

# Theatre Entrepreneurs and Opera Artists Travelling the Habsburg Monarchy in the Latter Half of the 19th Century as Shown on the Example of the Olomouc Opera Scene

Lenka Křupková, Jiří Kopecký

## Introduction

During the 19th century, there was a dense network of theatres which served as a space of lively cultural communication. Even on an international level, singers, Capellmeisters, orchestra players, composers, theatre entrepreneurs and audiences represented a specific social group, ranging across the social spectrum from the highest ruling circles to travelling groups that were not entirely dissimilar from beggars. Attempts to organise artistic bohemians into societies such as Schlaraffia tell us about the possibilities of the existence of an entertainment organisation, one that was only supposedly free from the political issues of its time.<sup>1</sup> The theatre very sensitively reflects social changes, which can be almost seen on the lives of concrete artists. Due to the relatively low amount of research into this issue, we shall limit ourselves to a number of cases which may not only suggest a possible research way, but also highlight the position of the 19th-century artist as a potential tool of official state policy and also as a strong individuality who struggles for its existence.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Martin Pelc, “Recesistické spolky Šlarafie. Herní prvek v kultuře 19. století” [“Recessionist societies of Šlaraffia. A playful Element in 19th Century Culture”], in *Historické fikce a mystifikace v české kultuře 19. století. Collection of Contributions from the 33rd Annual Symposium on the 19th Century, Pilsen, February 21–23, 2013*, eds. Martin Hrdina, Kateřina Piorecká, (Prague: Academia, 2014), 248–257. Members of the Olomouc chapter of this society mainly included artists employed by the director Carl Joseph von Bertalan. See Jiří Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci 1770–1878 I* [The German opera scene in Olomouc 1770–1878 I] (Olomouc: VUP, 2012), 277.

## From the Springtime of Nations to Neo-Absolutism: The Example of Friedrich Blum

The period during which Friedrich Blum (1847–1859) operated in Olomouc represents one of the richest chapters in the history of the city's opera. The young Emperor Franz Joseph I, who had been crowned in Olomouc, made the fortress city the site of important political meeting (in 1851 and 1853, Franz Joseph I met there with tsar Nicholas I). Blum deftly used such opportunities to build his theatrical empire. As the director of the Olomouc theatre, he expanded his reach to theatres in Opava, Karlsbad and, later, to Kraków (starting from the 1856/1857 season) and Bielsko. Through this network of provincial theatres, he circulated both its members as well as decorations and costumes. Blum came up with other ideas and, as a charismatic companion, he was able to convince members of the city council to support expensive plans (such as the construction of a summer Arena) and to acknowledge the importance of the city taking on the major expenses of operating theatre building. In return, Blum was able to secure for Olomouc a unique device for the sunrise scene in Meyerbeer's opera *The Prophet*. Friedrich Blum could not resist the urge to show off this rare device without having to wait for the exhaustive rehearsals of *The Prophet*. Instead, he put on Rossini's less demanding *William Tell* (February 26th, 1853), so that he could bolster the oath scene with the effect of the rising sun. The "Profetensonne" and other decorations came to Olomouc from Graz through the outgoing director Thomé, who later became the director of the Estates Theatre in Prague (*Die neue Zeit*, March 2nd, 1853). Following Blum's departure from Olomouc, *The Prophet* was performed without the sun device – perhaps the "sun" became broken, or it ended up somewhere in Kraków. During this period, many artists from the Court Theatre in Vienna came to Olomouc and Blum's best singers were seeking better contracts. The esteemed prima donna Karoline Dressler-Pollert had established herself as an artist of "bold allegros and powerful expression." However, the Olomouc press could not forgive Dressler-Pollert for introducing herself as a singer from the Court Opera in St Petersburg while trying to gain a contract in Vienna (see *Die neue Zeit*, May 20th, 1853).

In order to maintain operations in Olomouc and Kraków, Blum often had his best actors and singers stay in Kraków for extended periods of time – these artists were referred to by their colleagues in Olomouc as "the company of convicts." Newcomers and low-grade singers came from Kraków to Olomouc to make their debuts, which sometimes led to very embarrassing situations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jiří Štefanides, ed., *Carl König v Olomouci [in Olmütz] 1856–1868*, (Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, 2009), 41, appendix 76.

Blum left the Olomouc scene in a poor state while also failing to meet Vienna's expectations in Kraków – theatre had already become a national battlefield and the Polish audience refused to support the Habsburg establishment. His career ended in infamy. In January 1866, Blum took over the theatre in Lviv, but was relentlessly swept away over just a single season. He declared bankruptcy in December 1867 and, in 1868, he closed down his business and was employed by his former lover, Leopoldine von Lukatschy, who had once been a soubrette at the Olomouc theatre and who took over management of theatres in Bielsko, Cieszyn and Kraków. Towards the end of his life, there are record of him working as an actor and stage director at the Residenz Theater in Vienna (1875) and Graz in 1876, where he passed away. Blum came to Lviv under excellent conditions – he had secured a 6-year contract with the potential of it being extended up to 10 years. Although he had to pay a deposit of 6,500 gulden, he received an annual subsidy of 12,000 gulden, which was increased by a further 1,500 gulden in the first year and supplemented with free housing and firewood. Although the new director was preceded by a good reputation, three months later, Blum was criticised for lack of taste in the selection of works and a completely mediocre ensemble.<sup>3</sup> The Lviv premiere of *Die schöne Helena* (*La belle Hélène*) on April 24th, 1866 caused a sensation, but mainly thanks to the performer in the leading role, Anna Wierer. Blum was exhausted by the costly guest performances to which Lviv was accustomed. The conditions were further worsened by war developments and cholera, which swept through Galicia in the summer of 1866. Blum was again running multiple theatres, all of which were neglected and in a chaotic state. The operation in Lviv suffered from a lack of audience after the nationally conscious critic Władysław Łoziński, with the support of the editor of *Dziennik literacki*, Juljusz Starkel, launched an outright assault in 1866 against Blum's highly successful production of *Die schöne Helena*, pushing the Polish audience away from the German theatre. While, for Poles, theatre was among the foremost national institutions, for the Germans in the Austrian monarchy, it was mainly a place of entertainment where there was no need for confrontation with noble ideals. For example, the journalistic campaign against Offenbach's *Die schöne Helena* included the following phrases: aesthetic and moral values gave way to a tickling of the senses; short petticoats became even shorter, and later they managed without them entirely; operetta led German and French theatres to "[...] kompletneho wynaturzenia smaku, do ponizenia i upodlenia sztuki, do parodji piękna, do estetycznego kretynizmu, [...]" ([...] the complete

<sup>3</sup> Jerzy Got, *Das österreichische Theater in Lemberg im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Aus dem Theaterleben der Vielvölkermonarchie*, (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 685.

degeneration of taste, humiliation and degradation of art, parody of beauty, to aesthetic cretinism [...]).<sup>4</sup>

There was another director of the Olomouc theatre who ended up in Lviv, bringing the German theatre there almost to the very brink of complete liquidation. Following the departure of Blum, Carl König initially seemed like a good choice – due to being deep in debt, he did not require a subsidy of 10,000 gulden, but was willing to accept just 6,000 gulden. He established an advertisement magazine which had been successfully operating back in Olomouc, this time under the name *Lemberger Zwischen-Akt*, and satisfied theatre audiences with a number of valued guests. In short, “Das System Königs” meant that famous artists allowed him to raise admission prices – below the surface of guest performances, however, the ensemble was falling apart. The audience were sensing the wide gap between the successful guest performances and those put on by König’s employees. Regular theatre evenings were suffering from low attendance and the director did not pay his employees enough, driving the entire ensemble down to being beggars who had nowhere to sleep or, in the case of actresses, maintained “immoral relationships.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Building National Stages, Half-hearted Attempts at a National Repertoire: The Example of Carl König**

If, under Blum, the singers’ contracts were determined by the artistic prestige of the given theatre or ensemble and salary conditions, after the October Diploma of 1860, the element of national consciousness also entered this mix. Carl König (in Olomouc between 1862–1868) realised that he could specifically target the Czech audience and, as a result, began to enlist artists who were able to act and sing in both German and Czech. The best of these did not seek work in Brno, Würzburg or even Vienna, but were instead drawn to Prague as the centre of the Czech national revival. König’s plans did not come to fruition and his “audience hunts” often lost money.<sup>6</sup> However, during the 1860s, a number of personalities who passed through Olomouc would become crucial for the operation of the Prague Provisional Theatre and, later, the National Theatre – among them Ludevít Lukes, Eleonora von Ehrenberg, Betty Hanušová (Fibichová after marriage) and Adolf Čech. Ten years later, the example set by the Capellmeister Adolf Čech (in Olomouc during the 1865/1866 and 1866/1867 seasons) was later followed by Mořic Anger, who established himself at the National Theatre

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<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, 696.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 734–742.

<sup>6</sup> Adolf Čech, *Z mých divadelních pamětí* [*From My Theatrical Memoirs*], (Prague: Nakladatelské družstvo Máje, 1903), 118–124.

in Prague as the second Capellmeister working side-by-side with Čech (Anger worked in Olomouc in 1874/1875, 1875/1876). Both Čech and Anger gained valuable experience in Olomouc. For example, during his first season, Čech led 117 performances and staged 14 operas.<sup>7</sup> Both Capellmeister were praised for their approach to Wagner's works, which they later, as artists in the Czech theatre, did not have the opportunity to perform very often (in Olomouc, Čech produced *The Flying Dutchman* and Anger produced *Lohengrin*).<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Carl König adhered to the method of successful management of a provincial theatre brought to Olomouc by his predecessor, Carl Haag (1859–1862): to give young (and cheap) talents a chance to master the basic repertoire as part of the local ensemble. For example, in Olomouc we see the career beginnings of Adolf Robinson and Pauline Lucca (both during the 1859/1860 season). The baritone Robinson received a monthly salary of 40 gulden with no royalty for performances. He left for Prague with the promise to be paid 6,000 gulden per a year and then later made his way through the theatres of Dresden and Wrocław, spending some time in Italy followed by Vienna. He worked at the Metropolitan Opera House as a Wagnerian singer between the years 1884 and 1889. While Lucca was in Olomouc, she received a monthly pay of 80 gulden with 2 gulden per performance. As her fame rapidly spread, the Prague theatre director Thomé offered the prima donna a yearly salary of 3,000 gulden. However, the Court theatre in Berlin secured Lucca with the offer of 4,000 thalers (equivalent to 9 or 10 thousand gulden), 10 thalers per performance, clothing free-of-charge and two months of vacation.<sup>9</sup> It would only be a matter of time before Lucca conquered America.

### **During Austria-Hungary: The Examples of Ignatz Czernits and Carl Joseph von Bertalan**

With the growing popularity of operettas, the demands placed on singers by Wagner's operas, and the growing number of theatres in German-speaking countries, the conditions of theatre business began to change rapidly and drastically starting in the late 1860s. The model of the acting troupe where members were bound by what almost seemed like family ties began to fall apart and the economic perspective became more prominent. The salaries of tenors and prima donnas were rising, and theatres got into bidding wars over skilled singers.<sup>10</sup> Theatre per-

<sup>7</sup> *Olmützer Zwischen-Akt*, October 19, 1866; for more, see Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci*, 205.

<sup>8</sup> See Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci*, 295.

<sup>9</sup> *Die neue Zeit*, May 25, 1860; for more, see Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci*, 167.

<sup>10</sup> See the article "Moderne Opernzustände" in *Olmützer Zwischenakt*, March 21 and 22, 1867; see also Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci*, 210. A closer analysis of the situation at the time

formers moved through the network of provincial theatres with unprecedented frequency. We shall illustrate the difficult situations of theatre entrepreneurs on the example of Ignatz Czernits (in Olomouc between 1868 and 1872). This was the first time the city agreed to provide a form of subsidy, as it did not require Czernits to pay rent. The director was to ensure smooth operations while maintaining a varied repertoire: "Trauerspiel, Schauspiel, Lustspiel, Posse, Oper, Singspiel und Operette".<sup>11</sup> In order to provide year-long contracts for the members of his theatre, Czernits started a parallel business in Pressburg despite the fact that the city council strongly advised him to focus exclusively on Olomouc. However, the director was not going to take this criticism and, rather than risking bankruptcy, he threatened to terminate his contract.<sup>12</sup> Czernits was experienced in the theatre business which is perhaps why he refused to back down despite the city's threats – prior to his arrival in Olomouc, he had worked in Fünfkirchen/Pécs, Esseg/Eszék and Graz. Czernits lasted only four seasons in Olomouc, even though he had a signed contract for six years. Another very capable theatre entrepreneur in Olomouc, Carl Joseph von Bertalan (1874–1878) – who had worked as a secretary and theatre entrepreneur in Cilli/Celje and Pettau/Ptuj, (1861–1862), Leoben and Bruck an der Mur (1862–1863), Varasdin and Bad Gleichenberg (1865–1867), Marburg (1867), Klagenfurt (1868–1874) – experienced the similar tensions with the city government. He, too, left Olomouc after only four years, as the city demanded considerable investment into repairing the theatre building and securing decorations (especially for a production of Meyerbeer's *Die Afrikanerin* [*L'Africaine*]), which the experienced director could not afford. Bertalan was a capable clerk and a theatre enthusiast who refused to give up on his ideals (he paid particular attention to drama and felt all the more strongly the dwindling audience, who were instead succumbing to the operetta fever). He offered demanding opera titles, but after the departure of the Capellmeister Mořic Anger, he could no longer face the growing criticism. Each season had a more or less new make-up of the opera ensemble – which, however, typically needed some time to start performing well – and it would again fall apart come the Easter holidays. The director was thus forced to search for new members for the upcoming season. The older way of doing theatre business was collapsing and Bertalan resisted it through the sheer force of his hope in legal changes (such as penalties for breach of contract for actors and singers), changes

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comes from Joseph von Bertalan who ran the theatre in Olomouc between 1874 and 1878. See Carl Joseph von Bertalan, *Das Provinz-Theater. Skizzen über die kleineren (halfjährligen) Bühnen in Oesterreich* (Klagenfurt: Verlag von Rudolf Bertschinger, 1870).

<sup>11</sup> See the terms of the contract, Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci*, 229.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 232–233. Cf. Jana Lašavíková, *Městské divadlo v Prešporku na sklonku 19. století: mezi provincií a metropolí* (Bratislava: Hudobné centrum: Historický ústav SAV, 2020), 47.

in the city's approach (increasing subsidies) and the attitudes of the audience (resisting the temptation of trendy novelties).<sup>13</sup> After leaving Olomouc, Bertalan stayed only briefly in Graz (1878–1880) and Brno (1881–1882). He finally gave up on theatre following his unsuccessful return to Graz in 1886.

### Sopron – Olomouc – Pressburg: The Example of Emanuel Raul

Another example of a theatre director who was moving through the Visegrad area is Emanuel Raul (1843–1916). By the time he began renting the municipal theatre in Olomouc in 1880, he had worked as a travelling theatre actor and opera singer, going from place to place. In 1877, he founded his own theatre company and worked briefly as the director of the municipal theatre in Sopron, from which he moved to Olomouc,<sup>14</sup> and it seems that he also briefly worked in Pressburg.<sup>15</sup> It was in Olomouc that he expanded the scope of his business to the extent it had for the rest of his career, simultaneously leading two different theatre stages – the first was year-round, the other was limited to the summer season. During his time working in Olomouc, he also rented a summer theatre in Karlovy Vary.<sup>16</sup> The main “marketing” goal of his first season of Olomouc was to bring back the famous singer Pauline Lucca onto the local stage (she ended up performing in Gounod's *Faust*). The critics of the time criticised Raul for his “hunt” after worthless operetta novelties and his reluctance to run Wagner's operas. An undoubtedly important chapter in both Raul's time as director and the history of the Olomouc theatre is Gustav Mahler's two-month tenure as the opera Capellmeister – he was summoned to Olomouc after a pointed argument between the previous Capellmeister Emil Kaiser and Raul. After his time in Olomouc, Raul spent three years at the municipal theatre in Liberec and, follow-

<sup>13</sup> See the aforementioned text: Carl Joseph von Bertalan, *Das Provinz-Theater. Skizzen über die kleineren (halfjährigen) Bühnen in Oesterreich*.

<sup>14</sup> The Olomouc City Archives keeps a request dated to February 24, 1880, and sent by the Olomouc city council to the government of Sopron (Ödenburg in German), asking them to provide an opinion regarding the work of Emanuel Raul at their theatre. This request was likely attached to the requested opinion and sent back to Olomouc. SOkA (Státní okresní archiv Olomouc [State Archive Olomouc]), AMO (Archiv města Olomouce [Olomouc Archives]), Registratura hospodářská 1874–1920, Divadelní ředitelé 1878–1896 [Economic Registry, 1874–1920, Theater Directors 1878–1896], carton 765, sign. L 2 – item 359.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jiří Hilmera discusses Raul's management of the summer stage at the theatre in Karlovy Vary. See Jiří Hilmera, “Letní sezony ředitelů opavského a olomouckého divadla v českých zemích” [“Summer seasons of Opava and Olomouc theatre directors in the Czech lands”], in *O divadle na Moravě a ve Slezsku II* [About Theatre in Moravia and Silesia], ed. Tatjana Lazorčáková (Olomouc: VUP, 2004), 190–199.



ing a short and unsuccessful tenure in Wrocław, he set his anchor in Pressburg for nine years.<sup>17</sup>

### **From Pest to Olomouc, Theatre within National Conflict: The Examples of directors Robert Müller and Stanislaus Lesser**

The migration route of Olomouc theatre directors also led in the direction of Budapest. Prior to taking on a theatre contract in Olomouc, Robert Müller and Stanislaus Lesser rented a German theatre in Pest's Gyapjú utca ("Wool Street"). From the late 1860s up to its closure in 1889, this theatre was mostly on the "periphery of the cultural life" of the Hungarian metropole.<sup>18</sup> For one, it was physically located on the city's periphery and, secondly, between the years 1850 and 1870, the Hungarian National Theatre established itself as the primary cultural centre, providing its audience with both a national and an international repertoire. Classical German drama, translated into Hungarian, was among the theatre's central pillars. The German-language theatre was thus left with the role of being an entertainment theatre. One would be hard-pressed to find members of high society among its audience – although they partly retained their boxes, these remained empty for most of the season. Most of the auditorium was comprised of an indefinable mass – made up of many more groups than just the German burghers – which demanded Viennese schlager and operettas.<sup>19</sup>

The Olomouc native Robert Müller (1833 Olomouc – 1896 Munich) was able to rent out the Olomouc municipal theatre mainly because he came with excellent references from the places where he had previously worked. According to them, he was always able to maintain strict discipline among the theatre's employees, and the works they performed were also well-executed.<sup>20</sup> In all the places he had previously worked, he also put together a quality theatre ensemble. By the time he took over the theatre in Olomouc, Müller was a well-known theatre director in Austria, an actor often cast in the role of heroes and one of the most skilled operetta directors of his time. We also have information about his tenure in Teplice, Liberec and the joint theatres in Graz. Müller worked there

<sup>17</sup> Raul's work in Pressburg is discussed in Jana Laslavíková's book *Mestské divadlo V Prešporku (1886–1899) v kontexte dobovej divadelnej praxe. Působenie riaditeľov Maxa Kmentta a Emanuela Raula* [*The Municipal Theatre in Pressburg and its theatrical practice between 1886–1899: the Work of the Directors Max Kmentt and Emanuel Raul*] (Bratislava: Ars Musica, 2018), 64–102.

<sup>18</sup> See Wolfgang Binal, *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Budapest. Von den Anfängen bis zum Brand des Theaters in der Wollgasse (1889)* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1972), 326.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>20</sup> See also the opinion issued on May 3, 1884 by the city council of Graz, addressed to the Olomouc city council. (SOkA, AMO, Registratura hospodářská 1874–1920, Divadelní ředitelé 1878–1896, carton 765, sign. L 2 – item 359).



as a director in the years 1874–1878 and was ultimately succeeded by the aforementioned Olomouc director Bertalan. Robert Müller took over the German Theatre in Wool Street in Pest in 1879, under circumstances that were very unfavourable to the local German scene. Due to resistance from both the Hungarian authorities and the majority Hungarian population, the theatre was regularly closed. Before Müller became the theatre tenant, the theatre was purchased by the Allgemeine Österreichische Bodenkredit-Gesellschaft in Vienna. However, the city council denied the company a concession for theatre performances in a last-minute decision. At that point, just before the start of the season, Müller had already put together an ensemble and signed contracts with its members. After complicated negotiations, the season only started towards the end of November 1879, which caused Müller to suffer considerable financial losses in both lost profits and the fact that he had to pay the salaries to the ensemble members, as he had already signed contracts with them.<sup>21</sup> His entire time as director of the theatre was marked by existential struggles and intense conflicts with the Hungarians, whose sympathies Müller was unable to garner. In fact, individual performances had to be overseen by the police so that they would not be disturbed by the protests of Hungarian nationalists.<sup>22</sup> Müller obtained a license to perform plays, operettas and farces, but could not perform ballets or operas. Although he had several successes (especially with operettas) during his tenure as the director of the German theatre in Pest, the contemporary press also notes a number of issues. In addition to national unrest, during his time in Budapest, the German audience showed a lack of interest in German theatre and there are records of employees complaining about unpaid salaries.<sup>23</sup> The conclusion of his tenure in Budapest was rather infamous. Due to most of Müller's ensemble having left by early March 1882, he was forced to conclude the season with just the choristers. Under Müller's leadership, the Viennese owner of the theatre, Allgemeine Österreichische Bodenkredit-Gesellschaft, lost interest in this very unstable and unprofitable venture and, as a result, that same year they sold the theatre to Müller's successor and future Olomouc director Stanislaus Lesser.<sup>24</sup>

It is not known where Müller stayed between the end of his work as director at the Budapest municipal theatre in spring 1882 and taking over the Olomouc municipal theatre two years later. Throughout Müller's entire management of the theatre in Olomouc, the official holder of the theatre concession was his wife Katharina Krauß-Müller. The sources list Robert Müller only as the artistic director even though, in practice, he also handled the business side of things.

<sup>21</sup> Binal, *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Budapest*, 383–384.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 384–385.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

Müller's main goal was to put an end to the unprofitable and expensive opera productions at the Olomouc theatre – however, despite numerous attempts, he was unable to pass this through the city council. Similarly, as in Pest, he focused most of the financial and artistic attention on operettas. In fact, people recalled Müller's beautiful operetta stage designs for decades after and the ensemble included excellent operetta singers (Wilhelm Bauer, Mizzi Anatour).<sup>25</sup>

As an actor and theatre director, Stanislaus Lesser (1840 Warsaw – 1907 Vienna) went through numerous stints in German-language European theatres, and his biography is a model example of the 19th-century travelling artist. He began his career in Petersburg, afterwards performing in many places throughout Germany, including Leipzig and Königsberg (today's Kaliningrad) in East Prussia. In the 1860s and 1870s, he was also a frequent guest performer in Lviv.<sup>26</sup> He also appeared in Prague, Graz, Wrocław and Bielsko-Biala.<sup>27</sup> In 1882, Stanislaus Lesser took over the German Theatre in Pest after Robert Müller and the period of his management was undoubtedly more successful, viewed by critics as a period of permanent development of the theatre.<sup>28</sup> This was certainly aided by the fact that national conflict had somewhat died down and the economic conditions of the theatre business had improved. Lesser put together a relatively good drama and operetta ensemble. Lesser himself was an excellent actor, as noted by a contemporary account of his acting skills in Pest: "Allerdings Herr Lesser unverhältnismäßig aus seinem Personal hervor und sprengt beinahe den Rahmen des Ensembles."<sup>29</sup> Perhaps thanks to being aware of his artistic superiority, during his period in Pest, he mostly kept to his background duties as director and only rarely appeared as an actor. Lesser could afford to invite successful artists from Vienna to perform as guest stars, which also helped generate him more profit. For example, the famous comedian and operetta singer Alexander Girardi

<sup>25</sup> For more on the work of the Olomouc director Robert Müller, see: Lenka Krupková, *Německá opera v Olomouci 1878–1920 II* [*The German opera scene in Olomouc 1878–1920 II*] (Olomouc: VUP, 2012), 88–108.

<sup>26</sup> He first received a contract in Lviv for three guest performances in 1862 and, due to their great success, he later performed in three more shows. Lesser, then a well-known and successful actor, was invited to Lviv by the then-director of the Austrian theatre, Wilhelm Schmidt, in part thanks to his Polish background – the idea was that he would bring in the Polish residents. He was a guest performer in Lviv in the early 1870s under the management Anna Löwe, and even then, his shows packed the theatre and received raving reviews. See Got, *Das österreichische Theater in Lemberg im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, 641 and 748.

<sup>27</sup> See Peter Andraschke, "Das Theaterleben in Bielitz in der Zeit der Habsburger Monarchie," in *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa, Mitteilungen der internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft an der Technischen Universität Chemnitz*, Heft 4 (Chemnitz: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 1999), 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Wiener-Theater-Chronik*, September 24, 1884.

<sup>29</sup> "Mr Lesser stands out disproportionately within his group, almost exceeding the scope of the ensemble." (*Pester Lloyd*, November 5, 1882).

from Theater an der Wien performed at the German Theatre in Wool Street in 1886 and 1889, selling out every single seat in the house and thus giving Lesser a box-office success.<sup>30</sup> In Pest, Lesser focused primarily on the dramatic repertoire and guest performances of operetta stars were therefore much more uncommon. Opera was even less frequent under his management of the theatre in Wool Street. Worth mentioning is the 1883 guest appearance by the future director of the New German Theatre in Prague, Angelo Neumann, who, together with his travelling ensemble, performed the entirety of Wagner's *The Ring*, for which he had secured performing rights at the time. Another series of opera shows was performed by the ensemble of the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg, which Lesser allowed to guest appear in the 1888/1889 season.<sup>31</sup>

Contemporary critics praised the balanced composition of Lesser's repertoire at the theatre in Wool Street, where he alternated between classical works and contemporary ones while also giving a great deal of space to new operettas. The most frequently performed operetta authors were Karl Millöcker, Johan Strauss, Charles Lecocq, Franz von Suppé, and Jacques Offenbach, although the most successful operetta of Lesser's period at the German Theatre in Pest was Rudolf Delinger's *Don Ceasar*.<sup>32</sup> Lesser's career in Pest was ended by a fire of the theatre building on December 20th, 1889, which became a welcome opportunity to permanently shut down the German Theatre. Due to the fact that the hostility of Hungarians towards the German-speaking residents and their institutional power was growing, the German Theatre in Budapest was not brought back.

Lesser left Pest for Berlin, where he rented the Wallner-Theater and, in 1894, began a successful artistic career as a member of the Schillertheater.<sup>33</sup> His goal, however, was to once again run a theatre, which he achieved in 1896 when he won the competition for the post of the director in Olomouc.

In Olomouc, he demonstrated his knowledge and experience through his ability to recognise the truly talented among novice singers who would go directly from Olomouc to much more prestigious institutions (Anna Slavíková, Robert Berger, Emil Pollert, Gabriela Horvathová, Clementine Krauß, Else Bland).<sup>34</sup> The

<sup>30</sup> Binal, *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Budapest*, 404.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 408–409.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>33</sup> *Neuer Theater-Almanach. Theatergeschichtliches Jahr- und Aderssenbuch*, Hrsg. Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger, 20 (Berlin 1909), 152.

<sup>34</sup> The next journey of Anna Slavíková (1877–1948) led to contracts in Brno and Darmstadt and, later, she became a member of the National Theatre in Prague (1901–1914). She also appeared a number of times as a guest performer at the Viennese Court Opera. (Křupková, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci*, 169.). Robert Berger (1876–?) left Olomouc for Hamburg, worked for five years in the theatre in Wrocław (1900–1905), and also worked as a stage director and singer in the municipal theatre in Opole in the years 1907–1910 (*ibid.*, 183). After working in Olomouc,

future important conductor Gustav Brecher spent a season working at Olomouc under Lesser's leadership. Lesser invested heavily into productions of newer repertoire operas, which however led to often quite significant losses, as in the case of Goldmark's *Die Königin von Saba* which was poorly received by the local audience. Lesser also took advantage of the extraordinary success that Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* had with the Olomouc audience by including the opera in the repertoire for two seasons. However, Smetana's *Dalibor* was strongly refused by members of the local Deutscher Verein, which subsequently forced it to be taken off the programme and led to a complete ban of Czech works at the German theatre in Olomouc. Lesser also premiered Wagner's *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Olomouc (the world-class star Leo Slezák appeared in the first repeat performance). However, Lesser was not very popular with members of the city council due to his non-German (Polish-Jewish) background. To ingratiate himself, he invested more resources into opera productions than he could afford. While still in Olomouc, all of his property was distrained and, two years after leaving the Olomouc theatre, he died in Vienna in total poverty.<sup>35</sup>

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Emil Pollert (1877–1935) was immediately offered a long-term contract by the head of the National Theatre's opera, Karel Kovařovic (ibid., 187–188). Gabriela Horváthová's (1877–1961) case ended up being similar (ibid., 204). Clementine Krauß (1877–1938) left Olomouc for Graz (1903) and later ended up touring opera stages across Austria and Germany (in Cologne, Essen, Opava), finishing her career at the Volksoper in Vienna (ibid., 208). The pinnacle of Else Bland's (1880–1935) career was a contract at the court operas in Vienna and Berlin (ibid.).

<sup>35</sup> For more on the work of the Olomouc director, see Lenka Krupková, "Deficit, který ani vyčísliť neumím..." Olomoucká éra divadelního ředitele Stanislause Lessera v letech 1896–1904" ["A deficit I can't even quantify..." The Olomouc era of theatre director Stanislaus Lesser in 1896–1904"], *Divadelní revue* 25, no. 2 (2014): 58–76.

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## Theatre Entrepreneurs and Opera Artists Travelling the Habsburg Monarchy in the Latter Half of the 19th Century as Shown on the Example of the Olomouc Opera Scene

### Abstract

The Olomouc opera stage (as was, after all, true for all of those in Austria) was part of a network of provincial theatres, characterised by constant changes in membership. It was typical that, following the end of a season, theatre director would go to Vienna and other larger cultural centres to seek new talented singers. Another decisive factor in getting a contract was the successfulness of the artists' guest performances throughout the season. For small theatres, it was advantageous to establish contracts mainly with talented newcomers who had lower demands in terms of their salaries. Operating a successful theatre business was largely connected with the ability of directors to recognise the latent abilities of inexperienced singers. During certain periods, the German municipal theatre in Olomouc was a seedbed of future stars, helping kick off their glamorous

careers. However, national disputes, the hostility of city council members, fires, and epidemics as well as the fickle tastes of the audience could thwart the efforts of even the most experienced theatre entrepreneur and make them decide to try their chances elsewhere. The aim of this paper is to document, through several examples of singers or directors, the usual direction of artistic mobility in Central Europe in the 19th and early 20th century.

## **Divadelní podnikatelé a operní umělci na cestách v habsburské monarchii ve druhé polovině 19. století na příkladu olomoucké operní scény**

### **Abstrakt**

Olomoucká operní scéna (jako ostatně každá rakouská) byla zasazená do sítě provinčních divadel, pro něž bylo charakteristické neustálé obměňování členstva. Typická situace nastala vždy po skončení sezony, kdy se divadelní ředitelé vydali za výběrem nových pěveckých sil do Vídně či jiných větších center. O případném vstupu do smluvního vztahu také rozhodovalo úspěšné hostování umělců zvaných v průběhu sezony. Pro menší městská divadla bylo výhodné získat do angažmá především talentované nováčky, jejichž nároky na výši divadelních gází nebyly vysoké. Úspěšné divadelní podnikání bylo do značné míry svázáno se schopností ředitelů rozpoznat v nezkušených zpěvácích dosud nerozvinuté schopnosti. Také německá olomoucká městská scéna se stala v některých svých obdobích líhní budoucích hvězd, jejichž zářná kariéra byla zahájena právě zde. Avšak národnostní spory, nevraživost členů městské rady, požáry a epidemie, stejně jako vrtkavý vkus publika mohly zmařit úsilí i toho nejzkušenějšího divadelního podnikatele a přimět ho, aby se rozhodl zkusit štěstí jinde. Cílem tohoto příspěvku je dokumentovat na několika příkladech zpěváků či ředitelů obvyklý směr umělecké mobility ve středoevropském prostoru 19. a začátku 20. století.

### **Keywords**

provincial theatre; Olomouc; 19th and 20th century opera; theatre director

### **Klíčová slova**

provinční divadlo; Olomouc; operní provoz 19. a 20 století; divadelní ředitel

Lenka Krupková  
Univerzita Palackého Olomouc  
lenka.krupkova@upol.cz

Jiří Kopecký  
Univerzita Palackého Olomouc  
jiri.kopecky@upol.cz