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Inthe Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

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This week, Madonna gave her support for the members of Pussy Riot on trial by speaking at her concert, pulling on a balaclava and revealing the words Pussy Riot written on her back.

Wearing just a black bra, Madonna writhed to Like a Virgin in a tribute that seemed to fit her image perfectly, even if, as a colleague pointed out, "Like a Prayer" would have been even better. You have to give it to Madonna: She was offending the Catholic Church back when some of the members of Pussy Riot were still in diapers.

This was the kind of behavior likely to irritate former Komsomol workers such as Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who wrote on Twitter that "every former b. as she gets older tries to read everyone lectures on morals.

Especially during international tours." The letter "b" obviously stands for "blyad," an extremely offensive Russian word for tart.

He then added a retort: "Either take off your cross or put on your knickers."

I doubt Madonna will lose any sleep over this. And Rogozin has always been one for plain-speaking, to put it mildly. But I'm still reeling from the fact that this is a deputy prime minister talking in what is presumably his usual tone.

The satirical Twitter feed @KermlinRussia replied, "Only a few keep on working as blyadi in the Russian government."

Madonna had already spoken in support of Pussy Riot in interviews as she visited her gym in Moscow. And rumors were swirling that she would do something at her concert.

"Ahead of the concert there were none of the usual fan discussions about why she isn't performing "Into the Groove" on this tour," Vedomosti wrote. "No, the intrigue was that at this concert Madonna would perform in support of Pussy Riot."

Whatever your views on Pussy Riot, you have to hand it to their supporters for organizing a definitive stunt. Also, it is amazing how the group's homemade balaclavas have become such a strong symbol that it was enough just for Madonna to pull one on.

Kommersant's typically snarky headline for its story on the concert was "Pray, Love, Earn," but the reviewer admitted he was bowled over.

"It wasn't even about the music. Madonna didn't always hit or sustain the notes and maybe her new material is not as good as before. All that matters is the gesture and the show," he wrote.

But Komsomolskaya Pravda slammed Madonna for lecturing fans — and worse, keeping them waiting.

"After a rude three-hour delay without any apology, preaching the death of religion and the American way of life is a bit naive. You are in Russia, lady. Here we take these things seriously," the newspaper fumed.

Madonna's stunt won praise from some Russian celebrities, and less from others.

"It wasn't for nothing that I had her poster over my bed when I was 13," television host-turned-opposition-activist Ksenia Sobchak wrote on Twitter.

She commented ironically on two Russian pop stars, Yelena Vayenga and Valeriya, who have both criticized Pussy Riot.

"The main thing now is that after this Vayenga and Valeriya don't commit suicide. The irony is that now Pussy Riot are the only (Russian) group with an international name," Sobchak wrote.

Valeriya wrote back in a blog entry that was very different from her usual saccharine style.

She began by saying she could not address Sobchak politely as "respected."

Calling Pussy Riot "inexperienced idiots" and "puppets," she stressed that her own support for Vladimir Putin was a "citizen's position" not prompted by any favors.

Valeriya's producer husband Iosif Prigozhin wrote contemptuously on Twitter that ''Madonna came on stage at Olimpiisky with the slogan Pussy Riot. Next time on her arse.''

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