

## Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall Unveils Its New Pipe Organ

By Dr. Yasuhisa Toyota

In the Russian city of St. Petersburg, the 1,100-seat Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall opened in late 2006. (I wrote about the concert hall project and its opening in our January, 2007 newsletter.) In the autumn of 2009, the concert hall completed installation of a new pipe organ (Figure 1). In this article, I will share the story of the hall's installation and my impressions from listening to the new pipe organ for the first time.

When the concert hall opened in November, 2006, there was no plan to add a pipe organ to the hall. The front of the hall above the stage had a large glass window and located behind the large glass window was a rehearsal and multipurpose room. The architectural design enabled natural light from the out-of-doors to flow into the rehearsal and multipurpose room and, from there, to filter into the concert hall through the large glass window (Figure 2).



Figure 1: New pipe organ



Figure 2: Hall interior before organ installation

In the summer of 2008, Mariinsky Theatre Artistic Director Valery Gergiev made the bold decision to add a pipe organ to the concert hall. The new plan called for removing the glass window and installing a pipe organ in its place. A portion of the back of the pipe organ would extend into the adjoining multipurpose room and the plan also included adding a section of new wall between the concert hall and the adjoining multipurpose room.

I was the acoustical consultant for the concert hall project and was again asked to participate on the pipe organ installation project. I provided acoustical consulting services both regarding the pipe organ selection and during the construction work related to installing the pipe organ. Organ builder Daniel Kern, of the Strasbourg company Kern et Fils, was invited from France to build the Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall's pipe organ. The design, construction, installation and voicing of the pipe organ began in October, 2008 and completed in September, 2009, a duration of nearly one year. Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall celebrated the pipe organ's unveiling immediately after the completion of its installation and, since then, there have been pipe organ performances in the concert hall

once or twice every month.

I was eager to hear the new pipe organ, but the opportunity to do so did not present itself until recently. Through the kindness of Mariinsky Theatre organist Oleg Kiniaev, I enjoyed the pleasure of listening to this instrument's wonderful and myriad tone colors. It is not easy for me to find a concise way to describe in words my impression of this pipe organ's many sounds. If I dare to summarize my impressions, it would be with these words: incredibly beautiful, deep stereophonic sound. Mr. Kiniaev's performances captivated me as he played one passage after another of pipe organ music. I felt that I would have been content to spend eternity listening to this music, steeped in a space saturated with beautiful tones.

Churches and cathedrals have extremely high ceilings, grand spatial volumes and the very rich acoustics produced by such architecture. In general, I often feel that concert hall acoustics compare unfavorably with this aspect of church and cathedral acoustics with regard to pipe organ music. However, concert hall acoustics have the advantage of enabling us to hear the tone colors of the pipe organ pristinely and directly. Having visited many halls, I can unfortunately remember having heard more than one concert hall pipe organ that produced lackluster sound and, therefore, a diminished listening experience. However, at the Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall, the listening experience was one of total joy, and I can heartily attest that a pipe organ of the highest class has been created here.

St. Petersburg may be far from the locale of many of this newsletter's readers, but if you have the opportunity to be somewhere in the vicinity of this city, I highly recommend you make time to hear the Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall's pipe organ.

The Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall pipe organ has 53 stops and 2,942 pipes. Its physical dimensions are 602 cm wide x 730 cm high x 490 cm deep (237 in. x 288 in. x 193 in.).

The hall's Web site is <http://www.mariinsky.ru/en>