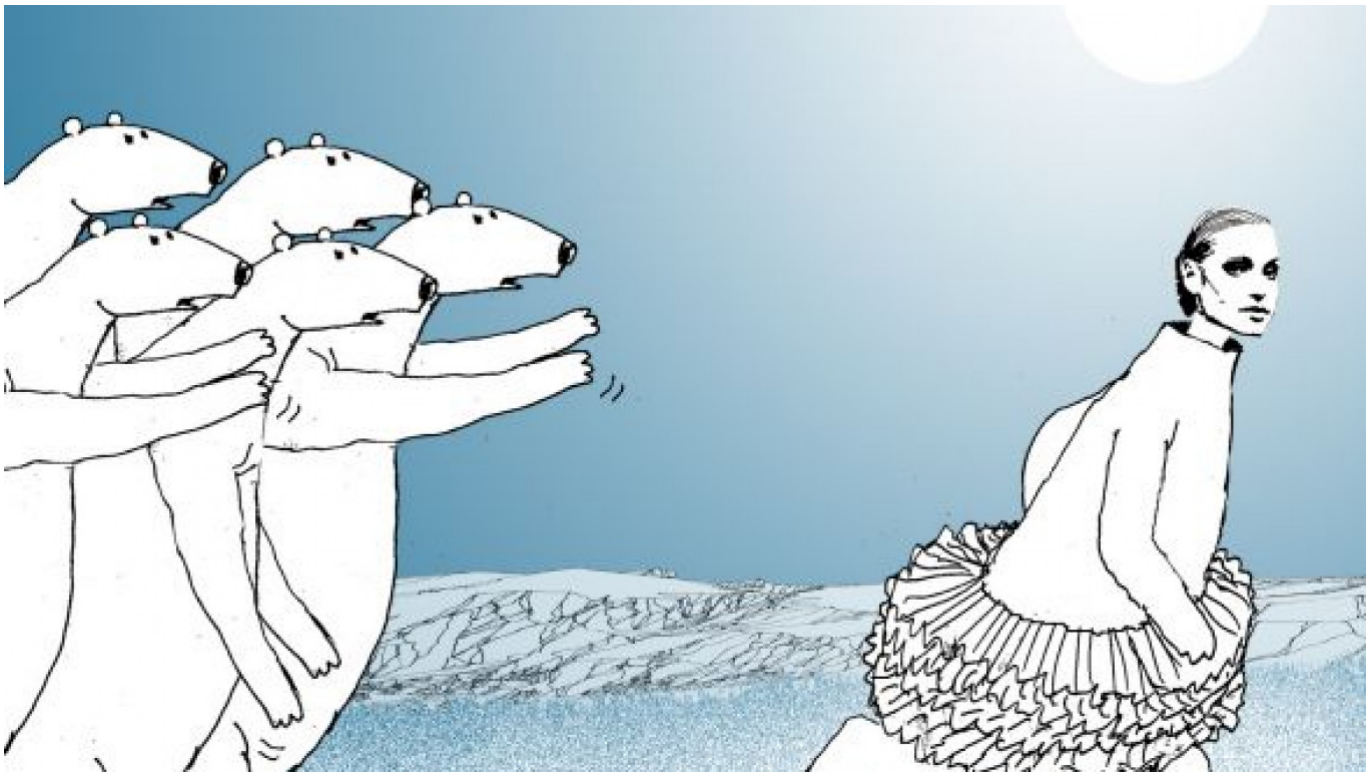
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

In the Spotlight: Backdated Apologies

By Anna Malpas

February 03, 2011



This week, ballerina Anastasia Volochkova emerged as a staunch supporter of jailed oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky, five years after signing a letter backing his jail sentence. Bloggers buzzed at the prospect of Vladimir Putin doing live comedy, and a very strange video of a woman in a polo neck jumper was watched more than a million times on YouTube.

Volochkova, the "fat ballerina" axed from the Bolshoi, gave an interview to Radio Liberty as it questioned all the public figures who signed an open letter supporting Khodorkovsky's first conviction, saying it was not politically motivated. Volochkova said she never saw the text of the letter and was told by United Russia party organizers that it was in support of Khodorkovsky. She used expletives to describe the party in an emotional outburst.

Rather touchingly, she told the station that no one had ever asked her about the letter, almost as if her views on politics carried no weight. "Everyone asks me why I went topless or why I'm big and fat," she said sadly.

The ballerina, who recently posted photographs of herself sunbathing naked on her blog, later used it to post a statement saying she was leaving United Russia, after joining in 2003. Here

she gave a somewhat different version, saying she knew the letter called for the jailing of people who stole from the country.

The letter was also signed by United Russia stalwarts including singer-songwriter and Duma deputy Alexander Rozenbaum and former rhythmic gymnast and Duma deputy Alina Kabayeva.

As Volochkova emerged as an unlikely dissident, bloggers discussed the possibility of United Russia leader Putin making an even more unlikely crossover into comedy.

Putin visited state-owned Channel One and rumor had it that he would appear on ProjectorParisHilton, a late-night current affairs comedy show, which airs Saturday. The show is recorded in front of a live audience and does not announce its guests before airing, but has had A-listers including actors Hugh Grant and Mickey Rourke. There's no question of anything close to the bone politically, but the presenters are sharp and funny. Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov denied the rumors, but it might be worth tuning in Saturday just in case.

Putin is probably surrounded by people who find his jokes very funny, but he likes to tell them cruel and crude. His joke about the Kursk submarine — "What happened to it? It sank" — was in the worst of taste. He also joked about the Israeli president Moshe Katsav being charged with multiple rape, calling him a "mighty man" and adding that "we all envy him." But then again, his target audience is probably not the hipsters who watch ProjectorParisHilton.

This week, Channel One was the joke as more than a million people watched a YouTube video of its show "Living Healthily." The schoolteacher-like host, Yelena Malysheva, decided to demonstrate circumcision — not the norm in Russia — and struggled to find the right euphemistic visual aid. She called a woman from the audience in a polo neck jumper and pulled the neck over her head to represent the foreskin. Then she sprinkled glitter on the top of the woman's head to show an infection. Grabbing a pair of scissors, she said cheerily "we'll give you back the sweater," and chopped off the top of the jumper. She also seemed to take quite a bit of the woman's hair away. To cap it all, a rabbi was watching in dismay in the studio.

Express Gazeta joked that "even experienced Internet users who have seen every possible perversion have never seen anything like this."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/02/03/in-the-spotlight-backdated-apologies-a4766