

A talk with Georg Stöger, President of the Association of Austrians in Prague, in partnership with AUDITOR, spol. s r. o.

The Viennese Ball

IS AN ORIGINAL WORLDWIDE TRADITION

To finish this societal season, your association is holding a ball for this year. So when people hear "The Viennese Ball"...

...they probably think about the opulent ballroom at the Opera in Vienna, Johann Strauss's famous waltzes, full-dress gowns, the dignified atmosphere in the old, historic mansions and palaces, and also perhaps a long-established programme with a ceremonial commencement with a polonaise or a midnight quadrille.

What are the interesting things that most of us not know about the ball?

The first official Viennese Ball at the Opera took place on 11th December 1877; although the history of ballroom dancing in Vienna reaches as far back as the beginning of the 19th century. The current tradition is popular worldwide, as proven by the Viennese-type ballroom events organised e.g. in New York, Dubai and Kuala Lumpur. There are around 450 ballroom jubilees annually in Vienna.

What is the Austrian ball in Prague like?

Unique. Our goal is to recreate the atmosphere of the Viennese ballroom soirees and combine them with both the Austrian fashion and the Prague spirit, as was found at the Žofín rooms. We have been organising it on behalf of the Association of Austrians in the Czech Republic since 2000. Among the many people to have officially commenced the ball is the ambassador of the Austrian Republic, a descendant of Austrian aristocracy.

We're making an effort to maintain many of the time-honoured traditions and to not overlook other niceties such as the debutants. The induction of young men and women into society that is done symbolically through the ceremonial opening dance and participation of recent graduates of the Austrian School in Prague.

What is the difference between the Prague ball and the classic Viennese one?

There's not much of a difference between the two. We want to revive as many of the traditions they both share. On the other hand, we are also trying to be more attractive to the younger generation by offering more pop music besides the polka and Viennese waltzes. Another difference is the charity focus on the whole event, as the net profit from the ticket sales will be donated to support precautionary medicine in Czech schools.

How do you feel about the Austrian ball being held at Žofín?

I'm looking forward to it. For me, our ball has several dimensions, including the unification between the



Photo: Bc. Klára Stojaniková

Austrian and the Czech balls. Dancing, itself, is deeply rooted in the Czech lands; the guild of dance masters was established here in the 18th century and, immediately upon the ending of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a new club was established, entitled "Dance Masters of the Czech Kingdom." The present institution of dance courses for adolescents is also distinctive within Europe. And, of course, all this is to be seen at the ball this year and the years to come – people continue to love dancing.

As the president of the organisation holding the ball, I have the honour to be one of masters of ceremony to launch it. On that evening, I'll use the occasion to greet the clients of our consulting company, AUDITOR, who are also customarily taking part in the event, and I'll also learn more about the extraordinary people from both Czech and other international companies. The participant arrangement is quite varied, which begins with the students to the entrepreneurs and the political and public representatives from several countries. And, of course, I'm personally looking forward to having the Wiener Schnitzel.

You own the consultancy company, AUDITOR, which does business in both the Czech Republic and Austria. Could you briefly explain about the company to us?

Our company has had a longer-standing work history in Austria than in the Czech Republic, where we've been

in business for over 20 years. Our main focus is to provide high-quality services in the fields of accounting, auditing, taxation and business consultancy. With offices in Prague, Pelhřimov and Brno, our employees are more available, as well as our service for our clients in the Czech Republic. We also do business in Slovakia through our branch in Bratislava.

You've said that you had twenty years of entrepreneurial experience in the Czech market. Could you share some of that with us?


When I came to Prague in 1991, it was a completely different world for me, being an Austrian that grew up in a neighbouring country. At the beginning, there were nearly no available offices or phone lines. Cars were often not allowed in Prague's centre due to their emissions. The legal system was completely opaque, and dealing with authorities was a quite a challenge. There weren't even any customary price limits for our services. With the implemented new tax laws in 1993, business became more structured and methodical. The market for office-space became more stabilized in the latter half of the 90's, and, since joining the EU in 2004, things have changed even more rapidly. I now see the Czech Republic as a very modern country with an internationally oriented economy.

Is there any difference in providing consultation to Czechs from Austrians?

Our practice in the Czech Republic is much more focused on the international clientele than its domestic patrons. We do realise that young Czech people are learning more quickly how to work in an international environment. The average age of Czech managers seems to be lower than the managers, themselves, in Austria, and the rapport with them is less formal. We also realise that young Czech people seem to be more enthusiastic and ambitious; they're ready to learn more foreign languages and more keen on taking business trips and training seminars abroad, even outside their regular working schedules.

Compiled by LM ■

Mag. Georg Stöger is a managing partner of the AUDITOR, spol. s r.o. in the Czech Republic, Auditor SK s.r.o. in Slovakia and STÖGER & PARTNER Wirtschaftstreuhand- und SteuerberatungsgmbH in Austria.

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