
Celebration of Advent at Charles University

Celebration of Advent at Charles University

The time of Advent at Charles University is traditionally celebrated by numerous Christmas concerts and other festive meetings of CU employees and students. The employees usually have a gathering within the institute or faculty they are working for; the latter mostly meet in one of the favourite student cafés or pubs close to their faculty building (as Czechs are lovers of beer, a pub is actually more likely than a café).

This year, however, Charles University decided to celebrate the Advent for the first time ever by opening the gates of Carolinum (the ancient seat of the university in the heart of the Old Town of Prague) to not only its academic community, but also inhabitants of the city and its visitors.

On Wednesday the 2nd of December, the inner yards of Carolinum buzzed with life in the early morning to prepare the afternoon event. Members of staff and students prepared to build and decorate several dozens of stands. These stands were to present each of the faculties of Charles University and introduce some of the various student associations active at the university; they also offered some typical Christmas time refreshments such as popular Czech Christmas cookies, mulled wine or other Christmassy scented foods and drinks.

The historical halls of Carolinum were open to the public by several guided tours – tickets for which could have been either booked in advance via email or obtained on the spot at the appropriate stand; the entry was free of charge. Equally, the new permanent exhibition on the history of Charles University, the oldest university in the north of the Alps and to the east of the Rhine, was open at no costs in the cellars of Carolinum for the occasion.

The event was rounded up by several lectures by Charles University teachers on topics related to Czech celebration of the Advent and Christmas time. There was a lecture on Advent and Christmas traditions by the Department of Ethnology as well as a talk on Jan Jakub Ryba (1765-1815), a village teacher and musician who was the composer of the most popular Czech Christmas music piece of all the time (if you do not count the numerous traditional carols connected to the season) – the “Czech Christmas Mass” known also under the title “Hej mistře” which translates into English as “Hail Master.” This is the title of the most famous part of Ryba’s Czech Christmas Mass, fondly named by the Czechs as “Rybovka.”

During the evening, “Rybovka” was played and sang in the Great Hall (Aula Magna) of Carolinum by the members of the Faculty of Education and its choir to close the event.

All in all, a very nice event to open one of the most festive seasons of the Christian year; Charles University is proud that its new contribution to the Advent time celebrations in Prague was received well by its members, as well as the general public and passers-by, and hopes for successful repetitions of the event in the years to come.

Abbie Elizabeth Burnett is a BA History student studying at the University of Essex in the UK. Abbie is currently studying within the Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague for her Erasmus year and is enthusiastic to immerse herself in all the opportunities that an Erasmus year within the Czech Republic can offer. She was motivated to join the international iForum to gain valuable journalistic experience, meet new people and experience other cultures.