

“WIRE DONKEY” – TRADITION AND INNOVATION

THE NIGHT OF MUSEUMS 20TH JUNE 2009



This year the National Széchényi Library had its *Museum Mass* bicycle tour, as well as a display of demonic books, numerous exhibitions and offered discount subscription rates for The Night of Museums on 20th June. The number of participants was close to eight thousand, which made us the fourth most frequently visited institution in the country.

Our “*Hidden Treasures: A Guided Tour of the Library*” program has been very popular every year, whereby in addition to the general tour, visitors have a chance to take a look into certain parts of our storage space and the book binding workshop. Besides the usual guests, this year we thought to attract a new target group as well, namely the cyclists. Some of our programs were dedicated to the theme of bicycles. We organised a cycling tour called “*Pedal Round the Night of Museums*”, starting from the National Széchényi Library and stopping at the National Gallery, the Ethnography Museum and the Transport Museum. Despite the bad weather, there was a large group of bikers and the event drew considerable media interest. We held an exhibition of documents and artefacts about cycling under the funny title “Wire Donkey”, the old slang word for bicycles. Compiled by the Collection of Historical Interviews, old newsreels and excerpts of films about the history and culture of cycling were projected in the Multimedia reading room, from which it transpired that the fastest bikers



are film deliverers and that there is no sight more refreshing than the bicycle polo match of the Hungarian Bicycle Association, where teams on wheels chase a ball. Lovers of biking took an active part in the night: Involving the national bicycle organisations, we tried to encourage visitors to adopt more environment-friendly attitudes through shade drawing and other playful activities. The program finished with an exuberant concert by the Kerekes Band, the atmosphere of which was so heated because fans shared the same interests. Thus the bloodcurring tunes and rhythms seeping out of NSZL’s auditorium mixed with the rumbling buzz of the crowd and the deep silence of reading rooms.

The other overall theme of the evening, “*This Balaton will always be Beautiful*” invited people on a romantic tour of nostalgia, enjoy-



The collector Csaba Skultéty and sea captain József Bauer talking about their memories of Fiume. Moderator: Andrea Benkő

ing Füred and its attractions by the lake. The old posters and film snippets of the Collection of Posters and Printed Ephemera evoked the ambiance of long ago summers, while the Collection of Theatre History and the Music Collection presented the history of Balatonfüred theatre, memorable moments of the prestigious Anna Balls and the social life of former and present-day spas. The Collection of Photos and Photo Art added a Balaton exhibition to the program.

Besides the thematic programs, there were other exhibitions and interactive programs. The *“Hungarians: Go out to Sea”* program featured a guided tour of the *“Memories of Hungary in Fiume - Csaba Skultéty’s Collection”*, and a former sea captain shared his memories with members of the public, who were munching coffee and cocoa beans while listening to stories about the sea, shipping and, certainly, about Fiume. Under the title *“Overcoming Borders - Philipp Melanchthon’s European significance from Wittenberg to Transylvania”*, the NSZL as the only venue in Budapest housed a high-standard travelling exhibition. The program of the Collection of Old Prints, *“Diabolical Books” – Magic, Mysticism, Occultism and Historical Mysteries in*

the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age attracted large numbers of ‘exorcists’, the Map Collection awaited visitors with the *“How the Earth was Measured”* display, while the Special Library of Book History and Library Sciences offered continuous screening of videos about topics related to libraries.

During the highly successful night, as witnessed by the press reviews of the programs, many of the NSZL publications were also sold. The one-off newsletter produced specifically for the occasion, called *“Crisis, crisis and more crisis”* was a free souvenir to those who attended the event.

During the special opening hours, the reading rooms were open to readers until 2 a.m. Under the positive impressions they had received here, a large number of people took advantage of our reduced rate library subscription rates. They arrived as interested visitors and left as library members. For us, probably this is the greatest achievement, while to our visitors it offered valuable intellectual benefits.

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