

We had a great time on our vacation trip to Europe, Oct. 19-Nov. 1. In Warsaw, we stayed at the Victoria Hotel on Pilsudski Square, overlooking the square with its Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the Teatr Wielki. It was walking distance to Old Town square and the shopping areas of Krakowskie Przedmiescie.

The day of our arrival on Oct. 20, we went to a concert in Teatr Wielki organized by the John Paul II Foundation for the 20th anniversary of the Pontificate. Tickets were literally priceless -- that is, they were free, but unavailable. We got them thru connections with the Foundation -- we know the head of the Polish chapter. It was a grand event, produced by famous film director Krzysztof Zanussi. The program consisted of recitations, film clips, several solo violin numbers played by Konstanty Kulka (world-class soloist), and then the Mozart C Minor Mass performed by the National Philharmonic under Kazimierz Kord, with top-notch soloists (incl. Wieslaw Ochman) and the National Phil. Choir. Afterwards, there was a wine reception where we rubbed elbows with Premier Buzek, Marian Krzaklewski, President of the National Bank Hanna Gronkiewicz-Walz, several Cardinals and dozens of bishops, Senators, members of Parliament and cabinet ministers (President Kwasniewski was pointedly not invited). Many of them we know personally from their trips to the US & to Rome. It was such a high that we felt no fatigue, even with only 3 hrs sleep in the last 36.

Later in the week we saw 2 operas, Puccini's Turandot and Verdi's Nabucco, staged by the National Opera on the huge stage of Teatr Wielki. Musically, both were top-notch. The soloists were good -- the Lyric stage would not be ashamed to have them -- but the chorus and orchestra were excellent, really world-class. Turandot's staging was weird - the principals had beautiful colorful Chinese kimonos, but the chorus was dressed in dungarees and caps like Red Guards. At the climax, when the rising sun came up, we were expecting it to carry a portrait of Mao. The set was also drab, looked like the ruins of some construction site. Nabucco, on the other hand, was staged beautifully - the National Opera had received a prize for it in Paris last year.