

BENEFIT GALA IN PRAGUE

HARCO and Giro Zentral move to support flourishing Czechoslovak cultural scene.

A gala benefit concert, the first of its kind in a central east European country, is to be held in Prague in November.

The concert at the Prague Palace of Culture will be under the patronage of Mrs Olga Havelova, wife of the Czechoslovakian President Havel. Handicapped children in the CSFR will benefit from the eagerly awaited Czechoslovakian debut of the Vienna Art Orchestra.

The event has been sponsored and jointly organised by the international trading house Harco and by the Austrian bank Giro Zentrale.

Traditional support

Harco chief Mr Robert Harmath has a long tradition of sponsorship in Czechoslovakia. He said in the past he had done whatever possible to support spectacular and popular events with cash aid from Harco. Harco was a pioneer of commercial sponsorship in Czechoslovakia and initially backed a wide range of sporting events.

Mr Harmath said the chance to introduce sports sponsorship into Czechoslovakia had itself been revolutionary during the period of the former communist government. It had introduced the concept of a committed international company that was not only interested in doing business with a reliable trading partner but which was at the same time prepared to invest in the society of the host country.

Millions in sponsorship

Harco and Mr Harmath individually invested millions of schillings in the development of sport in Czechoslovakia. The sponsorship program stretched from the introduction of new sporting ideas –

such as popular giant marathon runs with a huge public participation, to the televising and publicising of regular sporting fixtures in the Czechoslovak athletic calendar.

Mr Harmath said Czechoslovak officials had not been familiar with the concept of sponsorship when Harco first introduced the idea. They quickly learned to see this as an important new contribution to the promotion and financing of sports.

Importance of culture

Mr Harmath said the opening of Czechoslovak society has extended the need for sponsorship to virtually all areas of life and he saw a clear need for immediate action in the sponsorship of cultural events.

“Cultural activities are at present of the greatest importance in Czechoslovakia and they will become ever more important in future”, he said. The task is a two fold one, he said, it was to ensure that domestic creativity received the encouragement and the opportunities it deserved in the CSFR.

In the second place there was a need to help with the internationalisation of Czechoslovakia, and the process of opening the country to the world. This would involve the bringing of international standard events to the CSFR cultural stage as well as helping to maintain the image and growing reputation of Czechoslovak culture abroad.

Extravagant praise

The Vienna Art Orchestra is a jazz ensemble which has earned extravagant praise from international critics. The Prague concert is one of a 20 date tour which takes the group across most of western Europe. Sponsorship has enabled the group to play for an eastern European public and will also continue Harco policy of supporting charities in the countries where it operates commercially.