

Swiss-Russian virtuoso musician Alexander Boldachev excluded from Dutch Harp Festival

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Bowing to the poisonous campaign against everyone and everything Russian, the 2022 Dutch Harp Festival, held recently in the city of Utrecht on May 7-8, “postponed” the appearance of Swiss-Russian virtuoso harpist Alexander Boldachev.

The festival is a biannual event, which one organizer claims has “the most ambitiously creative and diverse programming” of any festival focused on the instrument. In a public statement issued at the last moment regarding the Boldachev situation, festival officials begin by proclaiming grandly that “the Dutch Harp Festival has always aimed to be a celebration of artists and music. We believe in the power of music to bring people together and transcend borders and boundaries.”

The officials then proceed to demonstrate what they mean concretely by “bringing people together and transcending borders and boundaries”: capitulating, at the first sign of “trouble,” to the relentless anti-Russian propaganda bombardment.

They go on to explain that “even though we have tried to be sensitive to the realities of the war in Ukraine, we may have not been sensitive enough.” The DHF statement acknowledges that the Russian-born Boldachev “has recently been performing in numerous charity concerts for aid to victims of this war, as well as posting daily Instagram posts with music set to Ukrainian poems” and notes that the celebrated harpist was scheduled “to perform a Sunday [May 8] afternoon concert at our festival.”

However, the Dutch event had also invited Ukrainian singer and *bandura* [plucked string folk instrument] player Maryna Krut to be a special guest. She traveled, the statement says, “from Kyiv to The Netherlands a week ago, while back in Ukraine, her loved ones are literally fighting at the front. Given these circumstances, it is proving too stressful for her to share the festival with a Russian artist, despite his support for the Ukrainian cause, at this time.”

Forced to choose between upholding principle and giving in to Ukrainian nationalism, and the official Dutch, European and US war hysteria, the festival chose the latter.

Trying to put a good face on things, officials assert that they have “discussed this situation with Alexander Boldachev and he has been very gracious in agreeing to postpone his contribution to the next festival.” How much genuine choice did he have in the matter?

Boldachev (born 1990) is a composer, teacher and internationally prominent musician. He has received awards for his music in the US, Japan, the UK, Switzerland, Italy, Bulgaria, France, Belgium and Russia. He is also a guest soloist at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and an official artist of Salvi Harps, the Italian manufacturer of concert harps.

BS Artist Management, Boldachev’s former agents, explain on their website that “Alexander was born in St. Petersburg, in the family of a professor of St. Petersburg Conservatory Irina Sharapova and philosopher-futurist Alexander Boldachev. He began studying on the piano at the age of four, and at the age of five he was already performing ... the first solo harp pieces.” After admission at the age of seven to the special musical lyceum of the St. Petersburg Conservatory in harp and composition, Boldachev began his international career at the age of eight, with a performance of Handel’s Harp Concerto with the State Orchestra of Lithuania.

The site continues, “The main compositional activity of Alexander is concentrated on expansion of the harp repertoire with his own works and transpositions for the harp, some of which (Fantasy ‘Scheherazade’ on the symphonic suite [by] Rimsky-Korsakov, the arrangement of ‘The First Suite’ by Rachmaninov for harp and piano) are among the most virtuosic examples of harp literature in the world.”

Boldachev, we learn, pursues a “very intense concert activity, having visited with solo tours and master classes more than 45 countries on 5 continents, performing with orchestras and different musicians in chamber ensembles.”

The decision by the Dutch Harp Festival does not simply involve the mistreatment of a world-class musician. The sinister anti-Russian chauvinism to which the event

surrendered is aimed more generally at polluting the political and cultural atmosphere and preparing the groundwork for truly horrific crimes by the US and NATO powers. Having instilled in the public the notion that Russians are beyond—or beneath—civilization, almost subhuman, the US and European ruling elites hope that their populations will be inured to the death of massive numbers of Russian people (“Getting what they deserve!”) in any potential conflict.

Such reactionary decisions need to be denounced and reversed.

Alexander Boldachev was gracious enough to provide us the following statement:

“For 27 years, I have been performing on stage and writing music. My first trips abroad took place in 1997, when it was tricky and cumbersome, but Russian musicians were seen with great interest.

“Then, more and more, I met Russians in all corners of the planet, where I traveled for concerts. Orchestras, festivals, competitions—almost no event could be accomplished without Russian artists. The war in Ukraine put the community before another moral choice, and, as usual, TV propaganda won over logic.

“Public opinion is a dangerous thing. It must be able to change politicians, but not excommunicate actors; uphold common values, but not remove musicians from the stage; guarantee equality of genders and nationalities, but not incite the next hotbeds of hatred and nationalism.

“A couple of days before the Festival in the Netherlands, the organizers called me. They told me about the problem: the Ukrainian singer did not want to perform at the same festival together with the Russian musician, justifying herself on the grounds of an internal conflict and out of concern for relatives who are now fighting on the war fronts.

“Having friendly relations with the festival and choosing cultural solidarity as my central ideology, especially in the current situation, after lengthy negotiations, I allowed my participation to be postponed to 2024. Everything is beautiful, decorous, everyone is happy. The festival sparkles with unity; I am a knight in shining armor, giving way to a lady ...

“We can't blame the Festival for this particular case, because media and social pressure did not give them any space to make the ‘right, humanistic’ choice without losing reputation in a catastrophic way. It was a huge personal tragedy for the organizational committee. But that is even more scary.

“At the moment—this is the sixth such case since the beginning of the war.

“And I wonder: how far will we go?

“If I say that I don’t want to play with a black man at the same festival, my career will be over before I can finish the

phrase. And no one will care about my experiences and psychological trauma, because we are taught that skin color does not affect the color of the soul. Therefore, all people have the right to an unbiased attitude and the social presumption of innocence.

“Why, as the Russian expression goes, step on the same rake again and again? War, cruelty, hatred, revenge—are the usual entertainment for people and, it seems to me, they no longer distinguish between a Hollywood blockbuster and where people’s real lives are. Yesterday’s ‘Maria Teresa’ will bite into the heart of the ‘enemy of the people.’ But who declared it to be so?

“I created the community LYUD?: Cultural Solidarity to unite people with the values ??we are currently losing. Value is action, not words. Solidarity is the destruction of stereotypes within oneself, an attempt to understand and welcome another person, another culture, taking a step towards and making the whole world a little closer.

“Our community has created a Music Academy for refugee children, held several charity concerts to help Ukraine, and organized socially unifying projects, meetings, rallies.

“As a Russian, I want united support in saving the countries of which I consider myself a native. As a Swiss, I don’t wish for extreme nationalism within Europe. As a cosmopolitan, I am afraid that the abyss between classes, the structures of countries, and common sense and stereotypes can no longer be closed by any culture or solidarity. Usually, at such moments, humanity goes through a global cleansing. But it can be terrifying.

“I hope that knowledgeable people will be able to give advice, both to me and to all of us.”



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