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Russian Theater Defiant Over Offending Religious Believers

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A Siberian theater whose rendition of a Wagner opera is under investigation for being religiously offensive says it is prepared to defend the legality of its artistic policy.

The Novosibirsk State Opera and Ballet Theater, which premiered a controversial version of the opera "Tannhäuser" in December, said Tuesday on its website that it is prepared to fight for its rights under Russian legislation.

Regional authorities launched an investigation into the opera after Metropolitan Tikhon — regional head of the Russian Orthodox Church — filed a complaint earlier this month, the statement said.

The rendition features a scene where the Roman goddess Venus promises eternal love to Jesus Christ, were he to agree to stay with her in a grotto. But he rejects the offer and destroys the grotto with the help of the Virgin Mary, according to a summary on the theater's website.

Russia outlawed offending the sentiments of religious believers in 2013 after shock-rock band

Pussy Riot sang a scandalous "punk prayer" in Moscow's main cathedral calling for the Virgin Mary to banish President Vladimir Putin.

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