The St Petersburg State Capella Symphony Orchestra is the historical successor of the first Russian state symphony orchestra established in 1882. The orchestra was originally called “The Court Musicians Choir” (back at the time, the ancient word “choir” was used for military and brass orchestras). On 16 July 1882, the Court Musicians Choir obtained its official status and staffing profile.

The original orchestra was formed essentially from the Court Capella orchestra students, who were brilliant musicians by the time they finished their classes. High-profile education of young musicians at the Court Capella was organized by two outstanding Russian composers: M.A. Balakirev, Director of the Court Capella since 1883, and N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov, the Court Capella Assistant Director.

In its early years, the orchestra’s life was closely related to the life of the Imperial Court. However, besides playing dance music and salon music, the orchestra performed masterpieces by Russian and European composers: Glinka, Dargomyzhsky, Serov, Napravnik, Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Berlioz, Bizet, Dvorak, Wagner, Weber, Delibes, Liszt. On Sundays, the orchestra performed for the Court, but on weekdays it welcomed the St Petersburg upperclass society for the dress rehearsals in the orchestra’s rehearsal hall. Since 1893, these dress rehearsals kept attracting increasingly more people. Essentially, they were open concerts presenting first-class artists. Soon enough, the rehearsal hall could not house everyone who wanted to attend.

Starting from 1902, the orchestra began giving educational concerts on a consistent basis, under the title of “Orchestra Gatherings for Music News,” where the orchestra performed contemporary music by Russian and foreign composers along with long-forgotten pieces. “Life of the Hero,” “Thus Spoke Zoroaster” by R. Strauss, the Symphony No.1 and the “Faun and Shepherd Girl” suite by Stravinsky, the Symphony No.1 be Mahler, the Symphony No.9 by Bruckner were premiered here. Through those years, the orchestra conductor’s rostrum saw such famous conductors as Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Artur Nikisch, Nikolay Cherepnin and Alexander Glazunov (who dedicated his “Solemn Overture” to the orchestra).

After the Revolution of 1917, the former Court Orchestra continued to give numerous concerts in a new status – the State Orchestra. In 1921, on the former Court Choir and Court Orchestra were transformed in the city Philharmonic. The new organization took possession of the orchestra’s music library and all its property. The historical orchestra remains to this day by the St Petersburg Philharmonic, in the status of Honored Collective of Russia.

On 1 November 1991, the State Capella Symphony Orchestra was re-established thanks to the initiative of Alexander Chernushenko. The Capella Symphony Orchestra became a state orchestra following the executive decision of the St Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak after the brilliant concert in the Capella Concert Hall under the baton of the former British Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath.

Despite the 70 years of historical pause, the orchestra is genetically following the tradition of the Court Orchestra. The new Capella Symphony Orchestra is young, yet it already has a lot of bright soloists that are honored with various prizes in different Russian and international competitions. Everything in the orchestra is inseparable from the history of the first Russian symphony orchestra. Its chief conductor, the People’s Artist of Russia Alexander Chernushenko who has been directing the orchestra since the day of its second birth, is a graduate of the M.I. Glinka Choral College and of the Leningrad Conservatory, that are following the living tradition of the former Imperial Capella through their mentors and tutors.

Despite the pause in the orchestra’s biography, one can say that what the reborn Capella Symphony Orchestra did was continued the original orchestra’s creative work rather than started over. Just as in the old times, the orchestra is held in esteem of a wide range of listeners in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Greece, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Great Britain, Ireland, China, Japan, South Korea, Finland, Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania and other countries. Outstanding performers and conductors of our age are collaborating with the orchestra. Over 50 CDs featuring the Capella Symphony Orchestra have been released all over the world. The orchestra is working on a number of ambitious projects. Nearly all orchestra pieces composed by Beethoven have been performed during the last few concert seasons. Through the years of its modern activity, the Capella Symphony Orchestra became one of the leading orchestras receiving great deal of invitations from famous performers and conductors

The Capella Symphony Orchestra is held in esteem of audiences all over the world: in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Greece, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Great Britain, Ireland, China, Japan, South Korea, Finland, Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania and other countries. The orchestra performs on the world’s most prestigious stages, including “Konzertgebouw” in Amsterdam, “Musikverien” in Vienna, the Munich Philharmonic, the “Konzerthaus Berlin,” the Beijing National Center of Performing Arts, the Grand Concert Hall of the St Petersburg Philharmonic, and many others.

The orchestra is often on concert tours around Russian cities, taking part in Russian and international festivals and high-profile music events. The following concerts are worthy of special notice: “Classic Open Air Dresden-2011” on the Frauenkirche Square, “Russia Day in the World” (Beijing), concerts of massed choir at the St.Isaac Square in St Petersburg, the premiere performance of the “Electra” opera by Mikis Theodorakis in the antique Dionysos Theater by the Acropolis of Athens, the concert in the ancient Dion amphitheater at the foot of Mount Olympus, among others.

Outstanding composers, conductors and performers of our age have collaborated with the Capella Symphony Orchestra, including Mikis Theodorakis, Gia Kancheli, Sergey Slonimsky, Boris Tischenko, Gennady Gladkov, Liana Isakadze, Naum Starkmann, Dmirty Bashkirov, Ivan Monigetti, Vladimir Krainev, Maxim Vengerov, Sergey Roldugin, Alexander Kniazev, Alexander Rudin, Yuri Laptev, Nikolay Lugansky, Juozas Domarkas, Leonid Gorokhov, Daniel Müller-Schott, Arkadiy Zenziper, Andrey Dogadin, Sergey Dogadin, Lionel Hampton, Julian Milkis, Jens Lindemann, Anatoly Kalvarsky, Allan Gilliland, Boris Adrianov, Vladimir Mishchuk, Valentin Uriupin, Wolfgang Emmanuel Schmidt, Bruno Weil, Maurice Bourgue, Gregor Witt, Jorg Bruckner among others, as well as actors Vasily Lanovoi, Mikhail Boyarsky and Veniamin Smekhov.

The Capella Symphony Orchestra recorded a great deal of CDs later produced in many countries, with the help of such famous sound recording labels as Chandos and Naxos. One of the orchestra’s most significant recording projects became collaboration with the outstanding Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis: the recordings of his Requiem, three operas and two oratorios.

Performing Russian music, including the overlooked pieces, is the main focus of the Capella Symphony Orchestra. The orchestra has equal success in performing both Russian and European music, as well as pieces by contemporary composers. The unique artistic union of the Capella Symphony Orchestra and one of the world’s best choirs – the State Capella Choir – allows the two collectives to perform long-form pieces on a consistent basis. Bright instrumental soloists can display their virtuosity in these concert programs.

In 2014, following the Alexander Chernushenko’s initiative, an educational program for young musicians was founded under the guidance of the Capella Symphony Orchestra, called “The International Orchestra Institute by the St Petersburg State Capella.” Masterclasses and concerts of leading musicians and international-level teachers are held regularly in the framework of the “Orchestra Institute.” The project aims at the revival of the orchestra-class tradition that once was an integral part of the Court Capella.

These days, the Capella Symphony Orchestra and its chief conductor are capable of placing themselves before more serious challenges. Not only is it performing complex and rare music pieces, but also conducting successful experiments beyond classical music. Some of the most interesting completed projects are joint performances with Ian Gillan (from “Deep Purple”), the Jazz legend Lionel Hampton, Boris Grebenshchikov and his “Aquarium,” as well as Gennady Gladkov’s anniversary concert.

On 31 December 1999, on the Grosser Stern Square in Berlin, the Capella Choir and Symphony Orchestra took part in “The Milennium Bell” grand concert of Mike Oldfield, guitar player and composer. On the other hand, the symphony jazz concerts of the Capella Symphony Orchestra are always a great success: the orchestra performs popular classics, jazz, jazz-rock, Latin jazz, symphony folk, and cinema music. Among the most successful experimental projects of the orchestra are the immersive concerts where the listeners find themselves up close to the conductor and musicians, literally immersing themselves in music making.

The Capella Symphony Orchestra is developing greatly, reaching a conceptually new performance level. Considerable creative accomplishments of the musicians allow them to feel optimistic about the future and be sincerely proud about their involvement in the great history of the St Petersburg State Capella.