The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Military Fest Takes Over Red Square

By Mikael Bernstein

September 05, 2010



The festival started in 2007, and tickets for this year are selling out fast.

The sound of soldiers marching on Red Square could be heard all weekend as the Spasskaya Tower International Military Music Festival started up in force.

The military tattoo, which will see performances every night through Thursday, offers a combination of military, classical, folk and popular music, as well as military band parades and dance shows.

More than 1,000 military musicians and artists, invited from nine countries — Russia, Germany, Israel, Kazakhstan, the United States, France, Bahrain, Ukraine and Tajikistan — are participating in the event, in front of a daily audience of more than 7,000 people. The total amount of spectators over the course of the festival's duration is expected to approach 35,000.

One of the most awaited visitors is from the United States.

"For the second time in world history, U.S. forces are marching on Red Square," festival

spokesman Lev Agronov said. “The first time was on May 9, Victory Day. The U.S. was an ally during the Second World War, but people have forgotten this fact, so this will be a great reminder. The U.S. is now marching as descendants of our allies.”

“This event definitely has political significance in terms of U.S.-Russian relations,” said the U.S. band and chorus commander, Lieutenant Colonel Beth Steele. “I think it is a great opportunity for us to show our emerging and growing partnership.”

Organizers also see the event as partly propaganda for the foreign audience.

“One of the main purposes of this event is that we Russians want to establish a memorable tradition. So many countries have traditions like this, and we want to follow them,” Agronov said. “Also, the festival is a great way to fight the foreign demonization of Russia. People abroad don’t see beyond our leaders, and we want to show them that we are people with great culture.”

Red Square’s first international military parade took place only in 2007, but the following year, because of the war in Georgia, the show was canceled. The festival returned last year, renamed as the Spasskaya Tower festival.

One of the highlights is Bahrain’s participation. The Kingdom of Bahrain Police Band, founded in 1929, adds a unique element to the tattoo with its traditional Arabic instruments and music.

“Generally, our band plays many kinds of music. But for this particular show, and for the first time in history, this type of Gulf-Arab music will be played by a military band,” said brigadier Mubarak H. Al Najem. “We will be playing three different types of Arabic drums, as well as our traditional instruments — the oud and the kanun.”

The oud is a pear-shaped stringed instrument, while the kanun is a multi-stringed instrument similar to a zither.

The EU band — The Crossed Swords Pipes & Drums — representing a continental pool of talent, is also performing, as is France’s North West Region Army Band from Brittany. The latter, which preserves its military musical heritage to emphasize its Celtic roots, is the only French marching group that uses bagpipes.

So far the festival has gone according to plan and without major problems. However, weather conditions remain a constant point of concern among organizers.

“During rehearsals, we realized that it will be very cold for the musicians to perform,” Deputy Mayor Lyudmila Shevtsova said. “The weather is the way it is, but at least it’s not 40 degrees [Celsius] any longer!”

The shows start at 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday on Red Square. Tel. 917-8507, http://kremlin-military-tattoo.ru.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/09/05/military-fest-takes-over-red-square-a1181