

The Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre is one of the oldest musical ensembles in Russia. It can trace its history back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, to the development of the Court Instrumental Kapelle. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the orchestra flourished under Eduard Nápravník, who was its ruling spirit for over half a century. The excellence of the Orchestra was recognised on numerous occasions by the world-class musicians who conducted it, among them Berlioz, Wagner, von Bülow, Mahler, Nikisch and Rachmaninoff. In Soviet times, the ensemble's dazzling traditions were continued by conductors such as Vladimir Dranishnikov, Ariy Pazovsky, Yevgeny Mravinsky, Konstantin Simeonov and Yuri Temirkanov, who further honed the role of the orchestra in productions of operas and ballets, addition to the precision of the intonation and the variety of sound, perfecting and renewing performance style. The Orchestra has had the honour of being the first to perform many operas and ballets by Tchaikovsky, operas by Glinka, Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, ballets by Khachaturian, Shostakovich and Asafiev. Since 1988, the Orchestra has been headed by Valery Gergiev, a musician of the highest order and an outstanding figure in the music world. Gergiev's arrival at the Mariinsky ushered in a new era of rapid expansion of the Orchestra's repertoire. In addition to operas (including, first and foremost, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and every other opera by Wagner in the original German, every opera by Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitry Shostakovich, most operas by Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky, both of Musorgsky's versions of *Boris Godunov*, and operas by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti, Richard Strauss, Leoš Janáček, Britten and Shchedrin among others), the Orchestra's repertoire also includes symphonic works and other genres of philharmonic music. The Orchestra has performed every symphony by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Mahler and Beethoven, Requiems by Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, Brahms and Tishchenko and other works by composers such as Henri Dutilleux, Hans Werner Henze, Rodion Shchedrin, Sofia Gubaidulina, Giya Kancheli and Nikolai Karetnikov. In 2008, According to the results of a survey of American music critics in 2008, the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra was ranked as one of the world's "Top 20" orchestras.