

In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

September 13, 2012



This month, NTV launched a new reality show, "The Call of Fate," where sleazy "model producer" Pyotr Listerman helps a millionaire choose from a harem of young women.

The idea of the show is close to that of the U.S show "The Bachelor," where women compete for the affections of a man who has been deemed highly eligible. But NTV takes away any semblance of romance or gloss by picking Listerman as a judge.

It's hard to say exactly what Listerman does. He calls himself a model producer but says openly that he runs an escort agency where beautiful women meet rich men for a night or even for arranged marriage. Naturally we only hear his side and he is a canny self-publicist. So it is not clear whether he really moves in the high places that he claims.

Listerman last did a television show like this in 2007, but he hasn't changed a bit: he still has the same little round glasses, black leather jacket and shaved head.

The show is called "A Call of Fate" because, the channel claimed, Listerman needs to make just one phone call to fix up the winner with the millionaire. "All the best marriages in the

world, I make them," he said in the trailer. And presumably the Church of Scientology has him on speed-dial.

"Listerman appearing on NTV is a symptomatic situation. Although you would have thought, how much further could they go?" said television critic Arina Borodina on Kommersant FM radio.

Ksenia Larina of Echo Moskvyy called the late-night show "pornography of the soul."

NTV has resolutely turned its back on any liberal opposition-minded viewers and is even having fun with its pariah status. It invited a verbally challenged Kremlin youth group member, "Sveta from Ivanovo", to present a show after a YouTube video of her spouting nonsense about United Russia became a hit. Last week its cameramen accompanied Orthodox activists who interrupted a discussion about Pussy Riot at Teatr.doc by shouting about blasphemy.

In a recent show, the toothy millionaire Vladimir Bulankov romanced some of the women over dinner before taking them all to a gym and watching them fight each other in a boxing ring.

Looking up Bulankov, I found that he is known as a "social lion" in Kiev, where he is a businessman. Bizarrely, the show features Russian women but probably to save money is actually filmed in Kiev, as could be seen from the name of the gym.

Bulankov wore pink suede moccasins and complained to Listerman about the cheap plastic-packed lunches the women were being served in their house. Not because they looked disgusting, though. "I think in three days they've already put on weight," he fretted.

In a later episode, apparently, he watched the women parade in their swimsuits before weighing each one.

The women, who are nearly all slim with long hair and in their late teens or early 20s, spent most of the episode I watched complaining. With some justification: they even had to share beds in the low-budget house. Listerman popped in now and then to swear at the women (bleeped out) and tell them: "I am always right, I am God."

Yana from Simferopol was sent packing after Bulankov did not like her attempt to wow him with erotic dancing, which he called "vulgar."

But the main event was the boxing ring, where the women had to fight each other. Listerman described it as a kind of therapy where they could vent their "internal wars with each other."

"Only until the first blood," he reassured the women.

The winner was the scariest woman, Yulia, 22, from Nadym in the remote far north. She got a little too enthusiastic with her fists and the other woman, a blonde, burst into tears and got a comforting hug from Bulankov, so it was not clear who had actually won.

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