

Invitation to the dance

The Tugboat Ballet at the HAMBURG PORT ANNIVERSARY

The world's greatest port festival, from 10 to 13 May

Hamburg, 18 April 2018 – The 829th HAMBURG PORT ANNIVERSARY is from 10 to 13 May this year, presenting a varied maritime programme for the whole family, in the unique setting of the Port of Hamburg. More than 300 ships and boats are expected, including magnificent tall ships and elegant cruise vessels, lovingly restored heritage ships and modern service vessels. The highlights of the world's greatest port festival include the amazing Tugboat Ballet – these robust workhorses of the port, powered by several thousand hp, will perform their pirouettes at Landungsbrücken, moving in time to popular film music.

A harbour pilot as leader

This unmissable performance will be started at 18:00 on Saturday 12 May by Captain Michael Schnabel. The 54-year-old harbour pilot has been responsible for the choreography of the Tugboat Ballet for the last five years. This time his choice of music centres on classical works. "I have been engaged for years now in selection of the best possible music for the tugboats to make their moves, and I want to demonstrate that classical music includes many wonderful pieces that are ideal for the tugboats to dance to."

Classical pieces and popular film music

Schnabel's favourite pieces include the "Leichte Kavallerie" by Franz von Suppé and the „Masquerade Waltz" by Aram Khachaturian. He has a soft spot for "Buongiorno a te" sung by Luciano Pavarotti. The programme also includes pieces by Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and other composers. Alongside these classical highlights, the tugboats will also be dancing to music from favourite film soundtracks such as "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Out of Africa". The traditional finale of the Tugboat Ballet is the Heidi Kabel song "In Hamburg sagt man Tschüss", when the tugboats form a circle and take their leave of the spectators.

Group photo with the Elbphilharmonie concert hall in the background

The tugboats will not only take the form of well-known symbols such as the number "8" or a star, but will go for a completely new shape – the big wheel. One of the boats will turn around its own axis at the centre of the formation, while two others will circle around it clockwise, and two more anti-clockwise. "I hope it all works out as planned," says Michael Schnabel. "Part of the buzz you get from the Tugboat Ballet is that the formations and sequences we show are completely unrehearsed – it's a premiere every time. We're also planning a Group Photo with the tugboats standing close together and the Elbphilharmonie concert hall in the background. That will definitely make a great souvenir photo."

Two generations of tugs on the dancefloor

This year Michael Schnabel has a special challenge – alongside the four smaller tugboats, he has a larger vessel to direct this time. “Size is not just dimensions – it is more power and pulling force,” he explains. Both tugboat types are about the same in dimensions, but the newer Bugsier 7 is about twice as strong as the four older tugs, developing some 6,500hp and a bollard pull of 72 tonnes. “That also reflects developments in the port. The ships are getting bigger and bigger, so we need stronger tugboats. The latest generation has a bollard pull of up to 100 tonnes”.

The art of the captains

A key element in the choreography will be to get harmony between the two generations of tug. Michael Schnabel is full of praise for the tugboat captains – “They are the real artists here, putting my ideas and intentions into practice,” says Michael Schnabel. “It is fantastic every time to see how they manoeuvre their boats precisely into position, keeping to the rhythm, adapting their speeds and maintaining the exact distances.”

Michael Schnabel has been working as a harbour pilot in the Port of Hamburg since 2004, and in that time he has guided some 6,000 ships safely through the port basin. From Blankenese onwards, he and his colleagues together with their tugboats help container ships and other large vessels to manoeuvre in very restricted waters. They help them to turn around in the Port, and ensure that the ships are moored parallel to the quays, without hitting them anywhere. Their work is a major contribution to smooth operations in the Port of Hamburg.

Welcome aboard!

Many of the vessels invite people to join them on board for the parades. For an overview, and other useful tips for the world’s biggest port festival, please visit <https://www.hamburg.com/port-anniversary/> or call the hotline of Hamburg Tourismus from 08:00 to 20:00 daily, on phone +49 40 30051300.

Get the app

The HAMBURG PORT ANNIVERSARY app puts all the information on the port festival of superlatives in your pocket – it is available free of charge on iTunes and Google Play. Many of the functions can be used even without an internet connection.

The HAMBURG PORT ANNIVERSARY would like to thank all its sponsors, especially its longstanding principal sponsor AIDA Cruises. Thanks to their support, the world’s greatest port festival thrills more than a million visitors from all parts of the world every year.

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