



Photographs: Kärt Kukkur

*Did You know that
famous British crime writer
is not fazed by Estonia's climate?*

And that's not all - he helps to organise a literary festival in Estonia.

Tiesitkö, että kuuluisa englantilainen rikoskirjailija ei anna Viron ilmaston häiritä itseään? Eikä se jää siihen - hän auttaa Virossa kirjallisuustapahtuman järjestämisessä.

Знаете ли вы, что знаменитый английский писатель-детективщик не пугается эстонского климата? Мало того, он еще и помогает устраивать в Эстонии литературные фестивали.

Kas teadsid, et kuuluis inglise krimikirjanik ei lase ennast Eesti kliimast häirida? Ja sellega asi ei piirdu – ta aitab Eestis korraldada kirjandusfestivali.



It all began when a few of Estonia's literary figures - well-known visitors in the middle of the Old Town and the Estonian spring - decided to start organising an international literary festival. No sooner was the idea conceived than it was put into action. The festival was named HeadRead.



In the early years, we used a tent in the heart of the Old Town as the main festival venue. But then came along an exceptionally cold spring, and everyone was pretty frozen in the tent - except for a famous British crime writer who has walked from Poland to Istanbul. He was sitting in the tent in his shirt sleeves.



At one point, the organisers decided to commission heating for the tent. The machine was delivered, but it broke down immediately, filling the tent with exhaust fumes. In order to provide some ventilation, the tent's walls were rolled up. Now it was cold and windy. The well-known crime writer kept speaking in his shirt sleeves: in a wall-less tent, a writer, an organiser who was interviewing him, and a twenty-or-so devotees of literature.



Estonians are used to being tired out by banks of snow when it does snow and by the darkness during a snowless winter. If the summer is a hot one, there is a good deal of moaning and groaning; if it is cold, there is even more moaning and groaning. However, it is worth thinking of **Jason Goodwin**, as it is he who is the well-known crime writer. He is pictured with his Estonian counter-part, Tiit Alexeiev.



Goodwin, who had attended countless festivals and fairs in his lifetime, saw a small, intimate event whose organisers were putting their hearts into what they were doing. Head-Read provides no machinery to draw a person from one wall of the castle-like tent to the other, which will then push that same person out into the limelight a moment later.



HeadRead is a festival in which the organisers have time and space for speakers, and the speakers for the audience and one another's stories. This is a festival at which it is perfectly normal for the Estonian president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, to stop by and talk about life and literature with the world-famous playwright, Tom Stoppard.



The audience face a writer with a writer and a writer with a translator on the festival stage. One of these writers is Sofi Oksanen, who is claimed as a native of two countries, Estonia and Finland, and her translator and writer is Estonia's very own Jan Kaus.



Literature may be rapped and sung about, read and staged. HeadRead make available all options to anyone who is interested. Pictured is Estonia's rapping-singing-writing thinker, Jarek Kasar, aka Chalice.



At the festival, poetry resounds in front of one of the world's biggest polyptych panel altarpieces from the late Middle Ages, which is located in the museum and concert hall of St Nicholas' Church.



HeadRead delivers good quality literature to a good quality audience. Pictured is the British writer, Sarah Winman, author of 'When God was a Rabbit'.



So, perhaps Goodwin was unfazed by the wind, exhaust fumes and the cold, for he saw straight through the circumstances of the moment. He saw how it generally is with us here in Estonia, and also managed to help others to see it. Jason Goodwin (pictured with Tom Stoppard and Sabrina Guinness) is today a member of the working group of the HeadRead Festival.