

CAPITAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA – PRESS RELEASE

GRAMMY NOMINEE BUILDS A NEW SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA IN MOSCOW

Marina Gaykovich, an Interview with Vladimir Gorbik, February, 2019

Vladimir Gorbik, conductor of the Male Choir of the Moscow Representation Church of Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, became known to wider musical world after one of his recorded works was nominated for a GRAMMY Award. This CD of sacred music composed by Pavel Chesnokov will compete for the title “The Best Choral Performance.”

Meanwhile in Moscow, Gorbik created and has been building up a private symphony orchestra, named The Capital Symphony Orchestra. An upcoming concert by this group will be given on January 30 in the Lesser Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. The program includes two symphonies: the “Tragic” Symphony, composed by Franz Schubert, and Felix Mendelssohn’s First Symphony.

The conductor told “Nezavisimaya Gazeta” about the chance he took in creating his own orchestra and, of course, about the nomination for the GRAMMY.

– Vladimir, please tell us how the Capital Symphony Orchestra came to be? To create such a large performing company, especially a private one, seems insane nowadays...

– Despite the fact that I have two degrees in higher education – Choral Conducting in the class of Professor Boris G. Tevlin and Symphonic and Opera Conducting in the class of Professor Igor A. Dronov – and even though I studied all five years of study at the Moscow Conservatory in the Composition department in the class of Professor Roman S. Ledenev – I became known to the world primarily as a choral conductor engaged in sacred music. On this basis, I made a lot of contacts in America, Australia, and Europe – and so there were many friends who supported the idea of creating the Capital Symphony Orchestra.

Why did I decide to create another orchestra, despite there being more than enough of them in Moscow? Working with a symphony orchestra has been my life’s dream since I was 14 years old. When I was still a teenager, I got up in front of the television – at that time they used to broadcast classical music on state television – and I “conducted” it with a stick when they showed Svetlanov or Fedoseyev’s concerts, and my parents applauded. Later, after graduating from the conservatory, I would occasionally work with various symphony orchestras in Russia and abroad. Currently, since I am still better known as a choir conductor, I am not invited as often as I would like to be to collaborate with other orchestras. Nevertheless, I have my own vision of how the repertoire of the orchestra should develop, my own view of the art of interpretation – and I would like to share it. Now, with our own orchestra, such an opportunity has appeared.

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– Who plays in The Capital Symphony Orchestra? How does it operate from a practical point of view? Is there a base location, are there regular rehearsals? No orchestra can function by getting together and preparing a program in a week's time...

– Of course. The orchestra has no permanent funding yet, and it has private status. But this is not a “session team,” we have the backbone of the symphony, numbering about forty people, and we rehearse regularly. For some time, we were in search of a permanent orchestral base, rehearsing during that time at the Moscow Representation Church of Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra. Recently, I signed a cooperation agreement and the International Slavic University has become our permanent base.

We are gathering additional forces to prepare the concert. When I decided to create my own orchestra and put out the call, it was in March 2017, the musicians who studied with me at the conservatory and today work in the best orchestras – in the Russian National Orchestra, “New Russia,” the State Orchestra – supported me and began to work with me. I am working toward receiving state funding over time.

– What do you offer to your listeners that distinguishes your orchestra?

– It seems to me that the noble and elevated spirit of great performances that was laid in the 20th century is now eroding. The sheer number of different shows that include the participation of symphony orchestras, so to speak, is oppressive. Orchestras began performing on rock stages, with pop stars...

– But ultimately, these are local events, not to say that these shows will soon crush art altogether, if we are talking namely about orchestras, rather than solo performers. If the Russian National Orchestra today accompanies the singer Valeria, this does not mean that tomorrow his skill will be lost.

– I meant, rather, the global trend of involving a symphony orchestra in large-scale shows. And I have much respect for the singer Valeria, and would be glad for the orchestra in this case.

I am not an opponent of rock culture, believe me. I have ten children from 3 to 25 years old, and with each of them I listen to different music, with teenagers – rock or pop music. With those who are older, I can go and discuss an academic music concert, while the younger ones ask to put the Nutcracker on for the night.

But as far as The Capital Symphony Orchestra is concerned, I would like to embody the traditions that I absorbed at the conservatory, what my professor Igor A. Dronov, a man of exceptional talent and exceptional depth, taught me.

– All right. What would you like to see your program entail?

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– I would put it this way: perform rarely played compositions in as high a quality as possible. The two symphonies that will be performed in our upcoming concert, the “Tragic Symphony” of Schubert and Mendelssohn’s First Symphony, are very rarely played! And this is wonderful music – both were written by composers at a young age; the music flows so freshly from them! I would like them to stand in a row of masterpieces, rather than remain in the background, in the shadow of, say, the Unfinished Symphony of Schubert or Mendelssohn’s Italian Symphony (No. 4).

Another important point for me is to make music accessible to children. Looking at my children and their peers, it seems wrong to me to think that today’s youth is not interested in academic culture, that they are interested in completely different things. Children are open to everything – you just need to direct them, to introduce them to music. This is what we do. At our upcoming concert, for example, there will be at least five families with six, nine, or ten children.

– What are the Orchestra’s immediate plans?

– With the American branch of the Orchestra – I lead a kind of twin-entity of the Capital Symphony Orchestra in New York City – we will open the Russian-American Friendship Festival in Manhattan. My performing credo is the strengthening of international cultural ties. The world smells of gunpowder, and I wish there to be no war in the lives of my children and myself. And the people across the Atlantic Ocean – and I often go there because of the profession – believe me, they want the same. We already have a hall – in fact, a Catholic church, where we will perform our concert. They also have become interested in orchestral history in Italy, in Florence, and so in that city we may start the third chapter of this collective.

– The disc with the recording of sacred music by Pavel Chesnokov “Teach Me Thy Statutes,” performed by the Male Choir of the Russian-American Patriarch Tikhon Music Institute (PaTRAM) under your leadership, is nominated for a GRAMMY Award. Why Chesnokov and Russian sacred music?

– This is a whole story in itself, and it began in 2013, when I was discovered by an active American businessman, producer, and Tony Award laureate Alexis V. Lukianov. He is the son of an Orthodox priest and, at some point, realized that he wanted to direct part of the income from his medical business to the training and formation of choir directors and singers.

He was looking for me to create an educational center in order to improve the state of church choirs in America, which was deplorable at that time. Alex attended our service, and heard the singing of the Male Choir of the Moscow Representation Church of Trinity-Sergius Lavra. He saw penitent people weep, and this made an impression on him.

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“How many professionals do you have singing?” he asked. I replied that about thirty percent of our choir are professional singers, and the rest are non-professionals. He simply refused to believe it. And, to be honest, I really love working with amateurs; I am impressed by their sincere desire and eagerness to learn. Even without a musical education, after some time they become full participants in the choir. Alex himself was thoroughly delighted, because he sings himself, and by ear. He has a unique voice – a basso profundo, he takes the contra-octave, and he really intones these notes, not just making low-pitched rumbling. The next thing you know, he became my vocal student, and very quickly we formed the Patriarch Tikhon Russian-American Music (PaTRAM) Institute in the U.S., where choir singers and director now study.

The proposal to record a CD actually originated with Alexis Lukianov and his wife Katherine. In Russia, the music of Chesnokov entered the everyday life of the Russian Orthodox Church, but in America it is almost completely unknown. They know Grechaninov, they know Rachmaninov, Stravinsky; they even call them their composers, which makes me smile.

I started to gather a truly international team for the recording: on a competitive basis, I selected nine singers from America and Canada, they were joined by twenty people from the Male Choir of the Moscow Representation Church of Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra and fifteen singers of the Saratov Male Bishop's Choir. In my view, this was without exaggeration an absolutely unique-sounding team, including six octavists and very high tenors.

We made a recording in Saratov, thanks to the reception and blessing of Metropolitan Longin, the bishop with whom we actually began the activity of the Moscow Choir of the Representation Church of Trinity-Sergius Lavra.

Producer Blanton Alspaugh and sound engineer John Newton flew to Saratov from Boston, where their own well-known recording company SoundMirror is based, and a ton of equipment was transported to Russia by plane. The CD was named 2018 Recording of the Year by the American magazine Music Web International, and based on this, I believe, and the support of my colleagues, the GRAMMY nomination was made. We now await the vote of the Recording Academy members!