

CZECH the News

Newsletter of the Embassy of the Czech Republic

Vol. 2, 2007

Klaus Visits the United States

Czech President Vaclav Klaus traveled to the United States in March 2007, visiting Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama before arriving in Washington, DC. While in Houston, President Klaus met with former U.S. President George H.W. Bush. He also addressed the Economic Chamber of the World Affairs Council and met with Houston Mayor Bill White. In Louisiana, University of New Orleans Chancellor Tim Ryan conferred an honorary doctorate in philosophy and financial economics on President Klaus. The ceremony was followed by a reception at the World Trade Center where Klaus met privately with Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. The President also met with New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and numerous representatives from

the local business community. Before leaving Louisiana, Mr. Klaus surveyed areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

In Alabama, Klaus participated in the Birmingham International Center's Spotlight on the Czech Republic, a year-long presentation of Czech culture to the people of Alabama. He also met with Alabama Governor Bob Riley and addressed a joint session of the Alabama legislature.

Wrapping up his U.S. visit in Washington, DC, President Klaus held meetings with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and Vice President Dick Cheney (President Bush was in Mexico). Missile defense and the visa waiver issue were among



President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus (left), and Ambassador to the United States, Petr Kolar (right), meet former President of the United States, George H. W. Bush (center).

Photo courtesy of Daniel Nony

the priorities on the President's U.S. agenda. At the CATO Institute, Klaus gave a speech titled, "Facing a Challenge of the Current Era: Environmentalism." A reception at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in honor of Klaus concluded his visit and was attended by numerous VIP guests, among them former

Chairman of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan and his wife Andrea Mitchell, Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent for NBC News.

President Klaus has been to the United States numerous times, but the March trip marked his first visit to the U.S. South.



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New Foreign Minister Makes U.S. Debut

In his new capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg made his first official visit to the United States in April 2007. The goal of the Minister's trip was to discuss important bilateral issues with high-ranking U.S. Government officials. Top on his agenda were what the Minister described as "two of the solid pillars of Czech foreign policy," transatlantic relations and human rights. Speaking at a reception held in his honor at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC, Minister Schwarzenberg said that the European-American friendship was extremely important and that transatlantic relations have been neglected since the fall of communism in Europe. He also emphasized the importance of supporting democracy, human rights, and personal freedoms saying "wherever democracy is threatened, our democracy is threatened, wherever human

rights are threatened, our human rights are threatened." Other topics for discussion on the Minister's agenda were the asymmetrical visa policy between the United States and the Czech Republic and the U.S. request for a missile defense radar base on Czech soil.

While in Washington, Minister Schwarzenberg met with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez, and U.S. Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Stephen Hadley. He also met with members of the U.S. Congress to discuss political and trade relations and participated in a conference on the proposed U.S. missile defense system hosted by the Prague Security Studies Institute and the Atlantic Council of the United States.

Minister Schwarzenberg then traveled to New York to



Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg

Photo courtesy of Daniel Dedeck

meet with United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe. He also toured the newly renovated Czech National Building (Bohemian National Hall) in Manhattan where he attended a performance of "The Servant of Two Masters" by a visiting troupe from the National Theater in Prague.





Photo courtesy of Chad Hyatt

Message from the Ambassador

Dear Friends,

Support of human rights and democracy is a top priority of the Czech government and of our Embassy here in Washington. During the winter, I had the opportunity

to travel to Miami and Puerto Rico where I met with members of the exiled Cuban communities. I was very impressed to see how well-organized and successful these communities are. While flourishing as vital citizens of their adoptive home here in the United States and Puerto Rico, they are dedicated to lending the force of their success to the cause of freedom in their homeland. It was an honor to meet representatives of the many Cuban and American pro-democracy groups and share experiences with them from the Czech transition to democracy. Given the current power shift in Cuba, combined with the level of commitment and support from the exiled Cuban community and the international community, there is reason for optimism that Cuba may soon enjoy the freedoms of democracy.

While former Czech President and human rights advocate Vaclav Havel held the Chair of Modern Literature at the Library of Congress (LOC) for 2 months this winter (see story page 3), the Embassy was privileged to work with both the LOC and with Mr. Havel to coordinate human rights events in support of Burma. Mr. Havel lent his presence and his wisdom to The Burma Forum: Havel, Burma, and Total Denial (see story page 3) at the Embassy in February, 2007. This was the first of what will be a series of ongoing forums, co-organized by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC, and the Stanley Foundation of Muscatine, Iowa, and dedicated to raising awareness of human rights abuses in Burma. The goal of the Burma Forum is to help the international community find ways to ameliorate the Burmese crisis.

President Vaclav Klaus also came to the United States in late winter with visits to Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Washington, DC, where he met with U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and other top administration officials (see story page 1). While the Visa Waiver Program and the U.S. missile defense base in the Czech Republic were top on President Klaus's agenda, he also spoke on environmentalism at the CATO Institute in Washington, DC, and even managed to attend his first rodeo in Texas.

Our cultural calendar has been just as active this winter and spring, and I encourage you to check the listings on page 5 for upcoming events. One highlight includes the English-edition launching of Vaclav Havel's latest book, which he partially wrote here in Washington. Paul Wilson, Mr. Havel's English language translator, will present the book *To the Castle and Back (Prosim strucne)* at the Library of Congress on May 17, 2007, and will discuss what it is like to translate Mr. Havel's work. The event is free and open to the public.

As always, I am grateful for your ongoing support of the Embassy, of Czech culture, and of the Czech-U.S. friendship. I look forward to seeing all of you at our next event.

Warmly,

Petr Kolar



Visa Waiver Program Modernizing

Since the fall 2006 announcement by President George Bush that the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP) will be modernized, the U.S. Government has been working to create the necessary new legislation. These policy changes, which will shift VWP focus away from immigration control to the enhancement of international security, potentially could lead to the inclusion of numerous U.S. allies in the VWP that are not currently in the program, including the Czech Republic.

On March 13, 2007, the U.S. Senate passed bill S.4, "Improving America's Security Act of 2007." S.4 contains provisions to enhance VWP security requirements, which, if met by countries that are allies in the war on terrorism, would mean the same visa-free travel privileges for their citizens traveling to the United States that U.S. citizens enjoy when traveling to these countries. In order for S.4 to become law, the House of Representatives must pass its own bill containing similar

language.

With minor exceptions, the provisions in bill S.4 are agreeable to the government of the Czech Republic, which already has implemented updated security measures in its airports, passport technology, and information-sharing systems. However, some provisions would still limit VWP inclusion for several members of the Coalition for Visa Equality. Comprised of U.S. allies not included in the VWP, the Coalition works to remove the visa barrier between the United States and these U.S. allies. Coalition membership currently includes eight new European Union member states—the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and the newest member Romania. The Czech Republic, along with the Coalition, will continue to work closely with members of the U.S. Government to ensure that the new VWP legislation will lead to inclusion of all the Coalition countries.



Timeline of Events



Photo courtesy of Mary Fezko

President Vaclav Klaus (left), Ambassador Kolar, and Jaroslava Kolarova

March 8, 2007

President Klaus and his delegation met with Ambassador Kolar, his wife, and special guests at a small reception at the Ambassador's residence during President Klaus's visit to Washington, DC.



Photo courtesy of Jana Kalimonova

NSO Executive Director, Rita Shapiro (left), Ambassador Kolar (center), Jiri Belohlavek (right)

April 17, 2007

Ambassador Kolar hosted a reception for Maestro Jiri Belohlavek who will be in Washington, DC, until the end of May to conduct the the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) and the Washington National Opera.



Photo courtesy of Mary Fezko

Ambassador Kolar, Jan Hrebejk (center), and translator Blanka Novotna

April 23, 2007

At the DC International Film Festival, Ambassador Kolar introduced Director Jan Hrebejk at the screening of the award-winning Czech film *Beauty in Trouble (Kraska v nesnazich)*.

Embassy, Havel Launch Human Rights Initiative

The Embassy of the Czech Republic and the Stanley Foundation presented The Burma Forum: Havel, Burma, and *Total Denial* at the Embassy of the Czech Republic on February 26, 2007. This event marked the opening of The Burma Forum, a new ongoing series to promote human rights in Burma.

The Forum opened with a 30-minute screening of the award-winning documentary *Total Denial* about human rights violations in Burma, made by Bulgarian filmmaker Milena Kaneva. Following the film, Ambassador Petr Kolar moderated a panel discussion with human rights advocate and former President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel, film



Former President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel answers a question during the Burma Forum.

director Ms. Milena Kaneva, and Burmese human rights advocate Mr. Ka Hsaw Wa. The screening and discussion centered on human rights violations perpetrated by Burma's military regime and

how the international community can help affect positive change. Following the panel discussion, Mr. Havel, Ms. Kaneva, and Mr. Ka Hsaw Wa engaged the audience in an open dialogue and

answered questions.

The Burma Forum is a continuing series co-organized by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC, and the Stanley Foundation of Muscatine, Iowa, to encourage discussion about how the international community can best support efforts to bring about national reconciliation and transition to democracy for the people of Burma, including full restoration of human rights. Future sessions of The Burma Forum will bring together experts from the public and private sectors in a personalized setting to promote constructive and in-depth dialogue about the current crisis in Burma.

Havels Wrap Up U.S. Sojourn

In March 2007, Vaclav Havel and wife Dagmar Havlova returned to the Czech Republic after a nearly 6-month stay in the United States. The Havels had been in Washington since the beginning of January. The playwright, human rights advocate, and former Czech President was a writer-in-residence at the Library of Congress (LOC), holding the Chair of Modern Culture at the Library's John W. Kluge Center where he worked on his next play. Before coming to Washington, Mr. Havel was scholar-in-residence at Columbia University in New York.

In addition to focusing

on his writing, Mr. Havel used his time in Washington to continue his human rights advocacy. On February 20, 2007, he led a discussion with eight international dissidents and activists on the struggle for human rights in Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Russia. Called "Dissidents and Freedom," the forum was held at the Library of Congress with a standing-room-only audience of more than 200 in attendance. Mr. Havel spoke on the importance of international support for dissidents and citizens of oppressed countries, and emphasized the need for media coverage in helping promote human rights struggles.

On February 26, 2007, Mr. Havel helped the Embassy of the Czech Republic launch its new human rights initiative, the Burma Forum, by leading a panel discussion on human rights abuses in Burma (see article above). Mr. Havel also attended the presentation ceremony of the 2007 *Gratias Agit Award* given by the Czech government to Irena Kirkland, a Czech American advocate of democracy, human and worker rights, and refugee assistance. Along with Czech Ambassador Petr Kolar and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Mr. Havel presented Mrs. Kirkland with the award 1 week before her death in January 2007.



Vaclav Havel meets with Frank Calzon from the Center for a Free Cuba.

This trip to Washington marked the second time in the past 3 years that Mr. Havel was writer-in-residence at the Library of Congress. During his previous LOC residency, Mr. Havel worked on his latest book, *To The Castle and Back (Prosim strucne)* published in English by Random House in May 2007. (See page 4)

Embassy Participates in Adopt a Doll Program

In April, Embassy staff and Czech Americans volunteered to make handmade dolls for the Adopt a Doll Program (Adoptuj Panenku) which raises money for UNICEF's global immunization program. Each doll is original and when "adopted" raises around \$30, the cost for one child to receive life-saving immunizations against the six deadly childhood diseases: pertussis, childhood tuberculosis, tetanus, polio, measles, and diphtheria.

Originally known as the Pigotta Project, the Adopt A Doll Program was developed 15 years ago in a small Italian town outside Milan. The word "pigotta" is an endearing

Milanese pet name for rag doll. School children, senior citizens, service clubs, and volunteers get together to hand-make the rag dolls representing children around the world. The dolls are then exhibited and sold to raise funds for UNICEF.

Each year, 3 million children die from diseases that are preventable using available vaccines. The Adopt A Doll Program is just one step in helping UNICEF reach the 30 million infants who grow up without being immunized, and is being adapted in other countries including France (Les Frimousses, Une Poupee adoptee,

C'est une vie sauvee), Finland (Anna & Toivo), and the Czech Republic (Adoptuj Panenku).

When a doll is "adopted," in the Czech Republic, the new parent sends a note to the maker of the doll to inform him or her that the doll has a new home and parents and that one more child will receive a full course of life-saving immunizations. The volunteers at the Czech Embassy made



From left to right: Jaroslava Kolarova, Jana Kalimonova, Zuzana Dvorakova, Lenka Fenclova, Liba Ellinger, Eva Cernikova, and Barbara Podoski (sitting).

four dolls which they named Bozenka, Babetka, Kvido, and Kordulka. Students from Czech schools throughout the country also participate in the program.



Gregor Mendel in Washington, DC

Dr. Jaroslav Cervenka (see article page 6) is not the only scientist from what is now the Czech Republic whose research has impacted the study of genetics. In fact, the father of genetics, Gregor Mendel, hailed from a town that today is known as Hynčice in Czech Silesia. When Mendel was born in 1822, his village was called Heinzen-dorf in what was then Austrian Silesia. Mendel himself had a name change. Known to us as Gregor, he was actually baptized as Johannes. The only son of a poor farmer, Johannes was expected to carry on the farming tradition. But young Mendel was bright and determined to study. The family's poverty limited his scholarly prospects and an accident that debilitated his father further strained their ability to support his academic life. Johannes persisted, suffering hunger and hardship in the pursuit of an education. First he went to high school in what is today Opava, then on to the



Mendel's Abbey

Photo courtesy of The Field Museum

Olomouc Institute of Philosophy where his physics professor, a man of the cloth, recognized that Mendel's keen intellect would be well-served by the priesthood, offering the young scientist a stable livelihood and a scholarly life. So in 1843, only 21, Johannes Mendel became an Augustinian novice, taking the name Gregor, and entered the Abbey of St. Thomas in present-day Brno.

To help the public learn more about the fascinating work and life of Gregor Mendel, The Field Museum in Chicago developed the exhibition **Gregor Mendel: Planting the Seeds of Genetics**, currently on view at the Museum of Health and Medicine in Washington, DC, until September 16, 2007. The exhibition tells how a friar, working alone with simple tools, cracked some of science's toughest mysteries. Visitors can see how Mendel conducted



his groundbreaking 8-year-long experiment with pea plants, meticulously collecting data that allowed him to discern patterns that revealed "elements" responsible for traits passing from one generation to another. Today we know these "elements" as genes. The exhibition features several interactive displays and nearly 100 objects from Mendel's work, among them, his letters, journals, photographs, botanical specimens, and garden tools. It also includes a section on modern Mendels about scientists who are using Mendel's work to map genomes and other modern applications, as well as works by contemporary artists that explore the subject of genetics. After its Washington run, the exhibition will travel to Columbus, OH; Memphis, TN; and Philadelphia, PA. For more information go to <http://nmhm.washingtondc.museum>.



Mendel's Botanical Specimen Box

Photo courtesy of The Field Museum

Paul Wilson – Translating Havel

Vaclav Havel's latest book *To the Castle and Back* (*Prosim struce*) will be launched in Washington at a noontime discussion with Paul Wilson, Mr. Havel's English translator, at the Library of Congress on May 17, 2007. Sponsored by the Library's John W. Kluge Center and the Embassy of the Czech Republic, the event is free and open to the public.

As writer, dissident, and statesman, Vaclav Havel played an essential role in the profound changes in Central Europe during the last decades of the 20th century, and became a powerful intellectual and political force for the reestablishment of democratic principles and institutions. In this intimate, illuminating memoir, a considerable amount of which was written while Havel held the Chair of Modern Culture at the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, Havel

recalls the pivotal experiences of his life and writes with eloquence and candor about his transition from playwright to politician and the challenges of governing a young democracy.

Paul Wilson is a freelance writer, editor, radio producer, and translator who spent 10 years in Czechoslovakia (1967–1977) where he taught English and learned Czech. He was expelled by the Communist government for his association with the dissident movement, particularly for his involvement with the underground music scene as a member of the legendary rock band, The Plastic People of the Universe. Returning to his native Canada, Wilson actively promoted the work of dissident writers and musicians during the remaining years of totalitarianism. He also began writing for magazines and distinguished himself as a

translator of Czech writers such as Josef Skvorecky, Vaclav Havel, Ivan Klima, and Bohumil Hrabal. Mr. Wilson's translations are familiar to readers of the New Yorker, Granta, Foreign Affairs, and The New York Times. His translation of *The Engineer of Human Souls* by Josef Skvorecky earned the Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1984, and his translation of Ivan Klima's *My Golden Trades* was short-listed for the Independent newspaper's International Translation Award in 1993.

In 2001, Wilson published his translation of Havel's play "The Beggar's Opera." Recently, he completed a new translation of "The Memorandum," an early play by Havel, in addition to his work on *To the Castle and Back*, and his own memoir.

The Havel book launch will take place at the Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson

Masaryk Biography Republished



Photo courtesy of UCIS

The University of Pittsburgh, University Center for International Studies (UCIS) has reprinted the biography of Alice Garrigue Masaryk, daughter of Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia. Using Alice's own words and letters, combined with those of her friends, the book chronicles major events in Alice's life from childhood through the tumultuous years of establishing Czechoslovakia and later trying to save it from the ravages of World War II and the communist takeover in 1948. *Alice Garrigue Masaryk, 1879–1966* was compiled by Ruth Crawford Mitchell and is available for purchase from the University of Pittsburgh, UCIS. To order copies call (412) 624-6150 or write to the University of Pittsburgh, Nationality Rooms Program, 1209 CL, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

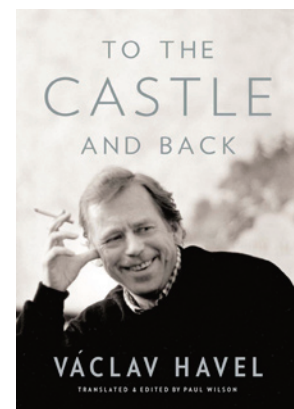


Photo courtesy of Random House

Building, Room 119, 10 First Street, SE, Washington, DC. For more information, please call (202) 274-9126 or go to www.mzv.cz/washington. To learn more about the Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, visit www.loc.gov/kluge.

EU Celebrates 50 Years, Poetry Project Launched

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the European Union (EU) and celebrate the cultural diversity of Europe, all 27 EU member states and the European Commission in Washington, DC, have launched an ambitious literary project titled *European Poetry in Motion®*.

During May 2007, 135 poems—5 poems from each of the 27 member states of the European Union—will be exhibited on posters in the Washington area bus and metro system in their original language and English translation. EU country representatives also will participate in a marathon reading at the Goethe Institute and poetry reading at Busboys and Poets.

Further information about the countries and poets are provided on the project's Web site: www.europeanpoetryinmotion.eu, which was launched on March 25, 2007, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which laid the foundation for the European Union.

European Poetry in Motion® is a project of the



Metro bus advertises Poetry in Motion.

Photo courtesy of Stefan Mobs

Cultural Counselors Roundtable of the member states of the European Union in Washington, DC, and their local supporters. The project enables EU countries to highlight their own languages and literature while supporting the United States in its valuable efforts to promote literacy. The ability to read and write not only opens the doors to a good education and a successful career, but also to learning about other cultures—all essential to meeting the challenges of a globalized world.

On May 5, 2007, from 2–7 pm, the Goethe Institute

held a Marathon Reading of all 135 poems. Cultural Attache of the Czech Embassy, Jana Kalimonova, read the featured Czech poems including *Country House (Venkovsky dum)* by Pavel Srut; *At the Pond (U rybnika)* by Emil Julis; *Sudden Feeling (Nahly pocit)* by Sylva Fischerova; *Natural Causes (Rozepsano v den smrti)* by Petr Borkovec; and *XXX* by Viola Fischerova.

On May 20, 2007, from 4–6 pm, the Embassy of the Czech Republic will participate with other EU countries in a poetry reading at Busboys and Poets, located at the intersection of 14th and V Streets, NW, Washington, DC. Each country will have 5 minutes to present a short introduction of the poet, his or her significance in national literature, a reading of the first four stanzas of the poem in the native language, and the whole poem in English. Admission is free.

For more information about *European Poetry in Motion®* and its related events, go to: www.europeanpoetryinmotion.eu.



Czech Pop Icon Performs at the Embassy

Marta Kubisova, whose song “A Prayer for Marta” (*Modlitba pro Martu*) became the rallying cry of Czech resistance to the 1968 Soviet invasion, performed at the Embassy of the Czech Republic on April 3, 2007, to a sold-out crowd.

A member of the Golden Kids, a vocal trio that included Helena Vondrackova and Vaclav Neckar, Ms. Kubisova gained notoriety during the 1968 Prague Spring—a brief period of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia led by Alexander Dubček and ended by the August 21st invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. “A Prayer for Marta” became the most famous single in Czechoslovakia after the 1968 invasion. The subsequent resultant hardline crackdown led the communist Czechoslovak government to ban Ms. Kubisova from performing or recording in Czechoslovakia for political reasons. At the time, Kubisova was one of the most popular Czech pop singers, with over 200 SP records and one LP,

Songs and Ballads. All records with her name on the label were removed from stores. The song, “A Prayer for Marta,” also was banned.

Ms. Kubisova was one of the original 243 signatories of Charter 77—the manifesto signed in 1977 by Czechoslovak citizens, including Vaclav Havel, who represented various occupations, political viewpoints, and religions—that criticized the communist Czechoslovak government for failing to implement human and civil rights provisions of documents it had signed, including the Czechoslovak Constitution. In November 1989, Ms. Kubisova broke the ban on her career when she emerged onto the stage at a demonstration against the communist regime. She performed the Czech National Anthem and her signature song, “A Prayer for Marta.”

During her concert at the



Marta Kubisova signs books for her fans after her concert at the Embassy of the Czech Republic.

Photo courtesy of JoAnn Cooper

Embassy of the Czech Republic, Ms. Kubisova sang along to recordings of hits from early in her career and played radio broadcasts from the 1960s. Now in her 60s, Ms. Kubisova also lent her warm, sultry voice to Beatle's songs and other classics. After the show, audience members lined up for autographs and some had original LPs from the 1960s which Kubisova revealed she does not have in her own collection since the communist Czechoslovak government confiscated her entire body of work in 1968.



Upcoming Events

Embassy of the Czech Republic
www.embassyseries.org

June 6, 8 pm

Hessova-Wiesner Duo



Photo courtesy of Hessova-Wiesner

The brilliant Czech duo of Silvie Hessova (violin) and Daniel Wiesner (piano) has toured all over the world to great acclaim. They will be performing works by Leos Janacek, Juraj Filas, Antonin Dvorak, Jan Hanus, and Josef Suk. A reception with Czech food, wine, and beer follows the performance.

Admission: \$50

Tickets: (202) 625-2361 or www.embassyseries.org

Avalon Theatre
www.avalontheatre.org

June 13, 8 pm

Return of the Idiot
(*Navrat idiota*)



Photo courtesy of Irena Kovarova

Drawing inspiration from the main character of Dostoyevsky's, *The Idiot*, the film reveals a serio-comic, modern-day love story. Frantisek, recently released from a psychiatric hospital, tries to assimilate into mainstream society.

Directed by: Sasa Gedeon
1999, 99 minutes
Czech with English subtitles

Tickets can be purchased at the box office a half hour before the start of the film.
Admission: Adult \$9.75
Senior, Student, Military \$7



Jaroslav Cervenka today

Jaroslav Cervenka – Man of Science and Letters

One need not browse too long among the shelves of fiction to see how often medicine and literature coincide. Anton Chekov, Michael Crichton, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Keats, W. Somerset Maugham, and William Carlos Williams, among others, all earned medical degrees and produced literary works. Czechs have no shortage of such literary doctors—Vladislav Vancura, Miroslav Holub, Josef Nesvadba, Frantisek Langer. Add to this list the Prague-born, Minneapolis-based Dr. Jaroslav Cervenka.

Raised in Prague, Cervenka earned a Medical Degree from Charles University and a C.Sc. (Ph.D.) in Human Genetics from the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Prague specializing in cytogenetics—the study of the cellular constituents (or chromosomes) in heredity. He first came to the United States in 1965. Although these facts read fluidly, the reality was otherwise. He recalls, “After high school I entered medical school and before the end of the first year I was expelled because my father refused to contribute to the communist Korean troops during the Korean War and I was put into forced labor. I was readmitted after a successful appeal to President Zapotocky,” an unlikely event described in “About Fate” from his short story collection *Mal D’Afrique*.

After medical school, Dr. Cervenka worked for 3 years in Czech border towns before being awarded a job at the Academy of Sciences in Prague in the Laboratory of Congenital Anomalies and Plastic Surgery, where he started a cytogenetic lab and a genetic counseling program. He soon realized that he needed to learn more about modern genetics, “So I applied to several American universities for a stipend,” he remembers, “and accepted a generous offer from Professor Robert Gorlin at the University of Minnesota. I came for 2 years as a Visiting Professor. It was the most pleasant and fruitful experience for me and, when it was over, I promised to return, crying on the way to the airport.”

Back in Czechoslovakia, political upheaval helped to hasten the fulfillment of Dr. Cervenka’s promise to himself and his wife, Sasha. “On August 21, 1968, in

the early morning, I looked out the window of our apartment and saw the street clogged, unbelievably, by hundreds of Russian tanks. I looked at my 3-year-old son Vojta and we decided. We took our Fiat 800, my ski boots, and two friends to emigration, knowing we would never be able to return. After we crossed into Austria we celebrated in a ditch with a few shots of Becherovka liquor, too loudly, maybe, with uncertain smiles and hidden thoughts. Soon we were on our way to Belgium to stay with friends and apply for U.S. visas.” (See “Ladies of the Brussels Night” in the collection *Revenge of Underwater Man*.)

Dr. Cervenka, wife Sasha, and son Vojta remained in Belgium for 3 weeks until then-U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey personally intervened and the Cervenka family was on its way back to Minnesota, where daughter Tereza was promptly born. Dr. Cervenka found a job waiting for him at the University of Minnesota, and spent the next 35 years there as Professor of Medical Genetics in the Medical School, School of Dentistry, and Graduate School, which he describes as, “the most wonderful years of freedom, being my own boss, surrounded by the friendliest people whom I admired and my Ph.D. students who invariably knew more than me.”

In 1982, Dr. Cervenka became one of the first diplomats in clinical cytogenetics from the new American Board of Medical Genetics. He lived in Japan, Kenya, and Nigeria and traveled

extensively on five continents where he researched the genetics of cancer, established cytogenetic laboratories, and studied what he describes as, “diverse people and their culture, or lack of one.” While studying the Cholo Indians in the jungles of Choco (Colombia), Dr. Cervenka discovered a new type of dwarfism and initiated a National Institutes of Health study that linked a mutation in a growth factor gene to a type of dwarfism characterized by abnormal development of the limbs.

Only 2 of the 50 stories that Dr. Cervenka has written (under the pen name Jarda Cervenka) have medical themes. But his trained understanding of the human body, its construction and deconstruction, are evident in the precisely-rendered protagonists who populate his literary works. He admits a fascination for ethnic and racial variations and their beauty or lack thereof. He also understands how the science of the body impacts the health of

the mind and believes, “that the mind is not much more important an asset than the able body is, the body without which the mind obviously could not exist. I recognize that the contribution to the wellbeing of mankind by a creative mind is much superior



Dr. Jaroslav Cervenka and son Vojtech raft down the Mississippi River



Dr. Cervenka in Kenya



Dr. Cervenka with the Cholos in Colombia

his western pupil, or a simpleton Inuit hunter whose mental limitations in no way hinder the importance of his contributions to his community.

Though his literary influences read like a who's who in world literature—Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Annie Proulx, Milan Kundera—one influence stands out.

“The first and lasting impression from literature for me was reading *The Stranger* by Albert Camus when I was in my late teens,” he remembers. “How could Camus write truth and still be published? How could he reveal that his main character thought only about getting laid—at the funeral of his mother? How far we still have to go in these

times of multicultural sensitivity, political correctness, and imperative religious tolerance—which all deny reality, reason, and ‘truth.’ How far to catch up with old Albert Camus in writing freely!”

During his award-winning career in medicine—he was twice awarded the Gregor Mendel Medal for Scientific Achievements—Dr. Cervenka wrote 2 medical texts, 120 articles, and conducted research that led to the discovery of a medical condition that is named in his honor. Cervenka's Syndrome, a new type of stunted growth of the extremities, established the standard for identification of human chromosomes called reverse banding.

His literature also has garnered numerous awards, among them the Richard Sullivan Prize for Fiction and the European Circle Franz Kafka Medal and Award. Dr. Cervenka's two collections of short stories, *The Revenge*

of *Underwater Man* and *Mal D'Afrique* have been translated into Czech and published in Prague by Triton Publisher. Both are available in the United States from most online book sellers. *The Adventures of Missi One*, his adventure travel book for children, also was published as a bilingual publication by Triton. Forthcoming works include two new collections of stories and a novel.

Now retired, Dr. Cervenka divides his time between Minnesota, Florida, and Prague and devotes himself to his fiction, which he writes in English. He considers himself an American writer, but says that his Czech heritage is “very important to me, to my writing, it is part of my thinking, still.” About his Czech compatriots he says, “Czechs are incorrigible atheists, nonconformists, musicians, theater lovers, beautiful women and ugly men, drinkers at the ready anytime, and, generally, fun to be with



Dr. Cervenka in Colombia

until the early morning hours. Also interesting are the few, hopefully rare, intellectuals suffering (or enjoying) the most unique and paradoxical mix of superiority complex combined with inferiority complex, unknown to me in other populations and population isolates.” With that gene pool as inspiration, it's a wonder that more Czech doctors don't write fiction. 🇨🇪

Excerpt from “Salima on the Governor's Bed”

SHE CAVED in her cheeks and sucked his middle digit, tightly enclosed in her lips. He called them *the* lips. The scorpion that had stung him in the fingertip was dark brown, so there was a question of whether it was the black species or the brown species, since they both vary in hue. The sting of a black scorpion would result in 2 days of misery and fever and his arm would swell like a Polish sausage. The sting of a brown one would hurt for 3 hours, then not even a swelling. Bad luck either way, just before his long agony of a drive to Lagos.

She took his other hand, put it under her blouse on her breast, and smiled at him with her eyes only. She could do that. She could do many such puny things that made him shake his head from side to side.

Her breasts were small. He understood it was a matter of fat. There just was not enough adipose tissue in the boondocks of the Igbo-land of eastern Nigeria. All women were like her, except the elephantine wives of the local “big man.” He calculated that, here, the thickness of subcutaneous fat was directly related to the thickness of one's wallet. The reverse situation was found in his native Baltimore. The thought of Baltimore awoke an image of “shopping Colleen” shopping, and he shivered.

“It hurts so much?” Ngozi asked, releasing his finger from the wet cave of her mouth.

“Oh no, sweetheart.” Jacob forced a smile back. “It just pulsates, as if you got a little electrical charge with each heartbeat.” Jacob contemplated: what to bring her from Lagos? It shouldn't be a problem; she has nothing, zilch, nada. No jewelry; no clothes really, no books, nothing. He was actually grateful to that miniature lobster with the ugly stingers for these moments. No pain, no gain. He felt a pleasant sensation around his stomach.

Yeah, maybe he'd bring her a nice watch, gold-plated and pretty, with a fancy band. No Patek Phillippe, mind you, but a reliable instrument. Or a gold necklace, 14 karat. She would jump 6 feet; she would glow, blush. Well, he wouldn't see blushing on her dark face, but she'd told him, during their intimate time, that she actually feels blushing. It could be felt, but remains invisible, just like a surge of sympathy or love—invisible on the outside.

Ngozi removed his unfortunate digit from her mouth, looked at it, and announced gravely, “You must eat onions.” Pulling out his finger made a cheerful sound, like uncorking a bottle to begin a celebration. They smiled at each other, and she put her face close to his. He rubbed her unprotruding nose with his. “Like Eskimos greeting each other,” he said.

“Es-ki-mos?”

“Yes, Eskimos. Inuit. These are people living far north, in the land of ice and snow. Very tough.” He felt her nipple rising mightily—but the driver should be here any minute. He removed his hand. “You know how the Inuit call making love, in their language?”

“Do I live in a land of ice and snow, to know?”

“Well, they call it ‘to laugh with a woman’! How about that! ‘To laugh with a woman.’”

She became serious, thinking, then her smile narrowed her eyes. “We have laughed,” she exclaimed. “Jacob, we laughed; we laughed. So it is true!” She jumped up.



Swing by the Kennedy Center for a Foot-Tapping Time!

Ondrej Havelka and the Melody Makers

On June 26, 2007, at 6 pm, Ondrej Havelka and the Melody Makers will perform at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage. The concert will consist of jazz and swing, from old-fashioned blues, New Orleans jazz, and the hot dance music of the roaring 1920s, to the glorious era of swing. For several years, Havelka sang with the group Original Prague Syncopated Orchestra before setting up his own 14-member big band, the Melody Makers, in 1995.

The group's repertory includes a broad spectrum of attractive tunes, ranging from Hollywood musicals to both Czech and American big band top swing numbers. The musicians' jazzy style, combined with their sense of humor and showmanship, make for the band's enthralling sound and tempo that support soloist Ondrej Havelka—the group's singer, speaker, and dancer.

The Melody Makers will sing in English and Czech. For more information, visit www.melodymakers.cz.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is located at 2700 F Street, NW, Washington, DC. Admission: Free



Photo courtesy of www.melodymakers.cz

Upcoming Czech Events

May 16, 19, 21, 24 (Washington, DC)

The Washington National Opera presents *Jenufa* at the Kennedy Center Opera House (sung in Czech with English supertitles). The show is directed by David Alden and conducted by renowned Czech maestro Jiri Belohlavek. Tickets are on sale now. Call (202) 295-2400 or visit www.dc-opera.org.

May 16-19 (Richmond, VA)

The National Genealogical Society holds the 29th Annual NGS Conference in the States. For further information, write to: ngs@ngsgenealogy.org.

May 30-June 6 (Anchorage, AK)

Czech/American Alaskan Polka Cruise. For more details, visit www.thedumplingnews.com/alaska.htm.

June 2 (Philadelphia, PA)

CSHA Philadelphia presents the Family Potluck Picnic beginning at 1 pm. Contact CsheritageAssociation@gmail.com for more information.

June 9-10 (Cleveland, OH)

The Cleveland District Alliance of Czech Catholics is sponsoring a bus trip to St. Anthony Parish in Chatham, Ontario, Canada. The feast of St. Anthony is January 11 and the Moravian-Slovak settlement in the Chatham area pays tribute to its patron. For more information, please contact Joseph Kocab at (216) 883-4760.

To submit a listing to *Czech the News*, please write to czech_events@yahoo.com. Due to spacing limitations, we can not guarantee that listings will be placed in the newsletter. 

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