Poland forever from

unique, and enduring. They also discussed things of interest in today’s world—quite different from their times—through the perspective of their lives and times, balanced with a recognition of a fast-changing world.

“How often we’ve wished we could bring back one or more of history’s great minds to help us today,” said Ettinger, “and to share their experience and wisdom with us. Well, this is one way to do it, by summoning our instincts and imagination instead of history as usual. And who is to say that the lessons here aren’t useful, perhaps even real.”

Copernicus (Wideryński) admitted to his fears of publishing his revolutionary theories of astronomy until the very last days of his life. “I had an intuitive sense of cosmic order... and a solid mathematical foundation. But who was I to question Plato, Ptolemy and Aristotle? I was but a simple eccentric—heliocentric, if you will—Pole from a small town. It was gratifying to learn that Galileo, Kepler, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein later confirmed my ideas.”

Paderewski (Kocyan) graciously thanked Helena Modjeska for helping him as a struggling young pianist in the early 1880s. “She was, and is, a great lady, and I am grateful. To be Polish! What a blessing, and what a challenge... then and now. Some say that destiny shapes our lives. I do not believe it. For me it was the Polish traditions of hard work, discipline and goodness. Who but a Pole could imagine being a popular concert pianist and Premier of Poland! In one lifetime!”

Helena Modjeska (Warecka) was never more glamorous or ebullient as she described her ideas of the inherent Polish spirit and energy that fueled her career and theatrical successes all over the world. “It is because we Poles truly understand that all humanity is very much the same... it is what we do and how we live and love that makes us different. I think it is an intricate blending of one’s ancestry, environment, family and friends, education and work, and being able to recognize opportunity. We live in an ever-changing world of both beauty and chaos. That is God’s test for us. To be smart, and good, that is the answer.”

Dr. Curie (Dudzick) emphasized the strong Polish work ethic and professional tenacity for her scientific successes, and two Nobel Prizes. “I am but an investigative scientist,” she said, “with the heart of a dreamer and the soul of an idealist. And totally Polish! Like Nicolas, I saw the world through a lens, the microscope—he through a telescope—so we both were very much of terra firma, and the nature of humanity.”

John Paul II, as played by Zbyslaw Petryka, reminded us of his long and varied career before coming to the Vatican as the 264th Pope. “I was an athlete, a salesman, even a laborer, and served in the military. I wanted to be wholly a man. I later became a holy man,” he quipped. “There is still much work to be done by all of us...in human rights, freedom and liberty, compassion and mercy, faith, courage, and love. Enough to keep us very busy. And you don’t have to be Polish. But it helps. You don’t even need to be Catholic. But I can help you with that. See me after dinner.”

Richard Wideryński, former president of the PAC, said that “the scripted scenario was well written but the variety of open-ended questions enabled us to creatively respond and engage on important ideas in both an historical and contemporary context. It was stimulating to be in an interactive discussion with such skilled participants who were not only well versed in their characters but quite intelligent in their responses and insights. Thinking on both a historical and contemporary level was exciting. I think Paderewski’s performance, both the spoken word as well as his impromptu piano performance added a most appropriate finale to the evening.”

Wojciech Kocyan felt “a strong connection with Paderewski in my life, as my piano teacher studied with Henryk Sztonpka, who was one of the few Polish students of Paderewski. In a way, I feel like Paderewski’s ‘artistic grandson.’ And he truly looked the part. Mr. Kocyan is the Artistic Director of the new Paderewski Music Society of Los Angeles, which promotes his legacy.

Theresa Dudzick said that she was honored to be able to step into the shoes of Dr. Curie for a few hours, “it was a humbling and wonderful experience, one that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Andrew Ettinger is to be commended for creating an informative and entertaining program. It is not easy to make history come alive and be relevant in today’s world. Yet, when we really delve into it, the basic elements that tie all of us together as humans transcend time and space. And there is so much to be learned from our often wiser predecessors.”

Zbyslaw Petryka said that portraying the Pope was both thrilling and intimidating at the same time. “I tried to present him the way I understood him, to show his love of people and peace of spirit, attained by total faith in God and absolute trust in Him. I hope the audience believed me.”

Aristotle? I was but a simple eccentric, if you will, Pole from a small town. It was gratifying to learn that Galileo, Kepler, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein later confirmed my ideas. 

The guests gathered in the reception room and heard the Kasztalan (Ed Sentowski) read the Preamble to the Polish Constitution.