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Gergiev's Defense Against Anti-Gay Allegations Fails to Convince Critics

By The Moscow Times

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Gergiev rehearses with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra for the 16th edition of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Gergiev Festival in 2011. **Bart Diels**

Conductor Valery Gergiev, whose recent performances in New York and London were marred by protests against his perceived support of a Russian law banning the discussion of homosexuality among minors, broke months of silence on the issue on Wednesday when he published a statement defending his position.

"I have said before that I do not discriminate against anyone, gay or otherwise, and never have done, and as head of the Mariinsky Theatre this is our policy," the conductor said in a statement published on his Facebook page Wednesday.

"It is wrong to suggest that I have ever supported anti-gay legislation and in all my work I have upheld equal rights for all people," he said.

Gergiev also hinted that the fact that some of his colleagues could be gay should be seen as evidence against the allegations.

"I am an artist and have for over three decades worked with tens of thousands of people in dozens of countries from all walks of life and many of them are indeed my friends," Gergiev said.

Yet this position has not seemed to appease Gergiev's critics. In an initial reaction to the statement in a blog post published on the website of the New York Times, one protester said the conductor had missed the point.

"The issue is not whether Valery Gergiev has gay friends or co-workers, but rather that he has been an ardent supporter of Vladimir Putin, for whom he campaigned," Andrew Miller, a member of the gay rights group Queer Nation and one of the participants in a picket against the conductor at the Metropolitan Opera said.

Miller said the LGBT community wanted Gergiev to openly denounce the gay law.

"Until then, he is merely Putin's collaborator," Miller said.

Gay rights protesters have disrupted several of Gergiev's public performances, including one at New York's Metropolitan Opera and another concert at Carnegie Hall.

In London, a concert by the London Symphony Orchestra headed by Gergiev got off to a rocky start when gay activist Peter Tatchell, addressed the audience from the stage of the Barbican Theater slamming Gergiev's affiliation and support of the Russian president and his policies.

Tatchell has announced another picket against the conductor at his upcoming concert at the Barbican on Nov. 8.

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