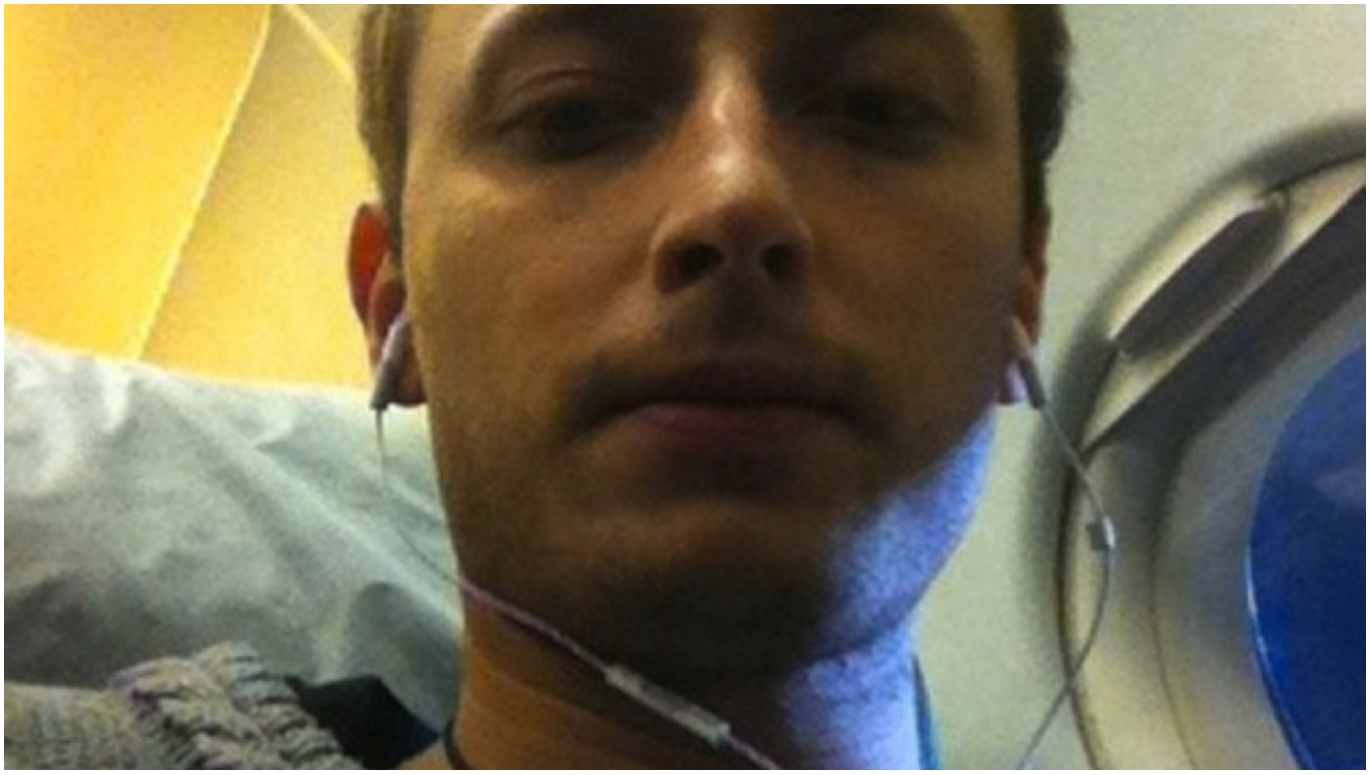
The Moscow Times
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Controversial Russian Opera Director Agrees to Remove Risque Jesus Poster

By Peter Spinella

March 16, 2015



A Russian opera director who recently faced charges of offending religious believers has agreed to take out of his show a poster apparently portraying Jesus Christ between the open legs of a naked woman, Interfax reported Monday.

A court threw out the case last week against director Timofei Kulyabin, whose rendition of the Wagner opera "Tannhauser" provoked the ire of a local Orthodox Church leader, but Kulyabin said he expects prosecutors to continue to push the case, and will therefore try to make things easier on the theater's management.

"This is why I will in no way judge the theater's management if ... any changes to the show are made to help temporarily subdue any unnecessary aggression," Kulyabin was quoted as saying.

Kulyabin's rendition of the opera, which has been performed at the Novosibirsk State Theater of Opera and Ballet since December, has a modern-day setting in which the main character is

a filmmaker. The poster in question was a prop used to advertise a film supposedly made by the protagonist.

Prosecutors had earlier cited the poster in a statement about the case: "This poster depicts a naked woman whose legs are spread. In the center, between her legs, is a man who can be associated with the image of Jesus Christ crucified on the cross."

The poster was replaced with a blank sheet of paper in the opera's stagings over the weekend, the report said.

Prosecutors opened a case against the director and the theater's head after a complaint by the regional leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Tikhon.

He referred to the opera as "an affront to the feelings of religious believers, an offense to the Orthodox Church and an incitement to religious hatred," culture news site Colta.ru reported.

Russia criminalized insulting the sentiments of religious believers in 2013 after female protest group Pussy Riot performed a "punk prayer" in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral calling on the Virgin Mary to banish President Vladimir Putin.

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Original url:
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