

Gergiev, Russian Acts to Rule at Edinburgh Festival

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Tokyo's Imperial Household musicians are scheduled to perform Gagaku music at this year's Edinburgh festival.

St. Petersburg — Russian art will take center stage at the upcoming Edinburgh International Festival, which is to take place from Aug. 9 through Sept. 2. More than one million spectators are expected to visit the festival, whose main focus this year is theater.

The Russian element in the program is by no means small, with the Mariinsky Theater Ballet Company giving four performances of Alexei Ratmansky's playful and witty take on Sergei Prokofiev's "Cinderella" (Aug. 30 and 31, Sept. 1). Talented pianist Daniil Trifonov will make his debut at the festival on Aug. 24, while another pianist, Nikolai Lugansky, will give a concert on Aug. 17.

Mariinsky Theater Artistic Director Valery Gergiev also brings the London Symphony Orchestra, of which he is the principal conductor, to a breathtaking four-concert residency

juxtaposing works by Brahms and Szymanowski (Aug. 16, 17, 18 and 19).

On Aug. 24, 25 and 26, the Chekhov International Theater Festival pays a visit to Edinburgh, with Dmitry Krymov's Laboratory and School of Dramatic Art Theater Production performing the world premiere of Krymov's provocative interpretation of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

One of the most intriguing items on the bill — the European premiere of the ballet "Tatyana," choreographed by renowned Brazilian ballet master Deborah Colker and performed by her company — was inspired by Alexander Pushkin's classic work, "Eugene Onegin." Set to an eclectic mix of music ranging from Tchaikovsky to Stravinsky to Terry Riley, the ballet tells the story through Tatyana's eyes. The company promises "an intense emotional rollercoaster of the famous tale."

"Tatyana" will be performed on Aug. 11, 12, 13 and 14.

On Aug. 14, Vladimir Jurowski will lead the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the exclusively Russian program of Denisov, Myaskovsky, Shchedrin and Rachmaninov. The concert also features three Russian opera soloists — Tatyana Monogarova (soprano), Sergei Skorokhodov (tenor) and Vladimir Chernov (baritone).

In addition, the National Museum of Scotland will host an exhibit devoted to Russia's most renowned empress. Titled "Catherine the Great: An Enlightened Empress," the show, which runs from July 13 through Oct. 21, marks the 250th anniversary of the coup d'état that brought Catherine the Great to the Russian throne.

More than 400 pieces of art, including a portrait of the empress' coronation, will travel to Scotland from the State Hermitage Museum. The coronation piece has been fully restored especially for the exhibit and has not been on public display since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

In September 2011, Gergiev, whose acquaintance with Jonathan Mills, the festival's artistic director, dates back to 2000, accepted the position of the festival's honorary president.

According to Mills, Gergiev's title is far more than an artistic accolade.

"It is also a great personal accolade that is awarded to someone who beautifully connects life and art," he said.

Mills' boundless respect for Gergiev and his work is mutual.

"I admire the structure and the atmosphere of the Edinburgh festival," Gergiev said. "I would not want to thoughtlessly copy or imitate this event in any way so that the Stars of the White Nights festival resembled it. St. Petersburg is a very different city, it is far more complex, and besides, the genres that our event covers are limited to the classical arts."

The Mariinsky has been a regular at the world's largest artistic event since 2008, when the company brought Karol Szymanowski's opera "Krol Roger," as well as concert versions of Sergei Prokofiev's opera "Semyon Kotko," Sergei Rachmaninov's opera "Aleko" and Rodion Shchedrin's opera "The Enchanted Wanderer" to Edinburgh.

"I will be inviting them over and over again," the manager said.

A composer himself, Mills devotes special attention to contemporary music and is especially interested in the works of living composers — something that makes the manager very close to Gergiev.

Mills, formerly head of the Melbourne International Arts Festival, first crossed paths with Gergiev in 2000 when Mills visited St. Petersburg. Mills then invited Gergiev to visit Melbourne and he and his troupe followed shortly after.

While in Australia, Mills and Gergiev discussed possible titles at an open-air nature reserve, where the impressive artistic partnership began to bloom.

Mills sees festivals as journeys that inspire artists and audiences who have an interest in their place in the world and their role as human beings. His vision is largely shared by Gergiev.

"This year we have decided to incorporate the New Horizons festival of contemporary classical music in the program of the Stars of the White Nights festival because we feel that expanding cultural horizons is our company's mission," Gergiev said.

"As the Edinburgh festival shows, the more effort you put into bringing artistic diversity to people, the better the creative climate it forges at home."

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