

Jiří Kopecký und Lenka Křupková,
Das Olmützer Stadttheater und seine Oper.
“Wer in Olmütz gefällt, gefällt der ganzen Welt”

(Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017. ISBN 978 394 0768 72 8; 304 pp.)
= *neue wege – nové cesty: Schriftenreihe des Sudetendeutschen Musikinstituts*, Bd. 14.

The volume *Das Olmützer Stadttheater und seine Oper. “Wer in Olmütz gefällt, gefällt der ganzen Welt”* by Jiří Kopecký and Lenka Křupková presents the findings of a several-year-long source research on German-language opera in Olomouc. The first research outcomes were published by the authors in 2012 in two separate volumes (Jiří Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci I. 1770–1878*; Lenka Křupková, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci II. 1878–1920*). Both were published by Palacký University in Olomouc, where the authors work as lecturers at the Department of Musicology, Faculty of Arts. Their joint publication is a revised and extended edition in German of those earlier works in Czech, released by the Sudeten German Institute of Music in Regensburg.

As the title indicates, this monograph is among the latest publications on Central European nineteenth-century provincial theaters, that is, theaters operating outside the capital. These theaters usually operated for six months out of the year; they staged both dramas and pieces of various musical-dramatic genres. The volume is also characterized by a comprehensive historical, social and cultural view, a hallmark of the latest academic works on music theater in the nineteenth century. In addition to providing information on theater operation, theater managers and repertoire, the volume also systematically evaluates the sources in historic and social contexts.

Despite a large number of provincial theaters in Central Europe, the number of monographs dealing with the subject has been rather small. For that reason, the volume can be considered an important contribution to research in the given area. According to the authors, the theater in Olomouc was run like many other municipal theaters in Austrian, Austro-Hungarian or German towns. The term municipal

theater referred to the town and its inhabitants who took part in its construction. As in case of other Czech and Moravian towns, the bourgeoisie in Olomouc spoke German and hence the theater staged plays in German language.

The opening chapter of the volume, “Theater und Stadt,” summarizes Olomouc’s historic military and defensive function in the eighteenth century, the loss of its original role and the regaining of its status under the influence of later political events. All of this influenced the transformations of the town and its inhabitants from the latter half of the nineteenth century and was also linked with modernization and industrialization. These links emerge from key documents of the daily operation of the Olomouc theater, such as municipal regulations and contracts defining the rights and obligations of renters of the theater building. Since the rental of the building was free of charge from the 1880s on, the authors argue that the renters should be properly called theater managers or theater entrepreneurs. In the absence of some primary sources, they use secondary sources to reconstruct the history of the theater building. Finally, the opening chapter also provides information on the length and course of the theater season, functioning of a theater orchestra, supervision by the Municipal Council, subscriptions and admission rates.

The chapter “Die Olmützer Oper 1770–1830” deals with opera productions staged in the Municipal Royal National Theater in Olomouc (Städtisches königliches Nationaltheater in Olmütz), located on the Lower Square. The building was also used as a dance hall. The opening of this simple wooden building in 1770 marks the beginning of a stable theater operation in the town. The authors use both primary documents and older academic literature to describe the repertoire and the audience, expanding the interpretation of well-known facts in the light of newly-acquired knowledge.

With respect to its extent, the chapter devoted to “Das neue Theater auf dem Oberring” comprises the core of the volume. The theater on the Upper Square was built in 1830 on a design by Vienna-based architect Josef Kornhäusel and called the Royal Municipal Theater in Olomouc (Königlich-städtisches Theater in Olmütz). In 1831, a ball room (Reduta) was opened in the theater. The building still exists; it has undergone several reconstructions and today it houses the Moravian Theater and the Moravian Philharmonic.

The volume continues with a chronological account of individual German and Austrian theater managers who ran the theater until 1920, i.e. until the emergence of the Czech theater. The titles of individual chapters are accompanied by technical, yet catchy subtitles, corresponding to periods, reflecting the cultural, social and political events of the times. In the period of 1848–1849, for example, the country witnessed several revolutions and the emperor’s presence in Olomouc between October 1848 and May 1849 directly affected the functioning and repertoire of the theater. Starting from the latter half of the nineteenth century the authors comment on the events of the German scene in connection with a grow-

ing Czech cultural life, reflecting on its influence on the staged repertoire. The twentieth century brought the changes in theater operation caused by World War I as well as increasing efforts to establish an independent Czechoslovak state. The authors document the last German season at the theater and subsequent hand-over of the theater to Czech representatives. According to the authors, all theater managers in Olomouc aimed to succeed with the audience, but some were more successful than others.

In the next chapter, “Das Opernrepertoire im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Kritik” the authors focus on the opera repertoire and the critical responses to it. They provide a brief description of the development of opera production from the late eighteenth century: the transition from Singspiel to opera, the victory of Italian and French grand opéra in Olomouc, and finally the introduction of the modern repertoire. Subsequently they analyze the repertoire by country of origin – German opera, French opera, Italian opera – finishing with the introduction of Czech and Slavic opera. The newly-acquired information on the repertoire is evaluated in the mirror of the latest research findings in the field of musical theater. One of their conclusions is that Vienna played a strong role in the selection of repertoire, because of the political situation. Every newly staged opera needed to be “tried” by a theater in Vienna and the theater manager was very careful with the selection of the “right” introductions.

The final chapters of the volume provide new information on the opera staging practice in the Olomouc theater (“Die Praxis der Operninszenierung im Olmützer Theater”) and reevaluate the singers, the principals and chorus, as well as the social status of young and beginner soloists (“Die Sänger im Stadttheater Olmütz”). The last chapter “Das Publikum des Olmützer Stadttheater” reflects on the composition of the audience attending the theater on a regular basis. It describes the social division in the auditorium as well as changes in the audience composition towards the end of World War I.

The picture of Olomouc theater including the activities of individual theater managers and the staged opera repertoire would not be complete without the lists of academic historical and contemporary literature and sources. The authors state that their research is a follow-up to a long-time survey conducted by Jitka Balatková and Jiří Štefanides, the authors of the register of opera repertoire of the German-language theater in Olomouc.¹

The volume *Das Olmützer Stadttheater und seine Oper*. “Wer in Olmütz gefällt, gefällt der ganzen Welt” presents an original contribution to knowledge in the given field. The list of sources and references is of a huge benefit to current historians of opera and theater. Rich illustrations show the theater building as well

1. Jitka Balatková, *Soupis repertoáru opery německého divadla v Olomouci od roku 1800 do roku 1920*, manuscript, State District Archives Olomouc; Jiří Štefanides, *Soupis repertoáru a členstva německého divadla v Olomouci v letech 1770–1940*, online database, Art Centre of Palacký University Olomouc.

as the casts. This publication is a welcome addition to scholarship on opera and theater in Central Europe.

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