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City Nightclub Throws Putin Party

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Bare-breasted women, celebrities and club promoters threw their support behind Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at a weekend lavish party.

"This is for Vladimir Vladimirovich, who is the coolest, the most respected man in all of Russia," organizer Andreas Lobzhanidze, clad in a pink shirt with Putin's picture on it framed by flowers, shouted to the crowd of some 2,000 at the trendy Moscow nightclub Rai on Sunday night.

Striptease dancers writhed with signs saying "I want the prime minister" as an electronic rendition of "Blueberry Hill" blasted out, a song now associated in Russia with Putin after he belted out the classic at a charity event in December.

Promoters said the party was to merely celebrate Putin — whose face wearing sunglasses was depicted on waiters' T-shirts — and not to ask him to run for president again.

"He's just so great. He is closer to the Russian people than any leader has ever been," pop singer and stylist Sergei Zverev said.

Behind him, young women poked their faces through a cardboard cut-out of a woman astride a motorbike with Putin.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov could not be reached for comment Monday, but he previously told the Russian media that the prime minister's image could not be used for commercial purposes, and that the nightclub had not sought permission to do this.

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