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Free Pussy Riot Fest A Success in St. Pete

By Sergei Chernov

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Dmitry Shagin, left, of the Mitki art group, spoke about the imprisonment of his own father during the concert. **Sergey Chernov**

Russia's first large concert in support of Pussy Riot and other political prisoners went ahead in St. Petersburg despite pressure from the authorities. Three people were detained for alleged jaywalking after the concert.

Glavclub was surrounded by scores of OMON riot policemen Sunday. More than a dozen police vehicles were parked along the short Kremenchugskaya Ulitsa on which Glavclub is located, with more parked in the streets close to the location.

Called Free Pussy Riot Fest, the concert also aimed to raise awareness and funds for the Other Russia activist Taisia Osipova, who was sentenced to eight years for drug dealing in Smolensk on Aug. 28 in a case her supporters say was fabricated, and for 17 people held under pre-trial arrest since the May 6 March of Millions protest rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad in Moscow.

An appeal for the three jailed members of feminist punk band Pussy Riot, who were sentenced to two years in a prison colony on Aug. 17, will be heard in Moscow on Oct. 1.

The concert opened with speeches by the band's lawyers, Violetta Volkova and Nikolai Polozov, who came to St. Petersburg for the concert from Moscow. A third lawyer, Mark Feigin, was summoned to an interrogation at the investigative committee concerning the case against the Bolotnaya Ploshchad protesters on Monday, and did not come. Throughout the concert — which drew about 1,000 people — the public chanted "Freedom to political prisoners."

Concert headliners DDT, who performed early in the show, started poignantly with "Church With No Crosses." It was with this song that the band opened its legendary debut show at the Leningrad Rock Club with in 1987.

"It was written and dedicated to the churches destroyed by the past authorities," frontman Yury Shevchuk said.

"Now the churches seem to have been rebuilt, but there has not become more love and mercy. It's sad, and this song is relevant once again."

Organizers said they had received several telephone threats from the police and officials wanting to stop the show since the venue was first announced last month. The last one came from the prosecutor's office on Sept. 4, when Glavclub was informed that a random fire inspection would be carried out at the venue the following day.

According to concert organizer Olga Kurnosova, the inspection was carried out, but only minor violations were found. She said the club only managed to remain open because of publicity in the national media.

"They calculated in Moscow that the damage from bad publicity would be larger than the benefits of shutting down the concert," she said Monday.

A riot police truck parked outside the entrance to Glavclub on Sunday.

No outdoor advertising for the concert was available because the company in charge of putting up street posters refused to sign a contract with the organizers at the last moment, Kurnosova said. Ticket distribution networks also refused to sell tickets to the show, which were only available from Glavclub.

Dmitry Shagin, who performed with guitarist and singer Vladimir Rekshan, founder of the city's 1970s rock legends Sankt Peterburg, sang in a balaclava made of a striped sailor shirt. Sailor shirts are the trademark clothing of the Mitki art group that Shagin co-founded in the 1980s.

Shagin, 54, spoke about the children of the imprisoned women of Pussy Riot and his late father, Vladimir Shagin.

"When I was little, about the same age as Nadya's [Nadezhda Tolokonnikova] daughter Gera and Masha [Maria] Alyokhina's son Filipp, my father Vladimir Shagin, a remarkable non-conformist artist, was jailed for six years," Shagin said.

"I remember it perfectly — his face behind the bars — and I understand what Gera and Filipp feel, knowing that their moms have been put in prison."

The concert also saw performances by Televizor, PTVP, the Electric Guerillas, Gleb Samoilov, Brigadir, Razniye Lyudi, Atmoravi, Alexander Zaslavsky, Mikhail Novitsky, Vasily K and Kirill Komarov. The musicians also spoke about the political repressions of Putin's era.

None of the bands received any payment for their performances, and Glavclub's director, Igor Tonkikh, offered his venue for free. All proceeds from ticket sales will go to help political prisoners.

Kurnosova said the police did not interfere with the concert.

However, three members of the audience were detained after the concert and taken to a police precinct where they were charged with jaywalking.

"A violation probably did take place, and the 200 OMON policemen stationed outside the club did not hesitate to make use of it," said rights activist Dinar Idrisov.

"But they could have organized a safe crossing for the masses of people leaving the club instead."

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