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Suspected Organizer of Bolshoi Acid Attack Pleads Not Guilty

By Natalya Krainova

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Two defendants in the trial over the January acid attack on Bolshoi Ballet artistic director Sergei Filin, including the suspected organizer, pleaded not guilty Tuesday to conspiring to inflict grave injuries on the victim, while a third defendant pleaded "partially guilty."

The attack, which left Filin nearly blind, prompted Bolshoi artists to speak up about their discontent with the theater's management, leading to the dismissal of Bolshoi Theater director Anatoly Iksanov in July. The case has attracted international attention due to Bolshoi's role as one of the world's leading theaters.

The trial of the three defendants in the case, who have been held in detention since early March, opened Tuesday at Moscow's Meshchansky District Court in the presence of several dozen reporters, photographers and television cameras.

Addressing the court, suspects Pavel Dmitrichenko, formerly a leading dancer at the Bolshoi,

and unemployed Moscow region resident Andrei Lipatov pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Dmitrichenko denied conspiracy and insisted that co-defendant Yury Zarutsky, an unemployed resident of the Ryazan region and a former convict, had acted of his own will when he splashed sulfuric acid on Filin's face near the entrance to the victim's apartment building in downtown Moscow on the evening of Jan. 17.

Dmitrichenko said he had told his acquaintance Zarutsky about "Filin's behavior" because Zarutsky wanted his underage daughter to take ballet lessons.

"Zarutsky, guided by his own motives, committed this crime," Dmitrichenko told the court, adding that he did not know of Zarutsky's plans to splash acid on Filin's face. "I believe that Zarutsky must be held responsible for his actions."

Zarutsky sat staring at the floor with an emotionless face as Dmitrichenko spoke.

Dmitrichenko conceded that he himself could be guilty of battery charges but did not elaborate. In early March, he told Moscow's Tagansky District Court, which ruled to arrest him, that he had agreed to Zarutsky's offer to beat up Filin.

The defendants now face up to 12 years in prison on charges of conspiring to inflict grave physical injuries on Filin, while battery is punishable by up to three months' imprisonment.

Dmitrichenko told the court Tuesday that he was displeased with Filin's "immoral behavior," accusing him of "having intimate relations with a number of ballerinas who were dependent on him in their work." He said the allegations were confirmed by materials from the Tagansky District Court.

Dmitrichenko denied the part of the indictment that suggested he was "displeased with how Filin distributed roles in performances."

Fellow defendant Lipatov pleaded not guilty to the charges of conspiring with Dmitrichenko and Zarutsky to drive the latter to the crime scene. Lipatov did not elaborate, but he had said earlier that while he did drive Zarutsky to the crime scene, he did not know about Zarutsky's plan to attack Filin.

The third defendant, Zarutsky, was brief when addressing the court Tuesday, saying only that he pleaded "partially guilty" to the charges. In early August, he told Tagansky District Court, which extended his detention, that he had committed the crime alone.

Filin, who has undergone numerous face and eye surgeries in Moscow and Germany since the attack but had not fully restored his eyesight, will testify in court Nov. 6, his lawyer told Interfax on Tuesday.

The trial will resume at 3 p.m. Thursday, when the court will begin to study the text of the indictment.

Meanwhile, Dmitrichenko's lawyer Sergei Kadyrov said Tuesday that he had sent a complaint to the Investigative Committee, saying the dancer had been beaten by police officers following the previous hearing on Oct. 16, although the police had denied the allegation, Rapsi reported.

Contact the author at n.krainova@imedia.ru

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