

# Moscow Theatre Director Questioned in Large-Scale Embezzlement Probe

July 09, 2025



Vladimir Kehman. **Vladimir Smirnov / TASS**

Russian investigators questioned the artistic director of two of Russia's most prominent theaters in connection with a major embezzlement case, the St. Petersburg-based news outlet Fontanka [reported](#) Wednesday.

The investigation centers on alleged financial misconduct during the restoration of the Gorky Moscow Art Theatre's stage, which was scheduled to reopen in October 2025.

Vladimir Kehman, the artistic director of the Gorky Moscow Art Theatre and the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, was summoned to the Investigative Committee's headquarters in Moscow and authorities searched his residence, Fontanka reported.

Kehman is currently classified as a witness.

The case is reportedly being led by the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, and the Interior Ministry's economic security division.

The Ostorozhno Novosti news outlet [reported](#) that the main entrance to Moscow Art Theatre was closed and that officers affiliated with the Interior Ministry had sealed off parts of the building.

Investigators are examining the roles of several companies that won major renovation contracts under Kehman's leadership, including RSK-Renaissance, Stroy-Expert and Atlant-Project.

RSK-Renaissance alone was awarded a nearly 1-billion-ruble (\$13 million) contract in 2023 for work on the Moscow Art Theatre.

Authorities have also expressed interest in the business dealings of Marat Karginov, a contractor with ties to projects at multiple theaters Kehman has overseen.

Kehman, 56, was appointed director of the Gorky Moscow Art Theatre in 2021. He has been described as one of the most controversial figures in Russian theatre.

He previously served as general and artistic director of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theatre before being [fired](#) for staging a production of Wagner's Tannhäuser that sparked an outcry from the Russian Orthodox Church.

A former banana importer once known as Russia's "Banana King," Kehman built a fruit empire through his company JFC, which controlled a third of the national banana market in the early 2000s. In 2010, 120 kilograms of cocaine were discovered on a JFC shipment, though Kehman was cleared of any wrongdoing.

He was declared bankrupt in the United Kingdom in 2012, followed by a Russian bankruptcy ruling in 2016.

The Bank of Moscow continued to pursue fraud allegations against him despite his bankruptcy and brought the case to a London court in 2015. The court found Kehman had secured loans through falsified documents and deception, [ordering](#) him to pay more than \$140 million in damages.

In Russia, a five-year probe into the alleged embezzlement of 20 billion rubles (approximately \$256 million) in bank loans expired in 2017 due to the statute of limitations running out.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/07/09/moscow-theater-director-questioned-in-embezzlement-probe-a89755>