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# **A Mid-March Night's Dream at the Faculties of Arts and Education Annual Ball**

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The joint annual ball of the Faculties of Arts and Education took place on Wednesday 7th March 2018. Members of both the faculties all arrived in gorgeous dresses and suits for the evening start at 8 o'clock. Not just students, but also professors, former teachers, and members of the public had since weeks been looking forward to what was to become a magical event. This year's theme was 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', one of Shakespeare's comedies, set in the woodlands by the light of the moon. This topic added a true sparkle to the evening with the atmosphere becoming complete with fairy-like creatures floating around.

The faculty balls are held annually in a number of faculties of Charles University. The tradition of the ballroom dancing is still very much alive and well in the Czech Republic today; certainly, well dressed young adults and students in their 20s stand out elegantly in the metro as they head to the balls – or perhaps classical dance classes. The Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education ball this year took place at the National House in Vinohrady, a perfect setting with its gorgeous ballroom, balcony and grand staircases. There was even a funky photo booth with props for guests to have entertaining photos from the night, as well as professional and glamorous ones.

For most, the first stop after entering the building and going up the stairs was gathering drinks at the bar. A lavish array of bottles of Prosecco, Czech wine, of course Czech beers and other spirits – livening up every table that surrounded the staircase bars. Along with drinks there was an array of obložené chlebičky ('garnished breads') which are a traditional Czech snack. They had various toppings of meats and cheeses, all fashioned so that they looked like the twisting female dancers in the ballroom. Everything was done with such taste and perfection, it matched all my dreams of what a ball would be like.



In every room there were tables and various groups of friends set around them. They were spaced around the perimeter of the main ballroom so that everyone could have an excellent view of the infamous Czech dancing. The Pirate Swing Band orchestra accompanied the dancing with famous ballroom and modern songs, ranging from 'Hit that Jive' and Peggy Suave to Palov Stelar. The Czechs certainly know how to dance – dancing since they attended their dance classes (taneční) during their high school time and putting on an excellent show with their various partners throughout the night. There was waltz, foxtrot, jive, the quick-step and cha-cha, with only a few breaks – clearly everyone had been saving up energy for this night. All ages and members of the faculty danced; it did not matter whether you were a 'stick of wood' (Czech phrase for someone who cannot dance) or you were the next Anna Pavlova because following the lead of others and the music was just as enjoyable.

A perfect dance floor for love and passion: watch out that you may be picked up by one of the Czech male dancers taking your hand and before you can say no, they will already be leading you around the floor. Certainly, for foreigners this kind of forward and very courtly way of asking a lady to dance is outdated and may come as quite a surprise – a pleasant one (it did for me) but these traditions and the people's confidence that beseeches dancing is what made the ballroom scene very attractive during this event. For me it was like going back in time to when my grandparents first met, but for the Czechs, well, it happens every year! Even if you are not asked to dance, moving your hips with your girlfriends or tapping your feet with the guys is worth it; a friend and I jived about the ballroom as finally we had a dance that we both knew well. In another room, for the late night and less conventional dancers, 'DJ Billy Hopp and Saxo Johann' were playing funky swing songs which people were racing to dance to. The saxophonist sounded incredible to the beat of the DJ; the perfect place to pass the last hours of the night away. Everyone was together on the floor and there was great vibrancy coming from all the faces of the guests and their dance moves.

Everyone had an air of glamour that turned many a head and made many blush during the night. Suave tuxedos and bow ties, even top hats found their way into the building! Ladies had their most swanky cocktail dresses or ball gowns on; some silky, some long, some black, some lacey. The mixture made the rooms colourful, a match for the Vogue

fashion weeks with their glammed up celebrities prancing about. In line with the theme of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' there were people with flower tiaras and glittering faces – men with twig crowns as though all were guests attending the marriage of Theseus, the Duke of Athens to Hippolyta, the former Queen of the Amazons (the play's main theme and setting).

Safe to say that the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education ball was a place to feel impressive and be impressed. All staff and guests were friendly and open minded – so much so that all ages, and nationalities will feel welcome in all respects: dancing, chatting, enjoying yourself!