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4 Charismatic Russian Celebrities Everyone Should Know

By The Moscow Times

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Zemfira

Russian tabloids are often filled with fatuous gossip about actors, socialites and models who inspire a less than lukewarm response from the public.

Luckily, one can still escape banality thanks to a few selected household names in the fields of music, cinema, and even poetry.

The Moscow Times looks at four of these Russian stars known for their talent, originality and, above all, charismatic personalities.

Zemfira

Since bursting onto the music scene with her self-titled debut album in 1999, Zemfira has stayed at the forefront of Russian rock and gained a cult following, captivated by her talent

and the intensity of her stage presence. She is equally notorious for her androgynous image and insistence on privacy, declining interviews and divulging as few details as possible about her personal life.

According to Zemfira, the best way to know her is through her songs. Her music is diverse, ranging from crunching guitar-driven anthems to schlager-style ballads, and it is this diversity that makes her one of Russia's most popular performers today.

After a 2-year hiatus, Zemfira is back on tour this summer. You can catch her at the Afisha Picnic in Moscow on July 25, or at the Kubana festival, which this year takes place in Riga on Aug. 6.

Renata Litvinova

Renata Litvinova is an actress, director, writer, and model, but none of these descriptions can truly convey the phenomenon behind the name.

"Goddess or Alien?": this was the question once posed by a tabloid headline. It is comparisons like these that inevitably arises after seeing her on screen. Litvinova's mannered way of speaking, exaggerated gestures and trademark red lipstick have made her both an instantly recognizable personality and the subject of innumerable parodies.

While she garnered critical acclaim for her performance in Kira Muratova's "Enthusiasms," it was the 2000 serial "Granitsa: Tayozhny Roman" (The Boundary: a Wild Novel) which made her a household name. Litvinova and Zemfira also have a longstanding creative collaboration, with Zemfira writing the soundtrack for Litvinova's film "Rita's Last Tale" and Litvinova's directing several of Zemfira's music videos.

Lately Litvinova can be seen in the film "About Love," directed by Anna Melkiyan, which just debuted at the Kinotavr festival in Sochi; on stage at the MXAT as Ranevskaya in Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, and Romaine in Agatha Christie's Witness of the Prosecution. She can also be admired on the pages of Hello! Magazine after being named its "Most Stylish in Russia."

Diana Arbenina

Diana Arbenina is one of the founding members of Nochniye Snaipery (Night Snipers), together with Svetlana Surganova, who left the group in 2002. Her music is fueled by pent-up aggression and teenage recklessness; it's not surprising that Arbenina herself called rock 'n' roll the music of eternal youth.

Since the early 2000s she has been a major driving force in modern music and has made a name for herself not only as an engaging and kinetic performer, but also as one of the most prominent contemporary songwriters in Russia and as an acclaimed poet.

On June 20 she performed at the Usad'ba Jazz festival in Moscow, presenting an acoustic

program of her greatest hits.

Filipp Kirkorov

Filipp Kirkorov has been dubbed the king of Russian pop, and the title is not undeserved.

Combining the fine traditions of catchiness and camp, Kirkorov's career took off in the 1990s and has not slowed since. Kirkorov's fame, however, might have more to do with his marriage to Russia's ultimate superstar Alla Pugacheva from 1994 to 2005, and his involvement in a series of scandals — most famously telling a female journalist that he was "tired of her pink blouse, her t*ts, and her microphone."

Kirkorov is also known for being one of a handful of celebrities to have spoken out against the Russia's "gay propaganda" law, which bans the promotion of non-traditional sexual relations to minors.

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