

What to Expect at Sochi's Opening Ceremony

By [Ivan Nechepurenko](#)

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The opening ceremony for the Winter Olympics on Friday will take Russia's biggest cultural gems and serve them up with contemporary dance music and spectacular lighting.

At least, that is what can be expected if the final rehearsal is anything to go by.

The organizers have asked that the exact contents of the ceremony be kept secret. On the conceptual level, the show consists of several episodes, each of them portraying a certain period and aspect of Russian culture.



Ivan Nechepurenko / MT

Thousands of members of the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee, as well as their relatives and friends, were invited to the final rehearsal of the opening ceremony — an event which organizers say will be watched by 3 billion people across the globe. Drivers, technicians, event managers and other specialists filled the train from Sochi to the Olympic park for the occasion Tuesday, highlighting the collective commitment made by thousands to prepare for the Winter Olympics.

The rehearsal aimed to be as close to reality as possible, with men in dark suits playing the roles of President Vladimir Putin, International Olympic Committee head Thomas Bach and Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee head Dmitry Chernyshenko. Putin declared the Games open, while Bach and Chernyshenko gave speeches saying that the purpose of the Games was to inspire people.

Hundreds of volunteers played the role of athletes during the rehearsal, making a long procession around the stadium. The crowd cheered and stood up when the Russian team appeared.



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Other volunteers played the role of Olympic flag carriers, who have not yet been identified but are said to include a conductor, scientist, teacher, and a cosmonaut, among others. In the ceremony, Russia's biggest points of pride — classical music, ballet, the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russian avant-garde art and architecture — get their own special features. These symbols are then given a modern interpretation with palpitating music and prolific lighting. The ceremony also included a DJ set featuring popular Russian songs, including by Putin's favorite band, Lube. Audience members called the show "awe-inspiring."

"The show was interesting, to say the least," said Vladimir, who works as an IT contractor for the Organizing Committee. Another purpose of the rehearsal was to test the logistics involved in moving a 40,000-person crowd in and out of the main Fisht Stadium.

As some of the entrances appeared to be closed, a big crowd rushed to the remaining ones, causing minor delays and discomfort.



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At the end of the rehearsal, the organizers said that most of the ceremony had been revealed, though certain aspects, such as the lighting of the Olympic flame and the final songs, were kept under wraps for the real opening ceremony.

The stadium rehearsals also marked the opening of the Fisht Stadium, the Olympic facility that had observers worried after encountering severe delays and undergoing multiple redesigns.

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