

POLISH THEATRE AT FIU SOUTH CAMPUS...

BY PROFESSOR PHILLIP CHURCH

Ever-tenacious in their desire to share Poland's cultural history with young artists, Maria Nowotarska and Agata Pilitowska, two pioneers of the Polish-Canadian Theatre of Toronto, drove from their North Miami Beach hotel on November 10, 2016 to the Mitch Maidique Campus of Florida International University in order to share their life's work in Polish theatre. There they recalled their training at the Krakow Conservatory, their time with celebrated filmmaker Roman Polanski and the lasting influence of Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Grotowski whose groundbreaking techniques helped shape theatre practices for actors and directors all over the world.

In the very same FIU theatre space where Maria and Agata had performed their production of "Radiation," a play about Marie Curie in 2013, the two actresses now faced a diverse number of questions from a curious and enraptured group of young performers. A slide show demonstrated the work the Polish-Canadian Theatre of

Toronto has produced over the years; the company in fact, is enjoying its 25th anniversary. As a final gesture, Agata and Maria performed a scene from the play that they were about to present that evening at the Biscayne Bay Campus, "Bonsoir Monsieur Chopin."

The FIU student actors were mesmerized as they watched and listened to two consummate actresses, mother and daughter, perform in their native Polish tongue. No translation was necessary, no costumes, no lighting no sound effects, only the enormous wealth of passion and color of voices that have experienced life and were now pouring that experience into an isolated dramatic situation. Truly a lesson in performance that no workshop could substitute. A realization perhaps that language is never a barrier to the felt-feeling of a truthful actor. Agata and Maria's inner truth radiated to all parts of the theatre and the novice actors that filled the Studio Theatre at FIU took away an indelible lesson.



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Phillip Church received his MFA from the University of California, Irvine and did his undergraduate work at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. He is a member of Actors Equity, and specializes in Classical Performance. Phillip has been teaching in the Department of Theatre for thirty-five years.

Professor Church has directed many plays in a wide variety of genres, and is the recipient of three Distinguished Director Awards from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for his productions of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Arabian Nights*, and *Julius Caesar*. He has also worked with many FIU and South Florida organizations on a variety of projects in various capacities. Just a sampling of these activities: He is the founding Artistic Director of What if Works Inc., a community-engaged alumni company that champions the arts to bring about social change (Most recently, a collaborative school tour of *Julius Caesar* in collaboration with award-winning Gablestage and "Flying Solo through Libraries", a series of solo bio-dramas presented in Miami-Dade Public libraries); he created the *Shakespeare-in-Stratford & London Study Abroad* course in which students study and attend the work of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-Upon-Avon and the Globe Theatre in London; he is the writer/director of "Conditions of Secrecy," a film focused on the issue of AIDS in college featuring FIU alum Danny Pino (*The Shield*, *Cold Case* and *Law & Order SVU*) and sponsored by Blockbuster Video, Texaco, and Republic National Bank (His other film work, supported by the Audrey Love Foundation, "Loners Not Losers," explores the issue of on-campus separation and alienation in college students).

Currently, Professor Church is working with Florida Grand Opera on "The Passenger," for which he translated Zofia Posmysz's radio play version of the novel "Passenger in Cabin 45;" and he is in the midst of planning a premiere of Eric Bentley's "Wedekind Cabaret", a project that will be performed in New York on September 14th, marking Bentley's 100th birthday.



Ms. Maria Nowotarska and Ms. Agata Pilitowska with FIU Students