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Controversial Croatian rocker stages concert

Croatian rock star, who some say glorifies fascism, performed without incident

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Despite being rejected by two Toronto venues, the controversial Croatian rocker Marko Perkovic took to the stage last night at a "secret and private" concert in Norval, west of Brampton.

The outdoor performance at the Queen of Peace Croatian Centre attracted a few thousand members of the Croatian community and proceeded without visible protest.

Social justice groups had earlier voiced concerns that Perkovic's ultranationalistic lyrics glorified fascism and anti-Semitism.

Members of the Croatian community, both young and old, flocked to the concert of folk-inspired rock – many of them either carrying or draped in Croatian flags.

Amid the overwhelming display of Croatian nationalism, no pro-Nazi symbols could be seen.

According to Hrvoje Pavic, an 18-year-old University of Toronto student and fan of Perkovic, ticket holders were told by tour promoters not to bring concert memorabilia linked to the Ustasha – Croatia's World War II-era pro-Nazi movement.

Ticket holders were only informed of the venue for last night's performance yesterday morning, due to concerns by event organizers that the concert would be shut down or crashed if its whereabouts were made public.

Media and non-members of the Croatian community were not permitted inside the Croatian Centre's grounds.

Despite the absence of Ustasha symbols, many fans chose to sport military tunics complete with Croatian military badges from the Yugoslav civil war.

Others wore T-shirts adorned with the face of Ante Gotovina, the Croatian commander during Croatia's 1991-1995 war.

"[Gotovina's] an accused war criminal with no evidence against him.

"But he's a hero to us," said a Perkovic fan who refused to give his name.



ANDREW WALLACE/TORONTO STAR
Cars enter the Queen of Peace Croatian Centre in Norval yesterday for a performance by Marko Perkovic, a Croatian singer whose ultra-nationalistic lyrics had sparked protests. Non-Croatians and the media were barred.

Serbs and Croats accuse each other of massacring more than a million people during World War II and hundreds of thousands after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Perkovic – whose stage name Thompson is a reference to the submachine gun he used during the war – has been accused of propagating hatred against Jews and Serbs.

But his fans say he's misunderstood.

"His music is patriotic, but he does not promote hate," said Pavic.

Fears that his set list might include a song purported to glorify the fascist movement that led 90,000 Jews, Serbs and Gypsies to concentration camps led two Toronto nightspots, the Kool Haus and The Docks, to cancel Perkovic's performance.

But according to Leo Adler, a spokesperson for Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center For Holocaust Studies, Perkovic's band had to agree to respect Canada's hate laws before being permitted to perform here.

Adler said although he was disappointed the show went on, he was reasonably satisfied the band was unlikely to spread any hate.

"Hopefully the band will abide by their word," he said.

Perkovic is set to perform in Vancouver later this week.