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5 Russian Artists Who Lit Up the Eurovision Song Contest

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Russian group t.A.T.u. performed at the 2003 Eurovision Song Contest and finished in third place.

Big hair, outrageous costumes and cheesy dance routines — it can only mean one thing: Eurovision is back.

This year's contest takes place Saturday in Vienna, which won the right to host the contest after Austria's Conchita Wurst claimed top spot with her performance of "Rise Like a Pheonix" in last year's final.

Russian singer and actress Polina Gagarina will be hoping to follow in Conchita's footsteps by winning over the public and judges alike with her song "A Million Voices," which she will perform in English rather than in her native tongue.

To celebrate the return of the much-loved contest, The Moscow Times takes a look back at five Russian artists who have shone brightly on the Eurovision stage.

Dima Bilan — Believe

"Cause I got something to believe in,

Mission to keep climbing,

Nothing else can stop me if I just believe,

And I believe in me."

One of the first names that comes to mind when talking about Russia's Eurovision successes has to be Dima Bilan, who won the contest with his song "Believe" in 2008 — two years after finishing as a runner-up with the song "Never Let You Go."

Bilan, who was 24 when he first appeared in Eurovision, was awarded 248 points for "Never Let You Go," but it wasn't enough for him to beat Finnish hard rockers Lordi who garnered 292 points to take the title.

Two years later, Bilan was back in action at Eurovision when he was joined on stage for his performance of "Believe" by Hungarian violinist Edvin Marton and Russia's Olympic champion figure skater Evgeni Plushenko.

The public loved the spectacle, and awarded Bilan a total of 272 points giving Russia its only Eurovision win to date. Ukraine came in second place.

Since he first burst onto the Eurovision scene in 2006, Bilan has had a successful music career in Russia, releasing five albums and recording several number one singles.

t.A.T.u. — Don't Believe, Don't Fear, Don't Ask (Ne Ver Ne Boisya, Ne Prosi)

"Don't burn and don't extinguish,

Don't believe, don't fear, don't ask,

And calm down, calm down,

Don't believe, don't fear, don't ask."

Faux lesbian pop duo t.A.T.u. were already established names when they represented Russia in the 2003 Eurovision Song Contest, going into the competition as the widely-tipped favorites to win.

But Yulia Volkova and Lena Katina caused controversy before the contest had even begun, reportedly calling German entry Lou "a witch" and suggesting that they would easily win the competition.

The duo, who shared a brief kiss during the performance, eventually finished third — just three points behind winners Turkey and two points behind Belgium, which came in second place.

Russia's state-run Channel One broadcaster later threatened to protest the results, claiming that if it were not for violations in Ireland's voting practices then Russia would have won the contest.

t.A.T.u continued to perform together after the contest and released three albums before splitting in 2011, though they did reunite for a brief performance ahead of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

Philipp Kirkorov — Lullaby for a Volcano (Kolybelnaya dlya Vulkana)

"Forget forever, volcano,

What you have threatened for centuries,

Please turn back,

To common sense and to joy,"

With a hairstyle to rival Captain Hook's and gold chains draped around his neck, Philipp Kirkorov took to the stage of the 1995 Eurovision Song Contest looking more like a pirate than a respectable singer.

Kirkorov, who was 28 at the time and was actually born in Bulgaria, eventually claimed 17th place for Russia with his song "Lullaby for a Volcano." But finishing outside of the top 10 didn't put an end to Kirkorov's Eurovision adventures.

In addition to working as a commentator for Russian television at the 1997 contest, Kirkorov co-wrote the 2007 Belarus entry "Work Your Magic" and also worked on the 2008 entry for Ukraine, "Shady Lady."

He has also covered a number of songs that were first performed by other countries at the Eurovision Song Contest, including Russian-language versions of "I Would Die for You" (Greece, 2001), "Diva" (Israel, 1998), and "Hero" (Sweden, 2008).

Kirkorov has enjoyed a successful career spanning more than two decades, and in 2008 he was awarded the title of "People's Artist of the Russian Federation."

Alla Pugacheva — Prima Donna

"Like a bird with golden feathers, flying with your broken wings,

I see you on the stage,

So happy in your world, in your illusion,

Sing just for me tonight, prima donna."

Two years after Kirkorov took part in Eurovision, his then-wife Alla Pugacheva represented Russia at the 1997 contest with her song "Prima Donna."

But despite an extremely rousing performance, Pugachova did only slightly better than her husband, finishing in 15th place out of a total of 25 entries.

While Pugacheva may not have brought Eurovision glory upon Russia, she is a hugely successful singer in her own right, releasing dozens of studio albums throughout a career that has spanned almost five decades.

She was named a People's Artist of the Soviet Union in 1985, and in 2007 she was awarded the State Prize of the Russian Federation for her outstanding contribution to the arts.

Buranovskiye Babushki — Party for Everybody

"The house is full of kids, the relatives have arrived,

I am going to put on my green dress,

I am going to tie a white head cloth.

And I am going to dance."

The Buranovskiye Babushki, or Buranovo Grandmothers, took the Eurovision Song Contest by storm in 2010, with their feel-good song "Party for Everybody."

The group, who sang in English, Russian and their native Urdmut language, was made up of eight women in their 60s and 70s, though only six members were allowed to perform onstage at the contest due to competition rules.

Hailing from the village of Buranovo, which lies to the east of the Ural mountains, the group said they would use any cash raised from their performance to help rebuild a local Russian Orthodox church.

They eventually finished the contest in second place with 259 points, losing out to Swedish entry Loreen, who picked up the second-highest number of points in the contest's history with her song "Euphoria."

But it wasn't the first time the Buranovskiye Babushki had attempted to make it to Eurovision. In 2010 they entered Russia's song selection process, but finished third with their song "A Very Long Birch Bark and How to Make a Headdress out of It."

The grand final on Saturday, which will be broadcast live from 10 p.m. by Russia's Channel One television station.

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