First Christmas Festival of Religious Music ends in Moscow

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The First Christmas Festival of Religious Music held with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia ended in Moscow on 23 January 2011. The last concert was performed at the Svetlanov Hall of the Moscow International House of Music.

Vladimir T. Spivakov, president of the International House of Music, and Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, acted as artistic directors of the Festival.

The Choir of the Popov Academy of Choral Art and the National Symphony Orchestra of Russia conducted by the People's Artist of the USSR Vladimir Spivakov performed "The Symphony of Psalms" by Igor Stravinsky and "The Song of Ascent" (symphony on verses from the psalms) and several pieces from the "Christmas Oratorio" by Metropolitan Hilarion, and "Chichester Psalms" by Leonard Bernstein.

Metropolitan Hilarion greeted the audience before the concert on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and warmly thanked Vladimir Spivakov.

Metropolitan Hilarion noted in particular: "The Book of Psalms has been a universal book of prayers for people for almost three thousand years. All people find a source of inspiration in it. Many composers used the texts of psalms to convey through sounds the feelings of people as they pray to God.

"A particular feature of today's concert is the performance of a large choir and a symphony orchestra. We hear the words of the last psalm, "Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!" (Ps 150:3-4). We shall hear trumpets, and tambourine, and pipe, and many other instruments that will praise God together with the choir. Our concert will bring witness to the fact that the human persons can glorify God by their creative art and their lives."

Metropolitan Hilarion expressed his hope for continuation of the Christmas Festival next year.

The unique forum of religious music was dedicated to the theme of mutual understanding and creative cooperation between representatives of different Christian confessions, of friendship, good, love, and

peace. Vladimir Spivakov believes that there are no frontiers in cultural space and said that the festival was the first so big an event in the world of religious music.

Taking part in the Festival were the Choir of Westminster Abbey (London, Great Britain), the St. Stephan of Decani Choir of the Cathedral of the Three Holy Hierarchs (Novi Sad, Serbia), the Cathedral Choir of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Moscow Synodal Choir, and the Male Choir of the Moscow Sretensky Monastery.

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