

Pianist plays National Anthems of Slovakia and the United Kingdom.

Laudatio by the Ambassador of Slovakia to the Court of St. James's HE Mr. Lubomir Rehak at a Reception and Investiture Ceremony marking the presentation of the Medal of The President of the Slovak Republic to His Honour Sir Gavyn Arthur and Sir Anthony Bailey at the Embassy of Slovak Republic on Tuesday 19 April 2016

Your Royal Highnesses, Yours Serene Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Your Eminence, Your Grace, My Lords, High Sheriff, My Lord Mayor of Westminster, Mr Alderman

Distinguished Guests,

Let me thank you all most cordially for honouring us by your visit and sharing with us these solemn moments.

This house, in my opinion, perfectly reflects the character of Slovakia and its people – being a bit old-fashioned and modern at the same time. Slovakia, being deeply anchored to its traditions and habits surprises often with new ideas, its strife for modernity and progress. Last summer President Kiska of Slovakia promoted here an unbelievable prototype of a flying car – a concept developed by Slovak inventors. A few weeks ago another high-tech fantasy has been announced to become a reality – a hyperloop, a superfast train connection between Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest. Once this is built, this will be a revolution in transportation, shortening the travel time between Bratislava and its twin city of Vienna from 1 hour to 8 minutes.

Slovakia's success, its remarkable economic growth, the beauty of the country, more intense people-to-people contacts and openness of its people contribute to a larger recognition of Slovakia. This year is particularly significant for us, as we will take over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of this year. This will naturally resolve in the multiplication of the friends of Slovakia.

By decorating two distinguished gentlemen today, I would like to thank symbolically all those friends of Slovakia in the United Kingdom, who do share their time, forces and resources spreading the good name of my country and fostering overall cooperation between our two nations.

It is my utmost pleasure and honour, acting by order and decree of the President of the Slovak Republic, His Excellency Mr. Andrej Kiska to present and decorate with the Medal of the President His Honour Sir Gavyn Arthur and Sir Anthony Bailey. The President, upon proposal of this Embassy and particularly my predecessor at Her Majesty's Court, Ambassador Miro Wlachovsky and the recommendation of the Commission for state decorations decided to grant both esteemed gentlemen with his medal in recognition of their outstanding contribution to Slovak-British political, economic and cultural relations, spreading the good name of Slovakia in the City of London and across the country as a whole.

The President made this decision on the occasion of his working visit to the United Kingdom in January this year, which included an Audience with His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales in Dumfries House in Scotland. It is also timely that we have this ceremony in a week of celebration of the 90th anniversary of Her Majesty The Queen, who visited Slovakia in 2008 and to whom I extend our most cordial and loyal wishes also from this gathering.

Honouring the valuable support of His Honour Judge Sir Gavyn Arthur to Slovakia especially during his mayoralship, with particular focus on entrepreneurship, innovations and start-ups, I am pleased to announce that the current Lord Mayor of the City of London, Lord Mountevans will visit Slovakia in May. I am confident that this important visit will contribute towards deeper relations between Slovakia and the City of London and its Corporation.

This Embassy has for years been advised by our friend Sir Anthony Bailey, businessman, philanthropist, inter-religious dialogue activist, and diplomatic adviser. Being both British and Irish, Sir Anthony has established close relationships to the centre of Europe, as demonstrated by his family ties and longstanding assistance to the region, including Slovakia.

May I now ask both gentlemen to join me for the investiture ceremony.

Your Honour, Sir Gavyn Arthur, by Order and on behalf of the President of Slovak Republic, it is my distinct pleasure and privilege to honour and present you with the Medal of the President.

Your Excellency, Sir Anthony Bailey, by Order and on behalf of the President of Slovak Republic, it is my distinct pleasure and privilege to honour and present you with the Medal of the President.

Follow brief thanking remarks of both recipients.

Ambassador continues:

Dear guests and friends, as a sign of typical Slovak pragmatism and effectiveness we have decided to include as part of this investiture ceremony two cultural segments:

The exhibition *One Country Three Worlds* is a joint exhibition of 3 young Slovak artists living and creating in the UK – I have pleasure in inviting them to join me on the stage.

Silvia Krupinska, Mira Varg and Mandy Hreus met during their master studies at the University of the Arts London and this exhibition marks their graduation. It is a celebration of three diverse art worlds and perceptions grounded in Slovakia. They are studying experience and its power. Mira is reflecting on variations of realities and our perceptions, Silvia is focusing on texture of landscape and hidden places and Mandy is investigating the effects of surrounding elements on our consciousness. Please, feel free to immerse in the experience, as they see it by observing their exciting artefacts.

The second cultural moment is a performance of the Slovak soprano Božena Ferancová. She studied in Slovakia, Italy and Russia, and has participated in numerous national and international concerts including in Russia, Hungary, Poland, Italy, Spain, Estonia, Japan, China and Czechia. At the moment, she is a guest soloist at Slovak National Theatre, at Janáček Opera in Brno and National Theatre in Prague.

Božena teaches singing at National Conservatory in Bratislava and also at Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica, giving also master-classes of opera singing.

She is also a friend of mine, a courageous lady and a devoted mother. Her husband, Peter Feranec is a famous opera conductor. As the only foreigner he has been for 3 years the chief-conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, continuing at the Mikhailovsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg.

Božena will be accompanied by London-based Slovak pianist Peter Janík.

Please, welcome on stage Mme Božena Ferancová and Peter Janík and enjoy the evening.

Thank you.