

# Scandal-Hit Charity Goes to Bolshoi

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Federation patron Yelena Sever, far right, speaking at a charity performance at the Bolshoi Theater on Saturday. **Daria Denisova**

[Scandal-tarnished](#) charity Federation, for which Prime Minister Vladimir Putin sang and played the piano in December, returned to the spotlight Saturday when it staged a ballet performance for young orphans at the Bolshoi Theater.

Putin stayed clear of the event but, in a sign that Federation remains in the government's good graces, the show was attended by Culture Minister Alexander Avdeyev.

The charity came under fire in March when the mother of a child with cancer accused it of pocketing money collected at the December event, whose attendees included film stars Sharon Stone and Mickey Rourke as well as Putin.

Federation initially said the December show was never meant to raise donations, only awareness of the problem of sick children. But it later announced that it had donated millions of dollars to hospitals, prompting more questions about whether the show had been

a fundraiser after all.

There were no similar problems with Saturday's event, with a charity spokeswoman explicitly stating that it aimed only to bring children to the Bolshoi for a performance that they would never otherwise attend.

"The minister's attendance means that his agency has checked the fund's transparency," said the spokeswoman, who refused to identify herself when reached by telephone Sunday, saying publicity would interfere with her personal life.

Some 300 Moscow orphans were offered a program centered around scenes from "Cippolino," a ballet based on a children's story from 1957 by Gianni Rodari that, somewhat ironically, tells of a struggle against corrupt authorities.

Among the performers were Bolshoi great Nikolai Tsiskaridze and tenor Zurab Sotkilava. Avdeyev praised Federation on stage alongside television celebrity Andrei Malakhov and the fund's patron, Yelena Sever.

"It's not important what happens at the top, only that the children are happy," Bolshoi artist Vladimir Goncharov said, explaining his participation. He dressed as the cunning Cardinal Richelieu from Alexander Dumas' "Three Musketeers."

Some participants may, indeed, have had their doubts after the media storm hit the charity hard in March, fueled by contradictory statements by Federation officials.

In a telling example, Dmitry Gryzlov, son of State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov, said in March that seats to the December event were offered for 1 million rubles (\$35,000), which contradicted the claim that the show was not a fundraiser.

The organization's main public face, Vladimir Kiselyov — a former rock musician who worked in the Kremlin during Putin's tenure as the president — has denied being acquainted with Putin, even though Putin's spokesman has said publicly that the two knew each other.

Federation's next charity event will involve Spanish pop star Julio Iglesias, who has a show in Moscow next month, the charity spokeswoman said, without elaborating.

Interestingly, the charity was not billed as Federation but the "Innovation Charity Foundation" for the Bolshoi show. Asked what was innovative about the group, the spokeswoman said it was not seeking publicity for its activities this time. "We're just helping the children," she said. "You need to do good quietly."

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