
Article on Award Ceremony

Award Ceremony

On the Wednesday the 30th of January the Charles University of Prague honoured Prof. Erling Norrby M.D. Ph.D, the Swedish Virologist who is one of the most eminent in his field worldwide. Prof. Norrby has long standing links with both Prague and the Czech Republic. Not only was he one of the first scientists to visit the Czech Republic after 1989, but during the communist period he also helped several Czech emigres adapt to life in Sweden. In particular, Prof. Norrby has a deep affection for Charles University, stating that he has a “deep respect for Charles University as an old European centre of learning.”

Prof. Norrby's achievements are many. He organised the first ever conference to combat HIV/AIDS in 1986, he served as chairman of the Nobel Prize committee, and he was appointed as Permanent Secretary of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Besides from his impressive career as a teacher, including being Dean of the highly prestigious Karolinska Institute in Sweden, he is also a prolific author, writing, to date, 308 original papers, 114 review papers, and 116 journal articles. As well as this he is an avid jogger, and has taken part in a 30km cross country race more than 50 times.

The award ceremony was carried out with the usual pomp and fanfare associated with these events. The deans and vice deans of various colleges entered the hall accompanied by rousing music, looking resplendent in their robes of black or red, black for the deans, red for vice deans. Also represented were senior professors from other universities in the Czech Republic and from Slovakia. After the deans took their seats, the national anthems, Kde Domov Muj and Du Gammla Du Fria (Thou Ancient, Thou Free), were played and the ceremony began.

Dr. Michal Anđel, head of the medical faculty, said that “It was a great Honor to recommend professor Norrby to rector prof. Vaclav Hampl for the award of doctor honoris causa. As faculty we do have a personal relationship. Professor Norrby has taken part at our conference about tuition in 1998, that was shortly after we have started to teach at the 3. faculty of Medicine according to the new reformed curriculum. At that time he was awarded with medal from our faculty. Today we have the honour to be co-creator of the ceremony, where professor Norrby will be awarded with Doctor honoris causa in medicine.”

It was then Prof. Norrby's turn to address the hall. Thanking the assembled deans, he spoke briefly but eloquently. It was clear to all present that he has a true and deep love for science, detailing to the audience how important science is to both culture and the psyche. He stated that “science is the poetry of the mind” and went on to elaborate on what he believes to be the finest trait in mankind, that the “urge to understand is one of the finest human traits.”

Prof Norrby ended with a follow up to his own quote, saying that, “while science is the poetry of the mind, poetry is the science of the heart”.