

CONTEXT

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Global Symphonies

Orchestras come to Moscow from across Europe and Russia.

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Symphonyfest.ru

As Moscow's concert season draws to close, a final burst of activity is due to begin on Sunday with the opening of the third annual Festival of the World's Symphony Orchestras.

London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Daniele Gatti, will perform twice at the festival, on June 9 and 10.

This year's festival, which runs to June 12, brings to town orchestras from Britain, Germany and Sweden, plus, as in the past, one from Russia's far-flung regions. By way of novelty, it is also due to present an ad hoc ensemble of musicians from 29 Russian cities, in a concert that will include the world premiere of a new symphony by the noted Russian composer Alexei Rybnikov.

Funding for the festival comes entirely from the Presidential Administration and amounts to some 86 million rubles (\$3.5 million), which seems quite an astonishing sum to support a mere six concerts and the commissioning of a symphony.

The festival will once again give concertgoers the rare chance to enjoy the fine acoustics and elegant surroundings of the Hall of Columns of the House of Unions on Okhotny Ryad. Dating from the 1780s, the House of Unions originally served as the Club of the Nobility. In post-Revolutionary times, its Hall of Columns witnessed the lying-in-state of the bodies of Vladimir Lenin and most of the subsequent Soviet leaders, as well as some of the notorious show trials held during the Great Terror of the 1930s.

The festival starts off on Sunday with an appearance by Germany's Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, playing a program comprised of Johannes Brahms' Symphony No. 2 and Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 3. The latter will be heard in its seldom-performed original version, which contains citations from operas of Richard Wagner that the composer, though an ardent admirer of Wagner, later chose to remove.

The Bamberg Symphony was formed in 1946, when the modest-sized city of Bamberg, in northern Bavaria, took under its wing the musicians of the former German Philharmonic Orchestra of Prague following their expulsion from Czechoslovakia. Led by a series of prominent conductors, the orchestra has come to be regarded as one of Germany's finest. Its conductor on Sunday will be the highly regarded English maestro Jonathan Nott, music director of the orchestra since 2000.

Next up among the foreign guests will be one of Scandinavia's most important orchestral ensembles, the Symphony Orchestra of Swedish Radio, led by veteran Finnish conductor Leif Segerstam. The orchestra's program on June 7 features what is almost certain to be an authoritative performance of the Symphony No. 2 of Segerstam's fellow Finn, Jan Sibelius, plus other music from the early 20th century by Claude Debussy and Norwegian composer Hugo Alfvén.

June 9 and 10 bring a pair of appearances by London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Founded by the great English conductor Sir Thomas Beecham in the same year as the Bamberg Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic has experienced numerous ups and downs since Beecham's death in 1961. But over the past 12 years, under the leadership of Italian maestro Daniele Gatti, it has won steady acclaim. For the orchestra's Moscow concerts, Gatti has chosen symphonies of Brahms and Ludwig van Beethoven, plus a trio of tone poems by Richard Strauss.

The regional component of this year's festival is the Rostov Symphony Orchestra, which, on Wednesday, plays music of Igor Stravinsky and Alexander Scriabin, under the baton of artistic director Yury Tkachenko.

Closing the festival on June 12 will be its ad hoc ensemble, dubbed the United Russian Symphony Orchestra, with famed maestro Valery Gergiev on the podium. On the program, in addition to Rybnikov's new symphony, is Pyotr Tchaikovsky's cantata entitled "Moscow," written in 1883 for the coronation of Tsar Alexander III.

For full information about the Festival of the World's Symphony Orchestras, see www.symphonyfest.ru. Tickets can be purchased at a box office located at the exit to Detsky Mir department store, 5/1 Teatralnaya Proyezd, M. Lubyanka, tel. 781-8590, or can be ordered by calling 641-1900 or via internet at www.19-00.ru.

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