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## Croat rockers court controversy

### Show will go on despite claims of racism

**Mike Howell**

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A concert by a controversial Croatian rock band will go ahead Nov. 16 at the Croatian Cultural Centre despite a call from an international Jewish activist group to cancel the gig.

But the controversy surrounding the Thompson concert has forced the Croatian Cultural Centre to pay the tab for Vancouver police officers to be on the scene.

Michael Milkovich, president of the centre, wouldn't say how much the tab will be but said he wants to ensure no incidents arise at the all-ages show, which is expected to draw up to 1,000 people.

"I just don't want the concert to be interrupted and anything untoward happen," he said. "I just want to have a peaceful concert like we've had before."

Milkovich noted Thompson has played Vancouver five times. There were no protests, incidents or complaints at those gigs, he added.

Thompson changed venues twice for its Toronto concert Nov. 4 after pressure from the Canadian branch of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies. Leo Adler, a spokesman for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, claims the band's fan base in Croatia is sympathetic to the former fascist Ustashe movement in Croatia during the Second World War.

He stopped short of labelling Thompson as anti-Semitic but said, "I don't think that's the type of person that one wants to have singing songs to the children of Canada."

He noted fans often wear Ustashe paraphernalia and give the Nazi-style salute during concerts. "We're not in favour of censorship, but at the very least we don't like to encourage people who promote fascism. Whether you call it Ustasheism, Nazism or fascism, it's the same thing."

The Ustashe oversaw a concentration camp in the Second World War where at least 90,000 Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and anti-fascist Croatians were murdered by the Ustashe and its Nazi collaborators, Adler added.

He pointed to the song "Jasanovic/Stara Gardinska" as one that glorifies the deaths in the camps. He claims Thompson sang it this summer in Croatia to saluting fans. Milkovich dismissed Adler's claims that Thompson promoted fascism and suggested media attention in Toronto led to the Wiesenthal Center's call to cancel the Vancouver gig.

"I'm flabbergasted and it's totally unfounded what he's being charged and labelled with," Milkovich said.

The controversial song Adler alluded to has never been played by Thompson, according to Milkovich, who said another band performed it in Croatia on television, leading to the song mistakenly being associated with Thompson.

"That's what I find bothersome," he said. "It's not his song, he didn't do it, he didn't write it. I've been at his five concerts in Vancouver, I was at the one in Toronto on Sunday and four others in Croatia and I've never heard the man sing the song."

Thompson is the nickname of Marko Perkovic, the band's lead singer. A soldier in the war in the 1990s during which Croatia became independent from a dissolving Yugoslavia, Perkovic carried a Thompson submachine gun.

Milkovich agreed some fans wear clothing with a large U on it, which identifies the Ustashe movement. But it's not something that Perkovic invites, he added.

"Thompson is nationalistic, no question about it. He sings of love of family, love of God, love of country."

Det. Tim Houchen, the VPD's hate crimes investigator, researched the band and concluded it is not promoting hate or anti-Semitism, but does advocate "extreme nationalism."

Houchen confirmed police never received any complaints from the previous Thompson shows. Houchen met recently with the Croatian Cultural Centre and the Simon Wiesenthal Center to address their concerns over next week's concert.

"If Thompson does go [to the Croatian Centre] and says, 'We should target a group' or 'We should advocate genocide' or promote hate, I guarantee you it will be the last concert he plays in Canada," Houchen said.

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