

TsEKh Fest Offers Best of Contemporary Dance

By [Katherine Lawrence Mansfield](#)

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“Sad Tropics” by Virgilio Sieni is one of two Italian shows that will finish the TsEKh contemporary dance festival. **Virgilio Sieni**

Moscow’s Center for Contemporary Dance and Performance, TsEKh, kicked off its annual Festival of Theater Dance this weekend. Once again, Moscow audiences are being treated to a weeklong kaleidoscope of some of the best contemporary dance, theater and performance around. In a city dominated by the Bolshoi in particular and ballet in general, the festival, which runs through Dec. 11, offers a rare opportunity to see a more experimental side of dance.

Now in its 11th year, the festival introduced a new concept to the program — 2+2, or two countries, two cities. Instead of focusing exclusively on Russian companies, as Moscow-based TsEKh has traditionally done, this year the festival is showcasing dance from both Russia and Italy and will stage performances in Moscow and Kostroma, a city situated on the Volga River about 400 kilometers north of Moscow.

This is a bold move for the festival. Attracting audiences to contemporary dance can be hard enough in big cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, but drawing a crowd in a town of just 270,000 is an ambitious task. But that's exactly what TsEKh plans to do by taking the festival on the road from Dec. 4 to 8 before returning to Moscow for a final few days of performances.☒

Fittingly, given its new 2+2 concept, the festival opened with "Punto di Fuga," a co-production between the Italian company Zerogrammi and Russia's Kostroma-based Dialogue Dance. This is a humorous dance of minimalist movement in which four men struggle for power on a stage set like a board game. Having premiered this summer in Turin, the work is an excellent example of the success that comes from cross-

cultural collaboration and was a great introduction to the festival.

Inviting foreign companies to perform began last year, and Italy was chosen this year as part of the Russian-Italian year of culture.

However, as Yelena Tupyseva, artistic director for the festival, makes clear, the decision to become international was not due to a lack of Russian contemporary dance companies. "I cannot say it's a marginal art in Russia,"☒Tupyseva said on the subject of contemporary dance, "after all, we've been putting on a Russia-only festival for nearly 10 years."☒

As she points out, while it's true that the hegemony of ballet is alive and well in this country, a number of nonballet dance troupes have sprung up over the last two decades.☒One such company, which is featured on the program and is always a hit, is the highly regarded Provincial Dances from Yekaterinburg.☒They will perform two works: "The Wedding," a restaging of Stravinsky's 1923 ballet that won the company a Golden Mask award in 2000, as well as "Sepia," a work created last year as part of the American Dance Festival.

Another Russian crowd-pleaser was Liquid Theater, a company jointly based out of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Chelyabinsk.☒Known for their site-specific performances, they presented "Subito Forte," a piece that includes live music and lots of sand.

In addition to Russians and Italians, this year's festival also includes a program of avant-garde dance from Poland. Four performances by young choreographers representing New Polish Dance, including the Harakiri Farmers, represented a rare chance to see Polish dancers in Russia.☒As Joanna Lesnierowska, artistic curator of the Polish component,☒ puts it: "We, all post-Communist countries, tend to look West, and we completely ignore what's going on next door."

The festival is by no means over, and Moscow audiences still have a chance to catch many impressive and cutting-edge dances.☒Traveling to Kostroma this week, the festival ends in Moscow with a full fare of Italian dance. Works that promise to be as good as the opening ones include another performance by Zerogrammi, "Sad Tropics" by Virgilio Sieni, a piece that weaves in ritual dance and masks, as well as "Six Degrees" by Santasangre, a musical-choreographic project on the theme of life and death.

Festival of☒Dance Theaters TsEKh '11 (Festival Teatrov Tantsa TsEKh '11) runs till Dec. 11

in the Aktovy Zal at TsEKh, 18 Perevedenovskiy Pereulok. Metro Baumanskaya. 221-0757. www.tsekh.ru. It also runs at Winzavod, 14th Syromyatnicheskyy Pereulok, Bldg. 6. Metro Kurskaya. 917-4646. www.winzavod.ru

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