

19th World Muscle Society Congress, Berlin 2014



A City of Cranes and Dinosaurs

From the wild and sunny landscape of California in 2013, to the beating heart of Europe, with myriad layers of history and heritage: the WMS 21st Century tour bus alighted in Berlin, host city for the 19th World Muscle Society congress, and, as always, offered Education, Entertainment and Excitement as senior myology experts from around the globe congregated to exchange ideas, discuss new theories, and disseminate their knowledge to the younger, up-and-coming players in the muscle field.

Delegates began to assemble in the preceding days to take some time to explore the city, or, in the hours before the Welcome Ceremony, to put up posters in spacious areas within two grand historical buildings, one at the Humboldt Graduate School with its high ceilings and ornate interior plaster and paintwork, and the second an expansive central glass roofed space at the Faculty of Agriculture and Gardening, providing abundant natural light, ideal for Facilitators and Prize Judges to scrutinise every detail of the posters vying for their position of glory in world muscle history.

The central location for this year's congress was Langenbeck-Virchow-Haus. During its 100 year history, starting out as the home of the German Surgical Society and Berlin Medical Association, it fell into the hands of the Soviet military following World War II and was robbed of its much-prized paintings, furniture and its extensive library. In 1949 it became the People's Chamber of the nascent German Democratic Republic and only in 2003, following legal twists, turns and political intrigue was it

finally returned to its rightful owners for use in the causes of science and medicine.

As dusk fell on Tuesday, delegates congregated in the great auditorium in Langenbeck-Virchow-Haus for the Welcome Ceremony. Our top man with the muscle for coordinating events as Chair of the Local Organising Committee for this year's congress was Werner Stenzel, who greeted the audience and provided a taste of Berlin's maverick character, a beacon of freedom and non-conformity in defiance during times of oppression in history. He introduced Dr. Annette Grütters-Kieslich, Dean of the Charité Hospital, who welcomed the World Muscle Society on behalf of the Charité: this hospital's specialist strengths and most important area of research lay in the neurosciences and neurology, earning it many Nobel Prizes. Dr. Grütters-Kieslich echoed the philosophy of the WMS as she declared that the Charité's interest in the congress was not about size and money, but to push forward the boundaries of knowledge and learning, best achieved by focusing on "smaller is beautiful" with just three specific topics and no concurrently running sessions.

Dr. Hanns Zischler, multi-talented author, scientist and philosopher, then stepped to the podium to take WMS guests on a journey through the history of Berlin and its people, in particular its prominent industrial past and its evolution into a great centre of science and medicine. Berliners, once "Pharaohs of industry", had become "Pharaohs of science". His detailed narrative was interspersed with song, as Martin Bresgott's male



The Athesinus Consort Berlin sings in harmony for the congress delegates.

quartet, Athesinus Consort Berlin, brought song to the audience with compositions by Johannes Brahms and Ralph Vaughan Williams, among other distinguished composers.

Delegates, now well rested but starting to crave sustenance, were ushered from Langenbeck-Virchow-Haus, along the street and across the wide Invalidenstrasse to the Natural History Museum, where they were transported back in time and walked among dinosaurs – or at least their skeletons – their muscle having atrophied into oblivion some time ago. But poetic balance was restored as myologists mingled among their bony Jurassic forbears and caught up with neuromuscular colleagues and

friends from around the globe, talked muscle, and eagerly anticipated the cerebral activities of the coming days, while caterers emerged from concealed corners and served wines and canapés.

Scientific proceedings were launched at nine in the morning on Wednesday following WMS President Victor Dubowitz's own welcome speech to the assembled delegates. He paid tribute to Professor Yukio Fukuyama, world leading myologist and father figure and mentor to many, who had passed away earlier in 2014. Professor Fukuyama had also been a longstanding supporter of the WMS since the outset in 1996, and would be in our thoughts over this congress. Victor Dubowitz touched on local history and the Charité's heritage under the prominent 19th century muscle pathologist, Wilhelm Griesinger. And moving to modern heritage he highlighted some of the features that reflected the contemporary culture of Berlin: the idiosyncratic Arte Luise Hotel whose rooms had been decorated by different local artists.

For this congress our President was delighted to announce that the standard of abstracts submitted had once again been extremely high, and the WMS had been able to award a record 70 fellowships of 500 Euros to deserving delegates. The high standard of abstracts had also been reflected in the number selected for the 'late-breaking' session which, following discussions within the WMS executive board, had been increased from six to nine.

Concluding his Welcome, Victor Dubowitz displayed a photograph of a sign in a shop window he had serendipitously



Muscle and bone: a winning combination. WMS reception with wine and canapés at the Natural History Museum, Berlin.



WMS delegates fill the Langenbeck-Virchow-Haus auditorium. Once the People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic, it is home again to science and medicine.

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