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Money Raised by Putin 'Missing'

By Alexander Bratersky

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Putin playing the piano during a Dec. 10 charity concert in St. Petersburg. **Alexei Nikolsky**

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin played the piano and sang in English to help ill children at a December charity concert attended by celebrities like the actors Sharon Stone and Kevin Costner.

But nearly three months later, no money has reached the children, a frustrated mother said.

In what could prove an embarrassment to Putin, people linked to the event are even offering mixed accounts of whether any aid had been promised in the first place.

Putin played a tune from a popular Soviet-era spy movie and delivered a solid rendition of "Blueberry Hill," singing with a live jazz band, during the Dec. 10 charity show at the Ice Palace in St. Petersburg.

The show, also attended by the actors Monica Bellucci, Alain Delon and Mickey Rourke, aimed to help children with oncological and ophthalmological diseases, according to organizers, one

of whom is an old acquaintance of Putin.

But a sick child's mother has told President Dmitry Medvedev via his Twitter page that hospitals still have not received money or equipment that the money was supposed to buy.

"I think I have a right to know how the raised money was used," wrote Olga Kuznetsova, mother of 13-year-old Liza, who has cancer.

She said seats at the private charity party were sold for up to 1 million rubles ($35,000), but the organizers behind a foundation called Federation have transferred none to the sick.

Federation spokeswoman Kristina Snikers said the only thing the organizers intended to raise was global awareness for ill Russian children.

"We don't even have a bank account," Snikers said Monday, according to RIA-Novosti.

She added that no 1 million ruble tickets were sold.

But a November video recording shows Vladimir Kiselyov — the husband of Federation president Yelena Sever and a former Kremlin official — promising that several hospitals would receive funds shortly before the December show and 500 children would obtain money afterward.

"We will also do everything that hospital officials tell us to do," Kiselyov, a Soviet-era rock star, said in the video, which is available on RIA-Novosti's web site.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the prime minister was aware of the situation but Federation representatives have "calmed his fears."

The foundation is working on purchasing equipment for Moscow and St. Petersburg hospitals, but the process takes time, Peskov said, adding that he was "not aware of the details," Interfax reported.

He mentioned a Moscow oncological hospital for children as a promised recipient of the equipment. A hospital spokeswoman was unavailable for comment Tuesday, a public holiday.

Peskov also said Putin "has never hidden the fact that he knows Kiselyov," who held a senior post in the presidential property department from 1999 to 2006.

Kiselyov's ties with Putin may date back to pre-Kremlin days because he helped raise funds for Putin's mentor, St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, when he ran for re-election in 1996, Novaya Gazeta reported in 2001.

A spokesman for Creative Management Agency, which represents Mickey Rourke, could not say whether the December show had actually raised money for charity. A representative for Finnish rockers Leningrad Cowboys, who performed at the show, said by e-mail Tuesday that show organizers had booked the band for a regular gig and made no mention that the event was for charity.

Federation is a new and obscure foundation, and the December show was its inaugural event.

The foundation apparently managed to launch with a splash because of Kiselyov's connections. A former member of the popular band Zemlyane (Earthlings), Kiselyov maintains close ties with senior Kremlin officials, including Vladimir Kozhin, chief of the presidential property department, Novaya Gazeta reported last year.

The Spark-Interfax business database indicates that Kiselyov is also a shareholder in the Moscow-based Kremlin International agency, which organizes concerts and events in the Kremlin Palace concert hall.

Pop music producer Iosif Prigozhin said by telephone that he has known Kiselyov "for a long time and he has always organized events very professionally."

But ex-bandmate Sergei Skachkov — who lost the rights to the Zemlyane trademark to Kiselyov after an extended court battle — gave a less flattering picture of the former Kremlin official. "Now he can do whatever he wants with the name," Skachkov said. "But people like Kiselyov are doing anything but charity work."

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