

CLEVELAND DEBUTANTE/CAVALIER BALL CAPTURES GLORY, ELEGANCE and MAGIC OF OLD WARSAW

The *Bal Młodzieżowy* Debutante and Cavalier Crystal Presentation Ball, held in Cleveland, Ohio, captured the elegance and glory of “Old Warsaw” by highlighting and reproducing features of a Winter European Formal Ball of the 20th century.

The ambiance of magic seemed to pervade every aspect of the evening, from the cocktail hour music, to the patriotic rhythms of the Kent State University Cadets, to the piano *Polonez* of the presentation, to the Fathers’/Mothers’ Waltz, to the Deb/Cav beautifully-choreographed *Polonez*, concluding with the Grand *Polonez*, where participation of the attendees was nearly 100 percent. The magic of the evening surely had an effect on everyone present.

Co-chairs Mitchell Bienia, PRCUA Director, District 5, and Aundrea Heschmeyer stated “We tried to incorporate as much as possible of the historical charm and elegance of formal balls into the program for the evening.” Hence, the name “Crystal” appears in the Ball title. And crystal was dripping from center pieces on every table, among fresh red and pink roses, and the twinkling flames of flickering candles, as well as from the four huge crystal chandeliers that graced the ballroom.

History of Debutante and Cavalier Ball 2020

The Debutante and Cavalier Ball of 2020 was the brainchild of a group of parents who wanted to present their daughters to society in this traditional Polish manner, but there has not been a Debutante Ball in Cleveland since 2010, when the Cleveland Society of Poles hosted its last ball, after 42 years of sponsorship. The reason was that there were no longer young ladies willing to participate in this tradition.

To encourage more young people to participate in the presentation ceremony, several changes were made to the criteria for participation. 1) Young men would be included as Cavaliers, to increase the pool of participants. 2) Anyone with Polish ancestry or Polish affinity, between the ages of 16 and 23, would be eligible to participate; no longer is participation limited to members of an elite society. 3) A fee would be assessed to participate, because there was no “seed money” available to underwrite the event.

More than a Social Experience

“The Debutante and Cavalier experience was designed not only to be a gala social event, but also an educational experience to make students proud of their Polish heritage,” commented

Heschmeyer. This concept included activities such as short courses in social etiquette and networking, as well as opportunities to compete for scholarships for both essay writing and a community service project.

Ball is a Huge Success

Despite the paucity of participants, only five, the Ball was an overwhelming financial success. The PRCUA was the first organization to offer support for the Ball, which gave it momentum. Vice President Micheline Jaminski also gave moral and emotional support, which helped keep the effort going. Jaminski said, “Don’t worry if there are few participants this year; it will grow as time passes.” PRCUA Directors also supported the Ball in large numbers, accepting Bienia’s challenge to sponsor a young person who wanted to participate, but did not have the money.

Thus, the birth of *Bal Młodzieżowy Debutante and Cavalier Crystal Presentation Ball* took place on January 25, 2020. It was the goal of the organizers to present the highest level of Polish culture, music, food and pageantry. “We wanted to make people proud of their Polish heritage,” stated Bienia. And, according to comments after the Ball, the goal was achieved!

The Polish American Congress–Ohio Division agreed to be the fiscal agent for the Ball, which allowed for funds to be collected and deposited in the PAC account.

Upon Arrival

The guests were treated to warm *grzaniec*, mulled wine, as they entered the foyer of the ballroom. Both a white warm honey wine and a warm red grape wine were arranged in goblets on a table inside the entranceway, to warm the hearts as guests came from the cold January winter weather.

First to be heard were the strains of the harp and clarinet duet, which played classical music for the cocktail hour, which featured Polish beer, wine and a variety of other adult beverages in an open bar the entire evening. Among the composers heard were Brahms, Beethoven, and obviously, Chopin. Clarinetist Kathleen Adelman, personal friend of the Bienia family, and her harp teacher, Cyndi Lally, played for this event. And indeed, the music, which set the tone for the evening, was heavenly! The magic started to happen right from the very beginning of the event.

Hors d’oeuvres

The hors d’oeuvre table featured Polish *zakąski* (appetizers) of *śledzie*, (herring in cream sauce,) trays of fruits, cheeses and European potato/vegetable salad, smoked Lake Erie white fish, roasted asparagus, deviled eggs with caviar, and assorted cured meats and kielbasa. Warm appetizers included another Polish specialty, mini *kartoflane placki* (mini potato pancakes) with

topping of either apple sauce, sour cream or caviar, and bruschetta on crostini, as servers passed the house specialty, lamb chops with tzatziki sauce.

Posting of Colors

It was not long before Olivia Gutowska sounded the trumpet to bring the guests to their tables, playing the emotionally charged *hejnal*, the traditional trumpet call from the higher tower of St. Mary Basilica in Kraków. Next was the posting of the colors, performed by the Kent State University Color Guard of the United States Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps. Instead of marching into the ballroom in complete silence, the flags of the United State of America and the Republic of Poland were accompanied by the rousing strains of the patriotic Trio section of the National Emblem March by Edwin Eugene Bagley. Quite stirring, indeed! The flags were a little larger than usual, with the Polish flag, used at official diplomatic missions, sporting the Polish eagle with a bejeweled crown. How regal!

Kent State University Air Force ROTC Cadets

The contingent of cadets from Kent State University included a total of nine ROTC students, each one more respectful, courteous and polite than the other. Besides serving as Color Guard, the cadets were escorts for the Debutantes and Cavalier. They also helped each person in the Debutante party descend the steps from the stage to the dance floor. Willing to be of help wherever needed, two cadets operated the spotlights, creating a magical effect wherever they were shining. The Cadets thoroughly enjoyed themselves, having been caught up in the magic, even participating in the Grand *Polonez* at evening's end.

The Rev. Fr. Eric Orzech, Chaplain of PRCUA Society # 2120, gave the invocation, welcoming all to the *Bal Młodzieżowy*. Then D'Ella Cika Heschmeyer, former Debutante and student at Baldwin-Wallace University in Berea, Ohio, sang a very moving rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, to the applause of the appreciative crowd. Dr. Joanne Uniatowski, Assistant Professor of Voice at Baldwin-Wallace University, and D'Ella's voice instructor, sang the *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego*, the official name of the national anthem of Poland, with a strong, stirring voice.

Presentation of Debutantes and Cavalier

The highlight of the evening came next, the presentation of the Debutantes and Cavalier. As each name was called by Dr. Mitchell Bienia in the semi-darkened ballroom, the Debutante or Cavalier stepped from behind the parted stage curtain, and stood between father and mother, as a spotlight illuminated the trio. Each Debutante curtsied first to the mother, and then to the father, who kissed the hand of his daughter. Family magic happened at this moment.

As each young person was presented, a *polonez* for piano, composed by Frederik Chopin, was played. Among them were Polonaise, op. 40, no. 1, in A major (commonly referred to as "Military,") *Fantasia Impromptu* in C sharp minor, Op 66 (also known as "I'm Forever Chasing

Rainbows,”) and Polonaise in A-flat major, Op. 53 (popularized with the title “*Till the End of Time*”). In addition, one of Chopin’s etudes, in E Major, opus 10, number 3, popularly known as “*No Other Love,*” was also played. The magic continued as guests hummed along, unaware that they were becoming fully converted to the “Old Warsaw” theme.

PRCUA Representation

Anastazja Golab and Michal Golab, a sister-brother pair who recently lost their father, were presented by their mother, Agata Golab. Both Golab young adults are members of PRCUA Society # 2159. After their biographies were read, Mrs. Golab took each of her “children” by the hand and led them throughout the ballroom, as Anastazja curtsied, and Michal bowed, to the thunderous applause of the adoring crowd. Mrs. Golab wrote a note to be printed in the program booklet, “Your father is in heaven looking down on you both, and he would be proud to see you keeping our Polish culture alive.”

Each of the other Debutantes presented, Mihalina Elżbieta Dziadyniak, Mary Amelia Cika Heschmeyer and Catherine Sophia Marie Katrenich, signaled their readiness to accept the responsibilities of adulthood in this ever-changing world. How grand it was to see clean-cut youth, in their formal finery, strutting like peacocks, proud to be Polish!

Blessing Upon Debs and Cavalier

Following the presentation ceremony itself, Fr. Orzech then bestowed the blessing of God Almighty on the assembled Debutantes and Cavalier. His remarks outlined the history of the ball season in Europe, and the tradition of the Debutante Ball in particular. Next, a toast was given to honor the Debutantes and Cavalier by Monica Sochecki, President of the Polonia Foundation of Ohio, Inc., after which a rousing version of “*Sto Lat*” was sung by the entire assemblage.

This part of the program concluded with another Polish touch, the Fathers’/Mothers’ Waltz, to the music *Walc Barbary* composed by Waldemar Kazanecki, from *Noce i Dnie*, a Polish film written and directed by Jerzy Antczak, and nominated for an Oscar in 1977 for Best Foreign Film. The audience swooned as the snow-white skirts of the Debutantes’ gowns swirled and the tails of the Cavalier glided around the ballroom. By this time, everyone was truly smitten with Polish pride!

Rev. Fr. Gerald Keller, Pastor Emeritus, gave the grace before the meal, in both the Polish as well as English languages. Then it was “*Smacznego!*” followed by “*Na zdrowie,*” offered by Fr. Keller.

Dinner is an Epicurean Delight

The dinner began with a clear red *barszcz* with a dollop of sour cream gracing each cup, a true Polish specialty. The two entrées were *beef rolada*, also a Polish epicurean delight, with mushrooms, bread stuffing, and a pickle wrapped inside tender slices of beef, paired with

chicken cordon bleu, with ham and cheese wrapped inside thin slices of chicken breast. The vegetable was a winter favorite, roasted brussel sprouts.

Desserts of Distinction

The dessert table was laden with Polish specialty goodies prepared particularly for this event by Chef Rick Sklodowski at Tremont City Side Ballroom. Among the delicious pastries was the favorite dessert of St. Pope John Paul II – *kremówka*, or Napoleons, rich and light made with custard and whipped cream. Another favorite of the crowd was *naleśniki*, the Polish version of crepes, with either cherry or a cheese filing, dusted with powdered sugar. Rich chocolate brownies rounded out the flavor panoply.

Robaczewski's Remarks

Following dinner, Part II of the program began. President James Robaczewski gave remarks which included encouraging words for the youth to continue their Polish traditions in leadership positions. President Robaczewski also encouraged youth to support Polish organizations such as the PRCUA, which is the oldest Polish fraternal benefit society in the USA.

Director Mitchell Bienia then announced the winner of the essay contest, Michal Golab, for his entry on the person who most personified Polish culture to him, which was his father, the late Stanislaw Golab. What a devoted son!

President Robaczewski then presented two monetary awards of \$250 each, to Debutantes whose names were drawn at random. As a good-will gesture, all Debutantes were included in the drawing, not just PRCUA members. Mihalina Dziadyniak and Catherine Katrenich, both members of PNA Lodge # 3274, won these awards.

PNA Matches PRCUA Awards

Next PNA Director Joseph Magielski spoke to the audience, echoing Robaczewski's words for youth to stay involved in Polish organizations and activities. The PNA also gave two monetary awards of \$250 each, to randomly drawn names of Debutantes, regardless if they were members of PNA or not, continuing the good-will gesture. These awards were won by Millie Heschmeyer, of PNA Lodge # 3274, and Anastazja Golab, member of PRCUA Society # 2159.

The Stately Royal *Polonez*

Approaching the end of the program, the Debutantes and Cavalier performed the stately royal court dance of Poland, called the *Polonez*, which was choreographed by Agnieszka Kotlarsic to the melody of the Polonaise, from the movie theme of the film "Pan Tadeusz: The Last Foray in Lithuania," conducted by Wojciech Rajska, composed by Wojciech Kilar.

The Debutantes looked stunning in their white ball gowns as they danced with fathers, while the Cavalier danced with his mother. It was early decided that the young people would dance with parents, rather than with escorts, in an effort to strengthen the bond between parent and child. And indeed, it was hard work, but an effort of love. Some parents acknowledged that they never danced with their daughter before this event. Other parents stated that they really did not like to dance, but would do it for their child. Still another father quipped, "I never wore a tuxedo in my life, let alone tails." The *Polonez* by the Debutantes and Cavalier proved to be one of the highlights of the evening, but it was not ended yet.

Fr. Orzech said a beautiful prayer of benediction, bringing to a close the formal part of the evening's program, after which Olivia Gutowska again played the *hejnal*, signaling the start of the evening's dancing.

The Grand *Polonez*

True to Polish tradition, Tom and Cathy Katrenich led the entire party in the Grand *Polonez*, in which all guests were invited to participate. And indeed, most of the guests lined up, waiting for the grand march to begin. With a long trail of more than 40 couples behind them, Cathy and Tom wound their way among the tables, around the dance floor, formed a tunnel for others to pass under, leading the group in many dance patterns.

The music took on a mesmerizing influence as the dancers felt the beat, 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3, the regal "pomp and circumstance" of the stately *Polonez Warszawski*. Everyone was trying to get the "dip" at just the right place, the first beat of each measure. **ONE**-two-three! **ONE**-two-three! **ONE**-two-three!

Ballroom Was Magically Transformed

The atmosphere of the ballroom was magically transformed as the music grew louder and louder. By this time the only guests not in the "conga line" were those with knee pain or back problems, so enchanting was the music. President Robaczewski's dance partner was Michelle Bienia, Director Bienia's daughter.

Even the non-Polish Cadets were awestruck by the rhythm and grandeur of the *Polonez*: 1-2-3, 1-2-3, as they joined the line of couples. The music reached a fever pitch, similar to that of a rock concert. And when it ended, everyone sighed in relief - as one never wants to "sit out" a good *Polonez*! Wow! The atmosphere was complete euphoria!

Polish Pride Shines

Polish pride was simply effervescent throughout the evening! Co-chair Bienia commented, "It looks to me like every Pole is born with the *Polonez* flowing through their veins. It takes an event like this one to "activate" that Polishness, and they are hooked for life - as true Polish-Americans!" What a wonderful conclusion to a magical evening of Polish traditions! Could Polish pride be any stronger?

“For those who regret not having participated in this year’s Debutante and Cavalier Ball, keep an eye open to see if there will be another one in a year or two,” commented Mitch Bienia, a weary Co-chair.

By Mitchell Bienia, District # 5
PRCUA National Director