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# 'Mathilde' Film Director's Studio Attacked With Molotov Cocktails

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Director Alexei Uchitel **Alexander Nikolaev / Interpress / TASS**

A studio belonging to a director whose upcoming film about a Tsar's love affair has drawn sharp criticism from Orthodox activists was attacked last night in St. Petersburg.

A fire broke out at filmmaker Alexei Uchitel's studio at around 3:30 a.m. on Thursday morning after unknown assailants threw Molotov cocktails at the building, a spokesperson for the local branch of the Interior Ministry was cited as saying by the state-run RIA news agency Thursday.

Investigators are looking into whether the attack on the Rock Films studio was linked to a private screening of Uchitel's "Mathilde," a film detailing the love affair between Tsar Nicholas II and ballet dancer Mathilde Kschessinska, the local Fontanka.ru outlet reported. "Mathilde" is due for release in late October.

Duma Deputy Natalia Poklonskaya and Orthodox activists have described the film as offensive

to believers.

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In February, a vigilante group called "Christian State — Holy Russia" sent a letter to dozens of cinema managers, saying "cinemas would burn, maybe people will even suffer" if the film was shown.

In comments to the BBC's Russian service on Thursday, Uchitel said authorities had ignored repeated calls to take action in response to the intimidation.

"This looks like the result of those earlier threats," he said. "Today is both Mathilde Kschessinska's birthday, and mine. I think these are not simple coincidences."

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