



profile



MAESTRO *in* MOTION

ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING CONDUCTORS, VALERY GERGIEV,
CREATES HARMONY ON A GLOBAL SCALE.

BY VALERIE HOWES

PHOTOS: CORBIS (THIS PAGE), GORDON BALL (OPPOSITE)



Valery Gergiev hops lightly from foot to foot, his left hand a fluttering hummingbird as he directs a tender exchange between the Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra and virtuoso pianist Denis Matsuev. The conductor's Saint Petersburg home orchestra is playing to a packed house at Ottawa's National Arts Centre. Gergiev raises both arms and stoops dramatically as he leads the musicians into the exhilarating final passage of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3. Bows sweep furiously; fingers crash down on keys; beads of perspiration fly. The final thunder of notes triggers a standing ovation that will pull him back onstage four times.

This week it's Canada; next week it's across the border for U.S. performances with the Mariinsky Theatre, of which he's artistic and general director. In between, he's conducting Shostakovich's *The Nose* at the Met (just one of the leading orchestras he regularly guest-conducts), and running music festivals in Holland, Finland, Israel and Russia. He also found the time during a recent U.S. tour to fly to the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, courtesy of Bombardier, where a worldwide audience of three billion watched him participate in the closing ceremonies and transfer of the Olympic flag (in anticipation of Sochi, Russia, hosting the 2014 Winter Olympics). Tough schedule? "We have a privilege to deal with something very beautiful," says the 57-year-old maestro. "My work is not something I take as a punishment."

For the world's busiest conductor, the new Learjet 60 XR Signature Series Red, with its enhanced multimedia space, doubles as an office. "I could only do it with the help of Bombardier," says Gergiev. "Having a private business jet was the only realistic solution." He watches DVDs in flight, for instance, to evaluate directors, costumes and production values of other performances. Sometimes it's simply a matter of getting from point A to point B at a moment's notice, like when Gergiev's access to a Bombardier Global business jet took him from Austria to New York for the Stravinsky Festival, bypassing Iceland's ash cloud. Every so often, after a long day of work, the reclining club chairs beckon and Gergiev lets himself relax. "It helps if you can just be horizontal sometimes," he says.

On the ground in Saint Petersburg, Gergiev still functions at his signature tempo: *prestissimo*. Take his revamping of the 227-year-old Mariinsky Theatre. He conceived of a second concert hall in 2004,

raised funds to build it in 2005, and by November 2006 was inaugurating the shiny new 1,100-seat auditorium in the presence of President Vladimir Putin. "It may be one of the fastest projects ever," says Gergiev, who presided over the whole process to ensure no corners were cut. He likens the end result to an instrument for "the sonority, the sound, the acoustical miracle" of it. By 2011, there will be a third building, a 2,000-seat opera house by Canadian architect Jack Diamond (whose Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto wowed Gergiev with its technical and structural mastery).

Despite his dedication to perfection, the maestro will take his passion for opera outside those acoustically ideal walls to reach the post-glasnost generation. "I am used to performing in places like Carnegie Hall, but that doesn't make it less important for me to go into a university and perform in a room that is full of young people," says Gergiev. A personal talk to the students – with a performance of choice highlights from *The Gambler* and *War and Peace* – might generate hundreds of new subscriptions to a special Prokofiev program guaranteed to get young people hooked.

Nurturing peace is another goal about which Gergiev is passionate, and which helped earn him a spot on *Time* magazine's recent list of the world's 100 most influential people. His face lights up when he recalls a stop in Kazan, Tatarstan, on his Moscow Easter Festival tour (see below). "You have a mosque and a Russian church, both of them extremely beautiful, standing on the banks of the huge Russian river Volga like two sisters. It's a symbol of how the world should be." He staged concerts around the world in the aftermath of a tragic school siege (in Beslan, in his native Ossetia), to support the families of the victims. And the globe-trotting conductor has led all 14 concerts since 1998 of the World Orchestra for Peace. It brings together leading international musicians with new talents from hotspots such as North and South Korea, Israel and the Middle East for concerts in symbolically charged places like Krakow and Jerusalem.

"Musicians cannot stop wars," says Gergiev. "We don't bring food, we're not magical doctors, but there's something else people need to end their suffering: This, most probably, includes music." That philosophy provides the grace note to Gergiev's harmonious conducting career. |||



CHRISTOPHE DEGOUMOIS, BOMBARDIER REGIONAL VP SALES EASTERN EUROPE & CIS, WITH MAESTRO GERGIEV ABOARD A LEARJET 60 XR JET.

Easter in Moscow

When Maestro Gergiev debuted the Moscow **Easter Festival** in 2002, its program included 20 concerts and performances by the Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra in five regions of Russia. It soon became an annual, month-long celebration of Russia's musical heritage. By the spring of 2010 it had grown to 120 events in 26 cities across the country, including choral and chamber music in historic cathedrals, open-air operas and concerts and performances by musicians visiting from Italy, France and Brazil. The lineup also regularly features charity performances in orphanages, schools and veterans' hospitals, getting to the heart of Gergiev's goal for the festival: promoting classical music to all of the citizens of Russia.

easterfestival.ru