

Fringe performers to show support for Russian punk band

Edinburgh Festival Fringe performers are planning to participate in global day of action on behalf of feminist Russian punk band, Pussy Riot, currently on trial, facing 7 year prison sentences for singing a song critical of Russia's president, Vladimir Putin.

Fringe performers will gather at the Sweet Grassmarket tomorrow Friday 17 August 2012 at 11:00am to read trial transcripts, including testimony by Pussy Riot members, prior to the trial's announced verdict due around mid-day.

Pussy Riot band members were arrested, and have remained imprisoned since February, after giving an impromptu performance in Moscow's main cathedral to call for an end to Vladimir Putin's rule.

The three women – Nadezhda Tolokonnikova (23) Maria Alekhina (24) and Yekaterina Samutsevich (29) who have already been in custody for five months, high-kicked and danced as they belted out their "punk prayer" in Christ the Savior Cathedral in February. The YouTube video of their performance can be viewed [here](#)

Amnesty International has called the women 'prisoners of conscience'.

The three women were charged with 'hooliganism motivated by religious hatred', which carries a maximum sentence of seven years. The trial has been seen as part of the widening government crackdown on dissent that followed Putin's election in March to a third presidential term.

"With every day, an increasing number of people start to

realize that if the political machine turned against girls who performed in the Christ the Savior Cathedral for 40 seconds, this means only that this political system is scared of the truth and the sincerity that we bring,” Pussy Riot band-member, Tolokonnikova said in her final words, addressing a packed courtroom. *“We have more freedom than all those people from the prosecution in front of me – because we can say what we want.”*

Defence lawyers have invited activists around the world to show their solidarity with the band by holding a global protest tomorrow the day Judge Marina Syrova is to issue her verdict.

The Sweet performance is part of a global day of action with events planned in dozens of cities around the world. The transcript reading was proposed by poet, Sasha Dugdale and playwright EV Crowe, whose program is to be performed at the same time at London’s Royal Court Theatre. The verbatim testimony was translated from Russian by Sasha Dugdale, who has been monitoring live feeds of the trial. She described their words as “extraordinary, poetic, full of passion and innocence”.

Director, John-David (JD) Henshaw, Venue Manager of [Sweet Grassmarket](#) remarked, “These three young women – some, mothers with young children – face unconscionable persecution, and severe prison sentences, for merely doing what each and every performer here at the Fringe does every single day of their lives – these women are being punished for exercising the simple basic human right of *free creative expression*,”

Henshaw continues, “We support them in our modest way by exercising that very same right of creative expression, and in doing so, remind ourselves how much we must always cherish the right of free expression that we enjoy in our own country. We hope for their safe return to freedom and their families, and for their undeniable right to pursue their art.”