

Irish Comedy God Tiernan Heads to Moscow

By [Paige Reynolds](#)

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Tiernan, who performs Saturday, won the prestigious Perrier comedy award at the Edinburgh festival in 1998.

Tommy Tiernan was once called an "Irish comedy god" by Time Out magazine before he played a gig in London. He is not quite that famous in Britain, but at home he can fill a 1,000-seater Dublin theater 166 times in a row with his act, and is said to have ticket sales second to only U2.

This Saturday he plays at Dom Aktyora as part of Irish Week, and is the second comedian following Ardal O'Hanlon's rip-roaring gig last Sunday.

Tiernan, 45, won the prestigious Perrier comedy award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1998 — previous winners over the years include Steve Coogan, Dylan Moran and Stephen Fry — and has a reputation as a sharp, passionate comedian.

"The reason I curse so much is not because of my lack of vocabulary, it's because I'm an Irish person. I'm an Irish person speaking the English language. And the English language doesn't suit my soul. I should be speaking the Irish language, but I don't understand a f-cking word of it," said Tiernan in one famous routine.

"Tommy is a unique comedian with a wild vocal style and boundless energy," said Johnny O'Reilly, Irish week festival organizer. "In Ireland we're familiar with his provocative and insightful commentary on local Irish culture. He's a veteran with many years experience traveling and performing all over the world and will have no problem applying his unique talent to Russian culture."

In a Skype interview, Tiernan said he was looking forward to the trip and was a fan of Russian cinema. "I'm intrigued by the culture. Russia's not afraid to be gloomy compared to the forced optimism of American cinema. It's such a relief to watch, to not have that weight of forced happiness upon you."

He also has strong opinions on what might link the Irish and the Russians as a people.

"I think there's a huge connection between the peasant peoples of the world," he said. "I don't mean it negatively. It's a unifying spirit of people who have suffered, people who have had other people in charge of them so that would excite me about going to Russia, there might be a kinship there. ... So I'm intrigued and excited."

Tiernan's main themes are family, sex and religion and he often jokes about being Irish — but he's not sure if that is good material for a Moscow audience, so they will hear something different.

"Previous shows have been about being Irish, so if I were doing one of those shows there would probably be a few difficulties," he said. "The show I'm doing at the moment, it's more about hitting my mid-40s, there's nothing nationalistic about it. There shouldn't be any difficulty performing, everyone can relate to getting older."

Tiernan has been in trouble a number of times for his act. The Irish Senate talked of blasphemy charges after one piece on "The Late Late Show," Ireland's most popular chat show, and he was berated after jokes about the Holocaust on Irish television.

"I would never consider myself controversial, that's always a label put on me by the media, and once you get that reputation it tends to stick," he said. "My job absolutely as a comic is to undermine everything. That's the delight in going to see a comedian, that he's not taking the world seriously and he's also not taking himself seriously, so hopefully the show is an undermining of both, that I'll neither take Russia nor Tommy Tiernan too seriously."

That doesn't mean, however, that the show will be littered with pokes at Putin.

"I'm very wary of being in a political subversive place. I'm in Belfast at the moment, this city has had to endure strangers coming in and prescribing solutions, so I'd be very slow to make comment on something that I know nothing about," he said. "I'd be slow to make comment about the political situation that I know very little about. It's the peasant link I'm really looking forward to."

O'Hanlon's gig was mainly homegrown material, but he did throw in a few Russian words when interacting with the audience and also joked about President Vladimir Putin's recent disappearance, adding, "if he is still your president, that is," a reference to the wild claims that Putin had been deposed, which drew big laughs.

Judging by his previous shows, Tiernan is unlikely to manage a whole show without some choice lines about Russia too.

Tommy Tiernan plays Saturday at 8 p.m. Dom Aktyora. 35 Arbat. Metro Arbatskaya, Smolenskaya.

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