

Song again floats over the city, gathering friends, old and new

By Viktor Andreev

This year, the jubilee forum set a record, despite the country facing a rather unfavourable economic situation. Even two weeks before the musical event of the year was launched, almost every ticket had been sold, notes the Festival's General Director, Rodion Bass. He adds that, for the first time, e-tickets were available, with citizens from abroad able to purchase them easily. This year, the *Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk* received serious support from the state. This year's Festival kept its traditional structure, with Days of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine held, in addition to *Vitebsk-2011* contests for children and adults.

Having been born from the ruins of the former huge country, the *Slavonic Bazaar* aimed to at least unite our previously single nations for a few days. Of course, this was not a matter of politics; everyone values and esteems their own independence. The Festival succeeds by offering good songs, theatrical premieres, bright shows and Chagall's drawings. Any sudden Vitebsk downpours are solved by huddling under an umbrella. Moreover, the city is impressive in its extensive hospitality and cordiality. The *Slavonic Bazaar* has become known for strong-voiced Serbian singers and caustic Moscow journalists but it's a true calling card for Belarus, which is now recognisable throughout Europe.

It's far from being a joke: 500 journalists from two dozen countries attended this year's event in Vitebsk. Even those in Hong Kong know about it. Phoenix TV Channel (boasting a 250m Chinese audience) arrived to shoot a film about Belarus — interviewing the President, touring the largest factories and visiting villages. They also expressed a wish to visit Vitebsk on these festive days.

In the hardest times, Belarus has preserved its *Slavonic Bazaar*. Pop performances and lofty art are always found here. Not long ago, Alexander Lukashenko was asked by journalists whether the country needs such festivals at a time when it's problematic to find foreign currency. Without hesitation, he replied that Belarus would never end the *Slavonic Bazaar*. This means that the Festival has a long life ahead!

This year, the 1st Arts Festival of the Belarusians of the World was held, featuring numerous guests from Russia and further afield. Global stars such

as Nikolay Baskov, Dima Bilan, Patrisia Kaas and Azerbaijani *Eurovision 2011* winning duo Ell/Nikki took part. Belarus was represented by *Pesnyary* and *Syabry* ensembles, Nikolay Skorikov, Irina Dorofeeva, Anastasia Vinnikova, Daniil Kozlov, and various dance and choreographic teams.

performed by leading modern singers. The Avenue is situated near the Summer Amphitheatre, featuring the names of those who hold the Belarusian President's special award: 'Through Art to Peace and Mutual Understanding'.

The best drummers from Belarus, Lithuania and Poland gave



Bright holiday of Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk

People's Artist of the USSR and Belarus composer Igor Luchenok was given a place on Star Avenue, as his songs are well known all over the world — owing to *Pesnyary*; they are even

an unusual show at the Vitebsk Concert Hall: *Gods of Rhythm*. Poland was represented by Stanislaw Skoczynski (a famous musician-percussionist, a professor at Warsaw's Academy of Music



Composer Igor Luchenok

Moon Dances, and is now a success in Europe.

The 1st Arts Festival of the Belarusians of the World also featured diaspora teams from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Holland, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Estonia and the USA — gathering around 250 people in total.

Despite numerous popular programmes being organised as part of the Festival, the International Pop Song Contest remains the major focus, having inspired intrigue for two decades. Young singers from around the world take part, with those from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Estonia featuring this year. Overall, about 400 contestants have performed over the twenty years of the Festival's existence.

After the *Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk's* musical segment officially ends, the city continues its holiday by hosting exhibitions, film screenings and theatrical meetings; Belarus, Russia and Lithuania have donated films



this year. Numerous tourist companies organise tours to Vitebsk — which is so much more than a mere festival city. It is also the homeland of Marc Chagall and boasts an art centre and a memorial house-museum to the prominent artist. There is so much to enjoy.