



# A Visit to Prague

## A Visit to Prague

In early June of 2005, I visited Prague to take part in the Prague Writers' Festival. It was a very interesting and complicated time for me, which plucked the strings of much that has happened in the last forty years, so I decided to prepare a report. I'll begin with some memories of how one of my bardic mentors impacted world history through a trip he made to Prague in the spring of 1965.

### The Impact of Allen Ginsberg On the Velvet Revolution of 1989-90

I remember how full of frisky joy Allen Ginsberg was when he was elected Kral Majales, or King of the May, by the young people of Prague in the spring of 1965. He had just been tossed out of Cuba for raising issues of homosexual harassment (plus, as I recall, he patted the derriere of the Minister of Culture at a party). Shortly after being paraded through the streets as Kral Majales, Ginsberg was seized by the secret police, his personal diary was confiscated, and he was summarily expelled from what was then Czechoslovakia and shoved onto a flight to London where he met and partied with the Beatles.

Three years later, in August of 1968, I ran through a tear gas attack in Chicago with Ginsberg during the police riots at the Democratic Convention, when there were troops with fixed bayonets and tank-like armored personnel carriers in the streets. Ironically, at the very same time there were Soviet tanks in the streets of Prague trying to squash the spirit of the Prague Spring. I hated those fixed bayonets in my own country, and the tanks in much abused Czechoslovakia as well.

Allen Ginsberg's role in rousing the sense of hope and defiance in Czechoslovakia, particularly in Prague, as a result of his visit in 1965 should not be undermeasured. Ginsberg in fact, through his good-willed but revolutionary demands to "walk the erotic and peacemaking talk" helped restore and advance personal freedoms in many countries.

Much of this was on my mind when I flew to Prague on June 3 to take part in the 15th annual Prague Writers Festival. I had never been there and I was excited.



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## WOODSTOCK Journal

Arr! Harr! Ride 'em, Doagies!!!

The Czech Airlines Airbus at JFK was packed. In line with the recent sardine configuration of public transportation, the seats were jammed together to the point of being unpleasant. It was like what is happening to American bus lines, such as the Trailways from Woodstock to New York City. They are becoming cattle-car-ish, so that when the person in front of you on the Airbus decides to lean the seat lean backward, you are faced with the olfactory performance of his or her hair pomade just inches from your jetlagged schnoz.

I am always amazed getting off a long-distance air flight to witness the sloppiness of travelers. When I walked slowly down the long aisle of the Airbus after it had landed in Prague it looked as messy as the grounds of a rain-soaked rock and roll festival, with newspapers, food, bits of this and that strewn upon the floor and under the seats, reminding me of the tableau of disorder at a hippie commune after a police raid.

I was met at the early a.m. airport by Prague Festival director Michael March, a bundle of energy, who has brought over the years a vast variety of writers to the city, often controversial ones, and obviously takes the time to absorb a vast assortment of literature from around the world. We cabled to the Hotel Josef, a modern and elegant hotel designed by Eva Jiricna in the Old Town section of Prague. We stopped for a chat in the lobby, on whose wall was a poem. European hotel lobbies are often the hub for quick conversations, exchange of literary buzz, and quiet fun. March is a tireless creator of cross-referrals, as he introduced me to Rosl Mehrdinger, head of the Austrian branch of P.E.N., who had just arrived. It's more than networking. He tries to make talent and organizers from various nations connect and stretch those connections into usefulness. His partner in all this is his wife Vlasta Brtniková, a novelist, editor and publisher. Like Michael, she seemed a bottomless source of energy during the exhausting non-stop 5 days of the Festival.

Each year the Festival has a new theme. This year it was Jacobus Casanova, the writer and diplomat (1725-1798), who after a complicated life spent his final years as the secretary and librarian in a castle in Dux in Bohemia south of Prague. He is recalled today mainly for his lengthy autobiography, *History of My Life*. Casanova is a good of example on how beneath the image, as Joan Baez once sang, of being fingered as "a rake and a rambling boy," brilliance and genius can lurk. Speaking of rakes and rambling boys, an earlier Prague Writers' Festival, in 2003, was held around the theme of William



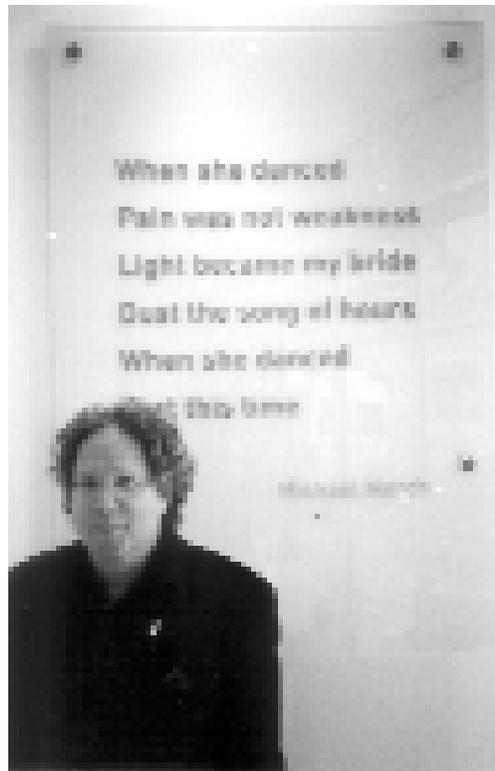
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Burroughs.

There is a related festival, the Vienna Writers' Festival, which began this year, and which is spearheaded by Michael March.

## Upcoming Luncheon at the American Embassy

To my surprise, Michael March informed me in the lobby of the Hotel Josef that the American Embassy would be holding a reception for me the day of my poetry reading. In my career, Embassies in my mind were more associated with dissidence and tear gas rather than welcoming lunches. So, I was speechless, but, as an activist in the Walt Whitman/FDR/Rose Schneiderman/Robert Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party, I felt honored, even in these times of brutal imperialism and war.



Something few poets have. One of their poems in the lobby of an elegant hotel. Festival director Michael March by his poem at the Hotel Josef, Prague



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March had informed me by e-mail a few days before the Festival that I would be having a press conference with the Plastic People of the Universe at the Globe Bookstore/Café in Prague just hours after my jet-lag arrival. It's often that way at literary festivals: you have to hit the ground running and explaining and getting interviewed.

I had been negotiating with the Plastics by e-mail as to what, if any, Fugs songs we would do. At first, I held out that no Fugs songs could be done, since it was just me on hand, and not the Fugs. But the Plastics are very persuasive, so I finally agreed to perform some tunes from early albums, singing with the Plastics.

## A Press Conference.

I poured myself upstairs to my room for an hour-long nap, then I was cabled to the press conference at the Globe Bookstore. I was jetlagged and tired from an all-nighter in the cattle plane, but I'm always startled by photographers taking my pictures. I walked toward the Globe, and I wondered whose picture they were snapping. Then I realized it was mine!

There in the back of a performance area of the Globe Bookstore sitting at a table were the Plastic People of the Universe! I felt a surge of emotion, spotting a group of musicians that had been through such turbulence during the Soviet-dominated era, and then had managed to hang together through the era of so-called free enterprise, when life seems more and more to resemble a junior college production of Brecht's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*.

## The Plastic People of the Universe

The Plastic People of the Universe was founded in late 1968 by a bass player named Milan Hlavsa, following the invasion of the Soviets to stop the changes implicit in the Prague Spring, an invasion which showed images around the world of Soviet tanks in the streets of Prague. The group was inspired initially by the Velvet Underground, but also sang songs by the Fugs, the Doors, the Mothers of Invention and Captain Beefheart.

As I mentioned earlier, I was in the streets of Chicago running through tear gas attacks from the police during the police riots during the Democratic Convention, and in the back of my mind was the uneasy image of those Soviet tanks in Prague. There were no tanks in Chicago, but there were jeeps outfitted with barbed wire screens



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apparently to serve as hippie-sweeping mechanisms, and there were a few armored personnel vehicles and, of course, the grim visual of lines of troops with fixed bayonets.

Three weeks after the Chicago tear-gas, my band the Fugs was performing at the Essen Song Festival in Germany, and some of us rented a bar and drove through Bavaria to the Czech border where we tried to sneak into Czechoslovakia along a farm road (it was potato harvesting season, and we were told that farm wagons went back and forth across the border). Our goal was to get to Prague in order to lie down in front of a Soviet tank and take some photos for the album jacked of our next Warner/Reprise release. Silly as it sounds now, back in 1968 we were serious, and weren't terribly afraid that the Soviets would mark our prone flesh with tank-cleats. Our plans, however, were terminated at a small rural kiosk when a guy toting a machine gun stopped us.

The concept of forming a dissident rock and roll band had begun in Czechoslovakia with the marvelous arrival of the Beatles' music in 1964, and then had grown with the rise of rebellious American rock and roll, including psychedelic music and bands such as the Velvet Underground, the Mothers of Invention, and my band the Fugs.

## Rock-'n'-Roll-Noia

The Rise of Folk Rock, Psychedelic Rock, Political Rock, and Satire Rock in the U.S. and England had a big impact on the Czechoslovakia underground. All of a sudden, it seemed to suspicious authoritarians, the nation was suffused with long haired hippies, rock magazines, "happenings," an underground music club scene, and other cabanas on the shores of freedom of personal expression. To the shudder of Prague communist authorities, ever eager to micro-manage the flow of time, radio stations began broadcasting rock and roll. To confound the micro-managers, rock bands formed in Prague, such as its first psychedelic band, the Primitives.

At first the government tried to suppress this graceful infusion of Western culture with tactics such as increasing the censorship laws. The Czechoslovakia government always, of course, had to keep an eye on the Soviet government, not wanting to upset it so much as to see even more of a Soviet squash-job on the level of self-government which Czechoslovakia enjoyed.

In early 1968, the year the Plastics were founded, Alexander Dubcek became head of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia. Not many weeks later there began what was called the Prague Spring. Dubcek stopped censorship of the radio, television and news-



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papers and he began pushing a number of hard-line Communists out of power, while proclaiming a program of “socialist democracy.”

The Sovs didn’t dig the surge of energetic creativity in the streets. And so August 21, 1968, Soviet tanks and some 175,000 troops from the Warsaw Pact overran Czechoslovakia. I once read that Dubcek was sent to Moscow in handcuffs. It was in all the American newspapers just as I prepared to fly to Chicago to take part in the anti-war demonstrations at the Democratic Convention.

I hated those Russian tanks just as I hated the barbed-wire-fronted jeeps in Chicago. And a few weeks later, when the Fugs were performing at the Essen Song Festival in Germany, Miriam and I, plus Ken Weaver of the Fugs, and our manager Peter Edmiston, tried to sneak into Czechoslovakia from Germany along a narrow farm road. It was potato harvesting season. We wanted to lie down in the front of the Soviet tanks, or at least to hold up protest signs. (We were halted by a guy with a machine gun.)

It was a terrible situation, both in the U.S. and in Prague, and many of us were in despair. Then in Prague, in St. Václav Square (Wenceslas Square) on January 16, 1969, 21-year-old Jan Palach set himself afire to protest the invasion, and became a martyr to personal freedom. There is a monument there in 2005 to this Czech hero.

## **The Plastic People of the Universe Encounter Trouble**

An art historian and what they called a “cultural theoretician” named Ivan Jirous (nicknamed Magor) became the Plastics’ manager/artistic director in 1969. The band continued to experiment in psychedelic music, until in January of 1970 the government revoked their professional license. They were no longer allowed to be paid for performances, and they lost also their state-owned instruments and rehearsal space.

In 1972 the PPU was banned from playing in Prague, and moved to the countryside. It was the year that jazz saxophonist saxophonist Vratislav Brabenec joined them, around the time the government totally banned them from performing because of their “negative social impact.”

## **Not Allowed to Eat the First Page of the Communist Party Newspaper**



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Ivan Jirous, the artistic director of the Plastics, began to get arrested. The first time was in 1973 for, among things, eating the first page of the Czech Communist Party newspaper. Jirous at a performance. Jirous also wrote for art magazines, and had begun his dissident work when very young, teaching himself to touch-type by copying the writing of Franz Kafka, which was not available in Czechoslovakia, and handing Kafka out to his high school friends.

In '74 hundreds of army troops and police with attack dogs dispersed a crowd listening to a Plastics concert. 200 were arrested. That same year the PPU record, *Egon Bandy's Happy Hearts Club Banned* came out,, with lyrics by Czech poet Egon Bandy. It had been recorded by stealth in a castle in Bohemia in '73 and '74. The tape was smuggled out and released in 1978 in the West.

During the 1970s, Jirous organized several underground music festivals, which attracted the loathing of the State. In 1976, at Jirous' wedding a dozen underground bands performed, and a month later the fuzz busted 27 musicians from five groups. Plastic member Vratislav Brabenec was given 8 months. Jirous was released from prison in September 1977, only to be arrested the next month, and was in jail for several more years.

The Plastics recorded several albums at Vaclav Havel's country home, including "Hundred Points," and the 1980 "Passion Play." When they performed the police circled the property and staked out the woods. You know how semi-police states are, they use fuzz to rattle your soul.

The hassling was so great that Brabenec and his wife and daughter left for Canada in 1982. Brabenec's excellent sax had been a core component of the Plastics' wild creativity, and so from then to now it's always a challenge to get all the band together from their disparate lives for now-and-then reunions. Lucky for me, The Plastic People of the Universe were back and performing in 2005!

It's a complicated story, for the history of a rock band is often bewilderingly swervy and fact-suffused. But the history of the PPU is well represented for your perusal on the Internet.

## The Rise of Charter 77

Meanwhile, along came the Charter 77 movement. In early January of 1977, 240



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Czechoslovakian intellectuals signed Charter 77, a manifesto urging authorities to respect human rights, as guaranteed by the Helsinki Accords and the Czech constitution, and to stop harassing dissidents. A movement sprang aloft, which planted the seeds for the downfall of the communist regime.

## The Helsinki Human Rights Accords

August 1, 1975

There was a three day conference in Helsinki, Finland  
which led to a series of standards for human rights  
which were signed by 35 nations,  
including the US & Canada

*Another earthly step away from violence & encroachment*

The movement, led by Vaclav Havel and many others, grew. But, to change an authoritarian situation, jail must be risked.

## The 1970s in the United States

The 1970s in the United States, after the fall of Richard Nixon in '74, were a time of modest reform and what they call Muckraking, that is, investigations into government excesses by a temporarily aroused media.

In 1974, my wife Miriam, daughter Deirdre and I moved out of New York City into the country, where I spent much time on poetry, music, the invention of electronic music instruments and environmental activism. By the late 1970's and very early '80's I had learned of the Czechoslovakian government's attacks on the Plastics. The band wrote me a letter in August of 1980 asking for help.

In the months and years thereafter I played a small role in speaking out in public and in print against the Czechoslovakian authoritarian government, and in raising money to purchase amplifiers and musical instruments which were smuggled into Czechoslovakia from Germany. The repression in Prague continued, and many continued to be harassed and arrested, including Ivan Jirous, nicknamed Magor. Jirous won in 1986 the Tom Stoppard Prize for his collection of poems, *Magor's Swan Songs*, which he had written





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Let it trade its dull boots of terror  
for pots of silence!

No more mad governments  
slobbering in the time-track!

Though I am not a fan of Radio Free Europe, after the concert I gulped and did an interview for RFE in which I reiterated my call for the overthrow of the authoritarian music-crushing government.

Things were hopping, as they say, and it appeared, correctly, as if the Czechoslovakian government might be at last overthrown. Then came the far-famed Velvet Revolution, and the election of Vaclav Havel as President, and then the peaceful separation of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.



The Czech Republic in 2005

The Czech Republic consists mostly of the two regions of Bohemia and Moravia, it is bordered by Poland to the northeast, Slovakia to the southeast, Austria to the south, and Germany to the west and northwest. Current population is 10,241,000.

Just as the coalition, say, that overthrew the evil Somoza in Nicaragua in 1979, soon split up into factions, so too, though not violently, the Civic Forum, the political coali-



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tion that led the 1989 revolution, soon split up into new main parties: the conservative Civic Democratic party (CDP), headed by Vaclav Klaus, and the liberal Civic Movement (CM). A Coalition government evolved, for instance the one which took office in June 1992— a coalition of the CDP, the Christian Democratic party, the Christian Democratic Union/Czechoslovak People's party, and the Civic Democratic Alliance. The other major party was the Left Bloc, dominated by the Communists, which won 14% of the vote in the June 1992 election. (I'm not sure what the current, 2005, strength of the Left Bloc is.)

When the Czech Republic became an independent state on Jan. 1, 1993, its leaders included Vaclav Havel, the former dissident playwright who was elected president of Czechoslovakia in 1989 and president of the Czech Republic in February 1993, and Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus.

Klaus of course was a founder of the Civic Forum movement that played a crucial role in overturning the Communist regime in 1989 and was later the movement's chairman (1990-91). He is a privatization kind of guy, and is the author of several books, one of which is titled *Dismantling Socialism* (1993).

Havel served as president for two terms, until early 2003. The current president is Klaus.



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## Havel

Václav Havel was born on October 5, 1936. His fame is as a playwright and human rights activist, and as president of the Czech Republic. His plays include *The Garden Party* (1963; Eng. trans., 1969), *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* (1968; Eng. trans., 1972), and *Temptation* (1985; Eng. trans., 1989). The commies long banned his plays and he was jailed three times for his dissenting political views. He was one of the founders of the underground opposition group Charter 77, and was imprisoned from 1979 till 1983, and again in 1989. He became Czechoslovakia's leader when the regime was at long last overthrown in 1989, but resigned in 1992.

After the Czech Republic separated from Slovakia in 1993, he was made its president. Havel served for two five-year terms until retiring in early 2003.

There is now a Václav Havel Library in Prague. I noted from the National Security Archive website, that the first publication of Havel's Library occurred in late 2004, a book that presents a series of documents, acquired by the Freedom of Information Act, on the Velvet Revolution, featuring much declassified U.S. State Department cable traffic from the Velvet era.

## The Plastics Survive.

Time tends to kick rock bands in the teeth, and few survive. The old adage is that if you can last five years, then it's forever. The Plastic People of the Universe have survived. It wasn't easy to keep on producing art during the 14 years since the flick-out of the Commies. It never is, but somehow they have kept on stirring the muses of music. Their talented founder Milan Hlavsa for instance, passed away a few years ago from cancer. Hlavsa had been in fit condition and exercised regularly, but I was told he had once worked during the Communist era in a factory making and cutting plastic bags, and may have been exposed to carcinogenesis from chemicals.



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I'd run into the Plastics in NYC recently at a fancy banquet honoring the memory of Allen Ginsberg, and also honoring Fugs co-founder Tuli Kupferberg, underground film hero Jonas Mekas, poet Miguel Algarin, and others. The Plastics had just played Joe's Pub, located next to the Public Theater on Lafayette Place,, and they also performed in D.C., with Clinton-era Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in the audience.

They wanted to perform together, doing some Fugs tunes, at the Prague Writers Festival. We were then in touch by e-mail, trying to figure out what tunes I could sing with them.

## Bringing my Plastics File to the Press Conference

I am a data-hound, and over the years compiled a "file" on the history of the Plastic People of the Universe, consisting of the poems and songs I had written for and about them during the years of their persecution by the government, and also letters from them, photos, and many articles written on their music and plight. I brought to the press conference at the Globe Bookstore my "Plastics file" and passed it around the table.

Michael March conducted the conference (which was webcast live), asking us questions. I began with a brief history of my involvement with opposing censorship in Communist Czechoslovakia, while careful to praise universal health care, rent control and other vestiges of socialism. In Europe, including the Czech Republic, the continued presence of social democracy provides free medical school tuition for future doctors! It's a great, great institution because European doctors don't spend much of their early careers paying off hundreds of thousands of dollars of loans, and thus, at least theoretically, health care costs could be kept lower.

Several of the Plastics spoke in English (Vratislav Brabenec) and one in Czech, which was simultaneously translated. (Many if not most of the events of the Writers' Festival were simultaneously translated.)

I recited the last part of my 1981 poem about the Plastics:

Some day the singers of Czechoslovakia  
and the singers of America  
will meet on some frozen river  
and boogie till the dawn sun melts the blue ice.



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Well, for me it wasn't a frozen river, but a bookstore in liberated Prague, where I could talk to some cultural heroes at last, who were still together performing their art. It's difficult to be happy when one's nation is engaged in an unjust war, but for a few minutes, sitting with the Plastic People of the Universe in a bookstore in the wild and ancient city of Prague, I dared to be happy, realizing that not always do the oppressors "win."

In conclusion, I sang the tune I used to perform in the 1980's when I spoke out against the authoritarian gov't of Czechoslovakia, "The Roots of Freedom" accompanied by the Strum Stick, a three stringed, fretted instrument with which I chant/sing some of my poetry.

There are countries where  
police state creeps  
throw you in jail for song

Oh, the roots of freedom  
so frail and dry  
will grow to a mighty oak some day

Let hearts beat wildly  
and never rest  
till the Czechoslovakian bards are free

till the bards of the world are free

Freedom presents other problems, such as keeping a career alive, but, as I would soon learn when I rehearsed with them, the Plastic People of the Universe are still very much a thrive.

## Flashing my Stolen Election Tee Shirt

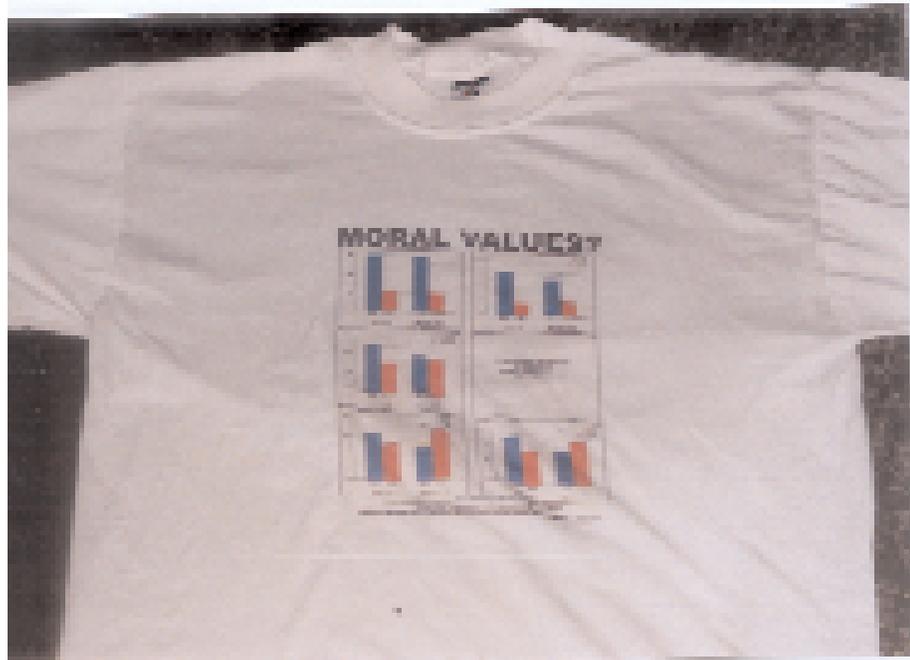
As the press conference came to an end, the photographers gathered in front of our table to click click click. I pulled open my shirt to reveal the image on a tee shirt I'd brought from Woodstock. It was a Stolen Election teeshirt made by Woodstock musician and activist Paul McMahon. The photographers crouched down to get good snaps of the tee, and I gave a brief explanation of what has happened in the States., where the right wing has learned to steal elections through electronic cheating.



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The teeshirt's graphs showed, for instance, the state of Illinois, with paper ballots, as having **THE SAME OR VERY NEARLY THE SAME RESULTS** between the exit polls and the actual vote tallies, whereas in states with computerized voting, the exit polls vs. the "actual" results showed Kerry winning in the exits, but Bush winning when the Republican-provided computers counted the votes. (I use the phrase "Republican-provided," because right wing Republicans own and provide (and developed) all the secret-code voting machines used in the United States.)

Million upon millions of Americans are convinced that a number of important recent computer-counted elections in the United States have been stolen, though you'd never get that sense reading and watching the mass media, much of which has been taken over by right wing firebreathers and even right wing sleaze. (There's a difference between firebreathers and sleaze, though both sorts don't seem to mind if elections are stolen, as long as they are stolen by the right.)



**The Stolen Election Teeshirt**



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## Receptions at Embassies

The embassies held receptions in honor of each country's writers. Thus the French Embassy held a reception instead for the eminent poet, biographer (of Giacometti, for instance) and art historian Yves Bonnefoy (while neglecting to hold one for the other representative at the Festival, the controversial writer Michel Houellebecq.) The Russian Embassy toasted another controversial writer in Prague for the Festival, Victor Erofeyev, who was banned under the late Soviets, and whose novels and essays are widely discussed in Russia. Apparently Erofeyev is also a famous television personality.

The evening of the press conference there was a cocktail reception at the Greek Embassy for Greek poets attending the Festival: Veroniki Dalakoura, Marigo Alexopoulou and Dimitris Houllarakis. The Embassy is located on a steep hillside overlooking much of Prague below, as we stood amidst writers and the local diplomatic community on a second story outdoor porch with a stunning visual picture below us of Prague Castle against a background of a wide pink sunset.

The joint was jumping, as they say. Why is it that so many diplomats are tall? There were about a hundred people on hand. One man, bustling with good will and energy, introduced himself. His card listed him as being in "Corporate Communications." Someone closely associated with the Festival later told me that the gentleman was a retired Naval Intelligence officer.

Our host was the congenial Greek ambassador, Vassilios Skossípentarchos, whose command of English was good. We chatted about ancient Greek poetry, including the absolute genius of Aeschylus, especially the dark and mysterious choruses to his plays. I quoted some lines from a chorus in the play *Agamemnon*, including "Hubris loves to give birth to hubris," as true as you can get in these times of unjust war.

I gave the ambassador a green tee shirt from a production of my two-act musical drama, *Cassandra*, which features dialogue in English, but songs and musical sections in ancient Greek from Homer, Aeschylus, Sappho and Euripides.



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The author with Greek Ambassador Skossípentarchos holding the Cassandra tee

## Interviews

The next day a series of interviews began with newspapers and magazines, most of them conducted in the lobby of the Hotel Josef. When you're jet-lagged, interviews pass by like colloquys with phantoms. During my five days, I was interviewed at least ten times, sometimes by video, and just about always with accompanying photographers.

In interview after interview as best I could I urged the Czech nation to keep its free national healthcare system for all, its free tuition for medical students, its generous paid vacations for workers, pensions that actually give enough to live on (unlike in the USA which don't), to keep rent controls, and to maintain some state-run industries, if only to show that, in a number of circumstances, they are useful and function quite well.

I further urged them not to let the ghosts of the neocons and the baleful apostles of Milton Friedman to do, for instance, what they did to the pension system of Chile— that is, screwed it up badly.

## Rejection of European Union Constitution

At the time of my arrival, French voters, in a near landslide, and then the Dutch, had rejected the European constitution. (The Netherlands voted 2-1 against the constitu-



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tion. —the “liberal, tolerant, prosperous and generous” Dutch, as one newspaper termed them.) The nominal purpose of the constitution had been to “streamline” the European Union’s extensive bureaucracy, but voters in two key social democracies had, it seemed to me, perceived it as march orders for a US-style dog-eat-dog neocon reordering of the European economy. No more month-long vacations, and get ready to die without a dime, and having to sell your house, trying to pay for health care.

The Czech Republic’s president, Vaclav Klaus, was against the constitution, whereas the country’s Prime Minister, Jiri Paroubek, was in favor. Nine EU countries have ratified the constitution in their parliaments, and some others have set up referenda through 2006. 20 of 25 EU states must ratify for it to remain viable.

Last year ten additional countries were brought into the EU, and there was speculation in the newspapers while I was in Prague that the French “No” vote was because of that enlargement of the EU last year, and fear of workers swarming in from the new countries to France, thus causing downward pressure on the traditional high wages, high benefits and high pensions on France and the other European social democracies.

It’s a murky torrent of Clio, the muse of history. I would agree that lurking slitheringly beneath the torrent is the hunger of neocons to Dickensiate (i.e., make the economy as dog-eat-dog as possible, as in some of the novels of Charles Dickens) the liberated Eastern European nations.

My further opinion is that the right wing that currently runs the United States national government vehemently does not want a strong European Union. So, they must be nodding with joy over the recent votes in France and the Netherlands. The U.S. has to be careful trying to crush the EU too overtly, but it’s obvious the States’ Power Elite, to borrow a fit term from C. Wright Mills, that is, its Military-Industrial-McDonalds-Surrealists don’t want a rival supplantation, the EU, working powerfully around the globe, or, in a decade or two, putting up colonies to mine the asteroid belts and beyond.

As Larry Elliot wrote in early June in *The Guardian*: “The Keynesians said that the euro, far from leading to stronger growth, would actually become a job-destruction machine..... The argument of the anti-globalizers was that despite all the talk of creating a social Europe, monetary union was actually a Trojan horse that would be used as a means of spreading neo-liberal ideas and big business values across the continent.”



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Amen, Larry, amen.

European workers don't want the solution to unemployment merely to mean that workers have to work longer hours and see ghastly cuts in benefits. They don't want to see the worst aspects of the U.S. economy corrode the European social democracies. The U.S. where very few, except college professors, get more than a week or so of frenetic vacation. The U.S., where the right wing seethes like a nest of bald faced hornets in a storm to recreate that benefitless Bedlam of a Dickens novel. The U.S. where Brecht's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* is secretly played on every evening's television fare.

## The Political Situation in the Czech Republic Not Easy to Figure it Out

So, where does prosperous Prague and the Czech Republic stand in all of this? It's not so easy to figure out.

To my surprise, I learned that a good part of the economy of the Czech Republic is still owned and run by the Czech government. As a democratic socialist I am in favor of government participation in the economy to keep big corporations and rapacious capitalists from creating a Gaia-suffusing Dickensianism previously mentioned.

While I was in Prague, newspaper editorials and articles complained in various ways how the people of the Czech Republic are not so eager to turn their destinies over to fangs-unsheathed market forces. It's one thing to oppose an excessively authoritarian Communist regime, but another to want to give up your life and security to the vicious ghosts of Milton Friedman and the oil-oids of Bush.

Yet, articles I read while in Prague more than imply that the "masses" should set aside their out-of-style passions for *outré* things such as decent pensions, living wages, month long paid vacations and national health care, and turn the economy over to manic wheeler-dealers bent on reintroducing vast class divisions.

Regular folk all over Europe, however recall well what the boys from Harvard did to Russia after the "collapse" of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.



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## Rent Control in the Czech Republic

There are 3.8 million apartments in the Czech Republic, with 1.16 million of them, about 31 per cent, in high rise government-owned buildings called *paneláks*.

There's of course a pressure to privatize housing, but the Czech masses are not eager to see their rents skyrocket, or their pensions vanish post-Soviet-style. While I was in Prague, there were articles in the press with headlines such as "Rent Control Under Threat," on a drive by the Czech government in power to deregulate rents. It was pointed out that rent control measures remain pretty much the same as in communist days.

Of course, not every single thing associated with the "old days" was hornéd evil, and rent control is one of the goods.

Rent control covers in the Czech Republic about 750,000 pads, or about 1/5th of the apartments in the nation. (About 300,000 of these apartments are owned by private individuals and about 450,000 by municipalities.) In the Czech Republic, and in countries such as Poland, private owners band together and try desperately to snuff rent control.

The bill being proposed in the Czech Republic would allow landlords to raise rents by average of 9.3 percent beginning in 2006, with similar increases each year it appears until 2012, when rents would putatively "stabilize." Rent increases per year thereafter would be based on 5% of a dwelling's so-called market price. Sounds like a pro-owner scam to me, and one that will only add to the post-Communist anguish.

## Hell Hath No Fury Quite Like That of an Association of Angry Apartment House Owners

Witness what happened in New York City, which once boasted a huge supply of well rent-controlled buildings, the result of a huge organization effort in the 1930s and 1940s by tenants associations which resulted in rent controls put in place during World War II. Rent controls stayed in place for decades following the war. This supply of rent-controlled buildings helped fuel the explosion of creativity in NYC during the 1950s and 1960s and even the 1970s.

Associations of apartment house owners relentlessly attacked rent control for decades, and with the neo-con erosions of the Reagan and Bush years, have mostly prevailed, so



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that only those young people with a manic metabolism can survive in the Apple.

## The Flow of the Prague Writers Festival

The Prague Writers Festival opened with a reception held at the swanky residence of Prague mayor Pavel Bém, who I think is a political ally not of the Social Democratic Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek, but of the somewhat more conservative President Václav Klaus. It's a strange political tightrope for festival director Michael March to walk, but the serious support of good writing is always the Great Trembling Rope Trick. Rival literary groups, I was told, have in the past tried to grab some of the public money, in this case from the city of Prague, out of the hands of the Festival. So, far March and his wife Vlasta Brtníková, plus the team of supporters they have put together, have prevailed.

## Abstruse Titles for Energetic Panels

The two panel discussions in which I participated had exasperatingly vague titles, which had one big advantage: one didn't really have to prepare for them. Mine were: 1. "Everyone has enemies. The sick want company," and 2. "Perhaps the best image of the human soul is the human body." I was grateful I wasn't on the panel titled "Sex is the Punishment for love," which featured the eminent French poet Yves Bonnefoy and others.

The American writer Gary Younge, who lives in Ireland, was the facilitator of the discussions in which I took part. The day of the first discussion, his article on the reopening of the 1955 Emmett Till murder case in Mississippi appeared in the *Guardian*.

I was impressed with the eloquence of the Israeli novelist, journalist and activist David Grossman who was featured in several panels, including "Everyone Has enemies, the sick want Company." He gave also a well attended evening reading, and it was always a good, if brief time, speaking with Grossman and his wife Michal in the breakfast room at the hotel. I purchased several of his works at the Big Ben bookshop, including *Be My Knife*, one of the best novels-in-letters I have read. Grossman has written a bunch of books, and is known in a number of countries for his efforts to help create peace and a lasting accommodation in Jewish-Palestinian interactions.

Another book of Grossman's I bought was *Death as a Way of Life— Dispatches from Jerusalem*, published in 2003. *Death as a Way of Life* features thirty-four articles written since the 1993 Oslo Agreements were signed by Rabin and Arafat. It's a brutally



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honest book, whose final sentences, written in 2002 after two years of the Intifada, are as follows: The situation can be summed up in several ways. I choose to do so by citing two facts that stood out in the reports of the last month. The first. According to data provided by UN agencies, more than a quarter of Palestinian children now suffer from malnutrition as a result of the situation. The second: Israeli schoolchildren will soon be given special classes in early identification and detection of suicide bombers. Israelis and Palestinians who refuse to see the connection between these two facts ensure that for many years to come we will all be each other's hostages, agents of gratuitous and pointless death."

Another writer who impressed was the German novelist Peter Schneider, who had in his youth been an activist on the left during the protests of 1968, and lives now in Berlin, having written over 20 books, including novels, volumes of essays, and screenplays, several of which have actually been made into movies, the grail of scriptwriters everywhere.

There's always the risk, at a packed Festival, of missing the Talk That Would Have Changed Your Life! And so I regretted, because of seemingly non-stop press interviews, not being able to attend more of the panel discussions, including one at which Vaclav Havel himself showed up.

## The Ancient Beauty of Prague

Several staff members of the Festival commented on my, uh, well, what they used to call in the Midwest, my D.W.O. look— the initials are for Death Warmed over. I was in my tired Kafka bruised-eyes mode, from jet lag, always grim from that long a flight, and media überbabble (too many interviews), plus the malady known as *kallipoleiperipateticophilia*, or the urge to walk around a beautiful city when excessively tired. It's a friendly malady I always endure when in beautiful places such as Florence, Rome, Paris or Prague. The urge is always there to walk for hours gawking at the eyeball thrills of the antique architecture and especially for me the neighborhoods of regular working people.

## The Eery Mr. Houellebecq

Thus after a walk around Prague in the afternoon after the reception for the Festival at the Mayor's office, I strolled from the hotel with a bunch of writers from a number of nations to the Theatre Minor, where most of the readings and panels were held. We



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were to hear the popular and controversial French author Michel Houellebecq, who now lives near Cork, Ireland. The talk/reading was of course in French, but there were broadcast headphone units available which provided instant translation into English. His talk was not totally friendly to muslims, and someone told me Houellebecq twice used what they call the “N word.”

Houellebecq is not actually that old— he’s just 47— but he bore the scorched look of one of Degas’ “Absinthe Drinkers,” and seemed a bit bent down in the hammering flow of time as he sat in the lobby afterward surrounded on several sides by well-attired female admirers. He is a literary lion, or komodo dragon, in France, and someone connected with the Festival told me Houellebecq had not long ago changed publishers and picked up a million dollar advance for his new novel. The word back at the Hotel Josef was that he had brought book galleys with him, and wanted to spend all his spare time correcting them. When a publisher gives you a million dollars, it expects you to chain yourself eagerly and inky to your galleys, as if they were a locked briefcase of cash handcuffed to your wrist.

There was a function room for the festival on the bottom level of the Theatre Minor where each’s days *Guardian* newspaper was available to all. *The Guardian* is one of the principal sponsors of the Festival, and I was amazed, reading it each day, at how much better written, better researched and more nuanced it is than, say, *The New York Times*, or the center-right U.S. newsweeklies.

After Houellebecq’s reading/talk Michael March and his wife Vlasta Brtníková took me with them for a late supper at a Serbian restaurant— for me a very good plate of gnocchi and vegetable soup. Then we walked back toward the Hotel Josef, and we encountered two writers from Vienna associated with the newly founded Vienna Writers Festival. They are Gunter Traxler, one of the top journalists in Vienna I was told; and his companion Christa Karas, the science editor of *Weiner Zeitung*, the oldest newspaper in Austria. Traxler and Karas had urged March to produce the Prague Writers Festival in Vienna, which was successfully done. The first Vienna Writers’ Festival occurred this past spring. The Vienna Writers’ Festival was sponsored by the Austrian PEN Center, in association with the Austrian Ministry of Culture and the city of Vienna. Such is the useful pattern of social democracies.

Michael, Vlasta, I, Gunter and Christa then had vodkas in the elegant Café de Paris where there was much talk about future writers’ festivals, after which I strolled back to the hotel to call Woodstock to check out the day there. Then, my sleep cycle a bit



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screwed up, I watched euro-soccer much too long till sliding into the arms of Morpheus at rosy-arméd dawn.

## The Yodeling Signature Club

The next day I had a book signing at the Big Ben Book Shop, and put my ink on some copies of the recently published *Tales of Beatnik Glory* (all four volumes in a single edition), plus *1968, a History in Verse*, and the first three volumes of my verse history of the United States. Suddenly there was a glut of strange men thrusting packets of cards at me to sign. They reminded me of the Alpine hiking clubs one encounters in trains out of Zurich. What they were were members of an “autograph club,” whose fascination is to get autographs on small cards. Some of them wanted me to sign ten cards! “It’s for my friends.” As my Rotring pen scratched away, I expected them, lined up in front of my book table, to begin yodeling in unison.

## A Visit to Franz Kafka’s Grave

I knew I had to visit Franz Kafka’s grave. It was the same hunger that has driven me to the stones of Chopin, Jim Morrison, Kierkegaard, and my mentor the poet Charles Olson, to try to get some sort of mystic fix on what the American folksinger delineated: “Something is happening here, but I don’t know what it is.”

Franz Kafka is buried in the New Jewish Cemetery on the outskirts of Prague. I was told there was a new regulation at the cemetery. You have to wear a yarmulka. I mentioned that one morning to David Grossman and his wife Michal while sitting in the Hotel Josef’s breakfast room whereupon Michal gave me one.

An associate of the Festival named Jitka Zamrazilová, who has completed a master’s degree in ecology and sustainable development, took me to the thanatopolis via the Prague subway, a very clean and efficient experience. First we walked on the Karluv most, the Charles Bridge, over the Vltava River, in the direction of Prague Castle, where I purchased gifts for my family. Then we recrossed the River, passing by the square where Jan Palach immolated himself during the Soviet invasion of 1968. She pointed out the monument to him as we walked down into the subway for the trip to the Jewish Cemetery.

At the little building (which featured of course pictures and postcards of Kafka) at the entrance to the cemetery, a woman darted out of the office in my direction, apparently



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to make sure I was wearing my yarmulka, which had slid down the back of my head. I pointed it out, and all was well. The Fodor guide book had a clear description on where Kafka and his family were located, so we proceeded around to the right along the front wall of the cemetery till we came to it.

I noticed that beneath many of the stones that visitors bring to Jewish gravesites visitors placed notes, so I jotted a poem to Franz, and put it behind his tall monument.



**Kafka's final home**

I could hear a bird beautifully chanting, which I caught on my digital videocamera, as we stood in what the bard Charles Olson called "this park of eternal events."

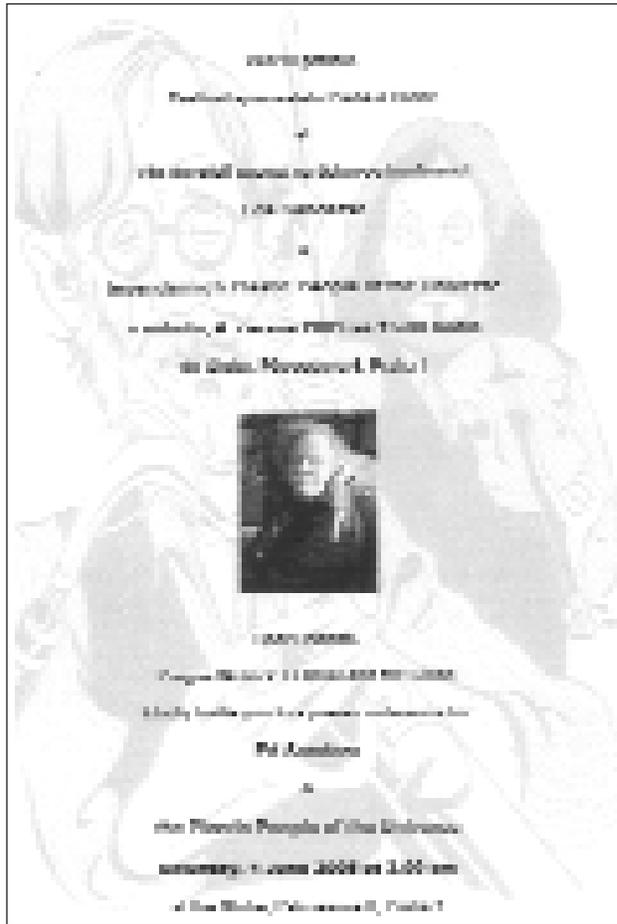
## **Winnetka and the Woodstock Bear**

Two emblems of my life in Woodstock, New York showed up in Prague. First I was amazed to see in local newspapers and on posters for the Festival our pet cockatiel Winnetka (named after the 1939 Bob Crosby hit, "Big Noise from Winnetka") who sometimes hops onto my shoulder while I'm writing in the mornings. I had sent a photo of Winnetka resting on my shoulder to Michael March, who tipped it into the poster announcing the press conference with the Plastic People of the Universe. Secondly, during one of the interviews I mentioned how my wife Miriam, back in Woodstock, was concerned because twice in the last 24 hours she had spotted a large black bear on a patio next to our house. The bear has been known to punch his or her way into near-



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by houses, in one instance in a house up the hill from us in order to munch down on some chocolate chip cookies. This particular bear lies on his back and shakes the seeds from birdfeeders into his mouth, and even has bitten into our liquid (sugar water) hummingbird feeder to guzzle down the sweet juice. It was fawn season in our heavily forested area, when mother deer are nursing their babies, and the black bears come down from the mountain for one of their favorite meals— tremble-legged, newly dropped fawns.



Winnetka on my shoulder on the Press Conference poster

Miriam was nervous at encountering the bear twice near the house, and not long after I blabbed about the bear in interviews, and apparently it was mentioned in a newspaper because people began asking how the bear situation was faring. Bears in Europe are, from say the short stories of Chekhov, are much more dangerous than the black bears of New England, USA.



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## Rehearsing with the Plastics

There's always that sense of hope and expectation rehearsing for a new type of show. I love it. I went by cab with the Plastics to an office complex, a bit run down but very functional, which now provides very affordable rehearsal and studio space for artists and musicians. Apparently it had been the home of a state-run construction business in the "old days," and the Plastics now rent a studio in the complex for about \$500 US a year.

As we rehearsed, I could sense how the Plastics have evolved into a tight and very sophisticated ensemble. A woman named Eva Turnová, who plays electric bass, has joined them, and she has a pleasing and full-throated singing voice. We worked on a bunch of tunes from early Fugs albums, including "Morning Morning," "How Sweet I Roamed," "I Want to Know," "Dover Beach," and "The Garden is Open." I hadn't sung "The Garden is Open," from the 1968 Fugs album, *Tenderness Junction*, since the year of its release.

I could feel that shiver in the spine that occurs when a performance is really coming together.

## Being Fingered as "Mad Poet" on Prime Time

I was asked to go on an evening news/entertainment show broadcast to the entire nation. Backstage in the makeup room, there were two American license plates attached to the wall, one from Hawaii, and one from New York. As they dabbed on the makeup upon my cheeks, a translator came into the room. He showed me a list of questions I would be asked. My answers were to be instantly translated into Czech. He wasn't quite honest. He left out one question.

I came out for the protection of open space and for protecting the water, a topic of great concern, I had learned, to a rising and increasing group of young professionals in the Czech Republic. My interviewer, who looked just a tad like someone from a William Burroughs novel—that is, crisply robotic and unfeeling, and was dismissive when I said that my home town, Woodstock, had laws to protect open space and keep out things like malls. Then he sprung the surprise question, What did I think when people called me a Mad Poet. I resisted giving a foam-mouthed gape-stare imitation of a mad poet, and resisted also mentioning Holderlin's Tower, the purported madness of Christopher Smart, the life-wrenching melancholy of Robert Lowell, William Cowper, and Anne



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Sexton, to list but a few. Instead I denied being bonkers, saying I'd been married for 44 years and was in my own way fairly normal. Of course, "normal" has wide parameters and paranormal perchancies.

## A Chat about Politics

The morning of the luncheon at the American Embassy, I met with the writer and film producer, Josef Rauwolf, who had translated my poems into Czech for the Festival. He brought me the Czech edition of my book on the Manson group, *The Family*, which in Czech is *Rodina*. We talked a bit about having a collection of my writing come out in translation in the Czech Republic, poetry and prose, in the mode of the *Gary Snyder Reader*.

Then I asked a series of questions I had prepared, a "Q List," on what was really going on politically in the country.

The political party that won the election chooses the Premier, who is Jiri Paroubek. The President, Vaclav Klaus, was elected by Parliament. He's been President, I was told, for about a year. The Commies helped him into power, for which they received official recognition. Klaus is "a very dangerous guy. His ego is galactic. His narcissism. A very explosive combination." And this: "He hates ecology." Many view Klaus, suggested Rauwolf, as the most dangerous politician in Prague since 1945. He's a clever populist, playing the two great and historic cards: 1. fear of Germany, and 2. nationalism. Klaus, I was told, wants to change the Czech constitution to give him more power. Prague then could be transformed into Dallas/Fort Worth.

The thinking, unfortunately, is that in the 2006 elections the Social Democrats may lose, and Klaus's party may then get to form a government.

As for the system of rent controls, the complaint is that rents are "quite low. Owners can't take care of the houses from the rents." His estimate was that maybe 50% of the buildings in Prague and the nation are state-owned. Medical school is still free, and much of the economy is still state-run, including the health care system.

## Lunch at the American Embassy

The American Embassy is located in the Schönbornsky palác, or Schoenborn palace, in the upscale Mala Strana section of the City. During my visit in Prague the Embassy



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offered me, as the American writer represented at the Festival, the assistance of a staff person, should I need any support during my stay. I was looking forward to the luncheon.

As anyone who spends time in Europe knows, the United States is often dismissed and despised as a violent neo-Rome. One Greek poet told me he was too angry at the United States to come to the Embassy, even though he was invited. I always tell anyone who will listen that the United States is an extremely complicated place, and many many millions are actively resisting the violent, imperialistic, dog-eat-dog group now in control of the government. I sometimes point out that any country that invents the wah-wah pedal can't be totally bad.

The Embassy sent a van to the Hotel Josef to pick those of us headed for the luncheon. As we were about to climb aboard, one of those invitees pointed toward the license plate on the vehicle. She said that "they" know the license plates of Embassy cars, and there was no attempt to conceal them, and how it would be easy to plant a magnetic bomb on the underside. I shuddered as I settled into my seat for the ride to the elegant mansion. "I hope it isn't today," I weakly joked.

During my nightly calls to Woodstock, Miriam suggested that maybe I should not recommend Bush's impeachment during any remarks I might give at the luncheon at the American Embassy. I agreed, though I was wearing the stolen election teeshirt I'd gotten from Paul McMahan under my shirt as I boarded the van outside the Hotel Josef.

Indeed, in the brief comments I delivered in front of those assembled for the meal, I did not venture into Shrub-land, but mentioned my work helping dissident musicians in the years prior to the Velvet Revolution.

Greeting us was Ambassador Bill Cabaniss and his wife Catherine. I was impressed with their cordiality. They are from Alabama, where Mr. Cabaniss runs a thriving steel-plating business. Bill said he had been in the Alabama Senate and House of Representatives, and been Ambassador for about a year. They did a background check on him going back ten years, he said. He has had to remove himself from running his metal-plating business. His tour of duty will be about 2-3 years. "They tend to be about two years," he told me.

Catherine Cabaniss said she had been reading some of *America, a History in Verse, Vol. 3 (1962-1970)*. Plus she had purchased a copy of *Tales of Beatnik Glory*, which she



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asked me to sign. I told her it was perhaps a bit too wild for her, and yet as I spoke with her I came to feel she could probably easily handle the beat glory time-lines.

For a nation packed with churches, Catherine told me, the Czech Republic has the lowest church attendance in Europe. I mentioned that my daughter Deirdre was a patent attorney in Boston. Mr. and Mrs. Cabaniss have two daughters. Her oldest had gone to Emerson College in Boston, then moved to Seattle, where soon she is getting married in a Buddhist service.

As we stood at round tables eating what seemed to be watermelon sherbet with fresh mint, an Embassy official said that Franz Kafka had lived a few months in the mansion, in 1917. That was before it was the American Embassy. The government, apparently around the time Kafka lived there, had faced an economic downturn, with increased unemployment, and hired people to build a wall, which is still there. I guess the claim is that, viewing the construction for the wall helped inspire Kafka to write his short story, "The Great Wall of China." The Embassy, he told me, is going to install a plaque commemorating Kafka's residency there.

Everything ends, and so we were driven back to our hotels from the well-guarded Embassy, whereupon I began preparing for my reading and performance in the evening with the Plastic People of the Universe.

## **The Festival's Final Night— Yves Bonnefoy, E. Sanders and the Plastic People of the Universe**

The final night's performances was billed as an "International Evening," and the Theater Minor was completely filled. Yves Bonnefoy began the evening with a conversation on poetics and writing, which I listened to back stage on instant-translation headphones. After Bonnefoy, there was a break during which we prepared to perform. The loudspeakers played the song, "Ultimate Things," from the recent *Fugs Final CD (Part I.)*

The Plastics and I had held a run-through of the tunes we were to do together, and I made some adjustments to my program. After meeting some of the Greek writers, including Festival director Spiros Vergos, a poet from Greece, and having spoken about the choruses of Aeschylus with the Greek ambassador, I decided to do a poem by Sappho, in translation and in the ancient Aeolian dialect and meter in which the woman



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the ancients called the Tenth Muse wrote.

It's an unusual experience, but of ten when I recite Sappho in her ancient metrics I feel as if I'm somehow INSIDE the poems, as if it were a high-energy trembling hologram. And so I entered the holo-poem of the poet of Mitylene, with the poem beginning:

Equal to the gods is the man who  
sits in front of you sweetly speaking.....

Tonight the Plastics are very very good. Vratislav Brabenec, saxophone, Josef Janicek, keyboards & voice, Jiri Kabes, acoustic violin and electric viola, Joe Karafiat, guitar, Ivan Bierhanzl, electric & acoustic bass, Eva Turnová, vocals, Lubuik Kandl, drums.

Magor was in the audience, and when he was asked to stand in acknowledgement of his great work in bringing greater freedom to his nation, the applause was thunderous.

The Plastics have a true-voiced young singer, Eva Turnová, with whom I sang much of the Fugs material. We performed Tuli Kupferberg's setting of Matthew Arnold's wedding poem, "Dover Beach," William Blake's "How Sweet I Roamed from Field to Field," written when Blake was about 11 or 12, "I Want to Know," from the Fugs' second album, and Tuli Kupferberg's "Garden is Open."

At the end, there was a standing ovation, and then we performed Tuli Kupferberg's "Morning Morning" a second time, only this time the band gave it a wild intensity, especially Vratislav Brabenec's saxophone wailing and moaning during the lyrics.

wail	Starshine starshine	wail
	Feel so loving in the starshine	
moan	Starshine starshine	moan
	Darling kiss me as I weep	

The applause lasted for minutes, and then the Plastics performed their song "Magic Nights" to end a remarkable evening. The Festival hopes to put out a CD of the performances.

All of us walked to the nearby Tulip Restaurant for a party which went on till dawn. The owner had donated the feast to the Festival. The heroic Ivan Jirous, who had suf-



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ferred so much raising the banners of personal freedom, the PPU, and poets from various European countries celebrated. The din was almost babylonic, and that's what you want in such circumstances, the good side of Babylon, the utter din of enjoyment.



### William Burroughs on a Shoulder

During the feast, a young man came over to show me his William Burroughs' tattoo, on his left shoulder. It had a remarkable resemblance to the grand old man of Lawrence, Kansas, and I located my camera to take a picture to send to my friend, James Grauerholz who was Burroughs' associate and editor for many years.

All good things come to a closure, and I cabbed back to the hotel with some other poets, and poured my stuff into bags, checked my final late-night Prague Writers' Festival flow of soccer on tv, grabbed some sleep, and then went in a cab, \$25, to the airport for another tight-rowed cattle-car flight across Europe, the vast moil of Oceanus, and a long circle down into John F. Kennedy Airport, followed by a ride with the Misty Mountain airport service back to Woodstock.

Included below are the poems and lyrics I performed at the Theatre Minor on June 8, 2005.

—Edward Sanders  
Woodstock, New York  
Summer 2005