

20 Years without the Curtain:

A Reason to Celebrate But We Must Keep Striving!

Exactly 20 years after the student demonstration which changed the direction of our country, almost 25 thousand people met in the same place. For organizers and performers and guests on stages at Albertov and on Narodni Street, the high turnout was proof that they are not the only ones who think that it's a reason to celebrate. But not only that. It is also necessary to work on continually improving the way our young democracy functions, as it will never be done.

3:00 PM Albertov	A reason to celebrate??? Speak out!!!
3:30 PM Albertov – Vysehrad – Narodni Street	Parade after 20 years
5:30 PM Narodni Street	A group picture after 20 years and a symbolic Fall of the Iron Curtain
6:00 PM Narodni Street	concert 20 Years without the Curtain
7:20 PM Narodni Street	After party

Albertov

The appeal by the organizing non profit organization Opona – A reason to celebrate?? Speak out at 3:00 PM at Albertov brought 5.000 people. Both young people and those who witnessed the fall came to see it.

The program at Albertov was moderated by **Pavel Lagner**, actor, curator and above all the co-organizer of the original student march. At the beginning he passed the microphone to **Sarka Sarkova**, the daughter of Professor Sarka. She came unannounced from Switzerland and agreed on the spot to read the speech her father, among other things a participant at Jan Opletal's funeral, gave at the beginning of the demonstration on November 17, 1989 at Albertov. From the Slovak Republic accepted invitation **Milan Žitný**.

Also speaking were current students from the **Democracy Czech-Up** initiative and guests from abroad, the human rights fighters **Oleg Orlov** from the Russian Memorial and **Gao Yu**, the Chinese dissident and journalist who was imprisoned in 1989 after protesting on Tiananmen Square and who has been an active opponent against the Chinese regime. They reminded us that we live in a more fortunate part of the world and are therefore obligated to help those who are not so lucky and do not live in a democracy, just like the West helped us earlier.

For the organizers, **Marek Vocel** came on, emphasizing Opona's motivation and mission. He appealed to the public not to project into their personal life their frustration with politics and to

realize that democracy is not a guarantee for happiness. Everybody must work at it. ***“It is important to realize that democracy is a continuous process. Today its first 20 years have passed. And even twenty years from now, we will not be able to say: it’s done, we don’t have to do anything for it anymore,”*** Vocol read in his statement. At the end, he thanked those who brought us democracy and who nurtured it more or less successfully. As another speaker from Opona, **Martin Kotas** filled in quite racy, cheering people to action: “Don’t be just pissed, join some party!” and he himself filled in a registration form right on the stage. He, however, didn’t say which party’s it was.

The program ended with performances by various artists. **David Koller, Cirkus Ponorka and Vosto5** performed. **Tomas Matonoha** sent a recording of his performance as a Comrade Sedlacek from Brno – a letter to the Party.

Right before the concert, another unexpected guest came on. Professor **Libor Paty**, a co-founder of Civic Forum, brought a carnation which he carried from Albertov in 1989, preserved in alcohol and as an acknowledgement, he gave it to the students from the Democracy Czech-Up.

Albertov – Vysehrad - Trojicka – Narodni Street

At 3:30 PM, approximately 7.000 people set off towards Vysehrad. Along the way they were joined by more and more people until the number of participants reached ten thousand. The organizers were happy that the participants were not only the representatives of the former students. Their confidence grew when they saw that people are interested in influencing the future and participating in democracy.

Current politicians were also among the participants. They came wearing their “civvies” and didn’t try to fight for space on the stage or make themselves visible in the crowd, despite the fact that many of them were activists in the Velvet Revolution.

The parade was headed by actor and director **Jiri Lastovka**, the “Velvet guy” in the fur coat, carrying a pink umbrella and a megaphone. He and other performers helped to create the spirit of the entire parade. The **drummers from the Marimba Club** set the tempo and the **jugglers in former police uniforms juggled with police batons**. Also present were **stilts walkers with allegorical puppets of angels carrying symbolic keys with the manufacture number “17.11.1989”, and devils and Grim Reaper** which closed the parade.

Also in the parade were two refreshment trucks offering Velvet Tea or Velvet Mulled Wine for a symbolic price.

In the place where 20 year ago John Bok tried to convince the then participants with the words “People, don’t be cowards, let’s go the Wenceslas Square,” his **allegorical statue** was unveiled. At the crossing in front of the Botanical Garden, **two monstrous puppets reminded us of the place where 20 years ago the police first intervened against the demonstrators**. In front of the house where Vaclav and Olga Havel used to live, the **parade greeted Mrs. Olga** with Asian lanterns of happiness, the **actors waved from the National Theater**.

Narodni Street

The moment the parade arrived at Narodni Street, they found another five thousand people waiting. A short happening took place on Mikulandska Street, “**Group Photo after 20 Years**”. **Tomas Trestik**, the photographer for Reflex Magazine, photographed from the platform the entire parade headed by the demonstrators from November 17, 1989. It was followed by the **symbolic fall of the Iron Curtain**, and ending with **Dan Barta singing the Czechoslovak anthem**. Then Narodni Street turned into a spectacular party with a turnout of 25 thousand people.

Vladimir Misik, Dan Barta, Michal Ambroz, Vladimir Merta, Matej Ruppert, Pavel Zajicek, Tereza Cernochova, Tony Duchacek, Tonya Graves, James Cole, Orion, Vladimir 518, Michael Kocab performed at a concert accompanied by the **Monkey Business** band. **Zdenek Suchy**, the author of the concert’s program, moderated the entire show.

Early into the concert, **Vaclav Havel** came out on the stage. After receiving a white handknit scarf from **Katerina Riley** from Opona as a present, he introduced himself as a “guitar carrier” and invited a special and unexpected guest, **Joan Baez**. Joan Baez had performed at a concert at Prague Crossroads a couple of days earlier and learned about Opona’s plans for November 17. Only two days before the actual event, she approached the organizers and, excited by their plans, she changed the date of her departure at her own cost just to be part of the concert. She even sang one verse of the song We Shall Overcome in Czech!

At the end of the concert, the journalist and dissident **Gao Yu** reminded us one more time of the deeper message of the concert and of the whole event. The concert was followed by an after party with DJ **Mardosha** from Tata Bojs, and Narodni Street turned into a party closed to all traffic. The positive atmosphere continued until 10 PM when it spontaneously ended. The activists of the Velvet Revolution partied at the **Rock Cafe** until late into the night.

The course of events

Both the parade and the concert were carried out in an atmosphere of good will. Not even the attempts of the right wing extremists who tried to spoil the parade at Vyton, ruined it. The possible clash was prevented by the police who, unlike twenty years ago, protected the participants of the parade.

“We intervened a total of five times, once in the parade and four times on Narodni Street. In all cases, it was illness. Four people from Narodni Street were taken to the hospital, the conditions of the participant from the parade did not require him to be hospitalized. We assess the entire event as having been very peaceful and trouble free”, the paramedics coordinator Michal Petrus of Prague Emergency Medical Service commented on the course of the events.

The event passed without disturbing public order, without threatening lives, health and property and fully in correspondence with the hopes of the organizers.

“We’d like to thank everybody who made the event possible. Apart from the sponsors, donors, media partners and all organizers, we mean especially those who decided to spend their day at this event. Without them, the celebration would have been the funeral of the great twenty-year effort!” added David Gaydecka on behalf of the entire Opona team.

What is next for Opona?

Opona’s aspirations do not end with the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. The main goal for the following months, maybe even years, is to find partners for the realization of the project Totalitarian Simulator. More information about Opona’s activities can be found at www.20letbezopony.cz

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On November 17, the Prague streets held the biggest celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the fall of Iron Curtain. Under the title “20 Years without the Curtain – a Reason to Celebrate!” the nonprofit organization Opona organized a parade from Albertov (at 3 PM) to Národní Street. The parade began with 30 minutes of speeches on Albertov and ended on Národní Street with a unique concert.