

“Helena The Emigrant Queen”

Last week in the salons of the Kosciuszko Foundation at 15 East 65th St. we had a chance to personally admire the beautiful Helen. Although this one did not start a war, she certainly caused a commotion among the audience attending the performance.

Nina Polan (Janina Katelbach) embodies the role of Helena Modrzejewska. She was encouraged from the audience by director of the original version of HELENA, THE EMIGRANT QUEEN, Joseph S. Kutrzeba and the Artistic Consultant of the present version Stuart Vaughan.

Kazimierz Braun's play, presented by the Polish Theatre Institute, although performed in English, certainly appealed to the hearts of the Polish emigrants who know the history of the great actress. The venue of the KF helped Andrzej Walczak the stage manager, responsible for the scenery and lights. Using just a few props he managed to create the atmosphere of a warm inhabited dwelling. The actress's costume, a dress, hats and shawls also evoked the past epoch. A few minutes past seven Nina Polan enters the stage and sets out on a retrospective monologue about the difficult beginnings and even more difficult ending of her life. We meet an older Helena who talks about her life from a distance, sometimes with a smile, perhaps a scowl, sometimes with sadness, but without a shade of regret or self-pity. Now, having left the stage, at the end of her acting career, she sums up her achievements. Once again she re-lives her first successes and defeats, proudly she recalls the standing ovations accorded her by

audiences, with anger the numerous auditions at which she was rejected because of her heavy Polish accent. Nina Polan (with more of a British than Polish accent) skilfully using artistic means of expression, created an unforgettable portrayal. Her vocal modulation, body language, and facial expressions created a very beautiful and varied (plastyczna) personality and at the same time an emotionally rich monodrama. She LOVED HERSELF most of all...and the stage... which came to the same thing...confides Helena, at the same time revealing her two great loves. Helena decided to emigrate to the "center of the world" (New York), since it was a place where she fitted best. In her private and professional life she was the creator and greatest exponent of the HELO-centric theory of life.

The monologue arranged at times as dialogues has many conversations with men. There are reminiscences of her husband Karol Chlapowski, friend Henryk Sienkiewicz, maestro Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Jozef Helmonski, Stanislaw Witkiewicz. There are no women, except for one, who appears several times like a phantom walking through the garden. That phantom is she, herself, from her youth. The symbolic reunion of the ladies will mean a proof of a mutual acceptance of each other of their common past present and future.

The audience enthusiastically greeted Nina Polan as she stepped onto the stage and bid farewell to Helena Modrzejewska as she was leaving it.