

NATION

Russian pop star tied to Trump has Tenafly roots

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Published 10:54 p.m. ET July 13, 2017 | Updated 10:38 a.m. ET July 14, 2017

Russian pop star Emin Agalarov wore black leather, drove a souped-up moped and wanted to be the next Elvis Presley, having spent his teenage years living large and dreaming big on the streets of his adopted hometown, Tenafly.

Twenty years after graduating from Tenafly High School, the Russian crooner this week hit it really big.

His publicist, Rob Goldstone, set up the meeting between Donald Trump Jr., Jared Kushner and Paul Manafort and Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya in June 2016 to

pass on reportedly damaging information about Hillary Clinton.

The bizarre story, first reported by The New York Times, is a major blow to the Trump administration, which is under investigation amid allegations of collusion with the Russian government during the 2016 election.

The burgeoning scandal has also put Agalarov in a spotlight he's been chasing since high school.

"He had this movie star vibe," said Dave Maresca, a high school friend, who now lives in Hillsdale. "He kind of already had that, 'I'm just waiting for the moment when my greatness is acknowledged' attitude. That's kind of how he carried himself."

Agalarov spent his teenage years in a modest split-level home on East Clinton Avenue — nothing close to the luxurious mansion, valued at \$3 million, that he owns on Anderson Avenue in Demarest, which is currently up for sale.

It was there that Agalarov would be seen zooming by on his customized black Myrons moped. Maresca said Agalarov was part of a group of moped riders at the high school that he jokingly called "the bikers of Tenafly."

"It was kind of a group of outliers," Maresca recalled. "They kind of found each other, and I think mopeds had something to do with that."

Agalarov was known as "the mad Russian" in the group, notorious for his ability to fill a 16-ounce glass to the brim with vodka and drink it like it was water, Maresca said.

He was a ladies' man who often dispensed love advice and wore black leather Frye biker boots and a flashy, higher-end leather jacket, even over sweats, Maresca said.

"I always had a feeling he had some kind of life that the rest of us would never get access to," Maresca said.

Agalarov rarely flaunted his wealth but it was on full display on his moped.

While his friends drove basic, no-frills motor bikes, Agalarov had the muffler on his adjusted so it roared louder than anyone else's and a stereo system mounted in it so he could ride around listening to Elvis, Maresca said.

"He would always say, 'Elvis is the king.' That was his catchphrase," Maresca said.

Sarah Lewitinn, a Tenafly High School graduate who knew of Agalarov from afar, went on to become an editor at Spin Magazine and is now the music director for a clothing brand.

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She knows what a rock star looks like. And teenage Agalarov was not it.

"I get paid to identify future rock stars, that's kind of what I make my living off of," she said. "And he's not someone I would have pointed at and said, 'That dude's going to be a rock star or a pop star one day.' "

Lewitinn remembers the leather boots and the moped, but "he was kind of someone who was just there really," she said. "He didn't seem like anyone who would be a rabble-rouser. He wasn't a troublemaker, he was just like a guy."

But Agalarov became a star – at least in Russia, where Trump took his Miss Universe pageant in 2013. It was there that Trump appeared in Agalarov's music video for the song, "In Another Life," delivering his signature line, "You're fired."

Trump is said to be close to Emin's father, Aras Agalarov, a billionaire real estate tycoon. The Washington Post reported that Aras Agalarov served as a liaison between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin during the pageant.

Aras Agalarov has a business address at an office building at 333 Sylvan Avenue in Englewood Cliffs, next to the town public works garage. The suite is currently leased to Corsy International, and previously was rented by a company called Russian Art Mall.

No one answered the door at Corsy International on Wednesday or Thursday.

The mansion at 159 Anderson Ave. in Alpine that Aras Agalarov bought in 2006 for \$8 million is also up for sale. It's not far from his son's home at 98 Anderson Ave. in Demarest that Agalarov has put on the market.

No one answered the door at either residence on Thursday.

Celebrity sightings are common in Tenafly and Alpine, where real estate values bend toward the stratosphere.

At various times, Stevie Wonder, Eddie Murphy and Sean "Diddy" Combs have all lived in Alpine; Trump's counselor, Kellyanne Conway currently lives in town.

Agalarov's emergence as the latest local star didn't seem to faze Tenafly residents on Thursday.

Steve Longo was working behind the counter at the Tenafly Kosher delicatessen and reacted to the news with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I say let the politicians play politics," he said. "Me, what I want is for the Mets to go on a 15-game win streak coming out of the All-Star break."

Sandy Sobel was having a bite at the Tenafly Diner when she heard about Agalarov for the first time. Sobel said she's tired of the political controversy over Trump's alleged Russian connections and wishes the story would go away.

She was forgiving as to Agalarov's involvement. "He's just trying to advance his career," she said. "And now, he's a deer in the headlights."

Maresca, Agalarov's high school friend from long ago, said he thought of Agalarov weeks before the scandal broke. He wondered what had happened to the Elvis wannabe.

"All of a sudden, I find out oh [expletive], he's connected to Trump," he said. "The idea that he's connected to that world is a little bit – I don't want to say frightening – but is a moment of pause. It makes you think, 'Wow, you never really know who you're hanging out with.' "

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