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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

In the Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

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This week, pop star and actress Jennifer Lopez announced she was divorcing singer Marc Anthony, but the show went on, as she sang at the wedding of an Uzbek businessman's son for a reported $1.8 million.

Lifenews.ru had grainy footage of the concert, where Lopez sang in a silver minidress and thigh-high boots with male dancers in holsters over their shirts. A nice touch that — even though they weren't loaded — suggested that Lopez knew she wasn't performing for a Sunday school picnic.

Audience members can be seen filming Lopez on mobile phones and shouting as she performs on a stage bare except for a giant silver heart. The abashed-looking groom and bride are pushed to the front to watch, while later a burly man can be seen dancing on an almost deserted dance floor to the sound of comedian Maxim Galkin singing about love.

Compere and television host Lera Kudryavtseva also spilled the beans by posting cell phone videos of Lopez on Twitter and gushing that the concert was "fantastic."

Lifenews.ru reported that Lopez was paid $1.8 million for the party, while the Sun put her fee at a more modest £620,000 ($1 million).

It's not Lopez's first such gig. Back in 2006 she performed at the birthday party of Telman Ismailov, the convivial owner of the now-defunct Cherkizovsky market. Ismailov likes to hobnob with celebrities and had Sharon Stone at the opening of his luxury hotel in Turkey in 2009. He then got his diamond-ringed knuckles rapped by the Russian authorities with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin angrily asking, "where are the jailings?" over a smuggling probe. But things seem to have simmered down now, after Ismailov decided to invest in Chechnya.

It's a small world. Ismailov was at the wedding party, Lifenews.ru reported. And guess where Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov reportedly went for his holidays.

This time, Lopez performed at a sanatorium outside Yalta for the son of businessman Azam Aslanov. The son, Amon, 33, lives in Indonesia, the Segodnya.ua web site reported. Scanty information about the family online suggested that they were involved in aluminum mining in Australia.

Lopez reportedly shared the program with Russian rock star Zemfira, whose fans include Roman Abramovich, as well as flamboyant "king of pop" Filipp Kirkorov and opera singer-turned-bland pop star Nikolai Baskov. There's no accounting for taste, and perhaps the Uzbek businessmen had to keep up with the Karimovs, who persuaded Sting to perform at a festival in 2009. Uzbek President Islam Karimov is frowned upon internationally over torture and unfair trials of his opponents, but Sting explained that he did not see the point of a musical boycott.

Sting had an attack of conscience last month, however, and turned down the chance to perform for Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev at a festival after he was warned off by Amnesty International over a crackdown on striking oil workers. Poor Nazarbayev had to make do with musical star Sarah Brightman and French singer Lara Fabian.

The mail-order celebs who turn up for events in Russia often seem to have fewer qualms. One of the guests at the recent star-studded charity concerts organized by the Federation fund may have been familiar to avid Forbes magazine readers as No. 8 on its list of the most wanted fugitives. Alimzhan Tokhtakhunov, whose nickname is Taivanchik, is listed by Interpol as wanted in the United States over bribery, but Russia is not extraditing him and he is often snapped at arts events. Lifenews.ru reported that he took Steven Seagal out on the town after the concerts.

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