

In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

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This week, everyone's attention has been on the Pussy Riot trial, whether wishing the women freedom or joyfully anticipating a long sentence, like pop singer Yelena Vayenga, who said she has already put champagne on ice.

It's a court case that leaves no one indifferent. Pussy Riot has gathered a pretty impressive cohort of supporters, including British comedian Stephen Fry, who used his massive Twitter following to call people to pressure Vladimir Putin, and quirky musician Jarvis Cocker, who signed a letter to The Times of London.

But Vayenga, one of Russia's most popular singers, said on her site that she would drink a toast to the judge who put the women away.

Vayenga sings a type of music known in Russian as "chanson," although there is nothing French about it. It can be prison-related but also sentimental about religion, big on crosses and guardian angels. She represents a certain section of middle Russia, like it or not. She became popular not through television slots or a powerful producer but by touring constantly and singing simple songs that people like.

Vayenga wrote on her website that Pussy Riot had offended her "as an Orthodox Christian to the depths of my soul," Moskovsky Komsomolets reported on Thursday, publishing a scan and a link.

"Seven years is a lot? They'll manage. Maybe it will put their brains in order," she wrote in an idiosyncratically punctuated and spelled post. She also claimed the consequences would have been much worse for the women if the protest had been in a mosque (even if she can't spell mosque). Oddly, this is a popular argument in Russia among people who can't spell mosque.

"Guys, I will personally drink to the health of the judge who hands them a jail term," she added, quoted by Argumenty i Fakty.

Vayenga removed the post after lots of media coverage, and put up a new one saying she only regretted misspelling mosque, which she blamed on "emotion and lack of education."

She told those who sent her "screeds from the Bible" to stop it. "Read that to your children. I don't want it!" she said, pouring scorn on the idea that Christianity might involve reading.

To get an idea of Vayenga's views: She has vowed to ask Vladimir Putin to shut down the trashy reality show Dom-2 on TNT. That is a view shared by the Pussy Riot victims' lawyer, Larisa Pavlova, who is a prominent figure in the Parents' Committee pressure group. Members have gone to court to ban the show from broadcasting in the daytime because of alleged erotic content. Pavlova colorfully compared it to "dogs mating."

What's really fascinating is how a group of feminist-theory-quoting radical protest artists even entered the orbit of conventional people like Vayenga and her fans.

Another opponent of the women is pop diva Alla Pugachyova, who has dismissed the Pussy Riot women on television as "talentless fools."

And another pop singer, Valeriya, told Radio Liberty on Tuesday in a milder vein that the "street hooligans" should be punished, but only with administrative measures, not jail.

The star, who has a wholesome family image, also brought up the Muslim argument, saying the women "would have been stoned" in a Muslim country.

Valeriya seemed most incensed by Western stars supporting Pussy Riot, saying that they should not bite the hand that feeds them after doing lucrative private gigs in Russia.

"They all come here for money and at the same time tell us what to do. They're for democracy... Let them work out their democracy over there," she ranted. A touch of sour grapes, perhaps, since her bid for pop fame in the West as a "Russian Madonna" has gone off the boil.

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