



OSCOW—It's January 2013, the end of the national holidays. The shops are groaning, and for most Muscovites, the living is easy. The city center is a magnet for disposable wealth and conspicuous consumption. At it's heart, and increasingly out of step with its commercial surroundings, is the Bolshoi Theater—older than the United States itself, and more recently, a symbol of everything communism did right, built by the state for the people. It is just 500 yards from the Kremlin, and reportedly a secret passage below ground connects the two institutions.

For ordinary Russians, every child's first visit to the theater is still a rite of passage. For their parents to see and be seen before the curtain rises is a ritual in upward mobility. The ushers—all ladies, all of a certain age, some of them with 50 years service for the Bolshoi behind them—call the new, upwardly mobile Russians "chandelier gazers." Disdainful of the new generation's lack of culture and respect, these *babushkas* know every act of every ballet or opera. They have seen it all. Or so they thought.

ACID ATTACK

On January 17, 2015, word spread that Sergei Filin, former lead dancer and current artistic director of the Bolshoi's revered ballet company, had been attacked. Acid was thrown in his face. Police identified the main suspect as well known male ballerina Pavel Dmitrichenko.

As filmmakers, we worked quickly to gain never-before granted access backstage at this Russian landmark during this complicated and dramatic time. Even in a Russia steeped in lurid tabloid headlines, this was a story that commanded the nation's undivided attention. Speculation intensified as to Dmitrichenko's motive. Wild stories of political conspiracy and underworld influence began circulating. Inside the theater there was first disbelief, then shock, then anger.



DMITRY BELIAKOV

Maria Allash, also a principal dancer, awaits her entrance backstage.

In early 2013, their affair was in its first flush, and Dmitrichenko was in awe of her beauty and talent. But Angelina was not getting the parts, and there appeared little Dmitrichenko or Tsiskaridze could do to influence the casting process which was within Filin's fiercely protected grip. When Dmitrichenko orchestrated the attack on Filin (he delegated the actual attack to a couple of local thugs he had only recently met), the perfect storm was unleashed.

Former dancers quickly stepped forward to describe the Bolshoi as an enormous brothel. Vorontsova left the Anastasia Meskova, sits in the wings, crushed, after learning she'd not been asked to go on tour with the Bolshoi.



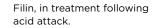


Maria Alexandrova performs, flawlessly.



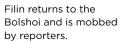
Ballet master Sergei Filin chats privately with a dancer backstage.







Accused of master-minding the acid attack on Filin, principal dancer Pavel Dmitrichenko behind a glass wall in court.



Putin's designated general director, Vladimir Urin, watches the audience assemble in the Bolshoi's main theater.

company immediately, followed by others. Tsiskaridze's contract was not renewed. He was effectively sacked. In court, Dmitrichenko claimed Filin was taking bribes, Tsiskaridze sued for wrongful dismissal, and the prima of primas, Svetlana Zakharova, disappeared for a week when overlooked for a part—all before the new season had even began, and while Filin was undergoing complex medical procedures to save his sight.

