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The Russians came -- conquered

By Lawrence Budmen
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An-all Russian team took the stage Monday night at the Broward Center when the Kirov Orchestra from St. Petersburg's legendary Mariinsky Theater played colorful scores by Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky (presented by the Concert Association).

Under the baton of Velery Gergiev, a veritable dynamo, the powerhouse ensemble garnered repeated standing ovations. With the young Russian pianist Daria Rabotkina (a pupil of Vladimir Feltsman) providing some glittering keyboard fireworks, it was an evening of high-voltage performances.

The concert opened with a thunderous rendition of Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*. Gergiev unleashed a virtual orchestral torrent that swept all before it. The Kirov ensemble's brass section was simply dazzling. Gergiev led a fiery version of Tchaikovsky's depiction of *Dante's Inferno*. In the love music of the tragic Francesca and Paolo, Gergiev delicately calibrated subtle gradations of tonal color and dynamics. The rich, dark Russian strings (with rubato aplenty) brought vibrant life to this brooding score.

Rabotkina essayed a whirlwind performance of Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 1. Her brilliant, muscular playing was second to none in sheer speed and keyboard dexterity. She also captured the ironic wit of this compact score by the 20 year-old Prokofiev. Gergiev brought unusual transparency to the orchestral texture.

Gergiev's razzle-dazzle performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio Espagnol* had the taunt intensity and inexorable momentum of Arturo Toscanini. Brilliant trumpets intoned Andalusian fanfares. A cascading harp solo of velvet serenity was matched by the elegantly virtuosic cadenzas of guest concertmaster Ilya Konovalov. Gergiev's rapid-fire version of the concluding Fandango was a sonic blockbuster.

Maurice Ravel's Technicolor adaptation of Mussorgsky's piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* was an orchestral extravaganza. A clarion trumpet launched the opening Promenade. Gergiev elicited warm, caressing tonal subtleties from his superb wind players. His vigorous performance was a real crowd pleaser. In the concluding *Great Gate of Kiev*, mellow brass and dynamic percussion (including bells and gong) provided an aural spectacular. In response to the cheering audience, Gergiev turned to the Kirov ballet repertoire with Tchaikovsky's *Waltz from The Sleeping Beauty* and *Russian Dance from The Nutcracker* in performances that were *con amore*.