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## Musicians Speaking Out Against Racism: "You Need to Love Your Country with Songs, Not Fists"

by Eglė Šilinskaitė

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One can love one's country in various ways. It is possible to protect your country without using your fists, too. And foreigners, arrivals of a different religion or race, also have the right to feel safe. The Kablys community center [actually a concert venue as I understood it, the name means Hook - trans] invited a group of Lithuanian musicians to think about values and tolerance on Saturday. They held a concert called "Hitler's Death" dedicated to fighting racial and ethnic hatred.

Vilius Alesius came up with the idea for the concert and came on stage with the band Skamp's Viktor Diawara. On Saturday Erica Jennings and her husband Jurgis Didziulis were presenting the Ball and Chain program in Šiauliai [other members of Skamp, apparently--trans].

It was after Viktor Diawara was attacked by nationalists on Lithuanian Independence Day, March 11, and called a monkey that Alesius got the idea to hold a concert to encourage tolerance.

Twelve of the best-known alternative Lithuanian bands graced Kablys's stage. "We didn't talk anyone into appearing at this concert. All we did was

invite people to contribute on Facebook, and the line-up was filled almost immediately," Alesius recalled.

The [unseasonably hot -trans] summer weather drove Vilniusites out of the city, so attendance at the Kablys event was smaller than organizers had hoped for. Even so, the sparse audience danced to the rhythm and enthusiastically chanted together with the musicians, "We're against racism!"

There was also a visual installation to get people to think about tolerance: different films by Lithuanian and foreign directors on the topics of nationalism and racism were shown on a multitude of screens.

Lithuanian minister of education and science Gintaras Steponavičius attended the concert. The support fund bearing his name donated 5,000 litas to this event and the Norwegian Embassy to Lithuania also lent support.

"This isn't the sort of event where I can make any political capital. It is actually just really important to me to point out the lack of tolerance in Lithuania. The musicians are first of all trying to remind us that although we are different, we are all important," Steponavičius explained.

Alesius says he sees expressions of intolerance everywhere in Lithuania. He said just looking at the comments on the internet are enough to confirm this, comments which are so disgusting that sometimes it seems as if the most important thing is to denigrate another in order to justify one's own existence.

"Why can't people live as they like, so long as they aren't violating anyone else's right to life and freedom?" Alesius wondered.

Alesius has been friends with Diawara--son of Mali writer Gaoussou Diawara and Lithuanian literature specialist and director Viktorija Preskienyte-Diawara--for a long time and has encountered racism many times as well in Lithuania.

He said it was especially strong just over ten years ago when the group Skamp formed and took their first steps upon the state, back when Diawara was one of a only a handful of black people permanently residing in Lithuania.

"Later, when we entered the European Union, intolerance seemed to decline, but lately it's been increasing again. The worst thing is that the skinhead and nationalist movements usually enjoy political support as well in Lithuania. I am in favor of patriotism, but you can love your country without your fists, in other ways: by singing Lithuanian songs, dressing up in ethnic costumes and celebrating your culture. We can try to make it so foreigners like our country, try to get them interested," Alesius remarked.