The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Inthe Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

January 19, 2012



This week, the main topic of gossip was the surprisingly colorful love life of Anatoly Chubais, the redheaded economic reformer of the 1990s. Rumor has it that he has secretly married Avdotya Smirnova, the much younger presenter of "School for Scandal," the NTV interview show. Neither of the couple commented publicly, but that did nothing to stop speculation.

Even Channel One television news ran a report on their wedding, citing "informed people" and bloggers. It said they got married on a working day this week, hoping to avoid publicity. The Ekho Moskvy radio station reported that the wedding rumors were premature, however, saying the couple was planning to marry Friday.

Chubais, the dour-looking head of Rusnano, whose armored car was raked by bullets in a bizarre assassination attempt in 2005, doesn't often make the gossip pages, although he evidently has an eye for beautiful women. For some, he is the apotheosis of evil, blamed for all the economic turmoil and lives damaged by his market reforms after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Smirnova, whose first name is sometimes shortened to Dunya, is 14 years younger than

Chubais, who is 56. She is the co-host along with novelist Tatyana Tolstaya of "School for Scandal," where they interview people in an enjoyably bitchy way. She recently directed her first film called "Two Days," about a provincial museum worker and a top government official falling in love despite their ideological differences. In that film, the official was played by perma-tanned actor Fyodor Bondarchuk, but many people have spotted echoes in Smirnova's real life.

Both Chubais and Smirnova picked up the phone and answered "laconically 'It's none of your business,'" Kommersant FM reported, while the Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid also got a curt reply from Smirnova, who said: "This isn't the business of newspapers."

Nonetheless, Chubais's personal web site does include a link on its front page to a report of the wedding.

The news of their relationship was broken by actor and scandalous blogger Stas Sadalsky, who wrote Jan. 2 that Chubais had separated from his wife and "left her all his savings and property." He then gave a description of Smirnova without naming names. The rumor sounded so unlikely that it prompted a string of disbelieving comments.

But film director Alexei Uchitel later told StarHit magazine that he knew "absolutely for certain that the wedding will be on Jan. 18."

And it girl and media personality Ksenia Sobchak wrote on Twitter on Monday that "Avdotya Smirnova and Anatoly Chubais are getting married soon. That means the film 'Two Days' was autobiographical. I'm sincerely glad for Smirnova. She deserves happiness."

However, she added a sardonic joke about Chubais's general unpopularity. "Of course, it's not Avdotya Smirnova's fault that the phrase 'happiness with Chubais' sounds like a joke to many people."

On gossip web site Spletnik.ru, commentators apparently in the know dished the dirt on Chubais's reputation as a ladykiller, but also praised him for choosing a grown-up woman, not a nymphet.

"At least he left in a good way, not leaving his wife hungry and naked. And his new love isn't a starlet either but a fully mature woman with brains and opinions," Kitana wrote.

Chubais married his second wife, Maria Vishnevskaya, an economist, 22 years ago, Vesti FM reported.

NTV news reported rumors that Chubais had left her a Moscow apartment, a snowmobile and a trailer, presumably after consulting his annual property declarations. Last year he said he earned 212 million rubles ($6.7 million), while his wife declared earnings of 21.62 million rubles.

Bloggers dug up an interview that Smirnova gave to Story magazine last year, when she said she had once worked as a speechwriter for Chubais back in the 1990s.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/01/19/in8200the-spotlight-11991-a11991