Miami’s charming and venerable Surf Club on Collins Avenue positively glowed on Saturday night, February 2, 2013, when the American Institute of Polish Culture hosted its 41st International Polonaise Ball for prominent dignitaries, business leaders and educators, world-renowned diplomats, celebrities and the Institute’s friends and members. This annual grand gala, the inspiration of Institute founder and president, Lady Blanka Rosenstiel, pays tribute to Poland’s and Polish-Americans’ friendship and relations with a different culture or country each year. The Ball celebrates accomplishments in the fields of art, science and education. From its inception in 1972, the Ball quickly became a major event in South Florida’s society circles and throughout the world as one of the most successful grand galas in the United States.
This year the Institute hosted an enchanting evening honoring Poland’s long friendship and relations with India. Both countries share a mutual admiration for the trials, tribulations and triumphs of their centuries-old cultures and a shared understanding of how to pursue and resolve a country’s struggle for total independence through non-violent beliefs and the actions of its leaders and people.

The Surf Club’s Grand Ballroom was jeweled and bedecked in rich, vibrant colors, lush floral centerpieces and whimsical touches - a carved turbaned servant, a garlanded trumpeting elephant, a feathered eagle (the official emblem of Poland) - creating a stunning blend of the cultures of Poland and India. The exquisite cuisine with light splashes of exotic spices, the exuberant entertainment by Polish and Indian dance troupes, and the visual smorgasbord of gorgeous and sparkling gowns, saris, black tie and diplomatic regalia swirled on the dance floor to the music of the Frank Hubbell Orchestra, all combined to ensure that this was going to be a night to remember.

Among the over 300 guests were many esteemed dignitaries from all corners of the world – Argentina, Brazil, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Sweden, and, of course, Poland and India. President Lech Walesa, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and the charismatic leader of the Solidarity movement which ended communist rule in Poland, eloquently expressed his life long admiration of India’s own non-violent freedom fighter, Mahatma Gandhi, and how he continues to be inspired by the profound messages and lessons Gandhi gave to the world.

Among other notable guests were His Excellency Ryszard Schnepf, the newly appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Washington, DC, Consul General of India in Atlanta, Mr. Ajit Kumar, and former India Ambassador to the US, Mr. Jagannath Doddamani. Dr. Wojciech Maksymowicz, former Minister of Health & Welfare of Poland, H.R.H. King Kigeli V of Rwanda, H.I.H Ermias Sahle Selassie Hailu Sellassie of Ethiopia and his wife, Lady Saba, members of the Order of the Pearl from Sulu, and Loretta Swit (Hot Lips Hooiplan in TV’s M.A.S.H.) were also in attendance.

Every year prestigious awards are conferred upon recipients whose accomplishments have gone beyond their chosen fields and have raised awareness of the contributions Poland and Polish Americans in the US and for those whom the Ball is celebrating - in this case India. Ms. Lisa Ray, the internationally acclaimed actress, artist and philanthropist was awarded the Institute’s highest honor, the Gold Medal, for championing human rights, advocating stem cell research and promoting her Polish-Indian heritage. The Lech Walesa Media Award was presented by President Walesa to
Dr. Thaddeus Radzilowski, renowned historian, writer and Co-Founder, President of the Piast Institute for his enormous contributions in promoting Polish history and culture through educational programs and media. President Walesa was awarded The Grand Cordon of the Royal & Hashemite Order of the Pearl of Sulu for his ongoing endeavors towards world peace by Chancellor Andres Lindholm who presented in abstentia for Sultan Muedzul-Lail Tan Kiram, Royal House of Sulu. Dr. Cezary Kakol, a Chicago internist born in Poland, was recognized for his ongoing medical support and charitable contributions to Polish-American communities throughout Illinois.

Ambassador Schnepf presented Lady Blanka Rosenstiel with the lifetime achievement medal, “Benito Merito,” from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radoslaw Skorki.

Many residents of Coral Gables have been long time friends and members of the Institute and were guests at the Ball, among them Honorable Mayor Jim and Carmen Cason, Marquis Alexander Montague and Marquisia Maria Alonso, and Mr. and Mrs. Amedeo and Miriam Guazzini. Some of them were honored at the Ball. Mr. and Mrs. Paul and Teresa Lowenthal received the prestigious “Amicus Poloniae” from Ambassador Schnepf for their outstanding efforts promoting the development and cooperation between Poland and the US. The Lowenthals have made generous contributions, hosted Polish students in South Florida and are working with the John Paul II Center for Documentation and Research in Rome. Count Rodney Hildebrandt and Count Matthew Meehan were recognized for their tireless work with the orphans and homeless children in India through their organization, Sunil’s Home Orphanage. To date over 16,000 children in great need have been fed, clothed, educated and given a safe secure environment by Sunil’s Home.

The artistic program featured dance troupes performing Polish and Indian classic routines with contemporary twists. Both dance companies were adored as befitting their country’s traditional costumes - velvet and fur for the Polish dancers, and silk and spangles for the Indian group - and gave rousing performances to the delight of all guests.

Hurricane SwaggeRaas, University of Miami’s premier Garba-Raas Team, have developed a signature swagger in their dance interpretation, and their skillful steps, energetic moves, and obvious passion and joy for the dance wowed the audience and transported all to the ancient courts of the fabulous Indian palaces.

The Polish American Folk Dance Company performed a fluid, elegant Mazur that evoked the centuries-old tradition of performing before the royal houses of Europe. The Mazur is an exhibition folk dance that is improvisatory in character, danced by couples who rotate around the dance hall and present a variety of graceful gestures to each other and the audience.

The 41st International Polonaise Ball celebrating Polish-Indian relations and friendship was a resounding success, and now we eagerly look forward to next year’s gala.
On Sunday, February 3rd, the Surf Club was once again the setting for a sumptuous buffet brunch. Archbishop Thomas Wenski was present and chatted with old and new friends, while the guests took photos with President Walesa, Lady Blanka, Ms. Swit and the year’s awardees.

The abundant brunch offerings included made to order omelets and fruit crepes, never-ending bakery goodies and platters of fresh fruits and crisp vegetables. It was a lovely way to wind down from the grandeur of the weekend and to make plans with friends for next year’s gala. The 42nd International Ball will be a tribute to Argentina and Poland and will be held on Saturday, February 1, 2014 at Eden Roc Hotel in Miami Beach.