

# The Independent

## When fame meets infamy

A fresh addition to the annals of "lies that Hollywood publicists tell on behalf of the rich and famous" was recently made by one Jason Weinberg, an influential Los Angeles talent rep whose roster of clients includes such high-profile stars as Madonna, Demi Moore and Lindsay Lohan.

On 26 September, Weinberg received an awkward inquiry from the Human Rights Foundation. Was it true, they asked, that another of his clients, Hilary Swank, had accepted a large appearance

fee to attend the 35th birthday party of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-backed despot in charge of Chechnya?

Absolutely not, he replied, in a dismissive email which suggested it was impertinent to even wonder if an Oscar-winning Hollywood liberal of

Me Swank's stature would consider such a vulgar and unethical career opportunity. "Hilary has no current plans to attend the party," it read.

Fast forward exactly nine days, and, well, I think you can guess what happened. Dressed to the nines, and watched by this newspaper's Moscow correspondent, Ms Swank sauntered up Mr Kadyrov's red carpet, before delivering a charming speech about how much she

had already enjoyed her stay in Grozny. "I could feel the spirit of the people, and I could see that everyone was so happy," she said. "Happy birthday, Mr President!"

Joining her was another vintage star: Jean-Claude Van Damme. He got warm applause for finishing his speech with the pronouncement: "I love you Mr Kadyrov!" Then, after hundreds of thousands of dollars-worth of fireworks had been fired into the night sky, the British violinist Vanessa Mae, performed a brief set. She was paid a rumoured \$500,000 (£324,000). Van Damme and Swank were also reportedly paid handsomely for their attendance.



Every good party is followed by a hangover, however. And for all three celebrity guests, that arrived yesterday courtesy of a statement from the Human Rights

Foundation, which had read the Independent's coverage of the event and is calling for their appearance fees to be reimbursed. "Ramzan Kadyrov is linked to a litany of horrific human rights abuses," it read. "It's inappropriate for starts to get paid to party with him. It bolsters his image and legitimises a brutal leader."

For decades, the international A-list have been able to add to their wealth by agreeing to attend (or perform at) social occasions to which they have no obvious connection. But traditionally, their more shameless exploits in this field have remained happily

below the radar. The onward march of technology puts paid to that, though.

**Guilty by association? When fame meets infamy**

**50 Cent, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé**

Cell phone camera footage of 50 Cent, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé performing at parties hosted by the Gaddafi family caused an almighty row earlier this year. The latter was paid as much as £1.2m for a private concert for the Gaddafi family in 2009 at St Barts in the Caribbean. Beyoncé said once the links to the Gaddafis were known, the money went

to Haiti's earthquake relief fund.

still decided to play. Cultural boycotts were counter-productive, he said.

**Sting**  
The singer was criticised for playing a concert in Uzbekistan, organised by the daughter of dictator Islam Karimov. Sting said he was aware of the president's "appalling reputation" but

**Sharon Stone, Kevin Costner and Gerard Depardieu**

An inexplicable standing ovation followed Vladimir Putin's slow-tempo, and excruciating, rendition

of "Blueberry Hill" at a charity event in Russia. Chief cheerleader: the actress Sharon Stone, with Kevin Costner and Gerard Depardieu adding to the celeb count. Hospitals expecting to benefit from the gala later said they received nothing.

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