

I have just returned from "Argonauti" at Laterna Magika (been misspelling that all along). It is hard to explain what Laterna Magika is. I can give you a list of what is in it: Theatre, Ballet, Modern Dance, Cinema, Stage Effects, Black Theatre, Music, Lighting and more. By the way, Black Theatre refers not to the race of the performers, but to a uniquely Czech form of theatre which utilizes darkness, black drapery, costumes, lifts and prop handlers to produce effects such as levitation, flight, animation, etc. Laterna Magika combines all of these forms in their own special synthesis. Grand scenes play out with cinematic projection onto multiple screens which are often integrated into the setting. Characters seemingly materialize in front of or behind these screens and leap from celluloid to life. Argonautica was produced by commission of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. You may have seen parts of it if you watched the opening ceremonies. It tells the tale of Jason and the Argonauts, with an entirely new score, choreography, etc. It is simply stunning. If ever back in Prague I will go to see whatever Laterna Magika is staging.

On the way home I grabbed a late night bite from a street vendor on Vaclavski Namesti (Wenzlas Square) and ate it while walking home. This path, from the Narodni Divaldo (National Theatre) to Municipal Hall to my hotel, is a major shopping strip. It is like an arcade of arcades, or a mall of malls. The large buildings lining the sides of Narodni are each Palladium of shops, or else large department stores. I must confess to not having ventured too far into these. Some of them have large central courtyard, and into some I have gone, simply to look at the inner vaults of the blocks. This is much like visiting Mew, Close or Alley shops in London.

I was quite exhausted before the theatre. I got up early and, after the hotel breakfast, was out on the streets before 08:00. My trek, briefly described in my earlier posting, was very long this morning. I set out to go get a ticket for Laterna Magika, which would entail going West to the Vltava and then south to Narodni. I decided that I would rather dodge north a short way to the east-to-west leg of the Vltava and then follow its big bend around Josefov (Jewish Quarter) and Old Town to the theatre. This was a good plan, but then I saw Smermuv Most (bridge) and had to cross. On the north bank there is a steep slope above Nabrezi Edvarda Benese, the corniche, to Ledenske Sady, the largest public greenspace in Prague. The views from the top of this embankment are spectacular.

A path extends west from Ledenske Sady to Prazsky Hrad, Prague Castle. Within the castle walls are St. Vitus's Cathedral and several other architectural gems. Most of the buildings are open to the public, with entrance fees of about \$10 per building. I demurred. I have so little time here that the last thing I want to do is spend it couped up in byzantine buildings with immense crowds of people, which is what these sites draw. There were hundreds, if not more, just at this one place. As it was I spent over an hour within the castle walls, without ever stepping into a building, other than the coffee shop to get a hot chocolate.

Then back down a winding path into the Little Quarter and back across the Vltava. On the eastern end of Manesus Most is the Rudolfinum, a grand hall, the Museum of Decorative Arts and the Old Jewish Cemetery. There was a concert underway in Rudolfinum, so I gave it a pass. Next was the Decorative Arts Museum. I am a big fan of Bohemian pottery, and Art Nouveau in general. There was a mass of young people outside the entrance. I figured they were waiting to go in, but soon realized that they were just hanging out. I have no idea why, but even though there are wide sidewalk on either side of the entrance, these kids just crowded onto the stairs smoking cigarettes, eating baguettes and chatting or texting. The whole thing made no sense to me. Pedestrians were forced to walk into the street to get around this mass.

Whatever. I went in. Turns out the new exhibit opens on Thursday, so I decided to just see it all tomorrow so I only have to pay one admission.

Next was the Jewish Cemetery. Oh my gosh, once I found the entrance I gave up on that. There were easily a thousand people just waiting on line to get in. There was no way I was

going to join that line. On to the theatre and my ticket! Since I was so close to Old Town Square and it was almost noon I ventured there to see the clock again, and then went southwest on Narodni to the theatre.

Here is a sculpture set into the facade of a building on Narodni, it celebrates the success of the Velvet Revolution on 17, November, 1989:



As I have already noted, I got a good seat, and enjoyed finding my way in the hustle and bustle of the noontime crowds. That done, I went in search of a meal. By the time I got to a restaurant it was already 14:30! I had certainly taken my time. Part of this was simply trying to familiarize myself with the area, the layout of streets, etc. I had a good time. I also missed the heaviest snow of the day - a flurry that lasted about a half hour. My meal was very nice, and then back into the street and home. I got to take a brief nap from 17:00 to 18:00 then left to get to the show on time. I got to theatre early enough to have a cognac at a nearby bar first.

Here is a shot of Narodni Divaldo from my earlier treks.Â This view is looking west down Narodni with the Vltava in the middle distance and the Divaldo on the left:



So, I was walking home with my late snack, nearing Municipal Hall, which marks the junction between the big modern shopping street, Old Town Square and Revolucni, the street my hotel is on. An attractive woman in a fur coat asks me for a light, in heavily accented English. I don't have one I tell her. She asks where I am from. "America," I tell her. "Oh, that is nice city," she replies, "Where you going now?" "My hotel." "So soon?" "I got up early." "Don't you want some happy happy?" That's it, I have just been propositioned in not just a new city, but a new country and continent as well. I walk away shaking my head not looking back. The coat was the first clue; it was obviously a gift from a man who neither loved her nor knew her well, the way it matched her hair in a most unflattering way. That and the fact that she spontaneously spoke to me on the street, that's a clue too. That said, I did successfully give directions to a young Frenchman today! Speaking of French, I wanted to share this photo of a sight on the bluffs to the west of town. This is called "The Trifle Tower" by locals. It is a 1/3 scale replica of the Eiffel Tower built for an exposition:



When I got to the hotel there was a throng of female Italian college students, 18 and 19 year olds if I had to guess. There were so many of them all packed into the entrance it was like the mess at the museum earlier in the day. If it weren't for the chaperone stepping in and shooing them over to one side they would not have even let me in. Lots of "Scusi" and "Grazie" involved here.

Good night, more tomorrow.

Ciao ciao!