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Russian Classical Music Highlights of 2020

There were gems amid the cancellations and closures.

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Vladimir Jurowski **meloman.ru**

The year 2020 began as usual for the music world in Russia, but came to screeching halt in March. Music lovers had to be content with live-streamed performances, musicians languished and the fate of large orchestras and their future contracts with soloists became uncertain. The Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, led by Valery Gergiev, was the first to open in July, followed by other concert halls and theaters in August. And they have not stopped working despite changes seating arrangements and audience limits (currently set at 25%).

Although the season was abbreviated, there were some memorable performances and concerts this year, starting with Mikhail Pletnev's recitals as a soloist with Russian National Orchestra, for which Pletnev serves as artistic director. The concerts, held in Moscow and St

Petersburg in October, were a rare treat for melomanes; Pletnev hadn't performed in St Petersburg in 16 years. His performance was unique, making Beethoven's well-known 3rd Piano Concerto sound like something the audience had never heard before.

Another highlight was Vladimir Jurowski's recent performances with the Svetlanov State Symphony Orchestra in St Petersburg and Moscow. Jurowski, the artistic director of the Svetlanov Orchestra, prepared two excellent programs: the first was Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and selections from Wagner's Die Götterdämmerung Suite; and the second was Strauss (selections from Der Rosenkavalier and the Violin Concerto) and Mozart. Jurowski also led the Seventh Another Space Contemporary Music Festival, where he conducted an outstanding program of modern Russian composers.

The audience at that festival also had a rare chance to hear the internationally renowned contemporary music group Ensemble Intercontemporain based in Paris. The French musicians were ecstatic to have the chance to play to a live audience as European theaters were subjected to another series of lockdowns.

Anna Netrebko gave several sold-out appearances in Russia before and after being hospitalized with Covid. She performed in Verdi's Don Carlos (Bolshoi and Mariinsky), Il Trovatore, and Eugene Onegin. And at the Mariinsky she took part in a memorable and moving evening of Russian romances dedicated to the late Dmitry Khvorostovsky.

The year is ending with a magnificent staging of Wagner's tetralogy of The Ring Cycle conducted by Valery Gergiev at the Mariinsky Theater in December. At the moment it is the only opportunity in Russia to see the whole cycle, and one of the few places in the world where Wagner is being performed.

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