

Visitors to the Municipal Theatre in the *Olmützer Sprachinsel* at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

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The Königlich-städtisches Theater (Royal Municipal Theatre) in Olomouc (in German Olmütz), whose history began in 1770, occupied the position of the most important cultural institution in the city with its predominantly German inhabitants until the end of its existence in 1920. There was only one period in the theatre's history when its significance went beyond the borders of the Moravian region, both qualitatively and geographically. Friedrich Blum was responsible for this during his directorship from 1847 to 1859. Blum headed the Olomouc theatre during the turbulent revolutionary period of 1848, when the imperial court was expelled from Vienna to Olomouc. At that time, as well as in the following years when the imperial court visited Olomouc several times, Blum made the theatre a kind of court institution, which attracted the attention of important artists and was also popular with audiences from distant regions.¹ This chapter of the Olomouc theatre, however, was an exception to the otherwise prevailing type of provincial theatre of the nineteenth century, whose sphere of activity did not extend beyond the city and its immediate surroundings. In my paper, I will attempt to reconstruct the structure of the opera audience at a time when what had hitherto been a German majority began to be threatened by the growth of the Czech population and the emancipation of Czech culture in Olomouc. The aim is to characterise the specifics, tastes, national distribution, and dynamics of changes in the audience.

From the mid-seventeenth century, the city of Olomouc was an important military fortress located near the Austrian-Prussian border and built up over the years, its task being to protect the military interests of the Habsburg monarchy. The importance of the city was also increased by the fact that the Olomouc bishopric was elevated to the seat of an archbishopric in 1777. The city, set in the centre of Moravia, one of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, was for centuries a German-speaking area, the so-called "Olmützer Sprachinsel". Before I get to the core of my contribution, I consider it necessary to introduce the basic characteristics of theatre operations in Olomouc.

Municipal theatre administration

The theatre in Olomouc was a type of municipal theatre in the Austrian monarchy with a half-yearly season from the end of September to Easter. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the role of the city as the owner of the theatre in Olomouc

¹ On Friedrich Blum's directorship of the Olomouc Municipal Theatre, see Jiří Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci 1770–1878 I*, Olomouc 2012, pp. 71–157.



Fig. 1. The building on the Lower Square in Olomouc, where theatre performances took place in the years 1770–1830. Its capacity was 350 seats. Photography by Lenka Křupková

was significantly strengthened, especially since the director was relieved of the obligation to pay rent for the building, and the municipality took over a large part of the operating expenses.² However, the municipality was by no means content with the role of building manager and became instead the theatre's intendant,

² On the relationship between the management of the City of Olomouc and theatre directors, see Lenka Křupková, *The City of Olomouc and Theatre Directors. A Model Example of the Functioning of the Austro-Hungarian City Theatre*, in *International Review of Music Aesthetics and Sociology* 45/2, 2014, pp. 275–291.



Fig. 2. The new theatre on the Upper Square was built in 1828–1830, a project by the Viennese architect Josef Kornhäusel. Photography by Lenka Křupková

co-determining its artistic character. Its executive body was the *Theatercomitée* (theatre committee), whose members were regularly elected, managed communication with the theatre director, and prepared key measures, which were then submitted to a vote of the college of city councillors. The city's management concentrated mainly on opera performances, whereas the public's preferences since the invasion of operetta had been directed mainly towards more entertaining forms of musical theatre. Opera, however, determined the artistic level of the Olomouc theatre. As can be seen from the contemporary press and documents on the meetings of the city councillors, the evaluation of the theatre, the activities of its directors, and the performance of the ensemble were primarily derived from the quality of the opera repertoire and opera performances. The municipality provided strict feedback to the theatre and its management, supervising the form of the repertoire and the level of its performance. The councillors had the right to approve or prohibit the programme, which the theatre directors were obliged to

submit for checking every week. The city council could also recall singers if, in their opinion, they put on poor-quality performances. The theatre director had only limited creative or production freedom. It is clear from the contracts concluded between the theatre director and the municipality that there was hardly a single step that the theatre director could take without the approval of the municipal government.³

Opera ensemble of a provincial theatre built from ‘beginners’

From the 1870s onwards, the theatre, which originally featured a cosmopolitan opera repertoire, gradually transformed into a stage of a distinctly national character. The basis of the opera programme consisted of the most-performed operas of the time, mostly of German provenance.⁴ The Olomouc opera scene (like every other Austrian opera scene) was embedded in a network of provincial theatres, characterised by a constant changing of membership. Many other German city theatres in Central Europe faced similar difficulties. The theatres had similar operating conditions, repertoires, and travelling company members. Theatres also put on productions with a similar visual appearance, for which they had the sets made in the Viennese studio of theatrical decorative painting firm Brioschi, Burghart and Kautsky.

A typical situation always occurred after the end of the season when theatre directors went to Vienna or other larger centres to select fresh singing talent. The successful guest appearances of the artists invited during the season were also decisive for their eventual entry into a contract relationship. For the smaller city theatres, it was advantageous to attract especially talented beginners, whose wage demands were not high. Successful theatre business was largely tied to the ability of directors to recognise yet undeveloped skills in inexperienced singers. The Olomouc German municipal stage also became, in some of its periods, a breeding ground for future stars whose brilliant careers were launched there.

Nationality conflict

For a long time, Olomouc was a German-speaking national island surrounded by Czech towns and villages. In 1876, the demolition of the fortress walls began, and the city, which was still dominated by a German population with numerical and economic predominance, was opened to new construction. The Germans feared the influx of Czechs as the number of Czechs in the adjacent suburbs and villages

³ The conditions of the operation of the theatre were clearly set out in agreements between the city of Olomouc and the theatre directors; see Jiří Kopecký/Lenka Křupková, *Provincial Theatre and Its Opera. German Opera Scene in Olomouc (1770–1920)*, Olomouc 2015, pp. 21–48.

⁴ On the repertoire of the Olomouc theatre see Jiří Kopecký/Lenka Křupková, Olomouc’s “Half-Year” Provincial Theatre and Its Repertoire, in *Opera as Institution. Networks and Professions (1730–1917)*, ed. by Cristina Scuderi/Ingeborg Zechner, Wien 2019, pp. 157–179.

had gradually outnumbered the Germans in the city outside the walls. They tried to resist any signs of what they collectively called *Tschechisierung*. A city still living in relative national peace became a restless melting pot of national conflicts.⁵ This state of affairs was also reflected in the situation in the city's theatre. While until then it had been open to Czech productions organised by local amateur actors or travelling Czech theatre troupes, from 1884 onwards they were denied this opportunity. The Czechs soon found an alternative to cultural productions outside the German theatre. They managed to overcome the building restrictions that were still in place and built the National House outside the city walls in the centre of Olomouc, where opera performances and other musical works were staged by the semi-professional singing and music society Žerotín.⁶

Social stratification of the theatre audience

The composition of the subscribers of the Olomouc municipal theatre can be reconstructed today only with difficulty and only on the basis of indirect indications. The reason for this is that the relevant sources, such as the box office books, have not survived as they were destroyed along with other valuable documents from the theatre archives during the flood in Olomouc in October 1930. As in the case of other European theatres of this period, the Olomouc theatre's public was principally constituted of locals.

The social stratification of a theatre audience can be deduced from the way it is seated in the space of the theatre auditorium. The architect Josef Kornhäusel provided the theatre with a horseshoe-shaped auditorium with four rows of boxes and a gallery, accessible from side corridors around the perimeter of the auditorium. The capacity of the auditorium in 1830 was approximately 900 to 1,000 people, with the parterre and gallery containing standing-room places.⁷ In the early 1880s, seats were installed in the auditorium parterre, reducing the capacity of the hall. Similarly to other German or Austro-Hungarian theatres, the audience seated in the parterre and boxes consisted of representatives of the then haute and petite bourgeoisie. These were factory owners, directors, bankers, lawyers, doctors, and clerks. This is also documented by the composition of the theatre committee of the Olomouc City Council, whose members were regular visitors to the theatre.

For example, in 1886 the Committee's chairman was Adolf Thannabaur, the director of the grammar school. Among the business elite were Carl Brandhuber, a textile-factory owner who served as vice-chairman of the Theatre Committee and later became mayor of Olomouc; Raimund Nietzsche, the owner of an engineering works; and Eduard Hamburger, who owned a malthouse and was a tenant of two

⁵ Jaroslav Horejsek, *Měšťanstvo ve druhé polovině 19. století a jeho politická, společenská, sociální a kulturní aktivita*, in *Studie k sociálním dějinám 19. století* 5, 1995, pp. 8–55, here p. 14.

⁶ Jiří Kopecký/Lenka Křupková, *The "Slavic Spirit" and the Opera Scene in Olomouc, 1830–1920*, in *Studia Musicologica* 58/3-4, 2017, pp. 341–361, here pp. 352f.

⁷ Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci I*, p. 46.



Fig. 3. Original state of the auditorium, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií* [Collection of images and photographs], State Archive Olomouc (SOKA), call no. V/103

breweries. Other members of the Theatre Committee were the trader in spices Josef Englisch, shoemaker Franz Hartwich, and optician and house owner Heinrich Sachs.⁸ Lawyers and high officials were also represented in the Theatre Committee: Conrad Bayer, lawyer and first secretary of the chamber of commerce; and Carl Buchberger, Imperial and Royal Court Councillor; and the dentist and house owner Franz Patloch.⁹

A quarter of a century later, the Theatre Committee still had the same composition, presided over by the bookseller and house owner Friedrich Grosse; his deputy was the director of the municipal elementary school, Josef Föhner. The members of the Theatre Committee included two school directors – the director of the Imperial and Royal Grammar School, Adolf Daumann, and the director of the municipal elementary school, Theodor Knaute. The business elite was

⁸ The ownership of residential houses and rental of apartments later became a source of income for Olomouc citizens (Horejšek, *Měšťanstvo ve druhé polovině 19. století*, p. 18.); therefore, the statement of ownership of a house was as important as the information regarding a trade or a profession, if not more so.

⁹ *Statistisches Jahrbuch der königlichen Hauptstadt Olmütz*, Vol. 1: *Einleitungsband als Festschrift zum vierzigjährigen Regierungsjubiläum Sr. Majestät des Kaisers*, ed. by Wilibald Müller, Olomouc 1888, pp. 117–122.

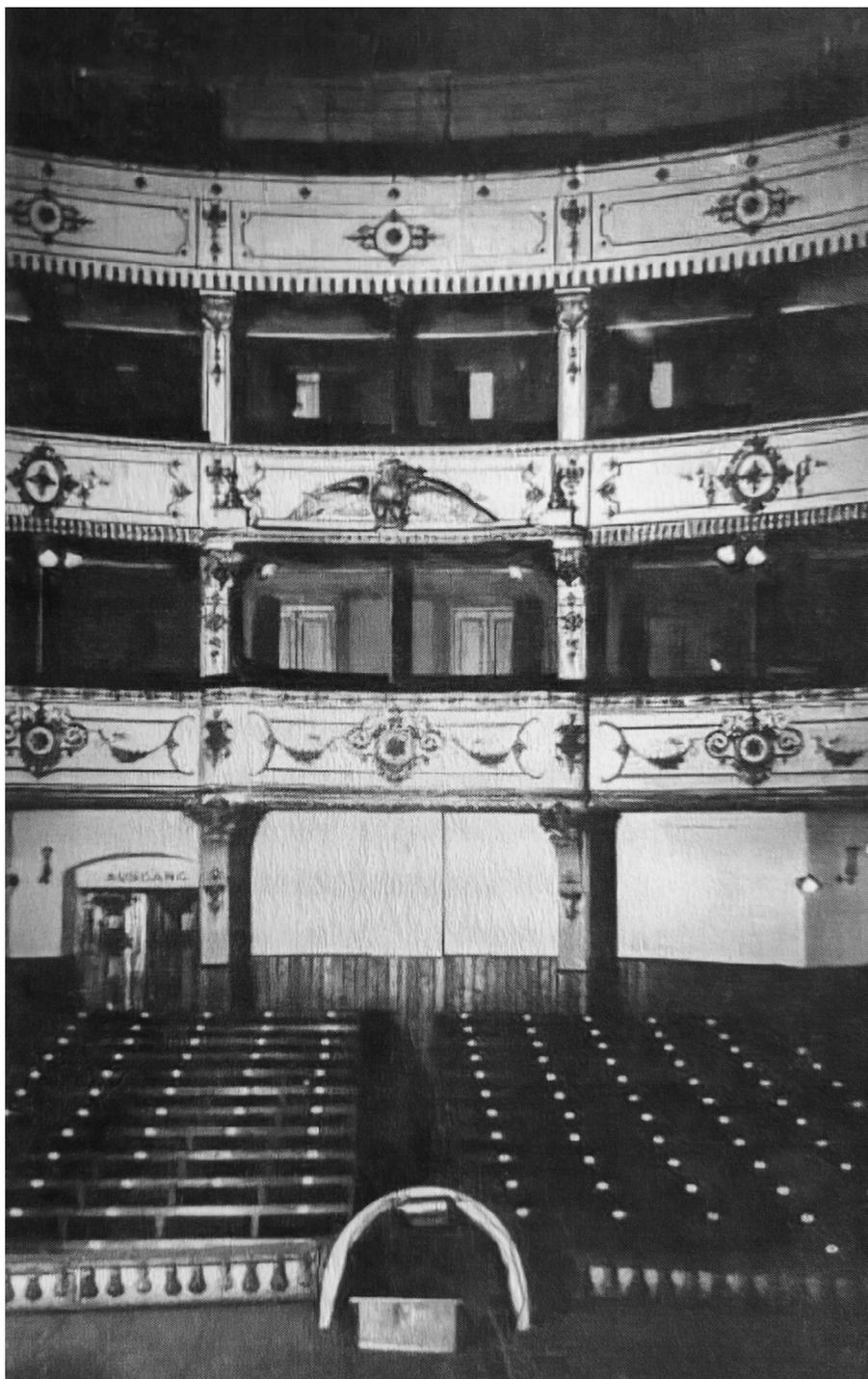


Fig. 4. Auditorium after rebuilding in 1880, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií*, SOKA, call no. XXVIII/141

represented by the industrialist and factory owner Robert Primavesi, while other members of the committee owned smaller-scale businesses – the malt-factory owner Friedrich Fischel, factory and house owner Eduard Mayer, trader in leather Max Deutsch, soap boiler Karl Weiß, and café owner Johann Rupprecht. Among the municipal clerks were the director of the post office, Josef Benda; the secretary of the chamber of commerce, Dr. Hans Krick; and the Imperial and Royal Court Councillor Dr. Oswald Theimer. The Theatre Committee would not be complete without the Imperial and Royal Lawyer Richard Mader and the dentist Dr. Josef Schön.¹⁰

The cheapest seats in the galleries and the standing area in the parterre were presumably occupied by groups of students and lower military ranks. Members of the lower social classes – workers and employees – could hardly afford to visit the theatre for two reasons. First of all, the price of admission was too high; in 1888, a parterre seat cost seventy kreutzers,¹¹ which was out of proportion, for example, to food prices (a loaf of bread was six kreutzers at the time, and half a kilo of beef was twelve kreutzers). Craftsmen, who in the 1880s earned an annual wage of 180–190 florins,¹² could visit the theatre from time to time when they managed to save enough money, but labourers living on a hundred florins¹³ could not afford such a luxury. The early start of the show was the second reason why there were no workers or employees among the theatregoers. In Olomouc, theatre performances started at 7 p.m.,¹⁴ which was incompatible with the working hours of manual workers. We can hardly imagine that after many hours of hard work, workers would find enough energy to go to the theatre, even for the cheapest standing-room tickets (twenty kreutzers)¹⁵ that they could possibly afford. However, many members of the petite bourgeoisie also had a long working day. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the theatre director Leopold Schmid wanted to move the start of the performances to half past seven so as to

¹⁰ *Die Statistischen Jahrbücher der königlichen Hauptstadt Olmütz*, Vol. 5: 1905–1910, ed. by Statistische Commission des Gemeinderathes, Olomouc 1911, pp. 185–187.

¹¹ State Archive Olomouc (SOKA), Olomouc Archives (AMÖ), Registratura hospodářská 1874–1920 [Economic Registry, 1874–1920], Divadelní ředitelé 1878–1896 [Theatre Directors, 1878–1896], carton 765, sign. L 2 – item 359, *Abschrift. Pachtvertrag, welcher mit dem Theaterdirektor Stick abgeschlossen wurde. Welcher zwischen der Gemeinde der kgl. Hauptstadt Olmütz an einem dann dem Herrn Carl Stick an anderen Theile um die Benutzung des Olmützer städtischen Theaters samt Redoutensales in Folge Beschlusses des Stadtverordneten-Kollegiums vom 1. 6. 1888, Z911W nachstehend abgeschlossen wurde.*

¹² Milena Lenderová/Tomáš Jiránek/Marie Macková, *Z dějin české každodennosti. Život v 19. století*, Praha 2011, pp. 32f. In the Czech lands, the conversion rate of 1 florin = 100 kreutzers was valid between 1857 and 1892.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ On days when balls were held in the Reduta Hall, which was located in the municipal theatre building, or other events organised by the municipal council accompanied by the municipal band, of whose members the theatre orchestra consisted, theatrical performances had to begin as early as at 6 p.m. and end at 8 p.m. This rule was usually formulated in § 9, 10 of the theatre contracts concluded between the theatre directors and the city council.

¹⁵ Twenty kreutzers was the cost of a standing place in the gallery in 1888. See *Abschrift. Pachtvertrag, welcher mit dem Theaterdirektor Stick abgeschlossen wurde*, 1 June 1888.

enable business owners and other traders who offered their services until the evening hours to also attend the theatre on working days.¹⁶ Theatregoing was mainly a Saturday and Sunday evening pastime because on those days the lower classes also found time to attend the performances, which mainly comprised entertaining genres, especially operetta and comedy. Hence, opera – a genre that was not too popular with the lower social classes – was usually presented during the week. With the emergence of the social state at the end of the nineteenth century, European theatres started to organise so-called popular performances with a reduced ticket price. Popular performances put on in Olomouc on Sundays and holidays at half past three were introduced by the director Stanislaus Lesser in 1898, and they were also organised by his successors. Aside from these popular shows, the director Leopold Schmid organised performances for schools. Their programme was carefully supervised by the municipal authorities to make sure that the young were offered valuable classical dramas by the greats of German theatre, supporting and encouraging national attitudes.¹⁷ Popular performances were fully in the hands of the theatre directors, who were aware that operetta would, above all, resonate with the mainstream audience.

Theatre attendance problems and solutions

The Olomouc theatre had periods of good and bad attendance. The worst situation in this regard was in the 1880s, when the general economic and agrarian crisis was considerably weakening the population economically. In hindsight, the poor attendance of the 1880s was seen as a consequence of the great fire at the Ringtheater in Vienna in December 1881, with more than 380 fatalities; afterwards, there was a great fear among the German population of Olomouc of any visit to the theatre. However, these attendance crises returned to the Olomouc theatre periodically. The theatre directors were not interested in investing in the operation of the theatre because they could not get a return on it, and consequently the level of quality fell further and further. The situation gradually improved towards the end of the 1880s, when the city council decided to contribute to the theatre's operation with higher subventions. The theatre directors were able to invest not only in singers and more expensive productions but also in buying the rights to perform operas and operettas that were particularly popular in Vienna at the time. The opera scene in Olomouc took a turn for the better, especially under the leadership of Carl Berghof (1890–1896). He won over the audience in particular with the performance of Mascagni's one-act *Cavalleria rusticana*¹⁸ (*Rustic Chivalry*) just a few months after its premiere at the Vienna Hofoper. For the production of *Cavalleria rusticana*, Berghof had new stage sets made in Vienna in the studio of

¹⁶ [Anon.], Theaterfragen, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 261, 16 November 1910, pp. 3f.

¹⁷ SOkA, AMO, Knihy [Books], sign. 2092, *Protokoll über die Sitzung des Stadtverordneten Collegiums der k. Hauptstadt Olmütz am 7.10.1912.*

¹⁸ In the first place are listed the titles of the operas under which they were performed in Olomouc.

MĚVEGKO-HUDEBNÍ SPOLEK ŽEROTÍN V OLOMOUCI.

Ročník XII. Výkon 66. a 67.

PRODANÁ NEVĚSTA.

Komická zpěvohra o třech jednáních. — Slova od Karla Sabiny.

Hudba od

BEDŘICHA SMETANY.

VE VELKÉ DVORANĚ „NÁR. DOMU“ V OLOMOUCI

v sobotu dne 3. prosince a v neděli dne 4. prosince 1892.

OSOBY:

<p>Krušina, sedlák. Ludmila, jeho manželka. Mařenka, jeho dcera. Mícha, sedlák. Háta, jeho manželka. Vašek, jejich syn.</p>	}	<p>Jeník, Michův syn z prvního manželství. Kecal, vesnický dohazovač. Principal komediantů. Esmeralda, komediantka. Indian, komediant.</p>
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Vesnický lid. Komedianti. Děti.

Místo a čas děje:

Vesnice o posvícení, děj odehrává se odpoledne po službách božích až pod večer.

Solové partie zpívají vesměs členové „Žerotína“; sborovou část smíšený sbor Žerotínský; úplný orchestr (kapela c. a k. pěš. pluku č. 93.).

Řídí pan Ant. Petzold. — Režii má pan Ant. Bendl.

Z A Č Á T E K:

v sobotu dne 3. prosince 1892 o 7. hod. večer, konec o $\frac{1}{2}$ 10. hod.
v neděli dne 4. prosince 1892 o 5. hod. odpo. konec o $\frac{1}{2}$ 8. hod.

CENY MÍST: Sedadla v sále v první řadě po 1 zl. 50 kr., v dalších řadách po 1 zl. Sedadla na balkoně v I. řadě po 1 zl., v II. a III. řadě po 70 kr. — Sedadla na první galerii po 70 kr. — Lístky na stání v sále po 50 kr., na I. galerii po 30 kr., na II. galerii po 20 kr. — Knižky textové po 30 kr.

Vstupenky prodávají se v obchodě pí. A. Hrubé na Horním náměstí a v knihkupectví p. R. Prozobergra v Olomouci a před představením u pokladny.

Kniř. arch. knih- a kamenotiskárna v Olomouci, 2982-92.

Fig. 6. Poster for the Czech staging of *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) by the local vocal and music club Žerotín on 3 and 4 December 1892, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií* [Collection of theatre posters], SOKA, C 1892/11

Nachdruck verboten! Direction: **Carl Berghof.** Nachdruck verboten!

Samstag den 9. März 1895.

36. Vorstellung. Abonnement suspendu. Gerader Tag.
Novität! Zum ersten Male. **Novität!**

Die verkaufte Braut.

Komische Oper in 3 Acten von C. Sabina. — Deutscher Text von Max Kalbeck.
 Musik von Friedrich Smetana.

Dirigent: **Carl Berghof.** Regie: **Gustav Rodmann.**

Personen:

Kruschka, ein Bauer	—	—	—	—	—	Hans Melms.
Katinka, seine Frau	—	—	—	—	—	Paula v. Richenfels.
Marie, beider Tochter	—	—	—	—	—	Henriette Dina a. G.
Micha, Grundbesitzer	—	—	—	—	—	Ludwig Rochelle a. G.
Agnes, seine Frau	—	—	—	—	—	Johanna Schönberger.
Wenzel, beider Sohn	—	—	—	—	—	Arthur Amendt.
Hans, Micha's Sohn aus erster Ehe	—	—	—	—	—	Georg Unger.
Regal, Heirathsvermittler	—	—	—	—	—	Emst Grünzberger.
Springer, Director einer wandernden Künstertruppe	—	—	—	—	—	Adalbert Winich.
Esmeralda, Tänzerin	—	—	—	—	—	Josefine Schwarz.
Muff, ein als Indianer verkleideter Kundsdiant	—	—	—	—	—	Gustav Rodmann.

Dorfbewohner beiderlei Geschlechts, Kunstfreier. — Ort: Ein großes Dorf in Böhmen. — Zeit: Die Gegenwart.

Tänze arrangiert von August BERGER, Balletmeister und Choreograph des königl. böhmischen Landes- und National-Theaters in Prag.

Die neue Decoration ist von Carl Latzin und Rudolf Knops ausgeführt.

Preise der Plätze:

Voge im Parterre u. I. Rang 4 fl. Voge im II. Rang 3 fl. Fant. Sitz 90 fr. Sperrsitz 70 fr. Stedparterre 50 fr. Garnisonstarkn 30 fr. Studentenstarkn 30 fr. Gallerie-Sitzplatz 30 fr. Gallerie-Stedplatz 20 fr.

Die Tagescassa ist geöffnet Vormittag 9—12 Uhr. Nachmittag 3—5 Uhr.

Cassa - Eröffnung $\frac{1}{2}$ 7 Uhr. **Anfang** 7 Uhr. **Ende** $\frac{1}{2}$ 10 Uhr.

Wochen-Spielplan:

Sonntag den 10. März 37. Vorst. Abonn. susp. Ung. Tag. Novität! Zum zweiten Male. „Die verkaufte Braut“. Komische Oper in 3 Acten von C. Sabina. Deutscher Text von Max Kalbeck. Musik von Friedrich Smetana. —

NB. Für sämmtliche am Spielplan angegebenen Vorstellungen werden jetzt schon Karten von den nicht-abonnierten Plätzen an der Tagescassa abgegeben.

Abgang derzüge von Olmütz nach:

Osavan 9 Uhr 50 Min., 12 Uhr 48 Min. — **Stevnberg** 11 Uhr 38 Min. — **Prostnitz** 10 Uhr 50 Min
Gittan 11 Uhr 38 Min.

Druck von Josef Brod' in Olmütz.

Fig. 7. Poster for the première of *Die verkaufte Braut* at the German municipal theatre, 9 March 1895, in *Olmützer Zwischenakt*, 9 March 1895

the painter Hermann Burghart as well as new costumes based on original Viennese figurines. Two years later Berghof also pleased the public by purchasing the rights to perform Leoncavallo's *Der Bajazzo* (*The Clown*), which he staged again on the Viennese model.¹⁹ In contrast, the theatre was empty mainly when repertoire operas were on the programme. Especially the early nineteenth-century operas were no longer of interest to the Olomouc audience at the turn of the century. Berghof, like other directors in Olomouc, promised better attendance, primarily at benefit performances by popular singers. In the 1890s, drama performances used to be poorly attended; only the operetta was always of interest to the public. Berghof was aware of the competition from Czech productions at the National House and also that Bedřich Smetana's operas in particular attracted the interest of the German population. In order to retain the goodwill of his audience, he sought to perform Smetana's *Die verkaufte Braut* (*The Bartered Bride*), something in which he succeeded in 1895 to the great enthusiasm of the German public and local critics.²⁰ His successor Stanislaus Lesser also took advantage of the extraordinary success of *Die verkaufte Braut* and included the opera in the repertoire in two seasons. Encouraged by the success of another Smetana opera, *Dalibor*, at the Vienna Court Opera, where it was performed eleven times between October and December 1897, Lesser decided to include this opera in the Olomouc repertoire in the same year. *Dalibor*, however, provoked a major disagreement among the representatives of the local nationalist *Deutscher Verein* (German Association), who subsequently forced its withdrawal and a definitive ban on Czech works on the German theatre stage in Olomouc.²¹

Problems with attendance also arose at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, when the public exchanged attending the theatre for going to the cinema.

The city's leadership saw the reason for the theatre's low attendance in the increase in admission fees, for which the directors were constantly asking for approval. The city council, however, was reluctant to accept these requests. In good times, however, even an increase in ticket prices did not discourage visitors, as in 1918, when war-weary people were again hungry for art.

Czechs in the audience of the German theatre

Czechs were only marginally to be found in the audience of Olomouc's municipal theatre from the mid-1880s onwards, and their numbers decreased over the years, partly because of the growing mutual national resistance but also as a result of the greater frequency of Czech cultural activities in the city. To attend a German theatre was to act against Czech national interests, and the Czech press in

¹⁹ [Anon.], Vom Theater, in *Die Neue Zeit* 272, 28 November 1893, p. 4.

²⁰ Kopecký/Křupková, The "Slavic Spirit", pp. 354f.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 356–358.

Olomouc repeatedly criticised the Czech population for this.²² The German theatre directors were very interested in attracting the Czechs to the auditorium, and their declining participation was significantly reflected in the theatre's income. The German city leadership resisted the directors' efforts to get Czechs into the theatre and would not listen to the pragmatic reasons for their actions.²³ The contemptuous attitude of the Germans towards the Czech population became apparent in the early days of the Czechoslovak Republic, which was established in 1918. In the struggle for the common use of the theatre, the Czechs were accused of being culturally immature. Germans were of the opinion that there would not be enough wealthy and educated Czechs in Olomouc to fill the auditorium of the city theatre.²⁴ It must be admitted, however, that the Czech side was also aware of this and therefore tried to attract Czechs from neighbouring villages or towns to the theatre, sending special trains for them and providing transport from the station.²⁵

Going to the theatre as part of the fight for German national interests

The German population was encouraged by the city authorities to attend the theatre and show their national feelings, which should not just be talked about but demonstrated by supporting German art.²⁶ The German audience was especially urged to attend the performances in the period when there was a real chance that the German theatre would be taken over by the Czechs, i.e. after the establishment of the independent Czechoslovakia. During this time, the theatre became part of the fight for German national interests. In this sense, the Olomouc theatre became a space for public demonstrations of a political nature much earlier. When, during a performance of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* in April 1895, there were cries of "Berghof hinaus!" (Berghof out!), it was not an expression of the audience's dissatisfaction with the conducting performance of the then theatre director Carl Berghof. It was an expression of the disapproval of the members of the *Deutscher Verein* of the German performance of the Czech composer's work in a German theatre.²⁷ Indeed, after the premiere of Smetana's *Dalibor* in 1897, the *Deutscher*

²² See e.g. [Anon.], *Dalibor v německém divadle v Olomouci*, in *Pozor* 131, 16 November 1897, p. 2.

²³ The director Stanislaus Lesser, who had the theatre on lease in Olomouc in 1896–1904, was particularly involved in this respect. In copious correspondence to the city council, he asked for permission to include a Czech repertoire that would bring Czechs into the German theatre. On this, see Lenka Křupková, "Deficit, který ani vyčísřit neumím..." Olomoucká éra divadelního ředitele Stanislause Lessera v letech 1896–1904, in *Divadelní revue* 25/2, 2014, pp. 58–76.

²⁴ [Anon.], Die Anteilung der Theaterspielzeit. Ein Antrag des tschechischen Theatervereins, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 267, 22 November 1919, pp. 3f.

²⁵ [Anon.], Zur Eröffnung der tschechischen Theaterzeit, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 199, 1 September 1920, p. 3.

²⁶ [Anon.], Benefice der Frau Rochelle, in *Die neue Zeit* 34, 12 February 1898, p. 7.

²⁷ [Anon.], Vom Theater, in *Die neue Zeit* 81, 8 April 1895, p. 4.

Verein threatened to “create a demonstration of enormous proportions in the theatre” if the opera was performed again.²⁸

Taste of the audience

Reflections on the bad taste of the Olomouc audience were quite often made by theatre critics in the local German newspapers *Die neue Zeit* and the *Mährisches Tagblatt*. Above all, they were dissatisfied with the fact that the public preferred operetta to opera or other forms of theatre. Theatre directors were advised not to be servile to the audience in this respect but instead to educate them through quality operas. The critics could not understand, for example, how, despite the opera ensemble’s poor performances, the director Carl Stick still had a full auditorium;²⁹ because of these and a number of other misdeeds, the city council prematurely terminated his contract to lease the theatre in the late 1880s. Olomouc audiences were criticised for their inability to recognise the good from the bad as they enthusiastically applauded even outrageous performances. Critics then accused the audience of having no standards for the quality of productions and individual performances. Equally, however, ordinary theatregoers resented the arrogance of the critics and their persistent attempts to create a better audience, as shown, for example, by a letter from an anonymous writer in 1913. He reproached the critics for considering every visitor to an operetta or a lighter piece as stupid and unintelligent: “Unfortunately, not everyone is as well off as the *Tagblatt* reviewer. There are other people in the city who work hard for 12 hours a day and whose tastes are not served by a perverse, hypermodern piece, who see the theatre as a place of entertainment and therefore also visit ‘stupid’ operettas.”³⁰ The idea of the theatre’s mission as a temple of education for the German population of Olomouc, which had been proclaimed for years by the city’s leaders, seemed increasingly alien to the ordinary theatregoer, who wanted to be entertained and to rest from their everyday worries in the theatre.

Czechs and the new rich

A significant rearrangement of the social composition of the Olomouc theatre audience started to take place after the end of World War I, i.e. in the last years of the existence of an independent German theatre in Olomouc. This transformation

²⁸ “[...] že v divadle stropí demonstrace ohromných rozměrů.” [Anon.], *Dalibor v Olomouci*, in *Pozor* 134, 23 November 1897, p. 2. All translations by the author.

²⁹ [Anon.], *Die erste Verwarnung*, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 245, 24 November 1889, p. 4.

³⁰ “Leider geht es nicht jedermann so gut, wie dem Redakteur des *Tagblattes*, es gibt außer ihm auch andere Leute in der Stadt, die sich im Tage redlich 12 Stunden plagen und deren Geschmack ein pervernes, hypermodernes Stück eben nicht dient, die das Theater als Aufheiterungsstätte betrachten und deshalb auch ‘blöde’ Operetten besuchen.” [Anon.], *Theatererinnerungen*, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 34/217, 22 September 1913, p. 4.



Fig. 8. The municipal theatre in Olomouc in 1899, postcard published by Römmler & Jonas in Dresden, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií*, SOkA, call no. XXVIII/14

was due to the new national conditions in the city, where the German population was losing its majority status and the Czechs were taking over the city's institutions, including the theatre. Now the city's elite also included those who had made significant economic gains from the war. This new situation was reflected in numerous comments in the German newspapers. Johann Kux, the author of a German-language history of Olomouc, described this period with a certain amount of bitterness in his book published in 1937:

This was no longer the old theatre-loving, art-loving Olomouc bourgeoisie; rather, the newly risen stratum of war profiteers, racketeers, and chain dealers made itself conspicuously felt in the expensive stalls and box seats, the same class of the 'nouveaux riches' who now filled the fine restaurants and cinemas every evening and who raised their heads in triumph over the impoverished bourgeoisie.³¹

³¹ "Das war nicht mehr das alte theaterfreudige, kunstsinnige Olmützer Bürgertum; es machte sich vielmehr auf den teuren Parkett- und Logensitzen die neu emporgekommene Schicht der Kriegsgewinner, Schieber und Kettenhändler auffallend breit; dieselbe Schicht der 'Neu-Reichen', die jetzt die feinen Restaurants und Kinologen jeden Abend füllte und die, über den verarmenden Bürgerstand hinweg, triumphierend das Haupt erhob." Johann Kux, *Geschichte der königlichen Hauptstadt Olmütz bis zum Umsturz 1918*, Reichenberg/Olmütz 1937, p. 468.

When the Czech Theatre Association took over the theatre building in 1920, it meant the end for German opera in Olomouc. German theatre operations were restricted to the summer months after the end of the Czech season and were limited to operetta and drama performances, which were provided by a company from a theatre in nearby Brno. After two seasons, however, even this limited operation was discontinued. The German theatre no longer found support from the Czech town hall, but also from the German-speaking public, who did not visit the theatre during the warm weather months. This completed the process of 'Czechisation' of Olomouc. Opera in Olomouc found its place on the Czech stage.

