

We went to the opera in Warsaw, to see Gounod's Faust at Teatr Wielki. Although this opera dates from the 1850's, would you believe this was its first-ever performance in Poland in the original French? Anyway, the theatre is really grand, and the production was spectacularly opulent. Elevator stages, vast multitudes in colorful costumes, external facades and interiors of great gothic cathedrals, and choirs of angels suspended in mid-air. All for a mere 2 performances -- no mention if this was a borrowed production, or if it will travel elsewhere.

The chorus was excellent (great waltz and soldier chorus scenes), and the soprano playing Marguerite was good (Radomska, I forget the first name but had heard of her previously), but the tenor (Faust) and bass (Mephistopheles) were so-so. The final trio was somewhat of a dud; perhaps she was holding back so as not to show them up. The major sour note was that the Walpurgis Night ballet had decidedly anti-clerical elements. True, it's supposed to be a scene of profanity, but this was too much -- took place inside a cathedral, with statues of popes, bishops and saints performing some lewd moves. The best performance of this ballet I ever saw was a stand-alone scene by the Ukrainian Donetsk Ballet in Baltimore, even tho there was one major flub when a ballerina was dropped with a splat -- remember, Marta? Overall, however, I'd say the Warsaw performance was better than Lyric's -- in Chicago, the excellent singing (Mirella Freni, Alfredo Krause, Nicolai Ghiaurov) was upstaged by the terrible set design.