Hungarian Cultural Association Celebrates and Educates

The Hungarian Cultural Association has promoted awareness of Hungarian history and culture on the Bloomington campus this semester by sponsoring two important events.

On March 18 at the IMU Faculty Club, the Hungarian Cultural Association held its annual commemoration of the March 15, 1848 uprising in Budapest, the beginning of the Hungarian War of Independence. Hungarian Chair Visiting Professor Ignác Romsics gave a speech about the significance of the holiday, and HCA student members presented Hungarian poetry and music.

The following week, the HCA cosponsored, with the Ethnomusicology Students of America, a performance of Hungarian music and dance by the Hungarian Scouts Folk Ensemble of New Brunswick, New Jersey, and the “Elefta” Folk Music Ensemble of New York City.

March 15th is a sort of “independence day” for Hungarians. In 1848, Louis Kossuth, the leader of an intellectual group of dissenters in Hungary who, together with poet Sandor Petofi, spoke out against Hapsburg domination over Hungarian political life. Sandor’s poem “Nemzeti dal” (national song) came to represent spreading national sentiment. Its celebration has been suppressed by various regimes in the years since. However, it has retained its popularity and remains a symbol of Hungarian national self-determination.

The March 23 performance was an exciting presentation of traditional dances, songs, and instrumental music collected from different regions of Hungary and from ethnically Hungarian areas in neighboring countries such as Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

With 19 performers on stage and over 250 audience members, this was the largest event ever produced by the HCA or the ESA. A long list of academic departments and programs (including the Office of International Programs), student organizations, individuals, and businesses helped support the event.

After Pasolini and Calvino, What Next?

U Bloomington’s West European Studies, along with Comparative Literature, French and Italian, and the Bar Koon Foundation sponsored an afternoon symposium entitled “A Difficult Inheritance: Italian Culture and Pasolini and Calvino” on April 8 in the Memorial Union.

Pier Paolo Pasolini and Italo Calvino were central figures of postwar Italian culture whose creative lives were abruptly ended by premature deaths.

The deaths of Pasolini and Calvino shocked the Italian intellectual world and have left a void that persists to this day.

Pasolini was the director of many films, including The Arabian Nights, The Decameron, The Canterbury Tales, and Salò, or The 120 days of Sodom. His films were creative and idiosyncratic readings which counterpoised an idealized, liberated preindustrial society against the modern era, which he saw as hopelessly ravaged by greed and consumerism.

Italo Calvino is best known in the United States as a novelist, but he was also an editor, critic, and translator. His many novels include Marco Polo, Invisible Cities, and Mr. Palomar.

Speakers at the symposium included Gian Paolo Biasin (UC Berkeley), Zygmund Baranski (U Reading), John Welle (U Notre Dame), and Rebecca West (U Chicago). Andrea Ciccarelli of IU’s Department of French and Italian was the prime organizer of the event.