



Guest Star 2008

# New Stars Are Born

**The fifth Guest Star award ceremony, this year set in the beautiful surroundings of the City Museum of Ljubljana, was a night of superb food, exquisite wines, eminent international guests and four starry sculptures for the winners, but above all it was a night of cultural blending, friendly bonding and strengthening the ties between Slovenia and its expat community.**

This year's unofficial motto resembled the one of the Olympics: the significance of the achievement is not measured by winning, but by nomination itself. Yet, as always, someone has to win and we are proud to announce the Guest Stars of the year 2008: musician, producer and composer Chris Eckman in the category of Culture, football player Marcos Tavares in the category of Sports, ambassador of The Netherlands John Groffen in the category of Diplomats and general manager of Kempinski Palace Portorož Thies C. Bruhn in the category of Economy.

These are the four new names that joined the fourteen Guest

Stars who won this title in the previous four years. The winners now form a very diverse international bunch – coming from no less than thirteen countries from all over the world.

The two organisers, The Slovenia Times and Radio Slovenia International, are very much aware of the importance of cultural variety and different national backgrounds for a small country like Slovenia. That is why in 2004 they decided to organize an event that would honour the growing expatriate community in Slovenia. The main objective of the campaign is highlighting those non-Slovenian residents who contribute to the greater development of Slovene

society and its recognition abroad. It is intended to promote expats as important figures in the Slovene public for it is they who promote our country beyond its national borders and thus create an image of it in the world.

## Under the Piano

For the second year now, the Guest Star ceremony took place in Ljubljana and this year's location was just the perfect setting for the gala occasion. The decoration and preparation of the reception hall was entrusted to the choreographer Igor Jelen. While the guests marvelled over the beautiful white concert piano on the upper floor, we must also credit

the no less than six strong men who carried that heavy instrument upstairs.

However, it was well worth the effort. After the introductory address to the guests, given by the host of the evening, Michael Manske, all the attention was directed to the talented young pianist Ana Šinkovec who played a piece from her vast repertoire and earned a loud applause. The evening was officially opened and Mitja Meršol, a legend in Slovenian journalism and the co-host of the ceremony, presented the nominees and first challenged them to say a few words in Slovene. Self-confident and eager to impress the audience with their knowledge of



HE Mikhail Valentinovich Vanin, ambassador of Russian Federation and Ljubljana mayor Zoran Jankovič



V.S. Seshadri, ambassador of India with his wife



Attractive dance performance by Igen theatre

the language, they all successfully passed the "test."

This year, there were sixteen nominees, suggested by the Slovene public and the editorial board of the organisers, who divided them in four categories – Culture, Diplomacy, Economy and Sports. The winners were chosen by the means of a popular vote through the internet and Radio SI phone-in programmes.

"The public response was outstanding. We received more than 10,000 votes in just one month," said Marko Stijepič, the Guest Star project manager.

Though keen on knowing who the winning names are, the nominees and audience were left on tenterhooks for some more time. Suspense was eased by some more sweet-sounding piano music and a warm welcome given by the Mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Janković.

"The Guest Star event has a really deep meaning. At the moment, the world is not facing merely a global economic and environmental crisis, but above all a serious crisis in relations. I believe that events such as this one tonight can give us answers as to how overcome and resolve those negative courses in which the planet finds itself at present," the Mayor said. He feels that the key to success lies in meeting one another, presenting different cultures and sharing experience.

Then finally came the moment everybody was waiting for: the announcement of the four winners. The audience heartily applauded each and every one of them and the atmosphere was bursting with positive energy and goodwill. Numerous handshakes, hugs and friendly smiles proved that the true essence of the event was indeed deeper and nobler than merely winning the award.

Painter Huiqin Wang, the only nominee who had already become a Guest Star, assured us that she was anything but disappointed for not receiving the sculpture again: "Winning the award is wonderful,

## The Guest Stars 2008



### Culture: Chris Eckman

*I feel a lot of gratitude. It's nice that people voted for me and it's definitely a pleasant reminder that I'm on the right track. But it won't really change anything in my life. I'm not a person who seeks celebrity and I usually let my work speak for me.*

### Sports: Marcos Tavares

*I'm very excited, because this is the first award I got in Slovenia, and I do hope it's not the last. My family and I really like the country and we want to stay here. The award has surely given me some extra motivation to do my best on the pitch and do everything to achieve my aims.*

### Diplomacy: John Groffen

*In the field of diplomacy, it's very difficult to measure whether you are successful or not. Becoming a Guest Star is therefore an acknowledgement that people have seen what you've done and that they appreciate it. It's a boost and I'm very happy with it.*

### Economy: Thies Bruhn

*This award is a great honour and I accept it on behalf of my whole team. I'm very proud if winning, but I must admit that I don't see myself as a Guest Star but rather as half Slovene already. We have big plans to carry out and this award has fired our enthusiasm to work even harder.*

but also the fact that I was nominated is a huge honour for me. It is nice to know that my work is noticed and appreciated. This gives me even more motivation for my future work."

## A memorable evening

Besides highlighting foreigners and their merits in making Slovenia a better place to be, the Guest Star campaign is also an opportunity for Slovenians to promote themselves in well-respected international circles.

The domestic star of the evening, super-talented pianist Ana Šinkovec, sees the event as an excellent chance which can open many doors: "I hold great respect for the campaign and was really honoured to have been given the

opportunity to provide the foreign audience with an insight into the Slovene art scene. Besides that, the performance was also a good promotion of my work and myself. I talked to some of the guests and, in the future, I might collaborate with the Polish embassy and their artistic projects."

Every year, Guest Star award ceremony attracts more and more media attention, increasing its recognition and importance in Slovenia. It is an event that brings together the most prominent domestic and foreign guests from business and diplomatic circles as well as the highest representatives of the state.

According to the host Michael Manske, the 2008 Guest Star Awards was the best edition of the

event so far. Such is the opinion of Ms. Wang as well: "I attended two ceremonies and I enjoyed both of them, but I must agree that this year's was really something special. The choice of the City Museum was an excellent decision and it made the whole experience even more memorable and enjoyable."

The happy faces and positive energy coming from of the invitees throughout the evening speak for themselves. The Guest Star award ceremony 2008 achieved its goal of emphasising the significance of friendship and co-operation between Slovenians and people coming from different cultural environments; this remains the fundamental goal that the organizers have set to pursue also in the future. ■



Pianist Ana Šinkovec and The Slovenia Times CEO, Brane Krajnik



Iris Mulej Miss Slovenia 2006 with Fabrice Delachambre, Editor of Luxurious Magazine, Thies Bruhn and Marcos Toress of Kempinski hotels



Vivo catering chef