

# Spiritual fraternity truly more precious than wealth

By Mikhail Veremeev

In his speech, Mr. Lukashenko noted, “The *Slavianski Bazaar* is a spiritual catalyst for integration across the post-Soviet space and, in a wider sense, across the Eurasian space.”

The ‘festival of festivals’ presents a broad panorama of global cultural achievements, with its famous Summer Amphitheatre celebrating its 25th jubilee this year. It gathers Eurovision laureates, as well as winners of such festivals as *New Wave* and *San Remo*. It seems true that music surmounts all obstacles, being the language of friendship, needing no translation. No borders or political obstacles exist where people revere art.

We say that a tree is strong through its roots and people through their friends’ and this is certainly upheld by the spirit of the *Slavianski Bazaar*, which encourages international friendship. This year, entrants from Australia, Cuba and Venezuela are taking part for the first time, taking part in the Concert of Friendship, which is the central event, uniting the artistic achievements of various nations. Meanwhile, the musical contests held over several days allow the world’s top singers to entertain in a warm atmosphere of celebration. There’s no doubt that the Festival promotes a love of music and sets a wonderful example to the younger generation, showing the benefits of mutual respect and trust.

## Reciprocal love

Life is ever changing and our modern world is dynamically developing. The Vitebsk Festival has long occupied a place at the forefront of cultural events, not only reflecting current trends but setting them. With this in mind, the Head of State ordered a new concept this year, with the Festival becoming more focused.

Its major slogan of ‘Peace and Mutual Understanding Through Art’ remains sacrosanct and, symbolically, the Belarusian President’s special award bears the same name. This year, People’s Artiste of the USSR Edita Piekha received the honour, gaining a star bearing her name near the Summer Amphitheatre, on the Avenue of Stars. Ms. Piekha often attends the Festival and is



Among festival guests: Anzhelika Agurbash  
Italian singer Al Bano  
Presiana Demitrova  
Alexandra Laktionova content with second prize  
Michal Kaczmarek tries for Grand Prix



Alexander Tikhonovich explains, “To judge performances by young artistes fairly, jury members need to return to their childhood. Love of children is vital and being among children, we are obliged to be filled with love and to share this feeling generously with contestants. Of course, the jury is extremely well-wishing to all but ensures that only those who demonstrate perfect vocal capabilities and an appropriate ‘repertoire’ are awarded.”

The Head of the Festival’s Directorate, Alexander Sidorenko, announced just before the opening of the Festival that ticket revenue had reached Br20bn: comprising the major share of the Festival’s revenue. “We were selling tickets for almost a month beforehand,” he explained. Audiences are traditionally most interested in the opening and closing concerts, as well as stars’ solo performances.

Mr. Svetlov stressed that — as ever — the forum enjoys substantial state support: this year, Br8.387bn. In addition, the Festival receives financing from the Union State budget. It’s almost impossible to recognise how much the population of Vitebsk swells during the Festival. This year, around 5,000 people were officially accredited but many more traditionally come to Vitebsk for the week of excitement, music and street promenading. If you drop into a local café, you may find yourself next to a celebrity, while it’s pleasant to stroll through the town, admiring recent developments.

The *Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk* is Belarus’ calling card, known all over the globe; participation brings prestige for young performers. Since it first launched, the Festival has hoisted the flags of 69 states and has been the starting point for dozens of pop stars. Among previous winners are Inna Afanasieva, Irina Dorofeeva, Pyotr Yelfimov, Yevgeny Gor, Diana Gurtskaya, Taisia Povaliy, Andrey Khlestov and Natalia Podolskaya. Since 2002, winners have received a bronze statuette cast especially in Minsk: a singing woman (against the background of the Summer Amphitheatre), with a golden lyre in her hands and crowned by cornflowers.

Besides song and dance, guests enjoy film premieres, folk craft fairs and a rich theatrical programme. This season, over 100,000 people from 30 countries have attended the town’s concerts, performances and film screenings.



now known worldwide, having recorded around twenty albums with the Melodiya (Melody) recording studio: all are classics of Russian and Soviet pop.

The ‘Peace and Mutual Understanding Through Art’ award is conferred on figures of culture and art, as well as upon artistic teams and organisations, who have contributed considerably to strengthening international cultural co-operation and the promotion of global cultural achievements, following ideals of humanity. Past recipients include Andrey Petrov, Alla Pugacheva, Sofia Rotaru, Alexandra Pakhmutova, Valery Leontiev, Vladimir Mulyavin and *Pesnyary* band, Igor Luchenok, and Lev Leshchenko. Since 2009, the names of award holders have been engraved on the Avenue of Stars.

Interestingly, Ms. Piekha performed in the earliest of days of the unique concert, during the Polish Song Festival. As Belarus’ Culture Minister,

Boris Svetlov, noted, the singer’s star ‘lit’ in Vitebsk long ago: in audiences’ hearts. “Our love is reciprocal,” Ms. Piekha admits, adding, “I’m always eager to come here, where an incredibly kind atmosphere and inspiring aura rule. I’m happy to have the chance to sing for such wonderful people.”

## Golden key

The Grand Prix of the *Vitebsk-2013* International Children’s Musical Contest went to Presiana Dimitrova of Bulgaria. First prize went to Lenka from Georgia while second prize was shared between Alexandra Laktionova from Belarus and Arsen Shavlyuk from Ukraine. Third prize was won by Russia’s Dayana Kirillova and Ukrainian Galina Dubok

Often, public opinion differs from that of the professional jury; accordingly, jury members usually refrain from commenting before final results are announced. Head juror

much loved and respected across all generations in Belarus. True talent never ages, remaining a diamond in global history, never losing its shine.

Ms. Piekha is rightly viewed as a Soviet pop legend so the decision to recognise her with the ‘Peace and Mutual Understanding Through Art’ award has been enthusiastically received by all. Born in 1937 to an émigré family in the north of France, she came to Leningrad on a Komsomol trip in 1955 (after studies). She there entered the State University’s Department of Philosophy, studying psychology, and only later began her pop career. She is