The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

From Extravagance to Exile: What to See at the Chekhov Theater Festival

Shakespeare, Nureyev – and of course Chekhov – are all on the menu at this year's two-month theater extravaganza.

By Emily Erken

June 01, 2017



Brazilian production 'Voices of the Amazon' will be staged at the Mossovet Theater on June 14-16.
CHEKHOVFEST.RU

The warm season may be dragging its heels, but Moscow's summer theater festival is already in full swing. From May 24 to July 20, the Chekhov International Theater Festival is bringing 21 productions from 14 different countries to Moscow's biggest stages.

The festival's goal is "to introduce Moscow audiences to the best of world theater," said project coordinator Irina Trostnikova. Festival organizers expect the two-month program to draw about 60,000 to the Theater of Nations, the Moscow Art Theater, Mossovet, Pushkin, Et. Cetera, Lenkom, Vakhtangov, and Bolshoi theaters, among others.

According to Trostnikova, over 50 percent of tickets have been bought already, and sales are likely to increase in the next week. The early sales demonstrate a high demand even among lower-income Russians, who often purchase tickets months ahead in order to secure seats they can afford.

“I would say that [ours is] a middle-class audience,” Trostnikova says. “But there are plenty of people who don’t belong to the middle class, but who are still trying to buy tickets for lower prices well in advance.”

The Chekhov Festival started shortly after the collapse of the USSR as a way to bring theater companies to Moscow audiences thirsty for anything previously “off-limits.”

As it grew, however, organizers prioritized audience accessibility, making sure to include programming that would not only draw Moscow’s “professional theatergoers,” but also young people and families.

The festival’s motto is “Theater for People,” and this egalitarian approach is visible in the breadth of the program, which includes events for multiple audiences. The Theater of Nations and the Pushkin Theater are hosting edgy plays for Moscow’s intelligentsia, while the Mossovet Theater has lined up family-appropriate musical spectacles all summer.

Spectaculars at the Mossovet

Mossovet has sent its own troupe on vacation, and rented out its large venue to the festival for the whole summer. Dance-based productions from Cuba, Argentina, France, Taiwan, Brazil, Korea, Netherlands, and Great Britain will blur the lines between drama, opera, dance, puppetry and even circus.

This week, Mossovet is hosting “Tango Show,” featuring 12 Argentinian dancers flanked by an instrumental ensemble sitting on stage, as if in a tango cafe. Later this month, the Guo Guang Opera Company and Ju Percussion Group from Taiwan will enact the Mulan tale (of Disney renown).

South America will also send its emissaries. If you never got a chance to see the Lion King musical in London or New York, “Voices of the Amazon” may sate your taste for large choruses, enormous costumes and joyous belting.

The Mossovet Theater’s playbill can be interpreted as a kind of Olympiad for large-scale song-and-dance shows. But the Chekhov Festival’s scope is wider yet, and includes many works for more particular audiences seeking an intellectual thrill.

Pushing the limits

The Theater of Nations and the Pushkin Theater will host more risky productions aimed at Moscow’s intelligentsia. At the Theater of Nations, Canadian actor-director Robert Lepage presents his life with “887.” The one-man-show is an homage to childhood, discovery, loss and shock, including Lepage’s own homosexuality.

The London-based theater troupe Cheek by Jowl brings a surrealist (and R-rated) rendition of Shakespeare’s “A Winter’s Tale” to the Pushkin Theater. UK director Declan

Donellan highlights the psychosexual subtext in his adaptation of the Bard's oddest play.

Closer to home, the Bolshoi Theater will premiere a ballet based on the life of Russian émigré dancer Rudolph Nureyev. Directed by Kirill Serebrennikov and choreographed by Yuri Posokhov, it retells Nureyev's defection from the USSR, his relationship with Danish dancer Erik Bruhn, and his death from AIDS.

"Nureyev," which premieres on July 11, has been given an 18+ rating; in a ballet, that means there will be scenes with a gestural depiction of sex.

While a select audience may appreciate theater that delves into one of Russia's most politicized topics, other audiences will probably prefer the bon vivant spectacles available at Mossovet. The Chekhov Festival promises to provide the best for both.

Details available at chekhovfest.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/06/01/from-extravagance-to-exile-what-to-see-at-the-chekhov-theater-festival-a58134