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Russian Director Serebrennikov Answers Embezzlement Charges

“Let the Ministry of Culture tell me to my face what we failed to do or what costs we inflated.”

By Kirill Serebrennikov

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Anton Kardashov / Moskva News Agency

On Feb. 21, the Russian director under house arrest for embezzling government funds spoke to the charges in a court hearing in Moscow. Here is his statement in full:

I would like to say a few words about today’s proceedings.

I will not speak about house arrest or about the felony case that has been ongoing for eight months and supposedly ended in early January.

The felony case is the reason why we’re here and for almost six months I’ve been deprived of the opportunity to work and create. I couldn’t see my parents.

And now my mom died. Yesterday, I was at the cremation, and now I'm back. So. The investigation is over. I've been accused of allegedly embezzling 133 million rubles ($1.1 million). That is almost 70 percent of what the state allocated for the "Platforma" project from 2011 to 2014.

That would mean that we did the "Platforma" project on only 30 percent of the budget. That would mean that for the state, and for the development of contemporary art in Russia, we only did a third of what we should have done.

But that is an absolute lie and one that is easily refuted. In 2012 alone, we were supposed to put on "Metamorphoses," "The Hunting of the Snark" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream." We developed them and put them on. We spent the money allocated by the state on those shows.

Is it important to know how much those shows cost? For example, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" — the show that supposedly didn't exist, the show that began this whole case and the show for whose alleged nonexistence Alexei Malobrodsky is in jail — that show cost 3,870,000 rubles ($70,000).

"The Hunting of the Snark" cost 2,750,000 rubles. "Metamorphoses" was a big project with a foreign director and performers and it cost 6,850,000 rubles. Ask anyone who knows anything about theater productions if that was a large or a small sum, and there is absolutely no doubt that the answer will be small.

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But we are accused of inflating the cost of events. Furthermore, they aren't saying in which events the cost was allegedly inflated, or by how much the cost was inflated.

They don't even tell us which productions allegedly never took place. They simply state without any evidence whatsoever that some productions didn't exist and that's it, with no explanation.

In 2012, we planned and produced the choreographed musical show "Dialogs," the musical performance "Outland," the concert "Rebellion" — a concert under the direction of the German composer and conductor Enno Poppe, "Catastrophe," a concert by Teodor Currentzis, "Four Seasons," a program of contemporary academic music and the "Transcription" project-laboratory.

I could continue to list everything that we were committed to doing and that we did in full. And we spent the funds allocated by the government on all of this.

But in addition to the plan, which we allegedly didn't fulfill, we held the concert, "Hardcore, Only Hardcore" with the participation of musicians from Berlin, the Russian composer Chernyshkov and a great number of Russian musicians.

We held a concert of performers from the "Seventh Studio" dedicated to the last day of the planet — it took place on Dec.12, 2012. Under the auspices of the "Platforma" project, we had a discussion event called "The New Left," after which we held the "Left Concert" with Vasya

Oblomov and other musicians.

We put on the opera "Four Quartets" and the show "F-CKING A." And we held master classes, discussions and media festivals. We did all of it on money allocated by the government. And we did it all not only to fulfill the plan that the Ministry of Culture had approved, we did all that above and beyond the plan.

And we didn't do it all because we stole money — that's absurd! — we did it because for us it was important to make the country enlightened and contemporary. Or at least make the small part of the country that came to see us and talked about us enlightened and contemporary.

In 2011, before we received any subsidies, we put on the concert "Aria," in which more than 130 people contributed to the performances "Valley of Pain" and "Sleep," we produced a show that later went on to win a "Golden Mask" award — "The Story of a Soldier."

In my hands is the 32nd edition of the journal "Theater." It is completely devoted to the "Platforma" project. My deepest thanks go to Marina Davydova and her colleagues who put this issue together.

Related article: Serebrennikov's Embezzlement Case, Explained

Marina writes at the very beginning that she did this edition for lawyers. Sorry, but that's wrong, Marina. You made it for the investigators, you made it for the court, you made it for the people who are interested in knowing what the "Platforma" project was.

In actual fact, you made it for people who don't believe the groundless accusation that 70 percent of the money was stolen. What's in this journal, Your Honor?

I'll leave if for you if you want to read it yourself or if you can. It is evidence that no one stole anything, and that everything planned for the "Platforma" project was done — and then some.

We have spoken about this many times. We've said that it's obvious and can be easily checked. We've said that the investigators should check it. But our words had no effect.

Why? All I have is speculation that I don't even want to speak of today. The journal has a huge number of posters for events held under the "Platforma" project, a great number of reviews. And there are also interesting numbers — listen to them — and I hope the investigators and prosecutors hear them, too.

"Platforma" received 70 million rubles each year, produced about 100 original events — shows, concerts, media festivals — conducted masterclasses and discussions about contemporary art. That's what we did to support and develop contemporary art.

Throughout the existence of "Platforma," we received 216 million rubles, and we used that money to create a project that had never been done before in Russia and that existed for three years and three months. The month-long festival for fans in Sochi in 2017 cost the treasury 264 million rubles.

That's the kind of event that is organized in our country. But we really tried for three years and three months. I want you to understand the scale of the injustice I have been compelled to endure for six months now. The most awful thing is that no one tries to see obvious things or come to the obvious conclusions.

I am accused of stealing 133 million rubles from the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Culture filed a lawsuit for 133 million rubles. The Ministry of Culture has not deigned to explain in the suit what damages it suffered.

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In 2018, what did the Ministry of Culture dislike among the works shown from 2011 to 2014, works that the audiences adored, works that won prizes and acclaim not only in Russia but abroad?

In 2018, what did the Ministry of Culture think was missing from what we did to develop contemporary culture in Russian from 2012 to 2014? Can the Ministry of Culture formulate its complaint and state it to us and to the public?

Usually the victim is the one who initiates the investigation. The victim comes to the police and says that a crime has been committed, but the Ministry of Culture didn't go anywhere. Investigators told the Ministry about an alleged crime. The Ministry of Culture did not to try to determine if there were any damages, what the damages were or how much the damages cost.

The investigators told the Ministry the amount of the alleged damages. So a question naturally arises: Why in these nine months of investigation haven't we seen anyone from the Ministry of Culture who would look us in the eye and tell us what the Ministry of Culture was missing, what it spent money on but didn't get, what in the "Platforma" project was done wrong?

Your Honor, I've only told you what we did in 2012. Everyone knows what was done in 2013 and 2014. Let the Ministry of Culture tell me to my face what we failed to do or what costs we inflated. Let the Ministry of Culture tell me and the public what Russia didn't receive from the "Platforma" project in terms of the development of contemporary art from 2011 to 2014.

My parents raised me not just to never take money that didn't belong to me, in fact, they were like: if you see money, walk away. Now my mother is no longer with us. Only my father is left. But he says the same thing.I have created art and I want to continue to create art. I didn't have anything to do with money.

There was and is not any cause to file a lawsuit against the "Seventh Studio" or for my house arrest. The house arrest should be revoked and the case dismissed. I am without a doubt innocent and right. And I hope for a wise and just decision.

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