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Pro-Church Activists Interrupt Pussy Riot Event

By Jonathan Earle

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At the Teatr.doc event, participants talked about Pussy Riot band members and answered questions about the trial. **Mikhail Ugarov**

A group of Orthodox Christian activists accompanied by an NTV camera crew burst into a theater event about punk band Pussy Riot and scolded those present, the show's director said.

The activists shouted "Repent!" and "Why do you hate the Russian people?" before being hustled out, Teatr.doc artistic director Mikhail Ugarov wrote on his Facebook page late Monday.

They attempted to mount the stage at the tiny theater near Patriarch's Ponds but were stopped by audience members and tossed out after about 30 seconds, Novaya Gazeta reported.

Ugarov identified one of the activists as Dmitry Tsorionov, the star of two widely circulated YouTube videos in which he berates a diner at a Mu-mu cafe and a man at a train station

for wearing pro-Pussy Riot T-shirts.

Mark Feigin, a lawyer for the three jailed Pussy Riot members and a participant in the event, accused authorities of giving pro-church activists preferential treatment while cracking down on the opposition.

Feigin said by telephone on Tuesday that he recognized the activists from demonstrations outside the Pussy Riot trial and called them "ordinary provocateurs."

"Under normal circumstances, they would have gotten a punch in the nose. But we're living under political repression. They put our people in prison and let these guys do their thing," he said.

Monday's performance also featured Pussy Riot's other two lawyers — Violetta Volkova and Nikolai Polozov — two Novaya Gazeta journalists, and Pyotr Verzilov, whose wife, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, was among the three band members sentenced to two years in prison earlier this month for performing an anti-Putin song in Christ the Savior Cathedral.

Participants talked about the band members and answered questions about the trial, which raised questions about the fairness of the legal system and the separation of church and state in Russia.

Tsorionov and his comrades charged into the theater about two hours into the event and were followed by a camera group that appeared to be from state-controlled NTV.

They did not identify themselves, but photographs of the incident clearly showed NTV correspondent Mikhail Ivanov, who has been linked to several anti-opposition documentaries.

A video of Ivanov aggressively questioning workers at vote monitor Golos went viral in November. He accused the organization of undermining parliamentary elections set for the following month.

Earlier this month, NTV ran an episode of its program ChP Investigations that portrayed Pussy Riot members and other radical performance artists as unprincipled, reckless and lewd.

The channel has portrayed the opposition movement as sinister and foreign-funded in past films, one of which sparked a protest that drew hundreds to its headquarters at Ostankino in March.

An e-mailed request for comment from NTV went unanswered on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the jailed members of Pussy Riot have appealed the verdict in their case, defense lawyer Nikolai Polozov told Interfax on Monday. He told the news agency that Moscow City Court will appoint a date to hear their appeal in the near future.

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