
“But Where is the Poetry?”



A short true story by Richard Parker, Delray Beach, FL



The red ribbon with the Polish National Eagle emblem fit loosely around my neck as we stood in line for the Polonaise – a promenade dance down the floor in side-by-side fashion to the Chopin music. The men were stately in their tails, white ties and gloves; the ladies resplendent in their best ball gowns, and the small orchestra filled the hall of the Miami Intercontinental Hotel with fulsome strains of Chopin music.

The Polonaise is a walking dance - the dance performed by the military in full attire with the ladies before going off to war, and the event crowned the Chopin Piano Competition earlier in the day. John Ford and Margarete Hanlon were paired in front of me, and the scene seemed from a movie set. The dance is danced at $\frac{3}{4}$ time, characterized by fluid and graceful motions, straight upright positions of partners and bows of the dancers toward the public and each other. Originally, musicians in the upper galleries of the great reception halls played the music, while the assembly, dressed in great splendour, danced it below in processional figures.



Rubenstein in the Polonaise

How remarkable, I thought, that this spectacle of dress, dance and music has such poetry, with dance being the poetic verse, and the couples being the expression. Dance is always much more than the simple choreographed movement, and dance and music together with the inspiration of the moment has a poetic quality.

However, this poetic quality of dance always worked against me for competitive events, and standing there, I recalled a time at Peter and Cassandra’s Miami Grand Nationals event with the Viennese Waltz.



Denise in the Line

This was another pretty picture where my Pro Partner, Denise Lazo, was to join me with the Viennese Waltz in a competition heat. So I took her out on the dance floor just across from the music station to join positions as the music started, dressed in my usual black tails.

Now in the typical practise lesson, it is all about me listening to her; but at a performance, it is about my being the man and taking the lead. While this role reversal is fine with me, I remain at heart subject to all the normal influences of a testosterone – boosted alpha male.

So she started the waltz movement in her spectacular white gown, all the while flashing that smile capable of peeling off wallpaper, and I am supposed to concentrate. “Look at me, Richard” she says (yes, and I am to concentrate on my posture, the choreography, the shoulder line, the forward weight – and look at my partner).

Yeah, right.

Well, it does not work easy for me, and in the midst of a set of skipping chasses, I took off to the right, ahead of Denise, into a whole new set of choreography, before I came back to the reality. Not being a good

competitor, I get lost in the moment. Perhaps I enjoy the movement and the music too much, and forget the competition.

But now the procession started and my thoughts returned to our Polonaise. The stately confection of the couples with the men in their sashes and medals, and the ladies with their gloves and finery filled the room with the movement to the gentle Chopin strains. This was an experience to remember, and beckoned to the creative soul with its fine textures of elegance, exquisite patterns of promenades and synchronised waves of dancers. Thus it continued for twenty enjoyable minutes.

Later that night during the social sessions, I overheard a couple on the floor bickering over the correct execution of a particular International Style grouping.

Perhaps they would get it right. In the meantime, I thought,

“Where is the poetry?”