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Anti-War Russian Pianist Dies in Custody

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Pianist Pavel Kushnir. **Sverdlovsk Regional Local History Museum**

Russian concert pianist and anti-war activist Pavel Kushnir died in police custody after going on hunger strike, his mother confirmed Monday.

Friends and activists said last week that Kushnir died at age 39 in a pre-trial detention center in the Jewish autonomous district, a remote region of Russia's Far East.

Federal Security Service (FSB) agents arrested Kushnir in May on charges of calling for terrorist activities in YouTube videos where he spoke out against the invasion of Ukraine.

The independent news website Mediazona reported Monday that it was able to verify Kushnir's death with his mother, Irina Levina.

"I was informed by the FSB investigator in [the regional capital] Birobidzhan. [My son died on] July 28 of this year. From a hunger strike," Levina, 79, was quoted as saying.

"They say they helped. They say there were IVs and they tried to support him somehow, but apparently it wasn't enough," she added.

Embed:

> ◙ Пианист Павел Кушнир умер в СИЗО Биробиджана после голодовки, сообщает «Вот Так» со ссылкой на правозащитницу Ольгу Романову и подругу Кушнира, пианистку Ольгу Шкрыгунову.
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> 39-летний пианист умер 27 июля. Он объявил голодовку в изоляторе и в последние дни отказался от воды.... pic.twitter.com/Q8TuzjJwDU
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> — Важные истории (@istories_media) August 2, 2024

Mediazona said other details and the official cause of Kushnir's death remain unknown.

Kushnir was a graduate of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory and a soloist in several regional philharmonic orchestras. He was a soloist with the Birobidzhan Regional Philharmonic before his arrest there.

Levina told Mediazona that her son's body was expected to be repatriated "soon" to his native Tambov region.

Vot Tak, a Russian-language affiliate of the Poland-based broadcaster Belsat which first reported his death, said Kushnir's YouTube channel had five subscribers at the time of his arrest.

Independent Novosibirsk councilwoman Svetlana Kaverzina said Sunday that the public did not learn about Kushnir's arrest or hunger strike until his death.

"Birobidzhan is a city where there are no connections between dissidents. There was no one to tell. Apparently, the relatives were afraid to go public and the man was left alone with the system," she wrote on Telegram.

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