

What's On in Moscow and St. Petersburg Dec. 17-19

A special report on holiday concerts this weekend and beyond.

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Theodor Currentzis conducting MusicAeterna orchestra. **Amoorphotographer (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Although December and January can present all sorts of challenges for city-dwellers — snow, slush, ice, and freezing temperatures — it's also that wonderful time of year, when everything is festive, and beautifully decorated holiday trees stand proudly on city squares. December has some great concerts, and the long vacation (Dec. 31 to Jan. 10) will be filled with lighter music, including European and Russian Christmas songs and medleys. Here are our picks.

MusicAeterna conducted by Theodor Currentzis

In December the residents of both Russian capitals will have a chance to hear MusicAeterna in two programs: the first in Moscow featuring the fourth symphony by Dmitry Shostakovich

and a work by a modern composer Marko Nikodijević, the second in St. Petersburg consisting of Igor Stravinsky's famous ballet suites "The Firebird" and "Petrushka." The orchestra will perform at the Moscow Conservatory [on Dec. 27](#) and in the St. Petersburg Philharmonia Hall [on Dec. 29](#). From Currentzis we can expect new, passionate interpretations of these complex works. MusicAeterna has accompanied them with an educational series including lectures about Shostakovich, the analysis of his fourth symphony, and round table discussions. All educational events are free (registration required), while the concerts are at the top of ticket pricing range. For more information about the events, see the [site here](#).

Cinema concerts at the Moscow Conservatory

Moscow is following the lead of big European and American concert halls in organizing screenings of films accompanied by live music. On Dec. 18 the Moscow Conservatory is offering three screenings of ["Frozen" with live music](#). On Dec. 25 at 8 p.m. you can see National Geographics' ["Flying over Russia"](#) with live orchestral accompaniment. The conductor Sergei Tararin will lead the Russian Philharmonia Orchestra.

St. Petersburg music festivals

St. Petersburg is hosting two big festivals with a number of concerts to choose from featuring many international and Russian performers in its two big classical music locations: Mariinsky Theater and St Petersburg Philharmonia Hall. The Mariinsky Concert Hall will run another edition of its famous and much-loved International Piano Festival featuring performances by Denis Matsuyev, Dmitry Shishkin, Alexandre Kantorow and Boris Berezovsky among others, with Valery Gergiev conducting. The festival runs Dec. 21–31; [see the site](#) for details and tickets. The St. Petersburg Philharmonia Hall will open the Arts Square Festival on Dec. 10 with a recital by the French cellist Gautier Capuçon and Russian pianist Nikolai Lugansky. Other international stars coming to St. Petersburg to take part in the festival include Sayaka Shoji, Alexandre Kantorow, conductor Ion Marin, singer Elina Garanca, pianists Rudolph Buchbinder and András Schiff. For details and tickets, [see the site here](#).

European music at Zaryadye Concert Hall and churches

If you would like to experience the feel of Christmas in Europe or the U.S., head to Zaryadye Concert Hall in Moscow for several exciting events: the renowned tenor Ian Bostridge singing Schubert's vocal cycle "Die Winterreise" accompanied by Julius Drake on piano on Dec. 17; a program featuring baroque music works by Henry Purcell and Georg Handel dedicated to Saint Cecilia performed by the Pratum Integrum orchestra and INTRADA ensemble, Christian Kernin conducting, on Dec. 21; a Christmas concert by the boys choir Cantus featuring works by Britten, Poulenc, Mozart, Handel on Dec. 25; and an organ concert featuring Swedish organist Gunnar Idenstam on Dec. 27. For more information and tickets, [see the site here](#). The Peter and Paul Cathedral in Moscow is a wonderful venue for Christmas music. The Peter and Paul Cathedral will host a Christmas concert on Dec. 19 and a concert by the Debut boys choir accompanied by organ on Dec. 28. For more information and tickets, [see the site here](#).

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