

Ballerina Says Pussy Riot Should Clean Toilets

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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The three Pussy Riot defendants standing trial in Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court last week.

Igor Tabakov

As Russian artists released a book and an Iceland mayor donned a pink dress to support Pussy Riot, celebrity ballerina Anastasia Volochkova called for the musicians to repent publicly for their obscenity-laced performance in Christ the Savior Cathedral and be punished by cleaning public restrooms.

The defendants — Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22; Maria Alyokhina, 24; and Yekaterina Samutsevich, 30 — face up to seven years in prison on felony charges of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred for their February performance denouncing President Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill. A ruling is expected later this week.

Volochkova — who once signed an open letter supporting the government's crackdown on tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky but backtracked six years later — said Pussy Riot's

performance was "offensive" to believers and urged the Russian Orthodox Church to demand the public apology.

"The church must call on them to repent publicly, and let them fight for the truth by polishing public restrooms!" Volochkova [said](#) on her LiveJournal blog on Friday.

She argued that the women could have sung and danced somewhere other than the solea, an area off-limits to the public, and said that they could have used sites adjacent to the cathedral but also belonging to the church — a banquet hall, a car washbay, a parking lot, a sauna or a concert hall.

The musicians apologized to Russian Orthodox believers on the first day of their trial, but only one of the nine people identified as victims at the trial accepted the apology. The state prosecutor and lawyers for the victims said in their closing statements last week that the trio has not apologized.

Prosecutors have asked for a three-year sentence, and Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court is expected to hand down the verdict on Friday.

Volochkova could not be immediately reached Sunday to elaborate on her thinking about the Pussy Riot case.

But she has not shied away from attacking the authorities in the past — and she has used obscenities to make her point. Volochkova, who was dismissed from the Bolshoi Theater in 2003, allegedly because she was too "fat," lashed out at United Russia in an expletive-filled radio interview in February 2011 when she resigned from the party. She said the party had tricked her into signing a letter in 2005 that supported the tough prison sentence that Khodorkovsky received at his first trial for tax evasion. Later in February, she angrily accused the Kremlin of getting back at her for quitting United Russia by canceling her shows on state television.

Pussy Riot's case has been likened to that of Khodorkovsky's, with supporters saying the women face a harsh punishment for a prank from thin-skinned authorities who want to make an example of them.

Khodorkovsky sent a letter of support to the Pussy Riot defendants, who have been in detention since early March, on the 30th birthday of one of them, Samutsevich, last Thursday.

In a reply [posted](#) by defense lawyer Violetta Volkova on her LiveJournal blog on Friday, Samutsevich called it an honor "to have the same status of a political prisoner and to be tried in the same courtroom" as Khodorkovsky. She addressed Khodorkovsky, 49, by his first name, Mikhail.

Khodorkovsky's second trial, which ended in 2010, was also held in the Khamovnichesky District Court.

Alyokhina said Khodorkovsky's words of support were "very important" to her and she was "very glad" to read them.

Tolokonnikova said she found encouragement in Khodorkovsky's experience. "Despite all efforts, they [the authorities] have failed to deprive you of your face and voice," she said.

Meanwhile, prominent art curator Marat Guelman gave space at his Moscow gallery late Friday for the presentation of an arts book inspired by the Pussy Riot trial. The book, which contains 192 pages in A-4 format, [was financed](#) by Viktor Bondarenko, an arts patron and one of the country's top collectors of contemporary and other Russian art.

Almost 50 Russian painters, cartoonists and photographers provided their works for the album free of charge. But a number of painters presented in the album asked to be identified only as photographers, not the authors of their works, and some used pseudonyms. One painter refused to reveal his or her name at all, for fear of repercussions from the authorities, [said](#) Dr. Alek D. Epstein, an Israeli sociologist studying Russian culture, who was behind the idea to create the book.

"The situation in which art works all by themselves have turned into elements of a political fight is very important," Epstein told 200 journalists and guests gathered at Guelman's gallery in the Winzavod complex.

Elsewhere, Reykjavik Mayor Jon Gnarr rode through the streets of the Icelandic capital in a bright pink dress and matching balaclava to add his voice to calls to free the Pussy Riot rockers on Saturday.

In a brief video posted on YouTube, Gnarr is seen waving his arms atop a van decorated with the words "Free Pussy Riot." One of the group's songs, "Clear the Cobblestones," a likely reference to Red Square, can be heard playing from speakers mounted on the van.

Gnarr, formerly an actor and comedian, made the gesture during Reykjavik's annual gay-pride festival, which ran Aug. 7 to 12.

Also Saturday, Icelandic musician Bjork published a statement expressing sympathy for Pussy Riot on her site, saying she understood the defendants "as a musician and a mother."

In the statement, Bjork invited the three band members to join her on stage to perform a song calling for greater justice.

In London, locals and tourists alike got a surprise five-minute spectacle Sunday when a group of 50 people in tights and balaclavas struck a pose on the South Bank, the city's cultural hub.

The flash mob aimed to raise awareness of the trial awaiting the punk band Pussy Riot and coincided with the final day of the Summer Olympics.

Organizers said they wanted to give an opportunity to people who would not be interested in a traditional protest to show their support in a simple and creative way.

After the flash mob, protesters marched across Westminster Bridge chanting, "Free Pussy Riot!"

Julia Karlysheva contributed to this report from London.

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