

25-28 May 2003

Nonstop Reading Marathon

The four-day Nonstop Reading Marathon begins in Prague on 25 May and will end on 28 May 2003. During this period, readers in Prague and in other cities around the world will be connected via Internet. The participating cities are Berlin, Bratislava, Brussels, Kiev, Los Angeles, Madrid, Moscow, Munich, Paris, Vienna and Warsaw. An eight hour reading session will also take place at the United Nations on 27 May from 10:30 a.m. to 4:20 p.m., which will be broadcast live on the Internet.

Readers are free to choose fiction or poetry from among authors that reflect the spirit of humanism and freedom of thought and expression through their work. They are free to decide in which language to read including their mother tongue. We encourage selections from among Czech and Slovak authors and other authors from the region historically known as Bohemia, and from their translations into other languages. Some possible Czech authors: Václav Havel, Milan Kundera, Franz Kafka.

The theme of the Reading Marathon is: Life in Truth - Homage to Václav Havel (read: Vatslav). The theme marks the end of the second and last term of Václav Havel as President of the Czech Republic (1993 - 2003). Mr. Havel is known as an author, a leading thinker, an artist and was a prominent dissident during the communist regime which had imprisoned him for five years. Life in Truth is a celebration of the independent spirit of literature so well reflected and articulated in President Havel's writings.

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This event is transmitted in a live webcast on internet. It is organized to pay homage to all the authors, whose writings had helped raise awareness in support of the cause of human rights, freedom and free speech. Traditionally it has been sponsored under the patronage of a distinguished Czech personality in politics. It is aiming at promoting important authors of literature whose work had and or still has a profound impact universally, on the subject of freedom and human rights.

The reading time per reader should not exceed 15 minutes. Those who wish to listen are also welcome to the room that will be designated for this event. After the reading there will be a reception at the Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to the United Nations in New York.

For books from the Czech Republic and the region of Bohemia, please feel free to contact the Czech Center at the address below:

The Czech Center telephone no: 1- 212-288 0830
 Madison Avenue 1109-1111 Facsimile: 1-212-288 0971
 New York, N.Y. 10028 e-mail: nycenter@ny.czech.cz or info@czechcenter.com

Background

This cultural event, organized by the Jazzová sekce - Artforum, a nongovernmental organization from the Czech Republic, is devoted to promoting noncommercial art with a tradition of more than 30 years. The Jazzová sekce - Artforum is one of the oldest independent cultural organizations in the Czech Republic. It was founded in Prague in 1971 by Karel Šrámek who has been Chairman of the organization for 32 years. During the communist regime, the Jazzová sekce contributed significantly in presenting and promoting art that was not in conformity with the official culture. This balancing between the forbidden and tolerated art eventually led to a brief period of persecution and imprisonment of its leaders, (including Karel Šrámek) in the mid eighties and to the banning of the Jazzová sekce. Many eminent voices from the Czech Republic including that of Václav Havel, and from abroad criticized the unjust process. The courageous work of this organization in the struggle for free speech during the period of the totalitarian rule, made an important contribution in the process of self-awareness of the people in their opposition to the communist regime. The core activities of Jazzová sekce - Artforum during this period comprised:

- publishing literature,
- publishing of the "Jazz" bulletin dedicated to art, philosophy and experiments in art
- organizing of concerts - "Prague's Jazz Days Music Fest" remains the most popular
- organizing of exhibitions and readings
- publishing of catalogues of paintings

During the 1990s, Jazzová sekce remained dedicated to the aim of supporting free and independent art and has continued in its activities. It is also active in organizing of exhibitions, such as "the Beat Generation Fest" or "Libri Prohibiti" and other historical exhibitions documenting the cultural, social and historical development in the second half of the twentieth century.

The first Nonstop Reading Marathon took place in Prague in 1998. The themes during the last five years were:

- 1998 - Nonstop Ferlinghetti
- 1999 - Nonstop Solzhenitsyn
- 2000 - Nonstop Škvorecký
- 2001 - Nonstop Czech and Slovak Literature "In honor of Independent Art"
- 2002 - Nonstop Czech and Slovak Literature in the World

Initially, the Nonstop Reading Marathons were intended to commemorate and promote literature and free speech, which had a crucial role in the counter-culture of the years of communism. In the year 2001 this event slipped over the border of Czech Republic into Slovakia and by the year 2002 it became international. Last year over 900 readers participated and the event took place in 17 countries in the cities: Berlin, Bratislava, Brussels, Budapest, Bucharest, Dresden, The Hague, Kiev, London, Madrid, Moscow, Munich, New York, Paris, Sofia, Stockholm, Vienna and Warsaw. It was broadcasted on the Internet in its entirety. Czech Cultural Centers and other organizations around the world are helping to organize and coordinate this event and related logistics.

This year, the event is organized under the patronage of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the Fifty-seventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Mr. Kavan was the Foreign Affairs Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of and is currently a member of parliament in the Czech Republic.