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Newsmakers Take a Walk Down Memory Lane

By Irina Filatova

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U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul and anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny, right. Lawyer Genri Reznik, left. **Vladimir Filonov**

It was a picture of contrasts that perhaps could only have come from the pages of The Moscow Times.

Rubbing shoulders in a hall Friday evening were the likes of Moscow Deputy Mayor Andrei Sharonov and anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny, U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul and society portrait painter Nikas Safronov, Wimm-Bill-Dann founder David Yakobashvili and Peter O'Brien, director of the European Pension Fund.

These personalities, who might never fraternize in regular life, gathered for a gala dinner to toast the 20th anniversary of The Moscow Times and share their memories of the last two decades in Russia.

"It's very nice to see all these people from the past. It's like deja vu," Moscow Times founder Derk Sauer said on the sidelines of the dinner in a hall of the Baltschug Kempinski.

Sauer, who arrived in Moscow in the waning days of the Soviet Union and took The Moscow Times daily on Oct. 2, 1992, recalled that his wife, Ellen Verbeek, had insisted that they go to New York instead. "But I said, 'No, we'll go to Moscow,'" he said, adding that he had no regrets about his choice. "I love it here, and my wife now likes it even more than I do."

Sauer, who hosted the event together with his longtime friend Artemy Troitsky, the music journalist, invited attendees like former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov and Roca Russia managing director Antonio Linares to share their memories about the development of Russian business and politics.

Setting the tone on Russian democracy, Troitsky couldn't refrain from taking a jab at the authorities. "Twelve years ago journalist Trudy Rubin asked the question 'Who is Mr. Putin?' and I have to say that we still don't know the answer," he said, referring to the question famously asked by the Philadelphia Inquirer reporter at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2000.

"Only one thing I can say for sure: It is that Mr. Putin loves animals very much," said Troitsky, who was wearing a knee-length tuxedo jacket.

Putin, who flew in a motorized hang glider with cranes last month, is known for his penchant for being photographed with animals.

But lawyer Genri Reznik appeared to be in a more peaceful mood about the state of the country.

"Fresh whisky, perfect munchies, and I have reached a more or less balanced condition that helps me surrender to reality," he told a reporter.

The menu offered trendy Russian cuisine aimed at surprising a sophisticated audience, including mushroom-stuffed vareniki with red caviar, vodka-lemon sorbet and slow-breast beef cheeks in Bordeaux sauce with Savoy cabbage fondant and celery mush.

The Kremlin's new investors rights commissioner, Boris Titov, praised the warm atmosphere of the evening, saying he was feeling nostalgic while listening to people recall the old times featured in the newspaper.

Many of the 150 attendees have made the headlines in The Moscow Times — and their dress reflected the international city that Moscow has become.

Painter Safronov, wearing his customary dark jacket and dark-blue jeans, gave a warm hug to Pavel Teplukhin, the newly appointed country officer for Deutsche Bank Russia. At the other side of the room, Navalny, wearing a black pullover and blue jeans, chatted with Ambassador McFaul, who preferred a more formal look.

The director of the Russian-British Chamber of Commerce, Alan Thompson, remained devoted to the traditions of his homeland, wearing a dark-green Scottish kilt.

But perhaps the frontman of the rock band Mumy Troll, Ilya Lagutenko, offered the most creative moment of the evening. Lagutenko did not attend in person, but he shot a two-minute video featuring him sitting with a guitar in a thicket of bamboo.

Having congratulated The Moscow Times on its anniversary, Lagutenko marked the end of the evening by singing the band's English-language song "Love Contraband" to the departing guests: "Time to go home/ To crazy Moscow city/ Got to deliver something pretty."

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