

St. Patrick's Day Paraders Disregard Ban

By [Naomi Sutherland](#)

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Hundreds of Russian fans of Irish culture sang and danced their way along Arbat on Sunday in an unauthorized celebration of St. Patrick's Day. **Naomi Sutherland**

Russian fans of Ireland took over Arbat on Sunday with dancing, singing and Irish wolfhounds as they ignored City Hall's decision to not allow a St. Patrick's Day parade.

Hundreds of people — many wearing green, some in kilts, some with Irish flags and shamrocks painted on their faces — paraded up the street. Fiddles were played, a fire show and acrobats strode down the street on stilts as police watched on with slightly more patience than is traditional for unauthorized Moscow meetings.

"We like Irish culture and music ... and you get to get to wear crazy hats," Ilya said, pointing to the fluorescent green one on his head.

"It is a very interesting culture, the music and a way of leisure that is very close to the Russian way," said Maria Chernykh, 23, who works in marketing and has been to eight St. Patrick's Day parades in Moscow. "Now we are off to the wonderful Irish pub Belfast to continue the

celebrations.”

The parade, which first took place in 1992, was refused permission by the city, which said it would cause traffic jams and that organizers had applied for permission too late. No traffic was halted on the pedestrianized Arbat.

Police asked the merrymakers not to parade, Ekho Moskvya radio reported, but the crowd answered them by singing. They did listen to one police request though, the station reported, to not wave the Irish flag as they went down the street.

Chernykh said the parade along Arbat was not new but an alternative one to the official parade begun after some musicians were barred from taking part in the official parade and that it is in its fourth year. Organizers of the official parade could not be reached for comment.

Even with the friendly attitude of police, five people were arrested all in Irish-themed costumes and on stilts, Kasparov.ru reported.

St. Patrick's Day is March 17, but events timed to coincide with the holiday have been taking place ever since all over Russia.

Fifty people and 40 dogs, of Irish breed, gathered in the center of Yekaterinburg for their own St. Patrick's Day parade on Saturday, local media reported.

Hollywood actress Michelle Rodriguez, who starred in Avatar and the television series “Lost,” played a DJ set at club Rai on Saturday in what was called a St. Patrick's event.

More traditionally, famous Irish pianist Miceal O'Rourke is among the performers who were set to play at the International House of Music on Sunday, while Moscow's Irish Film Festival had Irish wolfhounds, traditional Irish music and whiskey when it opened late Wednesday night.

“Every year, we showcase the unique Irish spirit, in all its romantic, darkly comical and tragic glory,” said Johnny O'Reilly, a filmmaker and co-organizer of the event.

Cinema-goers reacted positively Friday to “The Runaway,” a beautifully shot comedy about a South American criminal whose plane accidentally crashes in the heart of the Irish countryside and who is then helped back in the air by the local villagers. The film, based on a true story, won Best Irish Feature Film at the 2010 Galway Film Fleadh and shows again Thursday and Saturday.

“Ireland's image in Russia is still caught in another era, so we're aiming to show Ireland in a deeper way to Russia,” co-organizer Gerard MacCarthy said. “Anyone Irish living in Moscow is faced with rather dated preconceptions about Ireland which don't fully recognize that Ireland is a dynamic, innovative and progressive place.”

The Irish Film Festival runs till March 27 at Formula Kino Gorizont, 21/10 Komsomolsky Prospekt. Metro Frunzenskaya. Tel. 795-3795, www.irishfilm.ru.

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