

Two Free Festivals Bring Music to Life

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A guitarist entertaining the crowd at last year's sunny Fête de La Musique.

Moscow region is hardly lacking in summer music festivals, but events such as last weekend's Usadba Jazz and July's Afisha Picnic can at times seem like the exclusive habitat of Moscow's upwardly mobile, cosmopolitan youth. This weekend, two free musical events of vastly different origin will strive to carry live music to a broader Russian audience.

On Friday, the longest day of the year, Moscow and 12 other cities across Russia celebrate the annual "La Fête de la Musique." From 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., local musicians take over Tverskaya Ploshchad and the new pedestrian area by Kuznetsky Most, transforming portions of the city center into free, open-air concerts.

In the midst of all this, ebullient French rock group Archimède will play at Kuznetsky Most at 7:30 p.m., followed by the scintillating pop-chanson duo Brigitte at 8:45 p.m. on Tverskaya.

"It is difficult for Russians to get to know young, modern French bands ... The idea is to open up new trends in music for them," said Lucie Le Floch, coordinator of La Fête de la Musique in

Russia.

La Fête de la Musique began in Paris in 1982 on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture. The idea was to bring all the country's musicians, known and unknown, out into everyday life. Anyone could perform anywhere, in squares, parks, hospitals, train stations — apart from in a concert hall.

The idea has soared over the past three decades, becoming an unofficial holiday in France and expanding to more than 120 countries and 350 cities around the world.

In Russia, the concept of La Fête de la Musique was first fully realized in two independent events in 2011. It went national in 2012, gathering more than 800 Russian performers and 55,000 viewers in 13 Russian cities. Each event is organized locally.

While last year was certainly successful, attracting participants of all ages and backgrounds in the proper spirit of the event, Le Floch expects it will only improve. "It's still the beginning, so you can't yet say, 'Come! You will have a space, and anything goes,'" she said. She hopes to see current restrictions, such as the applications that participating musicians are required to submit, gradually disappear as the festival evolves.

Meanwhile, free music takes on a completely different form in the Moscow suburb of Elektrougli. The local Orthodox congregation has undertaken a daunting and vital cultural mission: to cultivate an audience for contemporary Russian music.

Elektrougli is a small provincial town like many others. Its uncommon name, an amalgam of the Russian words for "electricity" and "coal," tells the all-too-common story of an abandoned factory and lost jobs. Most of its residents commute daily to Moscow, returning home exhausted and apathetic.

Father Andrei Vennik and Father Alexander Lykov were driven to action. "We live in this city, we serve in this city, and it is very important to us what kind of people we live with. ... It is important that they be educated and cultured people," Orthodox priest Father Vennik said.

Among other cultural activities, the congregation began to invite some of the brightest names in contemporary Russian music to perform in Elektrougli.

The concerts were free from the start, largely with the purpose of attracting all residents. Despite the faith of the organizers, there is no evangelical drift to these events. Good music, the priests believe, nourishes the soul, which can only benefit the higher realm of the spirit. "If a person listens to good music, then little by little he becomes better ... everything affects us," Father Vennik said.

This Sunday, on the "Birthday of the Church" as well as Elektrougli's own feast day, the town will host its very first festival, "Troitsa," from 12:30 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Fifteen groups will play on two stages, including rock bands Megapolis and Masha I Medvedi, folk virtuosos Sergei Starostin and Taisiya Krasnopevitsa, the magically indefinable Inna Zhelannaya, and improvisational ensemble Alexei Aygi and Ensemble 4'33". Entrance, of course, is free, and all are welcome.

For more information on "Fête de la Musique" in Russia, see afrus.ru; for "Troitsa," see: 3fest.ru (both sites in Russian).

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