

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

April 2015

www.dcslovaks.org

Slovak Conductor Juraj Val uha Performs at the Kennedy Center

SASW wishes to thank Dr. George Mesko for the following report on Mr. Val uha's performance, and to him and his wife, Judith, for warmly welcoming the conductor on behalf of the Washington-area Slovak-American community.

I want to share with you our pleasure from a wonderful evening at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts where Juraj Val uha, the Conductor-in-Chief at the Orchestra Simfonica Nazionale from Torino (Italy), performed on the theme: "*Fantasy And Fates: Tchaikovsky's Masterworks*" on February 5, 2015, (and repeated on February 6th and 7th).

Juraj is from Bratislava, and he studied musicology and composition there and in St. Petersburg as well. Since then, he has conducted a multitude of orchestras, including the Orchestre National de France, the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Munich Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, and several others all over Europe. In the U.S., he had his debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the National Symphony, in Washington, D.C.

We were very pleased to see this six-foot tall handsome man in his elegant black tailcoat, with his rich chestnut head of hair, his trimmed beard and azure blue eyes, leading graciously this symphonic body. He started with a full suite of Igor Stravinsky's "Pulcinella" with many melodic facets of this vibrant musical mosaic. It was followed by violin concerto No.1 in G.minor, op.26 by Max Bruch, performed by the Norwegian Vilde Frang, a young rising star who presented the audience with an elegy of emotional movements underlined with the bucolic sound of the flutes and bassoons, underlined by brassy horns. The last piece was P.I. Tchaikowsky's Symphony No.5 in E minor, op.64, which Val uha performed with great panache and grace, portraying the individual reactions of the composer in the face of immutable destiny, involving stages of resignation, challenge, and final triumph in the face of inclement fate. The conductor received overwhelming applause and ovation from the audience, which lasted many minutes.

As members of the Kennedy Center, we received permission to meet the Maestro after the performance. He was very gracious to receive me and my wife, Judy, in his private lobby and we remained in cordial exchange for several minutes as natives from the same country of Slovakia. At the end of our meeting, we presented the Maestro with "The Story of the United States Capitol: We the People," which he graciously accepted as a gift from Slovaks in Washington, D.C. It was a memorable evening thanks to a young rising star and conductor from Slovakia.

Z. George Mesko, M.D.

[Note: A review of the Val uha performances was published in the *Washington Post* on February 6, 2015.]

SASW President's Message

Greetings to all SASW members. I want to recognize and thank all of our hardworking members who continue to volunteer their time and talents to make SASW a strong and fun organization. Our board of directors meets monthly to plan and organize our social events and speaker series. When you see our board members at any of our functions, whether our annual picnic, our Svätý Mikuláš party at the Slovak Embassy, or one of our many lectures, please show your appreciation for their dedicated volunteer work by taking time to thank them. A big thank you to all of our current and former board members for their many years of service to SASW.

The following individuals generously contributed money to support our City University Scholarship Fund for Slovak students and our SASW General Fund since September 2014.

SASW Scholarship Fund

Ken Bombara
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Ludo Hintos and family
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Dr. Jerry and Shirley Rich
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Dennis and Hon. Rosemary Macko Wisnosky
Carol and Steve Yanek, in memory of Anthony Strank

SASW General Fund

John and Georgene Chastain
Victor R. Haburchak, Jr.
Jan Kocvara
Markus family
George Swisko
Margie Zalesak

Our picnic is scheduled for Saturday, June 6, and our Svätý Mikuláš party will be on Sunday, December 6. I hope to see all of our members at both events.

Jerry Rich

SASW News and Notes

New Board Members and Officers – At the SASW annual membership meeting this past fall, SASW elected three new members of the Board of Directors: Anne Pavuk Wright, Ray Luca, and Ludo Hintos. We welcome this new infusion of energy and ideas to the SASW Board. At the first Board meeting after the annual meeting, the following officers were chosen for 2015: Dr. Jerry Rich, was re-elected President, Brian Belensky was chosen as Vice-President, Georgene Chastain agreed to move from Secretary to Treasurer, and Anne Wright was elected to take over the Secretary duties. We look forward to another successful year and thank these individuals for agreeing to serve as officers. Departing the Board are Evan Stefanik, Tom Marton, and Ken Bombara, all of whom will be staying involved with the Society.

Kalinak Visits Washington – Slovak Vice President and Interior Minister Robert Kalinak visited Washington on March 9, and accepted an award from Secretary of State John Kerry for Slovakia's cooperation in the war against terror. Mr. Kalinak presented Secretary Kerry with a very old Catholic bible, which was well received. Current U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Theodore Sedgwick, and former Ambassador Ted Russell, attended the event.

(Con't. on page 7.)

Mark Your Calendars for These Upcoming SASW Events:

- **Saturday, April 25, at 2 PM, at the Slovak Embassy**

Robert Dvorchak speaking on "Birds of Passage: Achieving the American Dream," a talk about Slovak immigrant history, based on a self-published family history. Bob worked for 47 years as a journalist, including eight years as a national writer for the Associated Press in New York City. He last worked for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

- **Saturday, June 6, noon – 5 PM, the SASW Annual Picnic**

SASW's annual picnic, will be held at a great new location – **Fort Hunt Park** in Alexandria, VA, just off the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Fort Hunt is part of the National Park System and is about 12 miles south of Beltway exit 108. There is a Fort Hunt exit off the parkway.

This Slovak-style picnic is jointly organized with the Washington Slovakia Meet Up group. Food and a variety of drinks (beer, wine, soft drinks) will be provided. Further details, including cost, will be provided soon (also via the Society's website < www.dcslovaks.org > and Facebook). Reservations will be required so that we can properly order the right amount of food and drinks.

- **Saturday, June 13, at 2 PM:**

Prof. Jana Kopelentova-Rehak, assistant professor of anthropology at Loyola University in Baltimore, and Towson University in Towson, MD, speaking on Slovak political prisoners. This talk will be co-sponsored with the Friends of Slovakia (FOS). The location of the talk is TBD at this time, so please check the SASW website for updates.

- **Saturday, September 12, at 2 PM, at the Slovak Embassy:**

Prof. Kimberley Zarecor, of the College of Design, Iowa State University, speaking on her book *Manufacturing A Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960*, which won an honorable mention from the Czechoslovak Studies Association Book Prize in 2014.

- **Saturday, October 31:**

- **at 12:30 PM, SASW annual meeting**, at the Slovak Embassy.
- **at 2 PM, Prof. Mark Stolarik**, Professor of History, and Chair in Slovak History and Culture, University of Ottawa, Canada, speaking on his book *Slovaks in Canada and the United States, 1870-1990: Similarities and Differences*. Prof. Stolarik last gave a very well received talk for SASW in 2011.

Diplomatic Dispatches: Peter Bondra – Local Star, National Hero

[Story sourced at < <http://puckbuddys.com/2015/02/02/diplomatic-dispatches-peter-bondra-local-star-national-hero/> >; additional photos available there.



The one and only Peter Bondra

The debate – to the degree there ever was any except in Mike Milbury’s mind – is over. Alexander Ovechkin has established himself as one of the greatest NHL players of all time, and we here in D.C. are lucky to have a ring-side seat to history. Years, decades even, from now, people will speak about this moment in the same way old-timers now talk about Gordie Howe, Stan Mikita, or Wayne Gretzky.

Bondra salutes Ovechkin

Yet not so long ago, in the days before Ovechkin, it was hard to imagine that anyone could ever surpass the sheer *scoar-moar-goalsiness* of Peter Bondra. Bonzai dazzled D.C. for more than a decade, although it was ultimately in Chicago as a Blackhawk that he scored his 500th career goal, joining former Hawks Bobby Hull, Michel Goulet, and the great Stan Mikita.

Bondra and Mikita share something else: they’re both two of the many great Slovak players to earn their way in the NHL. It should surprise exactly no-one that hockey is the national game in the Slovak Republic, just as in the other great European hockey powers, which helps explain how such a small nation can turn out so many talented players.

Recently, as part of our conversations with Ambassadors from the great hockey nations serving in the U.S., we had the good fortune to spend some time with His Excellency Peter Kmec, the Slovak Ambassador to the U.S., as well as Marek Skovajsa, president of Metropolitan Engineering/Shapiro-O’Brien, a D.C.-based engineering services firm, to hear their thoughts about Slovak players, the importance of hockey in culture, and efforts underway to encourage more youth to join the sport.

What role does hockey play in Slovakia?

Hockey is our national tradition, part of our national identity. Central and northern Europe are into two types of sports: hockey and soccer. As you've noticed, we clearly excel when it comes to hockey; a number of the players are genuine national heroes.

How closely do they watch the NHL?

The NHL is the best league in the world, and of course any Slovak ice hockey fan watches the games very closely, especially those teams that have Slovak hockey players. It used to be much broader now that the number has diminished a little bit, but we've got new faces, especially on the Red Wings. We watch the games, we talk about them in the media, it's very closely watched.

Do you follow any specific players or teams here?

We definitely very much focus on the teams where Slovak players perform. Marián Hossa with the Blackhawks, where Mikita played before him, and we watch Marián Gáborík with the Kings pretty closely. Then there's two rising stars with the Red Wings – Tomáš Tatar and Tomáš Jurčo, they're great. Slovaks have a good combination of technical skills and strong determination, real physical play. It's a combination of what's sometimes called the Soviet school and the U.S. style of ice hockey. Bondra had that, and so does the great Zdeno Chara.

Of course, Mr. Ambassador, while we still love Bondra here in D.C., not so much Chara...

Ah, but you don't hate him as much as the Canadiens do...

A little less. So why have so many Slovak players excelled in the NHL do you think?

It all comes down to a real sense of teamwork. You may remember the Šťastný brothers, who came to the U.S. – their success was clearly a team effort. They used to play for several years in Bratislava, and learned teamwork in communist Czechoslovakia, which they brought that spirit here to U.S. and Canada and excelled as a group, the three brothers playing together. The team spirit is a very strong asset we brought to the NHL, I think.

Are there particular Slovak players who became something like father figures for the next generation playing here?

You can find famous names in different generations throughout the NHL. First, I would start with Stan Mikita, a great player of Slovak origin and a very famous player in the Hall of Fame. Then there was Peter Šťastný, another famous player.

Then after all the political changes in central and eastern Europe, you saw a long line of very successful Slovak players coming to the U.S., and right at the top, one of the highlights, of course is Peter Bondra – an amazing scorer and hard worker on the ice.

Would you call Bondra a national hero?

Amb. Kmec: Definitely. When we became our own independent country, we needed heroes and faces to promote our country abroad. I can easily say he was one of our best ambassadors. Every goal, every hat trick, increased Slovak pride back home. Of course he's a respected business man these days, and even though he doesn't live there any more – he lives in the D.C. area – he still travels frequently back to Slovakia, to his home town, to support young Slovak players.

Marek Skovajsa: Also, he's still a role model after he finished his hockey career. It's often very difficult for successful professional athletes to move into a second or third career, usually at a young stage in their life, where there is a lot of fame around them. Peter was still in transition where he came back to the country to head up the national team for the 2010 Winter Olympics, which proved to be a very successful team.

This was right after he finished playing in the NHL and he worked as hard as he worked on the ice to get these guys committed to winning. It was really fascinating to watch the team and see how he motivated these guys. As great an athlete as he is, his transition to giving back to Slovakia and creating a successful business career is one of the great untold stories.

One of the things that really impresses me about Bondra is that he said none of his kids would go play professional hockey until they earned a degree in college. As soon as that happens, where they advance their brains, they'll mature. So his boy [David] goes to Michigan State where he plays hockey and is earning his degree.

I understand that Bondra is working hard to promote U.S./Slovak business exchanges...

Marek Skovajsa: Oh yes, not only that but he's still very active in supporting youth hockey leagues both in Slovakia and right here. Nicholas [one of Bondra's sons] is still in high school here, and local skating coaches ask him to help out and work with kids.

Tell me more about what Bondra's doing in Slovakia...

Marek Skovajsa: Well, with the changes of 1989, the entire system for supporting sport collapsed across central Europe, and we suffered the most. We had to start building capabilities from scratch. You need sponsors – it's quite an expensive sport – and it needs more money and organization flowing in. Players like Bondra have been great, coming to Slovakia and setting up their training camps, really helping the kids. But we need more.

Everything is changing so fast and so drastically. We've made a very fast transition from an industrial age to a technology age. Everything has to basically be reinvented, and that's for sports as well. I have a business view, and look at things from that perspective. If you make something financially smart, it's sustainable.

Hockey brings very complicated but tangible rewards. It teaches kids hard work, discipline and team work. And those are the skills that it's very hard to teach in schools. We just need a new model for economic support, and I think a lot of that will revolve around social networks. Think about it: one sheet of ice supports maybe 550 families. That's a powerful group of people to help sustain hockey, and that's just one sheet.

Ambassador Kmec: And here's where our responsibility as government comes in, to use this huge potential, and build a network, of professionals working in the U.S. to help build up hockey in Slovakia. Borders aren't important anymore, we need ideas floating around. From the perspective of ice hockey, it's important to empower kids with different types of skills. Generally a good sports culture helps build a good education culture, and that's why I like this idea of bringing as much Slovak talent and know-how back to Slovakia so we can really help the sport build and evolve.

Marek Skovajsa: Players like Bondra, Hossa, so many others, have been so helpful, running hockey camps back in their home towns. One thing we've talked about is creating a three-week camp here for Europeans. They would work on the skills for two weeks, and then have a one-week tournament. Then we'll invite colleges to do a draft of sorts; get these kids into the system. We just have to find the financial model to help support a facility like this. Doing stuff like this may not yield high-returns in the short term, but they will in the long term.

SASW News and Notes (continued)

Passing of Rep. Joseph Gaydos – SASW notes the passing of former **Rep. Joseph M. Gaydos, Sr.** on February 7, at the age of 88. Rep. Gaydos was the first Slovak-American elected to Congress, where he served from 1968 to 1992, representing the 20th Congressional District of (western) Pennsylvania. He was born in Braddock, PA, to immigrant parents, worked in the glass and steel industries before obtaining a law degree, beginning his career as a lawyer and moving on to be a state senator and then, congressman. He was a tireless advocate for working people, of which there were many in his western PA district. He was instrumental in passing landmark pension legislation (ERISA), and advocated for the steel industry, founding the Congressional Steel Caucus. While a congressman, Rep. Gaydos maintained a modest townhouse in Washington, D.C., and returned to his district on weekends. SASW extends its condolences to his family and friends.

...and these Notable Individuals – SASW also notes the passing of several other notable individuals: **Dr. L'udovit Pavlo**, Honorary President of the Slovak League of America, on December 22, at the age of 89; **Chuck Bednarik**, Hall of Fame Pro Football player, on March 21 at the age of 89; and of local note, **Thomas George Gibian**, a prominent member of the Czech community who served as executive vice-president of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU), and who was a founding member and director of the American Friends of the Czech Republic (AFoCR). SASW offer condolences and honors the contributions of these long-lived individuals.

Summer Tours to Slovakia – If you are interested in traveling to Slovakia this year you may want to check out the following opportunities:

--Honorary Consul **Joe Senko** and his wife, Albina, will be escorting the **11th Consular Tour to Slovakia** from August 23-September 2. In addition to touring historic Slovak towns, they will visit historic sites in Vienna and Budapest. Unique to this tour are spa treatments in Piešťany, a mock Slovak wedding, rafting on the Dunajec River, several wine tastings, and meetings with Slovak dignitaries. For more information contact Joe Senko at (412) 956-6000 or at < jtsenko@aol.com >.

--Renown folklorist **Helene Cincebeaux** will lead three "Treasure Tours" this summer, including the "**Treasures of Slovakia Trip**" July 10-19. The trip flyer and day-by-day itineraries are available at < www.our-Slovakia.com > or by calling Helene at (585) 342-9383; also email her at < helenezx@aol.com >.

--**Jim and Kay Bench** will host the **18th Annual Youngstown/Spišská Nová Ves Sister Cities Tour** July 13-27. For further information call Jim at (724) 858-5843 or email him at < jmbench@yahoo.com >.

--**Judith Northrup-Bennett** will host the **2015 Slovakia Heritage** small group tour September 11-20. For more information, visit < www.slovakiaheritage.com > or contact Judith Northrup, Slovakia Heritage Tours, at (978) 544-5144 or < connectionswork4u@hotmail.com >.

Upcoming Slovak Basketball Star at University of Maryland – While the Maryland team was recently eliminated from the NCAA Basketball Tournament, **Michal Cekovsky** from Košice, Slovakia, has become an important part of the Maryland Terrapins basketball squad. As a freshman listed at 7 foot 1 inch and 235 pounds, he has received increased playing time for the team, which will be a top seed in the NCAA Tournament. Michal represented Slovakia in the 2013 U-20 Euro Championships. The Maryland media guide calls him a dual threat, with his strong perimeter play and strong inside game.

Miss Czech-Slovak U.S. Pageant – Young women of Czech and Slovak heritage between the ages of 16 and 26 can participate in the Miss Czech-Slovak U.S. Pageant, which will be hosted in Wilber, NE, August 1-2, 2015. The deadline to apply is June 1. For more information, visit the website < www.missczechslovakus.com > or on Facebook at 'Miss Czech Slovak US Pageant'.

Slovak Film Showing – The Slovak Embassy has just announced that as a part of the Visegrad 4 (V4) Film Series, it will present a showing of the Slovak film, **Bathory**, on April 14, 2015 at 7pm. The film is directed by renown Slovak filmmaker, Juraj Jakubisko, and gives a unique perspective on the story of Countess Elizabeth Bathory – the “blood countess” -- of historical lore. The film is in English and is 138 minutes in length. The Embassy of the Slovak Republic is at 3523 International Court, NW, Washington, DC 20008, near Van Ness metro. Admission is free and you must RSVP to the event at svp.washington@mzv.sk with “Bathory” in the subject line.

Bistro Bohem Czech Movie Nights – This marks the fourth year of the **Film and Beer Series at Bistro Bohem**. The series this year focuses on the work of acclaimed screenwriter and actor Zdeněk Svěrák, who is renowned for the Oscar-winning film “Kolya”. All of the films will screen in Czech, with English subtitles. Each screening includes one free beer, as well as an introduction by a representative from the Czech Embassy. All screenings are subject to change. The screenings take place the third Tuesday of every month.

On April 21, the film “Secluded, Near Woods” will be shown, and on May 19, the series will feature the film “Dark Blue World”. Bistro Bohem is located at 600 Florida Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20001. You can call (202) 735-5895 or send an email to < bistrobohem@gmail.com >.

Mother of Sorrows Chapel Anniversary – 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, in Washington, D.C. The local branch of the First Catholic Slovak Union (FCSU/Jednota) typically sponsors a Mass in September, and it appears that this year may involve a larger celebration. We will forward details as they become available. The year 2015 also represents the 125th anniversary of the founding of the FCSU, and the centennial of the death of the organization’s founder, Father Stephen Furdek.

L’udovit Štúr Anniversary – October 29 will mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of the important Slovak figure, L’udovit Štúr. Štúr is credited, along with several colleagues, with the codification of a standard Slovak language, based on central Slovak dialects, in 1843. The L’udovit Štúr Museum, established in his honor, is located in Modra, Slovakia.

Slovak Mass on Easter -- There will be a Slovak Mass, in the Crypt Church of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, in the chapel of Our Lady of Missions, on Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015 at 10:00 AM. Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, 400 Michigan Ave NE, Washington, DC.

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We wish you all a Happy Easter (Ve ká Noc) and hope you'll enjoy this recipe!

It is traditional in many parts of Slovakia to have a basket of food blessed on Holy Saturday or Easter Sunday. According to custom, none of the food can be eaten until after church services on Easter Sunday, and each member of the household must eat a sample of everything in the basket, lest misfortune befall him or her. The basket usually contains smoked meats (bacon, sausage, ham), bread, butter, cheese, horseradish, salt, sweets, and *pysanky* (decorated eggs). Each item in the Easter basket has a special religious significance. The Slovak Easter cheese, known as *hrudka* or *syrek*, is a symbol reminding Christians of moderation. Hrudka is very mild, sweet cheese made from eggs and milk that are cooked until curds are formed, and are then shaped into a ball. Hrudka can be made either savory with salt, and sometimes pepper, or sweetened with sugar.

Below is the family recipe from SASW member Helen Fedor.

MARY FEDOR'S HRUDKA

2 qts. milk
1/4 tsp salt
1 dz. eggs
1 cup sugar
1 package cheesecloth

In the sink, set a colander into a large bowl, and drape the cheesecloth, folded into a large square (3 or 4 thicknesses of cheesecloth), over the colander, centering it. Have ready a piece of string 8-12" long.

Heat 1 quart of milk, with salt added, in a Dutch oven, over medium-low heat. In a large bowl, combine the remaining quart of milk, eggs, and sugar, and mix until completely blended. When the milk in the Dutch oven is hot, add the mixture from the bowl and stir slowly but constantly, so that the mixture doesn't catch onto the bottom of the pot. When the curds are firm, pour the mixture into the cheesecloth-draped colander. Carefully gather up the cheesecloth (the curds will be very hot) and shape the curds into a tight ball. Use the string to tie the cheesecloth shut. Hang the hrudka where it can drip into a bowl for 2-3 hours, until dry.

You can save the liquid from the *hrudka* (in the bowl under the colander) to drink after it's been chilled. The liquid smells very eggy, but it tastes much better than it smells.

The **Slovak American Society of Washington** is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. [Contributions and membership dues are tax-deductible.](#)

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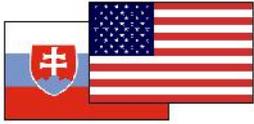
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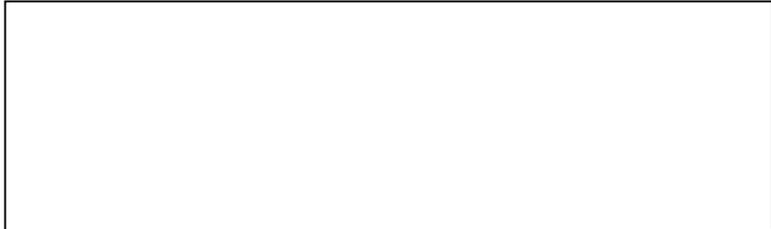
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SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
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**SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.
 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL/DONATION FORM**

New annual membership, and renewal of existing members for 2015, runs thru December 31, 2015.

Individual membership (\$25/year) \$ _____

Family membership (\$35/year) \$ _____

Optional tax-deductible donation:

VSM/City U. scholarship fund \$ _____

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