

The Biophysics Dispatch

Leipzig

Sunday, 22 September 2024

Dear Participants of the German Biophysics Meeting in Leipzig,

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Leipzig and hope you got here safe and sound. We are excited to organize the Biophysics Meeting for you this time. Today, there will be the opening ceremony in the Paulinum, which is the newly built main auditorium of the University of Leipzig. If the Paulinum reminded you of a church – this would be quite intended. The place where you are right now used to be the University Church St. Paul that dates back to 1240 AD. The church survived the bombings of WWII, but as the University became Karl Marx University after the war and Augustusplatz was renamed into Karl-Marx-Platz, Walter Ulbricht gave orders to blow it up in 1968. If you want to see the gigantic Karl Marx relief that was on display here, I can tell you where to find it. After reunification and quite some debate, the decision was made to rebuild the university complex and commemorate the church. The current building was designed by the Dutch architect Erick van Egeraat. As Theology is part of the classical faculties at German universities, the building is also used for academic services on Sunday (late!) mornings.

We would like to introduce our city to you. Leipzig is a **City of Music** and many famous composers had a close connection to the city. Among others, Johann Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelsohn Bartholdy, Richard Wagner, Robert and Clara Schumann, Gustav Mahler, and Max Reger lived and worked here. Leipzig offers an active music



Photo: Gert Mothes

scene and also the university is part of it. There are two pipe organs in the Paulinum. Today, we will hear the Jehmlisch organ in the west gallery, which was built in 2016/17 and

makes an innovative reference to Johann Scheibe's Baroque organ, tested by Bach in 1717 and was one of the most modern organ works of its time. Our organist today is Stefan Altner (*1956). He was a member of the famous *Thomanerchor* Leipzig and a student at the “Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy” University of Music in Leipzig. In 1986, he became managing director of the Munich Chamber Orchestra, also permanent harpsichordist of the baroque soloists of the Munich Philharmonic. From 1993 to 2019, he was the managing director of the *Thomanerchor* Leipzig and became the first doctoral candidate from the Leipzig University of Music and Theater to receive a Dr. phil. His concert activities brought him to many places in Europe, USA, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Australia.



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Leipzig is the **City of the Peaceful Revolution** in 1989. Today, we will listen to a contemporary witness of this time, Gisela Kallenbach (*1944). Due to her social background and christian faith, she was denied the *Abitur* in the GDR. She worked as a laboratory technician

at the Leipzig Academy of Sciences. In the 80s, she was an active member of the Environmental Protection Working Group at the Leipzig Youth Parish Office and was involved in the conciliar process of the churches in the GDR between 1987 and 1989. In 1989 she was a founding member of the “Ökolöwe” association, a Leipzig environmental and church group that was represented at the round table. From 1990 to 2000 she was a consultant in environmental protection. From 2000 to 2003 she served as international mayor of the UN mission in Kosovo. From 2004 and 2009 she represented the Green Party in the European Parliament. In the 2009 state elections, she entered the Saxon state parliament via the Green Party's state list. Gisela will take us back to the 80s and the

route that lead to reunification and will also comment on current problems and challenges.

Leipzig is a **City of Science**. Altogether, 19 researchers and/or former students at the University of Leipzig received the Nobel Prize. The last laureate was Svante Pääbo from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in 2022. We are happy that Johannes Krause (*1980) from the same institute will talk about his research today. Johannes is a native of Thuringia and received his Ph.D. in Genetics at the University of Leipzig in 2008. He worked at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and was appointed professor for Archeology and Paleogenetics at the University of Tübingen at the Institute for Archaeological Sciences. Krause focuses on the analysis of old to very old DNA using DNA sequencing. His research interests include pathogens from historical epidemics, as well as human evolution. He also contributed to the deciphering of the genetic heritage of Neanderthals,



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and managed to prove that Neanderthals and modern humans share the same language gene (FOXP2). In 2010, he discovered the first genetic evidence of the Denisovans, a stone-age primeval Homo species from Siberia. With his work on the evolution of historical infectious diseases, he was able to demonstrate that most of today's plague pathogen originated in the Middle Ages.

We hope that these exemplary contributions will make you eager to explore more of the city; there is time for this on Tuesday afternoon.

But let's now come to our scientific program. After the opening ceremony, we will start our scientific conference with two plenary lectures by Sudipta Maiti (Hyderabad, India) and Anne Imberty (Grenoble, France).

Subsequently, we would like to invite you for a Get Together in the Foyer of the Paulinum/Augusteum. Our speakers will stick around for questions, discussions and exchange. Enjoy the atmosphere of the building with a glass of wine and some snacks and meet your colleagues and friends.

This will conclude the first day of the meeting. Have a good night and see you all tomorrow. Thank you very much for coming to Leipzig and joining the meeting.

Daniel on behalf of the organizing committee

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