The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

New Pussy Riot Song Tops Spotify's Viral Charts

Donald Trump and the female genitalia unite again on streaming music service

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November 03, 2016



Pussy Riot / YouTube

Something unprecedented happened on Spotify this week: a song by a Russian artist topped the music service's "Viral 50" charts globally and in the United States. The tune belongs to none other than Pussy Riot, the political punk rock group that made international headlines after a February 2012 "performance" inside a Moscow Cathedral landed three band members in jail for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred."

In August 2012, when Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina, and Yekaterina Samutsevich were convicted and sentenced to two years in prison, they were more activists

than musicians. Today, the same is true for Alyokhina and Samutsevich, while Tolokonnikova has leveraged her fame and good looks to remain in the spotlight, spending much of her time in the United States. Last month, she released three new political songs as "Pussy Riot."

One of those tracks, an attack on Donald Trump that borrows his campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," is now enjoying viral success in the U.S. and around the world.

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On Wednesday, Nov. 2, Tolokonnikova's husband, Pyotr Verzilov, announced on Twitter that the song had topped Spotify's "Viral 50" charts globally and in the United States. "It seems this is the first time in history that a Russian group has taken Spotify's top spot," he wrote.

Speaking in somewhat awkward English slang, Pussy Riot's official Twitter account also celebrated the moment, tweeting, "Vagina gonna top the charts."

In 2013, Spotify launched its "viral charts," which the company describes as a "a new metric for a new age" to define successful music. Like traditional measures, the viral charts take into account the number of plays a song gets on Spotify, but they also consider what users do "after they discover a song." To generate these charts, Spotify studies how often songs are shared and rated after people listen to them. It is in these categories that Tolokonnikova's "Make America Great Again" has been so popular.

On social media, some have questioned how Pussy Riot managed to release a song that is more popular than tracks like Shakira's "Chantaje" and Drake's "Fake Love," which currently enjoy the number two and three spots on the "Viral 50" global chart. "We believe the most exciting power of the chart is its ability to showcase unknown artists organically," Spotify explained when it introduced its lists of viral songs.

Of Tolokonnikova's new songs, the first release, "Straight Outta Vagina," is actually the most viewed of the three on YouTube, where a colorful music video features women dancing around in pantyhose and exposed menstrual pads, men urinating decumbently while wearing high heels, and more. "Make America Great Again," where Tolokonnikova's character is tortured and ultimately murdered by a Trump-controlled U.S. police force, has 639,000 views — about 400,000 fewer than "Straight Outta Vagina."

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