

Documents Concerning The History Of The Castle Theatre In Litomyšl

Summary

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The Castle Theatre in Litomyšl and Maintenance of listed buildings

(Jiří Bláha, p. 5–8)

There are several approaches concerning the restoration and presentation of historic theatres. Some of the theatres are used commercially, others are perceived as unique treasures and their operation is restricted. It is only in the last few years that a dialogue on the presentation of historic theatres has taken place, inspired by the long-term restoration of the theatre in the Český Krumlov castle.

It is also necessary to consider the theatre in Litomyšl as a monument, which is unique and exceptional in many ways and thus we must carefully consider its presentation. Its importance is not reflected in its present-day state and utilization. It is either possible to present the theatre as a showpiece, or it can be turned into a *functional museum*, where period production techniques (scenery changes, acoustics and lighting effects) would be studied and demonstrated. The best would be to restore a complete period theatrical performance. Irrespective of the final decision, the conservation of all the equipment and its constant upkeep is inevitable.

The decision about the future form must be taken by the responsible authorities, who maintain the monument. Our association of friends of the theater can help the theatre primarily through further studies and promotion.

Castle Theatre Surveys

(Jiří Bláha, Ondřej Protiva, p. 9–17)

Since its creation the civic association *Miloslav* has been working on a survey of the present state of the Litomyšl castle theatre and its preserved accessories (equipment, furniture). The main survey was done in 2002 in the run up to a study entitled *The Possibilities and Perspectives of Restoration, Protection and Utilization of the castle theatre in Litomyšl*. The surveys have been complemented by information gained through the study of source-books.

We paid the greatest attention to the construction of the stage and its technical equipment. The original stage equipment serving to control shifting of the scene still exists: portable frames, a rotating shaft for wings, another two rotating shafts for changing borders and a range of other connected details. The stage equipment is almost intact and theoretically serviceable. In many places there is evidence of the use of several types of wood-working tools and coloured markings. The survey came across a number of used items, most probably from a previous castle theatre. Also traces of changes to the original stage ceiling have been discovered, the upper framework was raised in a very interesting technical way during the process of construction.

Also in the auditorium several changes were made. We don't know when the partitions dividing a corridor behind the boxes into three small areas on the first floor were removed. In 1974 a partition dividing the auditorium into a front and back pit was removed.

Decoration of the auditorium and the walk-on portal was the work of Dominik Dvořák. The decorations have been restored several times, during the largest renovation in 1974, the decoration of the ground floor completely renovated.

The theatre was originally illuminated by candlesticks in the auditorium, and movable footlights and wooden lighting poles were placed behind the wings. Either candles or oil or suet lamps were used. The first electrification took place after 1930; today's lighting originates from the 1950s and 1970s.

All the surviving elements of construction and equipment are important for a full understanding of the original work in the theatre. Its detailed documentation and thorough care are a basic prerequisite for preservation and future revitalization of this unique monument.

Pictures:

Pic. 1 (p. 10): The castle Litomyšl, the Theatre. The ground plan of the area under the stage and the auditorium. Graphic scale 0–10 m

Pic.2 (p. 12): The castle Litomyšl, the Theatre. The ground plan of the stage and the auditorium with boxes. Graphic scale 0–10 m

Pic.3 (p. 13): The castle Litomyšl, the Theatre. The portable frame with a wing, the view on the back side. Graphic scale 0–1 m

Pic.4 (p. 15): The castle Litomyšl, the Theatre. The movable footlights placed beside the front of the stage, the view from under the stage to the auditorium. Graphic scale 0–1 m

Pic.5 (p. 16): The castle Litomyšl, the Theatre. The wooden lighting poles with wired holders for lighting behind the wings. Graphic scale 0–1 m

Appendix 1 (after p. 102): The castle Litomyšl, the Theatre. The view on the stage machinery.

The Castle Theatre Decorations

(Jiří Bláha, p. 18–33)

An important part of the castle theatre in Litomyšl is its surviving collection of decorations. It is one of the most precious collections of its kind: few decorations dating from the 18th century have survived. The author of the decorations in Litomyšl – Josef Platzer was moreover one of the most important theatrical painters of the late 18th and early 19th century and was also the author of the decorations in the Burgtheater in Vienna and the Nostic Theatre in Prague. The collection was studied by Jiří Hilmera, during a survey of the theatre in the 1950s, but since then the decorations received no further attention.

Decorations are a substantial element of any theatre and that is why it is important to know, where they were situated and how they were used on the stage. The majority of backcloths were placed permanently on the stage in preparation for use, along with at least two rows of pelmets hanging over the stage. The sets of wings, which were being used at the moment, were inserted into portable frames, the remaining sets being deposited in the adjacent rooms. A wide range of clues help us to imagine the process of scene-changing, the way the doors were inserted into the backcloths and many other details.

A great part of the text deals with the various sets, detailing how they were assembled on the stage. Each entry in the overview contains basic information about the composition of the stage, its description and possible varieties and accessories. With the exception of two curtains, the following stage sets can be seen: a *Cabinet*, a *Forge*, a *Cell*, a *Jail Courtyard*, a *Rustic Room*, an *Armoury*, an incomplete *Minister's Room*, a *Middle-class Room*, a *Blue* and a *Yellow Room*, a *Temple Hall*, a *Gothic Hall* and a *Modern Hall*. Exteriors are represented by two *Street* variations, two incomplete sets of scenes depicting a *French Garden* and a *Forrest*, a *Landscape*, a *Cave*, a *Sea-view* and a later backcloth with a *Temple of Friendship* motif.

The Chronicle of the Castle Theatre and Theatrical Life in the 1850s.

(Jiří Bláha, p. 34–49)

Since 1948, the *Leitomischler Schloss Theater Gedenkbuch* or *Chronicle of the Castle Theatre in Litomyšl* has been stored in the theatrical department of the National Museum but it hasn't been processed yet in the literature connected with the theatre. The chronicle, dedicated to the Countess Cajetana of Wallenstein-Vartemberk, records information on the performances of the group of noble actors from the years 1827–1845. It significantly widens our knowledge of the theatrical life of the castle in the second quarter of the 19th century. Our understanding of this period was based mainly upon the handwritten textbooks deposited in the local archive. The article uses the entries in the chronicle along with many well-known facts.

The repertoire of the above mentioned period consisted mainly of unsophisticated farces by popular Austrian and German authors (above all August von Kotzebue). In the early 1840s, five French plays were performed, which were probably a part of the language education of the Countesses and the young Count. Some of the performances were organized for charitable purposes, primarily for the benefit of the needy in Litomyšl.

The list of actors in the chronicle inform us in minute detail about the structure of the Wallenstein drama group, even though it is impossible to identify some of the people today. Alongside members of the Wallenstein family, there were also several of their relatives and friends, many of whom came to Litomyšl from Vienna or their remote domains. The most prolific actors were relatives of the Countess Cajetana (to whom the book was dedicated), also her brother the Count of Fünfkirchen, her brother in law Count Belcredi and others. Many employees also took part in the acting.

Two plays were usually performed during one night. All the performances recorded in the chronicle took place solely in the winter season, from December to April; some of them being part of family parties celebrating birthdays or name days. There is only one reference to musical accompaniment of the performance.

The chronicle is amply decorated with ornamental motifs and the preamble is illustrated with drawings of the theatre curtain and the coats of arms of Wallensteins and their relatives.

The transcription of the text of the chronicle is on pages 39–49.

The Castle Theatre Inventories

(Jiří Bláha, p. 50–63)

Historic inventories of the castle theatre depict in details the theatre equipment especially at the turn of the 18th century. Several lists from this period describe a set of decorations, others we can follow the gradual enlargement of the wide collection of costumes. The most extensive inventory was compiled at the end of the 1820s, when the running of the theatre was resumed. There are more than 200 pages describing thoroughly all the facilities of the auditorium, the adjacent rooms, and the collection of costumes, props and decorations.

In these documents we learned, among other things, of original equipment lost forever. There were for example machines for making thunder and lightning, as well as counters for notes and large supplies of glass lamps. Great attention was focused on a rich collection of costumes, which regrettably didn't survive. The costume details include information on the performances they were used in. There are also some remarkable items including for example a *stuffed hermit*. A great proportion of the theatrical equipment was placed in a so-called *garderobe* on the site of a former theatre originating from

the early 1790s. Further storage was in *dressing rooms*, the whereabouts of which is unknown. We presume that they were situated in the close proximity of the theatre, probably on the ground floor in the northwest wing of the castle.

We have chosen primarily the extracts from the inventories referring to the decorations and props: their transcriptions can be found on pages 52–63.

Directories – Technical Scripts of Historic Performances

(*Jiří Bláha*, p. 64–80)

A great part of what we know about the technical details about the running of the castle theatre in Litomyšl comes from the collection of documents deposited in the Litomyšl archive. Among the handwritten schedules of particular roles there are also so called *directories* – the ancillary scripts for the director. The most extensive refer to the performances from the years around 1830.

Major sections of the directories consist of lists of performing characters and their entries and exits onto and off the stage. Besides this we can find detailed information about the relevant props and costumes in each sequence, the decorations used and in some cases even the operation of the stage equipment. Thanks to these documents we also know names of some of the people who handled the scene changes and how they took place. Notes regarding lighting operation and stage directions are also of great importance, as they give us an idea of the performance, from preparation to final staging.

On pages 66–80 there is a transcription of the most interesting directories (or their parts) from the years 1829 and 1833.

The Litomyšl branch of the Wallenstein-Wartemberg family

(*Jiří Bláha*, p. 81–84)

The history of the castle theatre in Litomyšl is connected with the names of the Counts of Wallenstein-Wartemberg. Their family arrived in Litomyšl through marriage in 1729 and they held their domain until 1855, when it had to be sold in a public auction due to debts.

Some of the notes relating to the process of building the first theatre in the castle in 1767 help to illustrate the Wallenstein-Wartembergs' relationship to the theatre. Unfortunately the theatre was destroyed by fire before its completion, as were the documents concerning the running of theatres in other family domains. Virtually every member of the family, starting with the theatre's founder Georg Joseph and his wife Marie Franzisca up to the last heir of the domain Anton II and his sister, performed on the stage of the local theatre. Relatives of Countess Cajetana, who was born in Fünfkirchen, also acted. Cajetana's, mother and some of her siblings lived in Litomyšl after they had sold their original domain in Chlumec by Třeboň.

The biographical facts of the Wallensteins can be found in their family tree on page 84.

Wallenstein-Wartemberg Theatres in Bohemia and Moravia

(*Pavla Pešková*, p. 85–91)

The Wallenstein-Wartemberg family owned not only Litomyšl but also a large number of other domains, in some of which theatres were also built and operated. The author documented their history in her university thesis and the following text is an extract.

The castle in Mnichovo Hradiště, the main family domain, already boasted a theatre in the second half of the 18th century. We don't know much about its appearance. The surviving theatre took on its contemporary appearance under the directions of Count Christian Vincenc in 1833, when a gathering of representatives of *The Holy Alliance* took place there, on this occasion an ensemble from Prague performed here. The theatre was simply equipped and boasted a valuable collection of decorations. Regrettably we don't know the author of the decorations, but it was very likely a painter from the Stavovske Theatre (perhaps Václav Fischer). Part of the decorations from the older theatre (from the 18th century), have also survived. Today a wide range of theatrical costumes and props are stored in the castle depository.

Another theatre, which has not survived to the present-day, was in Duchcov, and was most likely already operating in the early 18th century. It was certainly operating under Count Georg Christian, when the famous librarian Giacomo Casanova was employed there. We have detailed information about the wide range of theatrical equipment from an inventory dating from 1808. The theatre probably perished in the second half of the 19th century.

According to the sketchy information we have, a theatre was built in Třebíč for Count Vincenc in the years 1791–1792. There was probably only a very simple stage here, but we don't know anything about its exact appearance, location or its repertoire.

The theatre in the castle Kozel near Plzeň dates back to 1830 and was built for Count Christian Vincenc. Stage equipment and a modest collection of theatre decorations can still be seen here. We assume in accordance with period information that simple conversational comedies were performed here.