The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

In the Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

December 08, 2011



This week, the most unlikely celebrities have manned the barricades, whether on Twitter or actually by going out and getting arrested. Others confessed their love for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

One of the most surreal news items on Tuesday was the detention of Bozhena Rynska, a gossip columnist for Izvestia and now for the Gazeta.ru web site, whose natural habitat is cocktail parties and Courchevel. But Rynska, who was taking photographs at the rally, was grabbed by indiscriminating riot police, despite showing a press card. A YouTube video shows her shouting from the clutches of the burly officers: "I'm Bozhena, film me!"

In extremis, even a gossip columnist and her prey can reach an entente, and it girl and journalist Ksenia Sobchak covered Rynska's fate with sympathy on her Twitter account. "She often trashed me, sometimes fairly, more often not, but in times of misfortune, we are all equal," Sobchak wrote philosophically. She herself has taken an ambivalent stance on the protests. She said she opposed falsifications but feared a "powder keg" of nationalism and still saw Putin, her father's protege, as Russia's "only real politician." She wrote of her suspicion of jailed protest leader Alexei Navalny's nationalist views and said: "to my great

regret, he will come out in 15 days as a hero."

Luckily Rynska was later released, but her Becky Sharpe blog has turned into something that reads more like dispatches from an occupied zone. The same goes for other popular blogs. Natalya Radulova, a Kommersant columnist who usually writes about relationships, has even switched from LiveJournal to Facebook to protect herself from an Internet crackdown. And when a celebrity gossip web site like Spletnik.ru is publishing tips on what to do if you're arrested, you know something is up. Satirist Viktor Shenderovich wrote for Radio Liberty of the "world of glamour pouring into the ranks of the opposition."

From now on, "watch the gossip columns," he said.

But not everyone decided to man the barricades. Figure skater Yevgeny Plushenko very publicly decided to jump ship from A Just Russia on the eve of the elections, hinting that his affections had shifted to the ruling party in a news conference gloatingly covered on Channel One news. He later wrote on Twitter that "I will only vote for Vladimir Putin." The Olympic gold medalist, who only seems to have grace on ice, reportedly barely bothered turning up as a deputy in his home city of St. Petersburg.

And the delectable television host Tina Kandelaki somewhat bravely wrote on Twitter that she had voted for United Russia. Until recently she co-hosted Unreal Politics, a show that addressed some opposition topics and was closed by the other host, Andrei Kolesnikov, after host channel NTV rejected several episodes.

As usual, plenty of pop stars played free election day concerts, paid for by the authorities. This was highlighted when a plane was unable to take off in bad weather in Anadyr, Chukotka, stranding half of Russian show business — singer Valery Meladze, girl group Blestyashchiye and rock band Mumy Troll among them, RIA-Novosti reported. And in Oryol voters got free tickets to a concert by stars including teen idol Sergei Lazarev, Komsomolskaya Pravda reported.

Nevertheless, Lazarev retweeted the charming message about oral sex and sheep that appeared on President Dmitry Medvedev's Twitter account on Wednesday after someone accessed the nuclear "Tweet" button.

"And this is the president of a great country?" he wrote, almost as if prepared to throw away his next election gigs.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/12/08/in-the-spotlight-11324-a11324