

Modjeska's Voice Brings Polish Culture, History to Reiche

WILL KING

Like any other art form, a play needs to be well-executed, and it also needs to make the audience thirsty for more of something. Friends let me know that *Modjeska's Voice* was being staged at the Reiche Community Center on Saturday night, August 28th, and I am happy to say that it met both tests; it was executed very well in that little venue, and it absolutely made me thirsty for more - more of this lovely 19th Century actress, more of Poland, and more of her visit to Portland, Maine.

Ann Maggs was perfect as Helena Modjeska (her name was shortened from *Modrzejewska* to make it more accessible to an English-speaking public). Modjeska became a famous Shakespearean actor in the late 1800s and performed with Edwin Booth, the great American Shakespearean actor and brother of the infamous presidential assassin, as well as Maurice Barrymore, patriarch of the Barrymore acting family. In 1906, Helena Modjeska even appeared as Lady Macbeth in Portland.

But *Modjeska's Voice* was much more than a biographical snapshot of a woman who once visited Portland, it was a story of the outrage that was visited upon Poland by its

several neighbors - how Russia and Prussia and Austria nibbled at her borders until there was no Poland left. Well, that was true in geography books, but not in reality. This woman, Helena Modjeska, grew up in a Poland that was not supposed to exist, yet she knew she was a Pole. And, happily, the audience included many who knew very well that they, too, were Poles.

And the Jefferson Theater, the elegant 500-seat venue where Helena Modjeska performed in Portland? I do know that it was situated on one of the corners of Free Street and Oak Street, but I don't know which corner. After seeing *Modjeska's Voice*, I now want all the details.

Ann Maggs wrote *Modjeska's Voice* and was ably accompanied by Walter Carroll, who played several roles in the course of the evening. The performance was presented by the Polish Heritage Center of Maine and the West End Neighborhood Association. I have high hopes that more excellent theatrical events will take place at this delightful neighborhood facility.



Photo by Michal Slawiec

Anne Maggs & Walter Carroll in Modjeska's Voice at Reiche Community Center, August 28, 2010