

Bolshoi Acid Attack Suspects Deny They Conspired

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Filin attending a news conference at the west German hospital on Friday. **Wolfgang Rattay**

Bolshoi Theater dancer Pavel Dmitrichenko called on his friends and colleagues "not to believe anyone" about his alleged role as the mastermind of an acid attack on Bolshoi Ballet chief Sergei Filin, in what investigators say could be an attempt to soften his potential sentence.

Dmitrichenko was arrested on March 5 along with two suspected accomplices, Yury Zarutsky and Andrei Lipatov, and confessed the following day to having organized an attack on Filin. But he said he did not order the Jan. 17 attack "to the extent that it happened," insisting that he never told anyone to throw acid on Filin's face.

In comments attributed to Dmitrichenko posted Friday on the Facebook wall of his girlfriend, fellow Bolshoi dancer Angelina Vorontsova, he said that throwing acid is not something a "true man would do" and that he would "never do that," RIA-Novosti reported.

But, he added enigmatically, he was "obliged to agree to many things."

Dmitrichenko also said he never paid money for the attack to Zarutsky, who he said volunteered to beat Filin up, a proposal that Dmitrichenko said he agreed to.

Police say Dmitrichenko paid 50,000 rubles (\$1,600) to his pair of accomplices. Lipatov allegedly drove Zarutsky to Filin's apartment building to carry out the attack.

All three suspects have denied that it was a group effort.

"The three suspects did not conspire to commit the act they are being accused of," Sergei Zhorin, Lipatov's lawyer, said by phone.

"Dmitrichenko's acts cannot be qualified as intentional infliction of a grave injury," Zhorin said, and thus "the investigation will have to change the wording of the accusation."

On Tuesday, Zarutsky said he was the sole organizer and executor of the attack. He said he did it because of personal enmity toward Filin that developed after Dmitrichenko told him about Filin's "corrupt practices" at the theater, Izvestia reported.

Investigators have said they have evidence that the attack was in fact a coordinated effort. In an interview published Friday in Izvestia, one of the lead investigators in the case, Alexander Kuligin, said: "We have proof that there was a solid connection between the three suspects: how they agreed on what they will do and what their plans will be on the day of the attack."

Each of the three suspects faces up to 12 years in prison if found guilty of being part of an organized group that planned the attack, while the maximum sentence would be eight years for an attacker acting alone.

Bolshoi administrators and artists said last week that they believed someone other than Dmitrichenko was ultimately behind the attack on Filin.

Speaking on Friday at a news conference from a clinic in Aachen, Germany, Filin said that Dmitrichenko was "among the people he suspected" and that he is ready to have a "face-to-face interrogation" with him.

Filin said he was in daily contact with his deputy at the theater by telephone and had no fear about going back to work. "As soon as I can see, I will go back and do the same work. I am not afraid."

Filin's lawyer, Tatyana Stukalova, said Filin was preparing to file a suit against the suspects to compensate him for his ongoing medical treatment and all related expenses, Interfax reported.

According to Dr. Martin Hermel, a surgeon at the Aachen University Clinic, Filing could return to his job only in a few months' time.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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