

Aktovy Zal: A Diamond in the Rough

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Chances are if someone took a vote to determine what the coolest, hippest cultural corner in Moscow is, it would be a place called Aktovy Zal.

[Aktovy Zal](#) actually has a rather uninspiring appearance if you are standing on the street at 18 Perevedenovsky Pereulok waiting to get in. In fact, it doesn't look like anything from there because you can't see it through the big, forbidding gate that blocks off your entry to the courtyard. To see anything at all you have to slip past the guard on duty at Entrance No. 1 to the complex that is called [Proyekt Fabrika](#).

Then there it is in all its glory: the outside walls of a huge, partly crumbling, partly renovated old paper factory.

But, as they say, you can't tell a book by its cover. It is what is inside the old factory that counts.

Aktovy Zal opened in 2006, the brainchild of Yelena Tupyseva, one of the smartest, brightest

and friendliest of all the 10 million people who live in Moscow.

Yelena got off to a quick start in life. She performed some as a dancer before getting her degree in law. Then, after working in the offices of the Golden Mask Festival for awhile, she decided to try her hand at producing and organizing. The result was the [Tsekh Festival](#), a contemporary dance festival that has gained international acclaim since it was founded in 2000.

In 2006, Yelena opened Aktovy Zal, a place she envisioned as a center for fostering creative collaboration. It quickly began attracting new artists after it opened its doors, and in just a few short seasons it became one of the hottest tickets in town.

You never quite know what you will find at Aktovy Zal. Their program includes contemporary dance, cutting-edge drama theater, showings of noncommercial cinema and, once every two years, art and photo exhibits as part of the popular Biennale festival.

If that's not enough, some of the hottest indie and rock concerts in Moscow take place at Aktovy Zal.

Yelena laughs about the success of the rock concerts, something it appears she didn't foresee.

"Not all of our neighbors are crazy about the audiences that come to these concerts," she told me recently with a smile. "They're pretty radical and they're liable to do most anything."

Be that as it may, Aktovy Zal is the place to go if you're looking for contemporary culture in Moscow.

One afternoon last week I cornered Yelena against the backdrop of a gorgeous, vibrant orange wall that leads to the venue's performance hall, and I asked her to talk about her work a little. Click on the picture below to hear what she had to say.

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