

New Mariinsky to Open in 2013

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A model of the theater's controversial new stage. It is set to open in May.

ST. PETERSBURG — Mariinsky II, the second stage of the world-famous Mariinsky Theater, will receive its first spectators in May 2013, Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky promised this week after a meeting with the company's artistic director, Valery Gergiev.

"Russia will be getting the best theater building in the world," Medinsky said.

The new opera house's design was created by Canadian architectural firm Diamond and Schmitt Architects. The project, which is estimated to have a total cost of 19.1 billion rubles (\$600 million), is being financed by the Russian government.

"The troupe needs the new stage like living creatures need oxygen," Gergiev said. "It is shameful that in the 21st century, the Mariinsky Theater has to close for five days to mount the sets for Andrei Konchalovsky's staging of Prokofiev's 'War and Peace.'"

By his own admission, Diamond is not an architect that goes for extravagant solutions. Nor

does he tend to replicate the past. "If back in the 18th century St. Petersburg had been replicating the past, you would have had a different city," the architect told The St. Petersburg Times.

People in the local architectural community criticized Diamond's design for what they described as a devastating lack of personality.

"An average architecture student would have done a better job," said architect Mikhail Sarri, of St. Petersburg's town planning council.

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