



# Russian

# royalty

Singing sensation Valeriya is the Russian Madonna who has sold over 100 million albums. Before her first concert in the North East she chats to Liz Lamb about her success and surviving domestic abuse

**W**ITH her blonde locks and youthful good looks, Valeriya is every inch the pop star.

She may be a relative unknown in Britain, but back home in her native Russia she is as big as Madonna and so famous she is treated like royalty.

The 40-year-old has sold more than 100 million records – no mean feat considering most Russians couldn't afford to buy licensed albums until recently – and she can't set foot out of her front door without being besieged by adoring fans.

She is also hardworking mother of three who suffered 10 years in a violent relationship before escaping when she feared for her children's lives.

Valeriya says: "Unfortunately, I lived with a man who was very cruel and it was a nightmare living with him for 10 years.

"I left him. It was the last straw. "I could not bear it any longer. At first I tried to help him, I thought it was my duty to help him, no one forced me to marry him.

"At first I helped him. I thought I had to bear my cross and when I realised I could not help him any more, that I would ruin my own life and my children's life, I decided to

walk out." Her experiences of domestic abuse have been well documented in Russia because of a very public and traumatic divorce case.

The abuse was later documented in her 2006 autobiography, *Life, Tears and Love*.

Valeriya says: "It was me who raised the scandal and a lot of journalists ran articles during my divorce.

"It was unpleasant to see it in the Press. I had to do something to defend my family's honour, so later I published my autobiography and I am happy I did it.

"A lot of women are grateful to me for speaking out for them.

"It's like a red light.

"I know what it's like when no one can help you and no one will listen.

"Speaking out about what happened to me was the right thing to do."

To highlight just how famous Valeriya is in Russia, you only have to look at her accomplishments.

As well as the 100 million-plus record sales, she has picked up a state prize from former President Vladimir Putin, is ninth in *Forbes Magazine's* list of the 50 best-paid Russian celebrities, has her own fragrance and jewellery line, and is an associate of that other high-profile Russian

**SINGING SURVIVOR** Russian singer Valeriya is supporting Simply Red in Newcastle.



**It's important for me to try and be successful in the British market. I want to do something new. It's a challenge.**

Roman Abramovich. She is now hoping to take on the British music market with the launch of an album *Out of Control* and single *Back To Love*, released next month.

The star is also supporting Simply Red on their UK tour, which includes a date in Newcastle.

Ironically, Valeriya has sold more records than the British band.

She says: "It's modest to say. I can't go out in Russia. Everyone knows me, it's like a member of royalty.

"I can go for a walk here and people will not recognise me.

"It's important for me to try to be successful in the British market. I

want to do something new. It's a challenge. Here I am like a beginner.

"It's refreshing for me. In my country I can predict it, but here it is unpredictable.

"Everyone asks me if I am frightened, but I'm not.

"I have millions of fans in my country, but I'm just curious to find out what happens here.

"When I'm on stage I'm curious whether the audience will accept me."

● Valeriya is supporting Simply Red at Newcastle Metro Radio Arena on Tuesday, April 7.