

What a full evening! I left hotel at 19:00 still not sure what I would do. I thought of Jazz at Club Redotu, but that's at the west end of the Nové Město (New Town), and I didn't want to do that much more walking. There is a program of Gershwin and Bernstein at Municipal Hall, which intrigues, and Black Theatre, which does as well. I left with just my jacket, leaving my coat behind. I figured I would start by seeing if I could get a cheap ticket for the concert, and then try Black Theatre if I couldn't. Those are nearby, so I could travel light.

I struck out at the concert hall. Even though the house was opening as I got there, and was well under half sold, the cheapest ticket they would sell me was 700Kc, about \$42. For an hour of music, basically 20th century classical pop, that's just too steep for me. So I went in search of Black Theatre. Oops! Should have done some more research there, seems Thursday is the one night of the week that Black Theatre goes dark, ironic. Okay, jazz it is. I knew it was far too early for the jazz club, so I decided to just stroll Wenceslas Square. On the way in from the airport, as the driver was giving me tips for my stay, he said "I don't think you need to bother with Wenceslas Square, that's for the younger crowd these days." Well, he was right about that, but it was still a fun walk. The city is overrun with high school and college students right now. Many countries are on spring interval, which contributes to the mayhem. Interestingly, the gaggle of Italian high school girls who moved into my hotel last night have been complimented with an equal sized gaggle of German boys today. I expect international relations to heat up shortly.

Along the square the crowds were already thick before 20:00. There are several Casino along the square, along with nightclubs and bars. The crowds are courted by thickets of touts.

These people, toting signs, wearing vests or holding handfuls of flyers, are in front of just about every business. Even McDonalds has theirs. "Casino, Bingo, Craps..." "Good food, you try?" "Beautiful girls, no cost to look..." "Karaoke, cards..." London and New York have their touts, too. In New York it's the comedy and strip clubs that have the worst reputation. In London there are touts for just about anything, everywhere in the West End are ticket touts, and the signs telling you how many metres to the nearest McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Falafel or whatever are ubiquitous. They have nothing on Prague.

The touts, however, have met their match in the louts. I have long thought that American college aged, men in particular, were the worst louts around. I was wrong, and for that I apologize. Seems that once again globalisation has worked its magic, and louts the world over are pretty much the same. There are swarms of German, Italian, French and Spanish, Russian, Polish, and on and on, strutting and gamboling up and down the square shouting and carousing and spitting and generally making the worst possible case for the ascendancy of their particular homeland. Where is Genghis Khan when you need him?

Even so, it is an interesting spectacle to observe; I shrug off the touts and avoid the louts. As I work my way back from the bottom to the top of the square I decide to cross the shopping strip and see what's on the other side. Within two blocks I am twice approached by drug touts. These are a subtle breed. Rather than the obvious, in your face style of the normal tout, these use more of an en passant move. You're walking along, and the tout sidles up along side saying "Fummá, marijuana..." and watching closely for a reaction. Then they move on, as if they have never said a thing. Fine, the last thing I need is to be a poster child for the DEA.

After a lot of wandering and stalling it is finally time to go to the jazz club. I have been in just my jacket this whole time, but I am not really that cold. There are so many open doors (a beckoning tactic here) flooding the street with warmth, and it isn't that cold, so I am surprisingly comfortable. I have been outside for almost two hours by the time I enter the jazz club, and other than my face, I don't really feel it.

The club is small and intimate, which is a good thing as I am the only one there, besides the musicians and the staff, when I get there at 21:00. There are artifacts all around of a visit paid here by Bill Clinton, Madelaine Albright with Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus in 1994. I sit

in Vaclav Klaus's seat. A smallish crowd does wander in by the time the first set starts at 21:40, and the quartet plays a set of covers of the likes of Freddy Hubbard and Miles Davis. The latter, from his Spanish phase, gets them rocking, and the audience is getting into it. They play one more and take a break. The second set, and the rest of the show, are originals, and pretty good. I hear influences from Terji Rypdal and Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock and others from the late 70's, early 80's. A very well played set of music.

I leave the club shortly before closing at 23:45 and start to walk back. The crowds are now reduced to just the drunkest tourists and the most appalled locals. I think I straddle both camps. I stop at one of the street vendors to get a "Classic Prague Wurst". As I approach the stand a pair of middle aged women ask, "Sprachen sie Deutsch?" "Nein," I reply. The paradox of that catches them. "Was? Sie sprachen Deutsch!" "No, Anglais." "Oh, English. Are you from England or America?" Those of you who read last night's post can guess where this is headed. "I'm from both," I say, and move towards the food stand and away from them. "You want to come to bar? Nice company bar, you know?" they say. "Company" in this context does not mean business... Wait, let me rephrase that. By "Company" they don't mean firm... Well, you get my drift. They are trying to get me to go to a Cabaret or some other venue where some nice lady (I'm sure) will keep me company for the night, or however long it takes to drain my wallet. No thanks. I pretend not to hear them anymore, get my sausage (stop snickering) and walk away. Behind me I still hear "You speak English..."

Another night of culture in Prague, one of the oldest cities in the world.
Ciao ciao!