

**WE ARE  
PUSSY RIOT OR  
EVERYTHING  
IS P.R.**

**A PLAY ABOUT THE MOST FAMOUS  
PERFORMANCE ART PIECE  
IN HISTORY**

**BY  
BARBARA HAMMOND**



**DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.**

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WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R. was commissioned by the Contemporary American Theater Festival (Ed Herendeen, Founder & Producing Director; Peggy McKowen, Associate Producing Director), Shepherdstown, West Virginia, which produced the world premiere in 2015. It was directed by Tea Alagić, the set design was by Peter Ksander, the costume design was by Trevor Bowen, the lighting design was by D.M. Wood, the sound design was by Elisheba Ittoop, the video and projection design was by Matthew Haber, and the production stage manager was Deb Acquavella. The cast was as follows:

NADYA ..... Libby Matthews  
MASHA ..... Liba Vaynberg  
KATYA ..... Katya Stepanov  
FEMALE ROLES ..... Sarah Nealis  
FEMALE ENSEMBLE ..... Allyson Malandra,  
Keyla McClure, Brianna Taylor  
SERGEI/PUTIN/MALE ENSEMBLE ..... T. Ryder Smith  
GUARD/MALE ENSEMBLE ..... Cary Donaldson,  
Adam Phillips

WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R. was developed at Emerson Stage (Melia Bensussen, Producing Director; David Colfer, General Manager) at Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts, opening on March 31, 2016. It was directed by Kenneth Prestininzi, the set design was by Corey Umlauf, the costume design was by Caroline Blatz, the lighting design was by Ali Witten, the sound design was by Anna Drummond, and the production stage manager was Alta Lewis Millard.

NADYA/PUSSY RIOT GROUP ..... Ryanna Dunn  
MASHA/PUSSY RIOT GROUP ..... Allie Wittner  
KATYA/PUSSY RIOT GROUP ..... Isa Braun  
SERGEI ..... Riley Fox Hillier  
ANNA ..... Monica Rosenblatt  
PUTIN/PROSECUTOR/OTHERS ..... Mitchell Buckley  
PATRIARCH/HUSBAND/OTHERS ..... Justin Masters

PUSSY RIOT GROUP/OTHERS ..... Lily Richards, Clare Gomes,  
Maria del Mar Fernandez Gonzalez,  
Cat Yamishira, Jade Zaroff

WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R. opened at Theatre Battery (Logan Ellis, Producing Artistic Director; Gianna Gargiulo, Associate Artistic Director; Rebecca White, Associate Artistic Director) in Kent, Washington, on August 5, 2017. It was directed by Logan Ellis, the set design was by Lex Marcos, the lighting design was by Amber Parker, the costume design was by Luna McMeen, the original music and music direction were by Matthew Reed, the dramaturg was Gianna Gargiulo, and the production stage manager was Cassie Neiss. The cast was as follows:

NADYA/ANON. P.R. .... Erin Bednarz  
MASHA/ANON. P.R. .... Adera Gandy  
KATYA/ANON. P.R. .... Sango Tajima  
GUARD/PATRIARCH/  
CEELO GREEN/TV HOST ..... Charles Hawkins  
REPORTER/ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA/  
DOCTOR/ANON. P.R. .... Caitlin Macy-Beckwith  
PROSECUTOR/SECURITY/RUSSIAN  
LANGUAGE PROFESSOR/ANON. P.R. .... Kait Mahoney  
DEVOUT WOMAN/  
LIEUTENANT/ANON. P.R. .... Mandy Rose Nichols  
DEFENSE/SECURITY/  
MADONNA/ANON. P.R. .... Danielle Alexis Nicole Mitchell  
SERGEI ..... Joshua Hamilton  
PUTIN/PYOTR/COSSACK ..... Jesse Parce  
ANON. P.R. .... Tiana Ross

## SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to Mike Lerner, the documentary filmmaker of *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer*, for his sage advice and introduction[s] to Pussy Riot. In Moscow, many thanks to the art collective VGLAZ, civil rights activist Anna Karetnikova, journalist Juliana Lizer, translator Maria Fomina, and especially to those colleagues whose safety depends on not being named here.

WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R. received extensive workshop time and space at New Dramatists.

WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R. received a workshop at Duke University, dramaturged by Jody McAuliffe.

## FOREWORD

*We Are Pussy Riot or Everything Is P.R.* was prescient.

The play is rife with impudence, feminist discourse, and non-standard political resistance.

It's not pretty.

It's great theater for dressing up in neon stockings and funny ski masks and... Wait...

PAY ATTENTION.

Why this play is necessary, why it needed to be written is to be found in its heart, in its love for its martyrs.

LOOK THEM UP. DON'T FORGET.

The play's political heart was broken cycles ago, but it still insists attention must be paid.

Its heart birthed the cost of protest before our current flurry of girl-power plays.

PAY ATTENTION!

Say the name of the punk group.

WHAT PUNK GROUP!

Can't say it? It's too... too what?

It's not pussy that is radical or dangerous.

NOT PUSSY.

It's...

The RIOT in between the lines.

The riot in how Barbara Hammond turns research into an emotional reservoir.

You can be a theater artist and put on this play.

(Will you dare stage the play in its true state of rage and kindness.)

DON'T PLAY ALONG.

*We Are Pussy Riot or Everything Is P.R.* won't play along.

*We Are Pussy Riot or Everything Is P.R.* is a play.

What's a riot good for?

Absolutely nothing!

PAY ATTENTION.

PUNK.

Ken Prestininzi, director  
February 2020

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

In February 2012, less than six months after they formed, the Russian feminist art collective Pussy Riot uploaded their punk prayer “Virgin Mary, Chase Putin Away!” to the internet. The video was recorded, in part, on the altar of Moscow’s Christ the Saviour Cathedral, where women are forbidden from standing, much less yelling, punching, and kicking the air. The world took notice—and so did the Kremlin and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. Three of the group’s anonymous members were hunted down, arrested, and put on trial for “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.”

As I write this essay, Vladimir Putin is rewriting the Russian Constitution so that he will remain in power for life. This does not come as a shock to anyone who has been paying attention to world politics. As Sergei says: “So he likes his job, who can blame him?”

We are in an era of strongmen who “like their jobs,” and the question now facing society is: “What are we going to do about it?” This play shows what a small band of young women did in 2012, and I hope this play both keeps that action alive in our memories, and begins many late-night conversations on campuses, street corners, factories, offices, kitchens, and cafes about what each of us might do when faced with gross injustice and flagrant abuse of power.

Until 2014, Pussy Riot was a movement. After that, for better or for worse, it became a brand. Though fascinating in its own right, that brand is not what this play is about. It’s about a narrow window of time where activist art, religion, and politics clashed on the world stage.

Pussy Riot said “fun can be a revolutionary act,” but the truth is, their words and their actions were rigorous and disciplined. They were students of philosophy and history. They trained for these actions, rehearsed to be spontaneous, just as a play is rehearsed so as to seem natural and effortless.

Pussy Riot were inspired by the Holy Fools (yurodivy) of Russian history, and understanding the role of these yurodivy is key to understanding how to perform this play. Their purpose was to wake people up to what is going on around and within them. They are not

partisan—they simply hold up a mirror to what we are becoming, or could become, if we are not vigilant. Sometimes that is better accomplished with a whisper than a scream.

Nadya has repeatedly said that it is impossible to compare Western feminism and its concerns to the concerns of Russian women. “Feminism that doesn’t benefit men is not my feminism,” she has said. Men are part of their movement. Pussy Riot may require its performers to be female, but they are fighting for the equality of all people, and Sergei is one of those forgotten people for whom they fight.

I realize that calling this “a play about the most important performance art piece in history” is, in itself, P.R., but there are times when art does change the world, or at least won’t allow us to look away from the mirror it holds up to our society—in that way, all artists are called to be yurodivy. So when you rehearse this play, imagine that after opening night everyone involved will be taken to prison. In many places around the world, that is exactly what is happening. You are performing for them because they can’t.

Barbara Hammond  
January 2020



## THE TROUPE

12 YURODIVY (“Holy Fools”)

*Here are two examples of different character tracks.*

### **Example 1**

*(8 women, 3 men, 1 n/s)*

Nadya

Masha

Katya

Defense/Madonna/Pussy Riot Member

Prosecutor/Russian Language Professor/Marilyn Monroe/  
Pussy Riot Member

Judge/British Feminist Lecturer/Pussy Riot Member

Devout Woman/Lieutenant

Doctor/Anna P./Security 2/Pussy Riot Member

Sergei

Guard/Putin/Security 1

Patriarch/Pyotr/Cossack/Russian TV Host

Reporter/Pussy Riot Member

### **Example 2**

*(8 women, 4 men)*

Nadya

Masha

Katya

Defense/British Feminist Lecturer

Prosecutor/Doctor

Judge/Anna P.

Devout Woman/Lieutenant/Russian Language Professor

Reporter/Madonna/Marilyn Monroe/Pussy Riot Member

Sergei

Guard/Security 2

Patriarch/Pyotr/Cossack/Russian TV Host

Putin/Security 1

*The yurodivy playing Nadya, Masha, Katya, and Sergei should have no other roles for clarity's sake.*

The director can experiment with assigning the doubling during auditions and/or rehearsals. The yurodivy should work together to make the play, and delaying the assignment of roles may be good for the collaborative process.

The Reporter is not one reporter, but the entire world press corps, and his/her/their accents should be from all over the planet. Also, having a single yurodivy play the Reporter helps weave the story together and takes the audience on the play's journey.

Lines to be assigned include those of the TROUPE (all yurodivy), the PUSSY RIOT MEMBERS (those cast as P.R.), the PRISONERS, and the CROWD. Lines with the stage direction (*Distributed.*) are to be divided up and given to one or more actors. Playing with different variations on how the chorus of voices are shared and assigned is encouraged.

In addition to these 12, there may be a conductor/foley operator/choirmaster, who is also a yurodivy.

## **SETTING**

The Motherland.

## **LOCATION**

A confined open space.

A Cathedral, Police Station, Courtroom, Corridor of Power,  
Prison Cell, City Streets, a Soviet-Era Kitchen, a TV Station,  
Public Baths, a Concert, a Labor Camp.

The Public Square.

A Stage. The Internet.

## **NOTE ON TEXT**

Much of the dialogue is inspired by trial transcripts and statements by public officials, including Patriarch Kirill and Vladimir Putin, all of which are broadly available on the internet.

Prison scenes are created from Nadya's, Masha's, and Katya's letters from, and interviews about, the detention center and the penal colonies where they resided before and after their sentencing.

Sergei was created based on political activists, prisoners, and artists in Russia and particularly by the events that took place in Bolotnaya Square on May 6, 2012, and the arrests that followed. All other characters are fictions based on the thoughts and language from interviews, studies, and articles of real academics, anarchists, soldiers, policemen, and the Orthodox.

Madonna, of course, is Madonna.

Poetic license is rampant throughout the play.

*We were searching for real sincerity and simplicity, and we found these qualities in the yurodstvo (“the holy foolishness”) of punk.*

—Nadya Tolokonnikova,  
Pussy Riot founding member

# WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R.

## IN THE LOBBY

*Audience is barred from entering theatre.*

*The entire Troupe is in the lobby as audience members. Each has a piece of costume hidden that will identify them when the time comes.*

*There is a carnival atmosphere. It could go so far as having Pussy Riot supporters with climbing gear on the walls who hold up a sign that says: "TAKE MY PICTURE!"*

*Sergei hands out homemade flyers that read:*

### CONSTITUTION ARTICLE 31:

*Citizens shall have the right to gather peacefully,  
without weapons, and to hold meetings, rallies,  
demonstrations, marches, and pickets.*

*He may wear a placard with this information as well.*

*Before people can enter theatre, a Pussy Riot Action breaks out.*

*A handful of brightly balaclavaed Pussy Riot members perform  
for a noisy, confused minute.*

NADYA. (*Masked; shouting.*) Come, let us taste freedom together!

PUSSY RIOT MEMBERS. Church! State! Separate!

Choose the rhyme the priests will hate

Guns, tanks, arrows, bows

Mankind reaps the shit it sows!

Holy Shit!

*One of the Troupe becomes the Cossack and whips the chanting*

*Pussy Riot members. Other Troupe members pull on watch caps and become Security Forces, surrounding the audience and keeping a sweeping eye on them.*

COSSACK. Get out of here. Get out of here while we ask you nicely!

PUSSY RIOT MEMBERS. Holy Shit! Holy Shit! Holy Shit!

Mother Russia release your daughters

Motherland protect your girls

Virgin Mary destroy Putin

Madonna become a Feminist!

*Other members of Pussy Riot are in audience, filming everything.*

COSSACK. I will teach you to love our country!

*Cossack whips them.*

*They call out in pain.*

*Sergei gets close, films this with his phone.*

No filming! No filming here!

*Cossack whips them again.*

SERGEI. They have the right to protest!

COSSACK. No one wants this chaos!

*Sergei and Cossack tussle.*

SERGEI. Don't hurt anyone!

*Cossack whips Sergei, gets Sergei's hands behind his back.*

COSSACK. Arrest this man!

SERGEI. What are the charges?

COSSACK. Assaulting an officer. Inciting a riot! Violating the social order.

PUSSY RIOT MEMBERS. *(Distributed, to audience.)* Please. Film him! It is allowed! Don't let him get away with it!

Riot, riot!!

*Some of them run off or take off masks and blend back in with the crowd.*

*If cast is large enough, others are arrested too.*

*Maybe some audience members are arrested too.*

COSSACK. All those here to cause trouble, troublemakers, disperse. Go home!

*Cossack leaves with Sergei in custody.  
Security 1 and 2 are left in charge.*

SECURITY 1. If you are here for the show, ahem, for the trial, for the service—mmm, if you have a ticket, please enter here.

SECURITY 2. This way. This way, please, to ensure a seat.

SECURITY 1. Everyone follow the others!

SECURITY 2. Welcome in!

PUSSY RIOT MEMBERS. (*Distributed.*) They are taking all your names!

They know where you live!

SECURITY 2. Please. Citizens. Ladies and gentlemen!

Enter this way! Thank you.

PUSSY RIOT MEMBER. (*Imitating Security's tone and style.*) As never seen before! Right this way!

SECURITY 2. One at a time! There is room for everyone!

SECURITY 1. This is the way in. Please open your bags. Bags open.

PUSSY RIOT MEMBER. Show them all your stuff!

SECURITY 1. Bags, please. It is for your own safety.

PUSSY RIOT MEMBER. The trial of the century! Step right up!

*Security ignores Pussy Riot's antics.*

SECURITY 1. It is time! Spasibo! Thank you. This way, please.

SECURITY 2. Everyone follow the others! Welcome in!

*The audience is funneled into theatre. They are sent through makeshift metal detectors and to a table for bag inspection by the Troupe members playing Security Forces. Audience may be patted down, questions asked, empty your pockets, etc. Security Forces do not smile but are very polite. Security may repeat the following, like a TSA guard at an airport, repeating the message for each new group within earshot.*

SECURITY 1 and 2. (*Distributed, repeated.*) Turn off your mobile and noise-making devices.

No weapons.

No recording devices.

No whistling, shouting, or stamping of feet.

No clapping. No booing.

Take your feet off the seats. No smiling. No judging.

No whispering, no thinking. Please!

*Audience is directed to seats. Women are asked to cover their heads and men asked to uncover theirs. Colorful scarves are provided to those women without head coverings. Explanation given to those who ask: courtesy, tradition, respect.*

*At the same time, Pussy Riot members are secretly trying to get audience members to take a Pussy Riot balaclava instead of a traditional head scarf.*

*Audience members should take their pick.*

*The “Bogoroditse Devo” by Rachmaninoff (“A Prayer to the Virgin Mary”) overwhelms the space.*

*A jumble of masks, costumes, props are piled up in view of audience. Filled burlap sacks. Maybe a couple of wheelbarrows. A pile of scripts, even. As if everything had been hastily abandoned and could be reclaimed at any moment.*

*Devout Woman, head covered, is on hands and knees, trying to collect the blood-soaked garments, uniforms, etc.*

*When audience settles, music stops. Preferably, the music is created live, and all of the yurodivy take part. Otherwise, there should be a portable source of music that various Troupe members commandeer throughout the play in the struggle to decide where we are.*

*The yurodivy introduce themselves to the audience. They start, understandably, with Pussy Riot.*

ANNA P. We, all of us,

*She introduces the cast.*

are a troupe of yurodivy, or “Holy Fools.”

We come from the Orthodox tradition of saints who strive “with imaginary insanity to reveal the insanity of the world.”

NADYA. We,



*She introduces Pussy Riot members.*

are Pussy Riot. In February 2012 we uploaded our punk prayer “Virgin Mary, Chase Putin Away!” to the internet.

BRITISH FEMINIST LECTURER. This caught the attention of the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

*The Patriarch is introduced.*

PATRIARCH. Who brought it to the attention of President Vladimir Putin.

*Putin coughs.*

RUSSIAN LANGUAGE PROFESSOR. Three of this group’s anonymous members—Katya, Masha, and Nadya—

*Each are introduced.*

LIEUTENANT. were hunted down, arrested, and put on trial.

MASHA. Unlike most pieces of theatre, which are conceived in the writer’s imagination, what you are about to witness was stitched together from our trial transcripts,

PATRIARCH. and statements by public officials, like me, the patriarch

PUTIN. And me, the president

PYOTR. all of which are broadly available on the internet.

PUTIN. Even when I sing.

DEVOUT WOMAN. He’s going to sing?

*Madonna makes an entrance.*

MADONNA. Even what Madonna says, Madonna actually said.

TROUPE. Madonna?!

SERGEI. I, Sergei Barbarov, am based on a professor who, along with many

TROUPE. Many

SERGEI. others, were put in jail for insisting on their right to protest.

NADYA. While the world watched our trial

MASHA. Others remained how we began:

KATYA. Anonymous. And with the passage of time

DEVOUT WOMAN. And time it will pass

# WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R.

by Barbara Hammond

3 men, 8 women, 1 n/s (doubling, flexible casting)

In February 2012, five young women walked into the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow to protest the illegal presidential election in Russia. The young activists, who called themselves Pussy Riot, offered up a 48-second punk prayer, shouting, "Virgin Mary, chase Putin away!" before being dragged out of the church by security. After uploading a video of the performance onto YouTube, the women of Pussy Riot were arrested as enemies of church and state. But when Western media reclaimed the story, Pussy Riot's protest became the greatest piece of performance art in Russian history. This is their story.

*"[WE ARE PUSSY RIOT OR EVERYTHING IS P.R.] takes us into the spirit of Pussy Riot, into the wild energy and forceful violation of public spaces, into the group's provocative language, and total disrespect for State authority... [It] brings that Russian energy to an American stage, allowing us to witness... what it means to stand-up [sic] against the oppressiveness of State power and be counted."*

—DCMetroTheaterArts.com

*"...an immersive and outstanding theatrical experience, filled with unique choices and the sobering undercurrent that this story is not just theatrical fiction."*

—BroadwayWorld.com

*"...a poetic and sliced-up chronicle of the self-styled 'most famous performance art piece in history' and the politics and personas that swirl around it."*

—City Arts (Seattle)

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