Russia-Singapore ties get extra oomph

DIPLOMACY was honed to a fine tune on Monday night when Singapore, a symphony by Russian composer Vladimir Martynov, premiered here at the Esplanade.

The political who's who of both Russia and Singapore were spotted among the audience at the concert.

On the Singapore front were President SR Nathan, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean and Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Lee Boon Yang.

They were joined by more than 160 Russian delegates, including Mr Herman Gref, the Russian minister of economics and trade.

The show opened the second Russia-Singapore Business Forum, a one-day affair that took place at the Shangri-La hotel yesterday.

A trade and diplomatic event, it was hosted by International Enterprise Singapore, the Singapore Embassy in Moscow and Troika Dialog, Russia's largest private investment company.

On Monday night, home-grown artists Rahimah Rahim, Jimmy Ye and Sheikh Hakel sang in Russian, together with students from the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory and the Singapore Management University.

They were joined by the Moscow Vasilev Choir and shared the stage with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, famed Russian violinist Tatiana Grindenko and her string ensemble Opus Posth.

Dr Lee said at the post-show reception at the National Museum of Singapore: "This symphony is more than just a cultural exchange. It also provides a good setting and gives an extra oomph to the Russia-Singapore business meeting."

The hour-long avant-garde piece was commissioned by the Singapore ambassador to Russia, Mr Michael Tay, and written after Martynov spent two weeks here in early 2005 with his wife, violinist Grindenko.

It was first performed in Moscow in 2005 as part of Singapur Po-Russki, a month-long festival that featured a visit by MM Lee.

Adeline Chia

SINGAPORE SYMPHONY: Composer Vladimir Martynov and his wife, violinist Tatiana Grindenko.