

Petersburg Lawmakers Call for Fired Theater Director, Conservative Nemesis to Swap Jobs

April 01, 2015

The  Moscow Times

St. Petersburg lawmakers called Wednesday on the city's authorities to replace businessman Vladimir Kekhman, director of the city's Mikhailovsky Theater, with theater director Boris Mezrich, who was recently fired from a Novosibirsk theater over a controversial production of the opera "Tannhäuser."

Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky fired Mezdrich as director of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theater and replaced him with Kekhman on Sunday, citing Mezdrich's failure to back down over the opera staging that Orthodox activists said was sacrilegious. Kekhman, who was not required to leave his post at the Mikhailovsky in order to take on the new role some 3,100 kilometers away, said Monday that the controversial staging of "Tannhäuser" would be removed from the theater's repertoire.

The St. Petersburg deputies expressed concern over Kekhman's ability to head two theaters simultaneously, and wrote in a letter to City Hall that "inviting him [Mezdrich] to St.

Petersburg would boost our reputation as the cultural capital and get the entire theater community behind the local authorities," the TASS news agency reported.

Maxim Reznik, a St. Petersburg deputy aligned with the liberal Yabloko party, told The Moscow Times by phone Wednesday that the campaign to install Mezdrich was "no April Fools' joke."

Reports that the "Tannhäuser" production would be performed at the Perm Opera and Ballet Theater, however, were refuted by the Perm Theater as a hoax Wednesday.

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