

Creating a bridge between Leipzig and Danzig

Leipzig's Festival of Lights remembers, in Germany and Poland, the autumn of '89

It is tradition that the Leipzig Festival of Lights, a project uniting art and the people of Leipzig, invites all to the Augustusplatz on 9 October. But in 2011, for the first time ever, the event will also create a bridge within Europe: In Leipzig and Danzig people will simultaneously remember the events of autumn '89 as they actively join in the festival. Both cities will confront issues like liberty, solidarity and civic engagement.

On the evening of 9 October in the Polish Baltic Philharmonic Danzig a special concert commemorating the anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution will take place. The orchestra will play under the direction of Jürgen Wolf, Cantor of Leipzig's St. Nicholas Church and Musical Director of the Festival of Lights. The programme is to include works by Polish and German composers.

Simultaneously, in Leipzig the historically resonant Augustusplatz will again take centre stage. There, participants can experience a video performance, projected in large-scale format onto the façade of Leipzig's opera house. The Festival's Artistic Director, Jürgen Meier, will connect historical points of reference from Danzig and Leipzig with current perspectives and integrate these into a live screening of the Danzig concert. All festival visitors are warmly invited to create a glowing '89 on the Augustusplatz with candles. The concertgoers in Danzig will, at the same time, be able to gain impressions of the events in Leipzig via a live screening.

The Festival of Lights is presented by Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing (LTM) GmbH in cooperation with the city of Leipzig and the initiative "Day of the Peaceful Revolution – Leipzig 9 October 1989". The Polish Institute in Leipzig has provided considerable support in terms of liaison with the Polish partners and coordination of the activities in Danzig. The Festival of Lights has already received a great deal of attention from neighbouring Poland and is receiving top level support: festival patrons include, among others, Mieczysław Struk, Marshall of Voivodeship Pomerania, and Paweł Adamowicz, Mayor of Danzig. In addition, this collaborative Festival of Lights has been recognised as an official project by the Polish Presidency of the European Council (1 July – 31 December 2011). An invitation has been issued by Germany's Consulate General in Danzig to a concert and an official reception honouring the Day of German Unity.

For a United Europe

2011 marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of the German-Polish Neighbourhood Treaty. Leipzig's Festival of Lights picks up as a theme the events that led to the political system change in neighbouring Poland, which had a decisive meaning for the developments in Germany and Europe. The wave of developments, which began in Poland, spread and continued to gather impetus in the former GDR, will be made symbolically visible in Leipzig's Festival of Lights.

Leipzig, City of the Peaceful Revolution

Leipzig has for many years cultivated a culture of active remembrance of the autumn of '89. Among the most important events on the key date of 9 October are the traditional prayer for peace and the address on democracy. The element of light has, since 2007, continued to play a part – then and also in the following year the LTM GmbH held a “Night of Candles”.

In 2009 for the first time a Festival of Lights commemorated the Peaceful Revolution. On that occasion around 150,000 Leipzig citizens and visitors took to the Augustusplatz and the inner city Ring in remembrance of the events that took place 20 years ago. After the successful premiere of the festival in 2009, and a moving Festival of Lights in 2010 commemorating “20 Years of German Unity” and including an organ concert in Berlin, this year follows with the creation of a bridge to Poland. Strategically, the festival continues up until 2014 with the defined themes of Hungary (2012), the Czech Republic (2013) and the 25th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution (2014). The continuation of artistic and citizen-based projects at historical locations within a European context is foreseen.

Danzig, City of Liberty

In 1980 in Danzig (Gdańsk), Europe’s unparalleled Peaceful Revolution began with the strikes in the city’s docks led by Lech Walesa, and the emergence of the people’s movement, Solidarnosc. The events became the first milestone on the way to the autumn revolution of 1989 in Europe, which led to the collapse of the communist system and ultimately brought to an end an era of a divided Europe. Each year, Danzig celebrates the memories of August 1980 with a “Festival of Liberty”.

