

# Bohemia and (free) beer

*Don't expect free pens and stickers at the upcoming Czech Embassy's street party. There'll be something much, much better,* writes Rebecca Gross

Of all the phrases that exist in the English language, few are more enticing than 'on the house'. Just ask the Czech Republic's Permanent Representation to the EU. Last year, its premiere Czech Street Party attracted 4,000 attendants – about 3,500 more than were expected – with the promise of free beer, food and music. This year's edition, scheduled for June 12, is expected to lure an even larger crowd with the same irresistible pledge.

The event was launched last October to celebrate the opening of the Czech House, home to the Czech embassy, various trade and investment organisations, and the Czech Tourist Authority. "We thought about having a reception, but receptions

are usually quite boring," says Jan Vytopil, a spokesman for the Czech Permanent Representative. "We wanted to do something a bit different."

Open to the public and entirely free, the event is different in all the right ways. And with the Czech Republic's EU presidency term set to begin in January 2009, it's an ideal time to generate a positive Czech buzz.

To introduce locals to the rich culture of the former Kingdom of Bohemia, representatives from each of the Czech Republic's 14 regions will be on hand to offer the best of local fare, including sausages, cheese, wine, and 'Štramberk ears' – an ear-shaped gingerbread cookie created in 1241 to celebrate the ousting of the Tatars. Even more appetising is the selection of beers that will be

served, which will include local brews not commonly available in Belgium, as well as big-name brands. Teetotalers will have a special treat of their own: orange juice served from the Czech Republic's largest teapot.

**Czech Street Party**  
June 12 from 16.00 to 22.00 at the corner of Rue de Trône/Troonstraat and Rue Caroly/straat, Brussels (Ixelles/Elsene)

As guests drift about sampling the culinary goodies, five different concerts will be held during the course of the evening. The programme kicks off at 16.00 when big band jazz ensemble Lab Band takes the stage. South Moravian drummer Pavel Fajt goes on at 17.20, followed by the frenetically punky

pop group Mandrage, who were nominated as the Best New Artist of the Year by three separate music awards in 2007. Rock band Yellow performs at 19.30, leading up to the final performance of the night by Gipsy.cz.

Set to start at 20.40, Gipsy.cz is a Roma hip-hop group that Vytopil describes as "a cross between the Gipsy Kings and Eminem". The group's unique fusion of traditional ethnic and modern beats won them Best New Artist at the 2006 Andel Awards (the Czech equivalent of the Grammys), and their single *Romano Hip Hop* spent three months on the World Music Charts' top 20 in 2007.

As the Permanent Representative puts in last-minute orders for more beer, Vytopil reflects that "there are always countries which are bigger, stronger, and richer. We just created a different way to stand out."



Czech it out: fashion, music and plenty of refreshments were served up at last year's premiere street party to celebrate the best of Bohemia in Brussels, left and below

