

Dear Reader,

February 28, 2007

With this newsletter you will certainly **gain knowledge** to **impress your clients, colleagues and friends**.

Here are interesting facts and news you may, or may not know:

> Winter Gets Banished in Carnivals around Slovenia

Thousands of masks and tens of thousands of spectators converged on Ptuj, Cerknica and Cerkno, three Slovenian cities that have the **longest history of carnivals in the country**. While there was not much work to do in chasing away the mild winter, the revelers nevertheless made sure that it got banished for this year. The **largest festival was the one held in the town of Ptuj**, where, according to organisers, some 50,000 spectators watched some **2,600 different masks** including 76 organised groups, a record for the Ptuj event. The Ptuj festival, dominated by some 500 kurenti - distinctive local figures - featured masks from Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia. Cerkno, a town in western Slovenia, was meanwhile overwhelmed by "laufarji", a group of some 25 different costumes, some of which are believed to originate from **pagan rituals**. The laufarji - the **costumes of some of which are made of 10,000 ivy leaves, fir boughs** or, in the case of the main character, the Pust, between 60 to 80 kilograms of moss - will condemn Pust on Tuesday. This is also the day that Pust will be buried in Ptuj and Cerknica.



The carnival in Cerknica meanwhile featured Butalci - the half-wit inhabitants of the village of Butale, a fictional village from a book by humorist Fran Milicinski Jezek - and the **famous witches**.

Some 15,000 visitors of Cerknica were also treated to a giant pike, devil and his dormice and the local hillbillies.

What do **James Bond, Oliver Twist, Aslan the King of Narnia** and **the Predator** all have in common? The answer: **Prague's Barrandov Studio**.

Not only were these four silver screen heroes filmed at the Barrandov Studios, but it was the **talent of Czech filmmakers** that helped to make these productions so successful. And if that weren't enough, the recent opening of the **largest soundstage in Europe at Barrandov** may help turn the Czech Republic's cinematic ambitions into reality and transform Prague into the Hollywood of Europe.

Foreign film productions from the United States, Great Britain and other countries happily return to film new projects in the Czech Republic, in part thanks to **low costs and the skills of local film professionals**. Barrandov Studios have played a key role in bringing feature films and big-budget television films to the Czech Republic. The studio is building on a **long tradition of filmmaking that dates back to 1931**. After the Second World War and the Communist era that followed, film productions at Barrandov were mainly limited to Czech and Slovak films.

The country's big break came in 1984, when **Czech-born director Miloš Forman chose to film his biographical film Amadeus** in what was then Czechoslovakia. Of course,



> Czech Republic: Filmmaking in the Heart of Europe - part 1

Barrandov Studios were used to realize production. Since then, interest in the country's film industry has been growing steadily, helped much by the easily accessible and exceptional locations key to filming historical films such as Amadeus or **Barbara Streisand's Yentle**, which was filmed in Prague shortly after Forman's picture.

The German film **"The Lives of Others"** about how the East German secret police invaded people's lives has won an Oscar for best foreign language film. **First-time director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck** said at the ceremony in Los Angeles Sunday evening that he hopes the success will counteract a trend in Germany towards feeling nostalgic about the communist era. "I was happy it worked against this whole new phenomenon in Germany that people feel nostalgic for the East and start glorifying the Communist past," Donnersmarck said. Recent films such as "Good Bye Lenin!", "Sonnenallee" and "NVA" have taken a light-hearted look back at the communist regime and avoided dealing with state persecution in the German Democratic Republic. In contrast, "The Lives of Others," **set in the early 1980s, features a Stasi secret police officer assigned to spy on a playwright and his actress girlfriend.** The movie, which was a hit in Germany, successfully evokes the climate of fear in the GDR and the corruption that pervaded the system. The film swept last year's Lola film awards in Germany as well as the European Film Awards, and Donnersmarck told Reuters in a recent interview that he hoped an Oscar would give the film more exposure and "signal power." **"An Oscar is the ultimate symbol of recognition so it means everything,"** he said. "Everybody in the world dreams of winning an Oscar, even people who don't work in films."

> and the
Oscar for
Foreign
Language Film
goes to ...
Germany, for a
change

The film has had the **most successful launch in the United States** of any German film, playing to packed theatres and earning almost \$750,000 in the first two weeks since its launch. It is only the third German film to win an Oscar, after **"Nowhere in Africa"** in 2002 and **"The Tin Drum,"** an adaptation of the Günter Grass novel of the same name, in 1980.

After winning the award, Donnersmarck thanked California Governor (born Austrian) Arnold Schwarzenegger "for teaching me that the words 'I can't' should be stricken from my vocabulary."



I am looking forward to hearing from you with feedback or group requests in the near future.

Kind regards,

Birgit Kraus

