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Improved Lineup for 2009 World Orchestra Fest

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[By Raymond Stults / Special to The Moscow Times](#)

The historic Hall of Columns of the House of Unions on Okhotny Ryad opens its doors next week to the fourth annual Festival of Symphony Orchestras of the World. Beginning on Monday and running until June 12, the festival is due to present orchestras from France, Germany and Hungary, as well as a distinguished local orchestra and, as at all past festivals, a leading orchestra from Russia's far-flung regions.

The festival is obviously an expensive undertaking, with a budget last year of some 86 million rubles (then \$3.5 million). But at its first appearance, in 2006, the festival's organizers refused to disclose their source of funds. Only a year later did it become known that financial sponsorship was, and continues to be, drawn entirely from the coffers of the presidential administration.

Though the festival boasts of presenting orchestral performances of the highest international standard, its guest foreign ensembles have to date, with the exception of the midlevel Israel Philharmonic, all been chosen from the second-tier Western European orchestras. On the rather authoritative list of the world's 20 best orchestras — as picked by a panel of leading music critics and published last December in the British magazine *Gramophone* — only one, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, has so far made a festival appearance.

This year, the festival appears to have moved a notch upward in its ambitions by engaging two orchestras from among the top 20, the Budapest Festival Orchestra (No. 9 on the list) and Moscow's own Russian National Orchestra (No.15).

Leading off the festival on Monday and Tuesday will be a well-regarded symphonic ensemble from France, the Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, led by its principal conductor since the start of the current season, Tugan Sokhiyev. A native of North Ossetia, Sokhiyev has risen with remarkable speed in the world of conducting since his graduation eight years ago from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. His credits include those of house conductor at the Mariinsky Theater, artistic director of Britain's Welsh National Opera and guest appearances with major orchestras of Western Europe.

Music from Russia occupies the program on Monday, with works by Sergei Rachmaninov, Dmitry Shostakovich and Igor Stravinsky. On Tuesday, the orchestra turns to composers from its homeland, Claude Debussy (his "Prelude a l'Apres-Midi d'un Faune" and "La Mer") and Hector Berlioz (his always-daunting *Symphonie Fantastique*).

The visitors from Budapest arrive on June 4. Conducting them will be Ivan Fischer, a founder of the orchestra in 1983 and its artist director ever since. The program appropriately includes music by two great Hungarian composers, Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly, together with a pair



Festival Of Symphony Orchestras
Conductor Tugan Sokhiyev, originally
from North Ossetia, leads the
Orchestre Capitole de Toulouse at the
festival.

of works by Czech composer Antonin Dvorak, his Suite for Large Orchestra and his Symphony No. 7, a powerful piece that seems rather unjustly overshadowed by his two later symphonies.

On June 6, the festival presents the Symphonieorchester des Westdeutschen Rundfunks, from Cologne, Germany, led by its principal conductor of the past 12 years, Leningrad-born, U.S.-trained Semyon Bychkov, a highly acclaimed figure on European orchestral and operatic circuits. On the program are two works by German composers, Robert Schumann's Symphony No. 2 and Richard Strauss' Alpine Symphony, a gigantic and increasingly popular work that musically depicts the pleasures and perils of a day's journey through the Alps.

This year's representative of the Russian regions is of Siberian origin, the Omsk Symphony Orchestra, led by its artistic director Dmitry Vasilyev. Its program includes a pair of novelties, a symphony by contemporary Omsk-born Israeli composer Ilya Kheyfets and Modest Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," not in the familiar orchestration of Maurice Ravel but in a much lesser-known orchestral version created by the late Soviet conductor Sergei Gorchakov. Also on the program are Mussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain" and the Overture-Fantasy "Hamlet" of Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

The Russian National Orchestra brings the festival to a close on Russia Day, June 12, with a program devoted entirely to music of Alexander Scriabin. Led by the orchestra's artistic director, Mikhail Pletnev, the orchestra opens with the composer's Symphony No. 1. Pletnev then turns over the podium to yet another young Mariinsky Theater house conductor, Mikhail Tatarnikov, who most recently appeared in Moscow leading the segment with live orchestra of this year's Golden Mask ballet award-winner, "Diana Vishneva: Beauty in Movement." Tatarnikov leads the orchestra in Scriabin's "Poem of Fire," which perhaps will bring with it the vivid display of colored lighting that the composer specified as an accompaniment.

Full information about the Festival of Symphony Orchestras of the World can be found at www.symphonyfest.com. Tickets can be ordered by telephone at 641-1900 or by Internet at www.19-00.ru, or purchased at the box office of the Hall of Columns, located at 1 Bolshaya Dmitrovka. Metro Okhotny Ryad, Teatralnaya. Tel. 692-0532.

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