

# The “Slavic Spirit” and the Opera Scene in Olomouc, 1830–1920<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** In 1830, a new theater building was opened in the Olomouc Upper square. The stable theatrical life enriched enormously the cultural life of the city and encouraged the development of publishing activities in the field of music journalism and publishing. The public debates on the artistic value of theater performances, on abilities of particular artists and on other subjects gained new quality after the 1860 October diploma because Czechs living in and around the traditional German town put pressure on theater directors and demanded Czech plays on the stage. The fights for the national repertoire on the stage of the Olomouc Provincial Theater are demonstrated in this essay in two contrary ways: at first, the introduction of Czech dramas into the German scene during the 1860s is discussed, then the intensive promotion of German operas during the 1880s and 1890s when internationally played Slavonic operas were performed in all theaters. The director Carl König (1862–1868) offered a contract to many artists who were able to speak both German and Czech, so he could open an independent subscription for the Czech public. The relatively tolerant atmosphere allowed König’s company to give performances in both languages and connect the Olomouc theatrical life to the Prague Provisional Theater. However, Czech nationalism was getting stronger during the 1870s and provoked competitive and unfriendly reactions on German side. The arguments for refusal of Smetana’s and Tchaikovsky’s operas by the directors of the Olomouc theaters are discussed on the basis of archival sources as well as articles published in contemporary periodicals.

**Keywords:** national opera repertoire, Smetana, Tchaikovsky, Austrian provincial theater

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## Olomouc, a city without composers, a city of top-quality performers

The opening of the new theater in Olomouc in 1830 marked the beginning of an era in which performing arts could develop systematically. The newly opened theater naturally became a central cultural institution, a center of education, entertainment and an important political forum.

The character of the city's population before the events of March 1830 is best evoked by a verse of the poet Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský: "Here's to you the city of clergy, the home of soldiers."<sup>2</sup> The fact that Olomouc was an important religious center as well as a major fortress was also demonstrated by the nature of celebrations at the time. The space of Reduta, for example, part of the theater building, was decorated and turned into a party venue to celebrate Archbishop Sommerau-Beckh on 4 January 1837. Organized by the civic association, the festivities included fireworks for as many as 1,200 people in the open air in front of the theater. The music program included a long list of compositions, among them Carl Maria von Weber's overture, a duet from Mercadante's opera *Andronico*, the first movement from Moscheles' Third Piano Concerto, choirs from *Robert le diable*, variations for violin à la Paganini, the overture to Rossini's opera *Semiramide* in the arrangement of Carl Czerny for eight pianos and 32 hands, and the closing chorus from Rossini's opera *Mosè in Egitto* performed on eight pianos and an orchestra.

The following is a description of the favorite public activities of local people at the time. "The happiest moments for members of the local bourgeoisie were when they could dress up in uniform, parade around at religious feasts and visits of important guests and demonstrate their shooting skills at the municipal shooting range as part of the annual celebrations of the infamous withdrawal of the Prussian army from Olomouc on 2 July 1758."<sup>3</sup>

The relocation of the Estates Academy to Brno in 1847 was a major blow for the Olomouc intelligentsia. Many scholars left the city, including Alois Vojtěch Šembera who became Professor of Czech language and literature at the University of Vienna two years later. "During the intermissions of German productions, Czech patriotic songs were sung along with excerpts from operas, translated into Czech by A. V. Šembera, a great lover of music and one of the leading figures of the Czech patriotic movement in Moravia."<sup>4</sup> Šembera's followers and friends included the composers Ludvík Dietrich and Arnošt Förchgott-Tovačovský. Šem-

2. The poem was published in the volume entitled *Kvítí polní z Moravy a ze Slezska* [Field flowers from Moravia and Silesia] by Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský in 1840 in Prague. Quoted from Jiří Fiala, "Divadlo, Ve víru válek s revoluční a napoleonskou Francií" [The theater in the whirl of wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France], in *Dějiny Olomouce* [The history of Olomouc], vol. 1, eds. Jiří Šmeral and Jindřich Schulz (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2009), 520.

3. *Ibid.*, 520–521.

4. Jiří Sehnal and Jiří Vysloužil, *Dějiny hudby na Moravě* [The history of music in Moravia] (Brno: Muzejní a vlastivědná společnost, 2001), 153.

bera’s friendship with the Czech baritone Ignát Rosa encouraged theater director Karl Burghauser to stage several productions in Czech in the winter of 1842–1843, among them Klicpera’s *Divotvorný klobouk* [The Magic Hat], Štěpánek’s *Berounské koláče* [The Beroun Cakes] and several opera acts.<sup>5</sup> Burghauser was known for having staged Czech plays even earlier. While director of the theater in Opava (1832–1835), he put on Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek’s comedy *Berounské koláče* [The Beroun Cakes], unfortunately renamed as *Opavské koláče* [The Opava Cakes] due to a lack of language skills and sensitivity.<sup>6</sup>

The ever-growing emphasis on interpretation and its quality led to even more frequent appearances by travelling virtuosos in Olomouc. Unlike the theaters in Prague and Brno, however, the Olomouc venue did not become a stronghold of opera production, but it did attract attention for its above-average interpretative quality.

Karel František Rafael, a *Kapellmeister der Parodie*, had the opportunity to launch the opera tradition in Olomouc in the season 1839–1840, at the time when Karl Burghauser was director of the theater (1834/1836–1847). Unfortunately, the fluctuation of artists between theaters around the Habsburg monarchy stood in the way and original opera creation was therefore not to flourish in Olomouc.<sup>7</sup>

5. See “Autobiografie p. Ignáta Rosy, člena c. k. dvorní opery vídeňské ve v. v Moravské Vsi u Břeclavi na Moravě” [Autobiography of Ignát Rosa, member of the Vienna Opera House in Moravská Ves near Břeclav in Moravia], in *Sborník Čechů dolnorakouských* [Proceedings of the Bohemians from Lower Austria] (Vienna: Národopisný odbor dolnorakouský, 1895), 111–112. Rosa (1818–1906) left Olomouc after one season in 1843 to pursue his career at the Vienna Court Theater (1843–1880). The Olomouc ensemble had other members who spoke Czech, among them Václav Svatopluk Koliha and Anton Balvanský. The reviews of the time, published about Klicpera’s *Divotvorný klobouk* do not reproach Burghauser for staging a Czech play. Quite on the contrary, the Olomouc audiences were pleased to have the opportunity to see a play that had already made its mark in Prague and Brno, which also led some critics to encourage the director to repeat such an accomplished idea. The success was also facilitated by the fact that the texts (Jelen’s quartet *Vše jen ku chvále vlasti a krále* [Everything to praise the Homeland and the King] and the opening aria from Škroup’s opera *Oldřich a Božena* [Oldřich and Božena]) were transcribed and printed out for the audience. B. R. Leitner, “Feuilleton: Theater in Olmütz / Aus Olmütz,” *Moravia* 6/24 (23 March 1843), 98.

6. Karel Boženek and Miloš Zbavitel, “Opavská německá divadelní scéna do počátku první světové války” [The German theatrical scene in Opava before World War I], in *Divadlo v Opavě: 200 let, 1805–2005* [Theater in Opava: 200 years, 1805–2005], ed. Miloslav Zbavitel et alii (Ostrava: Montanex, 2005), 22–24.

7. Karel František Rafael (1795–1864) was the son of a teacher of Žamberk. A multi-talented artist, he began as a double bass player, continued as a bass singer and actor, composer of music for theater and was probably responsible for several complex theater pieces (such as *Eisele a Beisele aneb Co dokáže kouzelnictví* [Eisele and Beisele or what magic can do] performed at the Estates Theater on 2 May 1847). He appeared as a singer in the first Czech opera, *Žižkův dub* [Žižka’s Oak] by František Bedřich Kott (1841). He joined the theater directed by Burghauser in Olomouc on 7 January 1837. From 1838 until 1840, he was in charge of the theater orchestra in Opava and Kraków. His wife was also a member of the Opava ensemble. In 1838 and 1839, he was choirmaster and second Kapellmeister of Czech productions in Brno where he also was in charge of the local library. Rafael’s fundraiser night was held in Olomouc on 11 January 1840, and the program included, among other pieces, Hérold’s *Zampa* and the farce *Das Zauberrüthchen* with music by F. Škroup. 1843 saw Rafael active in the drama ensemble, between 1844 and 1846 he was Kapellmeister in Burghauser’s company after which he left for Maribor. His son Franz (František) Rafael (1816–1867) was Kapellmeister and composer in Olomouc at the time of Carl Haag in the post of theater director. His focus was mostly in operetta. Cf. *Hudební divadlo v českých zemích: Osobnosti 19. století* [Musical theater in the Czech Lands: Personalities of the nineteenth century], ed. Jitka Ludvová (Prague: Theater Institute / Academia, 2006), 427–428.

### After 1848: first attempts at Czech original creation

The revolutionary year of 1848 allowed the population for a short time to manifest its free will, only to have it repressed again under Alexander Bach's Neoabsolutism. The energetic director of the theater, Friedrich Blum (in charge between 1847 and 1859) managed to make the most of the first or the euphoric part of 1848. He was quick enough to share with the "new" audiences his philosophy of the theater as a public institution which was supposed to bring about fundamental change: "Aus einer Drahtpuppe wurde ein selbständiger freier Mensch."<sup>8</sup> He also responded to the imperial manifesto, a document laden with hope for major social changes with its promise of a constitution and the end of censorship.

As early as 16 March 1848, only a day after the Olomouc public was informed about the Emperor's intentions via posters distributed around the city, Blum galvanized the citizens who supported his already firm and popular position.

That evening the theater director Blum gave a speech on the stage, provoking an enthusiastic reaction from the audience. His were the first free words spoken in public, his fervor was contagious, spreading across the hall:

"Brethren! Until this day, we have been trodden upon by the privileged, like worms swarming in the mud. Our hearts were bleeding, our voices suffocated. Now we can stand up bravely and speak out against our oppressors – this freedom is bestowed upon us through the free press. We no longer need to be afraid of being locked up for practicing free speech by the secret police, whether sent by politicians or the clergy. No more accusations of heresy, no more black crosses, no more expelling. The oppressors are defeated. Now we can speak and write it all out, in line with the only law – the law of our free will. Censorship has led us to the most repulsive behavior of them all: hypocrisy and lies. It is finally gone! May our honesty be reborn with the free press, guiding us towards the truth and morality. We have been given a constitution which defines our taxes proportionally as well as our role in the legislation process. Finally, the ministers will be accountable to us with their agendas and spending our money ...

And what benefits will these changes bring about to our Czech nationality, you ask me? Our authorities will be Czech, they will have to accept Czech letters. No longer will they be allowed to reject Czech documents and protocols without German translation, they will be obliged to communicate with us in our language whether in speech or in writing. We will have Czech schools in which we will teach according to our standards. We will have Czech grammar schools where the German language will be taught along with and equal to

8. See Friedrich Blum's humorous article "Constitutionelles Lexikon," *Die Neue Zeit* 1/5 (12 April 1848), 3

other subjects. We will have Czech schools for higher crafts and farming education and lecturing in both German and Czech in colleges.

Brethren! The German is no longer a master and the Czech no longer a slave. As of today, the two nations are equal and deserve the same amount of respect and legitimacy. Up until today, brethren, we were told to be ashamed of our language. The language of our illustrious ancestors. We were ashamed of it because it was not the language of the powerful. We should be ashamed of another thing, that we did not have enough spirit to stand up for the crippled beggar of our language, when it was chased out of schools, churches, offices as well as our households.

Repent now and let us do our best to compensate for such an insult. Work hard to allow the Czech language to stand equal with the scholars of Europe. Brethren, let us emulate our grandfathers – in our hearts, our spirit, our words and our deeds. Let us be Czechs once again.”<sup>9</sup>

As a multinational country with a Slavic population of up to 40%, Austria was supposed to allow all nationalities to express themselves in the field of theater. In this regard, Blum did not lag behind and built himself a reputation as a tolerant, multiculturally oriented director of a German institution (German in the sense of *deutsche Bühne*). On 25 November 1848, he applied at the city hall for permission to put on a regular Sunday program of Czech productions, running from 4 to 6 pm. His motivation was twofold: first, his need to expand the opera ensemble, second, his willingness to meet the expectations of the audience described as follows: “meist nur der slawischen Sprache kundig, und dadurch orts-, dienst- oder sonstiger Verhältnisse nicht füglich des Abends das Theater besuchen können.”<sup>10</sup>

Blum was allowed to stage Czech plays up until the beginning of 1849. The most popular nights at the time were Josef Kajetán Tyl’s *Paličova dcera* [The arsonist’s daughter], staged under the title *Pražská děvečka a venkovský tovaryš* [A Prague damsel and a countryman] on 3 December 1848 and attended in person by F. Palacký, F. L. Rieger, K. Havlíček, and other prominent personalities. Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek’s *Čech a Němec* [Czech and German] on 10 December 1848 also attracted major attention as the Emperor himself was expected to at-

9. The speech was published in: *Týdeník, listy ponaučné a zábavné* 1/13 (30 March 1848–1849), 103–104. Quoted from Jiří Fiala, “Královské městské divadlo v Olomouci za ‘Jara národů’ roku 1848” [The Royal Municipal Theater in Olomouc during the “Spring of the Nations” in 1848], *Bohemica Olomucensia* 1/1 (2009), 111–112. Blum’s speech was followed by the national anthem, after which “Freiheitschor” from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and the duet from Bellini’s *I puritani* were performed. The audience was given prints of the poem *Die Universitat* by Ludwig August Frankl. Cf. *Moravia* 11/38 (28 March 1848), 125, and 11/44 (11 April 1848), 176.

10. Jaroslav Čičatka, *Vývoj divadelnictví ve střední a severní Moravě: Dějiny hudby a zpěvu v Olomouci* [Development of theater in Central and North Moravia: the history of music and singing in Olomouc], (Přerov: self-published, 1942), originally published in *Vlastivěda střední a severní Moravy: Vlastivěda župy olomoucké* [History and geography of Central and North Moravia: History and geography of the province of Olomouc], vol. 2, eds. Norbert Černý and Rudolf Pelíšek (Kroměříž: Učitel’ské jednoty v župě olomoucké, 1938), 408.

tend, a hope which turned out to be vain in the end. Last but not least, Tyl's *Paní Marjánka, matka pluku* [Lady Marjánka, mother of the Regiment], performed on 26 December 1848 (with the fairytale *Die Teufels Mühle am Wiener Berge* as the first part of the program), was attended by members of parliament who came from Kroměříž. On 17 December 1848, a Czech song was sung by the singer Radkovský as part of Macháček's play *Ženichové* [Bridegrooms]. Štěpánek's comedy *Čech a Němec* was only placed back on the repertory on 5 February 1856 as the Czech opening of the season. The venue also saw the performance of Štěpánek's adaptation of Nestroy's farce *Opice a ženich* [Ape and bridegroom].<sup>11</sup>

The bilingual nature of the community was a fertile ground in which Czech artists were provided with opportunities to grow and excel. The director discovered a great talent in Jan Ludevít Lukes at the end of the season 1852/1853, who later became a big name at the Prague Opera. The press announced the performance of the tenor, misnamed as "Luces" in the leading role of Flotow's *Alessandro Stradella* on 5 May 1853.<sup>12</sup> The fund-raiser of Anna Chaloupková (on 7 May 1853) could only be presented under the title *Ein musikalisches Potpourri*. The Prague-born singer enticed the public with her "charming" performance of the Czech songs *Dívka z mlýna* [The girl from the mill] and *Ah nejni, tu nejni* [Oh, It Ain't Here]. It was Lukes, however, who turned to be the star of the shows, singing in his gently tinged "Brusttenor" the romance in Balfe's *Die Zigeunerin*. The press was prompt to refer to him as a noteworthy singer with a voice not extreme, but definitely sufficient.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that Blum built himself a reputation in Olomouc as a respected and tolerant artist and manager promoting the values of multiculturalism and although he was considered a successful venturer in the field of performing arts (he was active in theaters from Carlsbad to Lviv), his career had a rather bitter ending. In the season 1866/1867, when working as the director of the Lviv Theater, he was confronted by the Polish part of the public, a community with serious concerns about the Polish nationality. The venue, German as it was, prioritized the entertainment function of theater, offering opulent operas and operettas. For the Polish, however, theater was a crucial matter of national identity. A campaign was launched against Blum, specifically against him staging Offenbach's *Krásná Helena* [The Fair Helen]. Led by the critic Władysław Łoziński and a journalist of *Dziennik literacki* Juljusz Starkel, the campaign discredited the theater with the Polish public. The following is only a brief summary of what the press hunt against the production had to say. "Short underskirts have gotten even shorter, only to disappear completely in the end. The genre of operetta is for the German

11. Jiří Štefanides et alii, *Kalendárium dějin divadla v Olomouci (od roku 1479)* [Almanac of history of the Olomouc Theater (from 1479)], ed. Jan Dvořák (Prague: Pražská scéna, 2008), 52.

12. *Die Neue Zeit* 6/101 (5 May 1853), 3.

13. *Die Neue Zeit* 6/104 (10 May 1853), 3.

and the French theater a path to ... complete decadence, humiliation and the antithesis of the arts, a parody of beauty, aesthetic cretinism.”<sup>14</sup>

### After 1860: Olomouc as the birthplace for stars of Prague’s Provisional/National Theater

The issue of Czech theater came into the foreground after the October decree was published in 1860. The Czech spirit was asserting itself much more subtly in German opera and, unlike in the field of drama, no open conflicts were recorded. The Czech Lands also still thrived on the reputation of being Europe’s conservatory: “Und Böhmen insbesondere wird das Vaterland deutscher Tonkunst genannt ... Sind es nicht böhmische Tonkünstler, die man in allen berühmten Orchestern Europa’s zerstreut findet?”<sup>15</sup> Czech artists usually sang in Czech in a company or a song, which was not a reason for the destructive polarization of the audience. A number of art journals were soon established in Olomouc, serving in hindsight as a valuable reflection of the process of radicalization of expression. Some articles were exclusively embedded in hate talk: “ever since the German met the Slavs, there have been disputes and fights”; “the self-indulgent German wants to Germanize us at all costs and export his culture to the East (which the ungrateful Slavs and Hungarians do not want to succumb – no, he says!”<sup>16</sup> More serious disputes between the Czech and the German population occurred in 1867, when members of the Czech Männergesangverein demanded that singing of Moravian national songs be allowed in federal concerts. The demand was dismissed, leading the Czech members of the association to leave in protest.<sup>17</sup>

Carl König was another theater director (in the post from 1862 until 1868, after three seasons managed by the theater entrepreneur Carl Haag) in favour of Czech productions. As of 2 February 1864, Czech productions found their way back on the repertory at the Municipal Theater.<sup>18</sup> The repertory of 1864 was in fact so full

14. “... kompletneho wynaturzenia smaku, do ponizenia i upodlenia sztuki, do parodji piękna, do estetycznego kretynizmu.” Władysław Łoziński, “Teatr,” *Dziennik literacki* 15/22 (29 May 1866), 350–351; Juljusz Starkel, “Teatr,” *Dziennik literacki* 15/34 (21 August 1866), 542–543. See Jerzy Got, *Theatergeschichte Österreichs*, Bd. 10: *Das österreichische Theater in Lemberg im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert: Aus dem Theaterleben der Vielvölkermonarchie* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 705.

15. Christian d’Elvert, *Geschichte der Musik in Mähren und Oesterr.-Schlesien mit Rücksicht auf die allgemeine, böhmische und österreichische Musik-Geschichte* (Brünn: Verlag der hist.-stat. Sektion, 1873), 1.

16. *Hvězda* 3/3 (19 January 1860), 48., and *Hvězda* 3/5 (2 February 1861), 86.

17. Jitka Balatková, “Opery slovanských skladatelů na jevišti olomouckého německého divadla” [Operas of Slavic composers on the stage of Olomouc German Theater], *Střední Morava: Kulturně historická revue* 1/1 (1995), 32.

18. On 20 September 1864, König applied to the council that a Czech performance should be held every second Sunday at 4 pm. The application was dismissed, but König did not give up. The audience was satisfied, profits more than satisfactory and ovations intense. On 12 October, the city council decided that König would be in charge of all upcoming shows. He then informed the council about another Czech performance, held on 12 March 1864, in a letter dated 10 March 1864, the envelope also contained a poster. Olomouc Archives,

of Czech drama productions that opera only seemed to be a secondary genre.<sup>19</sup> The Czech press endorsed König's approach, all the more so as "the house was more than full most of the time." The theater had to hire actors fluent in Czech to be able to put on a Czech performance every Sunday, as the description below suggests:

... it is plain to see that the two eminent actors, Th. Ledererová and Mr. Paleček, words are not enough to praise their excellence, are not enough to push the cart on their own, and that our audiences will not come obligingly, throwing away their money, only to hear their mother tongue on stage, should it be spoken in a blemished and disrespectful form. And this truth is plain to see for the director himself.<sup>20</sup>

The closing Czech production of the season 1863/1864 also built on the talents of Ledererová<sup>21</sup> and Paleček; the program on 13 March 1864 included a comic musical act from Donizetti's opera *La fille du régiment* and a staged version of *Bořivoj's Christening in Velehrad at the time of Svatopluk*.

The following season almost gave the impression of the theater being a fully-fledged federalist institution.<sup>22</sup> *Die Neue Zeit* reacted to the coverage, provided by the Czech press, on the frequency of performances in Czech, by suggesting that the director may be about to launch season tickets for the Slavic population of Olomouc and its vicinity.<sup>23</sup> The success of the Czech productions led the director, during the summer break of 1865, to cast new members of the ensemble in Prague. König's moves as a director were also mentioned by the renowned Prague literary and theater critic Jan Neruda, who did not consider it all that unusual that the directors of German theaters "act as all theater directors," helping themselves out financially with box-office income from Czech plays:

Political Registry, 1786–1873, carton 81, folder Česká divadelní představení [Czech theatrical productions], 1864–1871.

19. As of May the whole company was hired by F. Liegert to help the opera of the New Municipal Theater in Prague. See Adolf Čech, *Z mých divadelních pamětí* [Excerpts from my memoirs of theater] (Prague: Máj, 1903), 39.

20. *Hvězda* 6/8 (27 February 1864), 72.

21. Terezie Ledererová only performed minor roles in opera. In 1864, she was called to Prague by the theater director Liegert, but she was not hired in the end. She returned to Olomouc for the season 1864/1865, making a mark especially in the role of Eurydice in *Orpheus* and Marta in *Faust*. She applied for Prague once again in the spring of 1865, this time successfully. She appeared on stage in Olomouc once again in 1866. Her life role was that of Esmeralda in Smetana's *Bartered Bride*. Josef Paleček returned to Prague in 1864, gradually pursuing his career up to first soloist at the Provisional Theater. Bedřich Smetana (Kapellmeister in 1866) cast him in demanding bass roles of the international repertoire and his own operas. In 1870, he left for Russia where he built himself a reputation as one of the greatest soloists at Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg.

22. On 16 October 1864, *Die Neue Zeit* announced Donizetti's *Belisar* for the usual evening slot and second Czech show, the farce *Das Erntefest*, from 4 pm. *Die Neue Zeit* 17/237 (16. October 1864), [3].

23. *Die Neue Zeit* 17/222 (29 September 1864), 3.



The waves are high on the Czech theater scene, it is all hustle and a bustle, the foam is frothing. On the coast, Mr. König, or whatever the name of the Olomouc director is, sits, watching. He has a romantic mind, waiting for pearls to fall, by accident, into his lap. They say he has already got himself a whole string and is going to drag it to Olomouc one of these days. Choosing his actors, they also say, his eyes and ears are completely focused on whether the artists can play in Czech. Olomouc is about to have a regular program of Czech plays. Shame on you, Brno!<sup>24</sup>

Under König’s management, the theater in Olomouc took pride in collaboration with many artists who were, or were soon to become, big names at the Interimstheater, or the National Theater: conductor Adolf Čech, Terezie Ledererová, František Ferdinand Šamberk, who married the Olomouc-based opera singer Julie Knornová, Ludevít Lukes, Eleonora z Ehrenbergů or Betty Hanušová. Not only were regular Czech shows relaunched under his management, but, starting in 1868, König also allowed professional Czech theater companies to have guest appearances at the venue.<sup>25</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Anna Štanderová performed in Olomouc from January to March 1868. After König left the town, however, the tolerant federalist approach could no longer be upheld at the theater.

### **Bans on Czech productions, itinerant theaters and the power of community**

König’s successor Ignatz Czernits (in the post from 1868 until 1872) filed a successful application at the city council to organize Czech Sunday shows starting on 7 November 1869 (the shows began at 4 in the afternoon) specifically for the ensemble of Anna Štanderová or her son Antonín Štandera. In 1870, Štanderová’s company was exchanged for Václav Svoboda’s ensemble, which also put on successful performances on workdays, outside of the Municipal Theater. The year 1871 marked the end of the Czech period at the venue: Czernits applied for 30 nights for Svoboda’s company, but was rejected due to upcoming construction work at the theater. The decision of the local establishment need not be interpreted politically, however, it sparked a backlash from the Czech public, especially as the

24. [Jan Neruda], “Feuilleton,” *Národní listy* 5/133 (16 July 1865), [1].

25. Theatrical productions in Olomouc were in all probability organized by the Slavic reading association. The Association of Amateur Community Theaters was only founded in 1872. The first to be granted permission to stage performances in Czech in Moravia (with the exception of the royal cities of Olomouc and Brno) was Josef Štandera in 1863. Up until 1868, Anna Štanderová’s company, managed by Štandera’s widow, was allowed to perform in Olomouc: the Municipal Theater rented her the space on Sunday afternoons.

news about Czech theater being performed at a private house in Olomouc came along with news on the plans to build the National Theater in Prague.<sup>26</sup>

Community theater and puppet theater were considered key parts of the Czech cultural heritage, and its Prague branch, with very tight connections to professional itinerant theaters, was among the most admired. Czech performances were from now performed at the hall of *Občanská Beseda* [Citizens Committee], Czech operas then found a home at the inn *U města Olomouce* [Olomouc Tavern]. The incident resulted in the establishment of the Community Theater Union (*Jednota divadelních ochotníků besedních*) in 1872, a body approved by the government in Brno on 29 August 1872. The Union operated out of the offices of *Občanská Beseda* [Citizens Committee] on *Dolní náměstí* [Lower Square]. Due to disputes at the Union and loss of their proper space, performances had extremely poor attendance. The initiative only survived one season, that of 1873/1874, with a total of 25 performances, after which a long period of apathy followed.

Julius Schwabe (director of the theater from 1872 until 1874), as is apparent from the available materials, seems to have been an amenable person, open enough to lend costumes to the Czech theater community. He also adapted a number of Czech musical plays originally staged in Prague, despite the fact that the city council was against engaging Czech artists.<sup>27</sup> In the spring of 1874, Václav Svoboda's company had several performances at the theater, at the Beseda house as well as in the summer venue at the St. Moritz Church.

The music scene of Olomouc was no longer dominated by opera as Schwabe had not been able to provide suitable conditions for the genre to flourish due to the lack of attractive new pieces in the repertoire, the average-level performances of the singers, and the stereotypical repetition of notorious pieces. The community life, on the other hand, was alive and kicking. One of the leading personalities at the time was Wladimir Labler, a proponent of Richard Wagner, director of St. Moritz choir from 1868 until 1908. He was also active in the Teachers' College, he was the conductor of the *Musikverein* and, as of the early 1870s, the manager at *Männergesangverein*. The former ensemble marked its twentieth anniversary in 1872 with its one hundredth concert.<sup>28</sup> The concerts of the *Männergesangverein* played a major role in the social and cultural life of the city, defining its rhythm and contributing to its vibrations. The ensemble's repertoire consisted of popular choruses from *Prorok* [The Prophet], *Lohengrin* or *Trubadúr*. Olomouc was also very fortunate to have Pavel Křížkovský as a director of the cathedral choir (1872–1883). Křížkovský was an outstanding cultural manager and was in charge of reform in line with the values of the Cecilian movement.

26. See *Die Neue Zeit* 24/88 (18 April 1871), 5; 24/97 (28 April 1871), 4.

27. Balatková, "Opery slovanských skladatelů," 32.

28. See *Die Neue Zeit* 25/78–80, 82, 87 (5, 6, 7, 10, and 16 April 1872).

Carl Joseph von Bertalan (in the post from 1874 until 1878) was yet another director of the theater in Olomouc. During his tenure, the company of Eliška Zöllnerová manifested a major interest in the theater. Due to the planned construction work, the municipal collegium did not allow Czech performances in the period 1873–1875. Zöllnerová eventually rented the hall of *Občanská Beseda* and her company finally performed in Olomouc for the first time from 3 May until 2 June 1876, putting on 24 shows in all. *Die Neue Zeit* called for 10 Czech plays to be allowed at the municipal collegium, informing about the enthusiastic reactions of the Czech press: “Bravo!”.<sup>29</sup> In 1876, Zöllnerová staged Smetana’s *Bartered Bride* featuring the later member of the Vienna Court Opera House, bass Vilém Heše. Jindřich Mošna, another legendary Prague actor, reportedly appeared in one-act plays at the time.<sup>30</sup>

According to the evidence of contemporary documents, Franz von Suppé and Jacques Offenbach’s operettas were also performed in Olomouc venues. The vivid activity of the Czech theater community in the field of drama and opera represented a major competition to the established Municipal Theater. The 1877 request was smoothly accepted; the March 12 session of the Municipal Council unanimously approved the lending of the theater in April and consequently extended the approval with another 14 performances. From 2 April until 16 May 1877, Zöllnerová and her company staged *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and Schiller’s *Loupežníci* [The Robbers] and *Mary Stuart*. Guest performers included František Kolár from the Provisional Theater and Otýlie Sklenářová-Malá who performed the leading role of *Mary Stuart* on 3 May 1877 in front of a sold-out house. The audience, including members of the Sokol association, Česká Beseda and Czech students, turned the standing ovations into a national manifestation.<sup>31</sup>

The gradual transformation of the audience which, in itself, reflected the changes in the overall population structure, brought about much more than the conflict of national interests.<sup>32</sup> With the military role of the Olomouc fort in decline, the aphorism about more soldiers than people in the city no longer befitted. One of the priorities of the time was to cultivate the public in Olomouc and its vicinity, overall purely educated in music and preferring entertainment in the form of operettas to operas. Bertalan’s approach was time-proofed: towards the end of the season, he offered guests from Vienna and his program was a well-balanced combination of operettas and quality cast operas. The latter were selected according to a pragmatic key: not to require too many soloists (such was the case with Meyerbeer’s *Dinorah*) to save forces for special programs such as Meyerbeer’s

29. See *Die Neue Zeit* 29/104 (6 May 1876), 4.

30. See Stanislav Langer, “Stručná historie divadla v Olomouci” [Brief history of the theater in Olomouc] (Prague: Arts and Theater Institute, 1961), item MB 721a.

31. Štefanides, *Kalendárium dějin divadla v Olomouci*, 63–64.

32. In 1880, the locality’s German population (12 879) outnumbered the Czechs (6 123 of the total of 20 176) by a half.

*L'africane* and Wagner's operas in the first place. This repertory was once again, as was the case with König, a fertile ground that allowed another great conductor to grow in Olomouc and then leave for the Prague Provisional Theater and the National Theater: Bertalan brought with him Moritz Anger as first Kapellmeister and it soon turned out that Anger was apt for the most demanding tasks. At the end of the season 1874/1875, he staged *Tannhäuser* as a fund-raiser night. A year later, Anger repeated the success with Wagner's *Lohengrin* as a fundraiser. The piece was performed in Olomouc for the first time and it was "magnificent."<sup>33</sup> In the hindsight, it seems almost paradoxical that Moritz Anger saw it through with Wagner in Olomouc at a time when the main conflict around Wagner and Smetana's *Dalibor* were long time over in Prague.<sup>34</sup> Later, in the 1880s and 1890s, as a second Kapellmeister at the National Theater, Anger joined the anti-Wagner wing of the Czech music community and focused on the interpretation of Italian operas. It is important to assert, though, that the music landscape had undergone major changes by then.

### The German association and the Municipal Theater

Olomouc had transformed significantly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Until then a city with prevalent German population that held most of the city's economy in its hands saw the fortification torn down in 1876. Olomouc opened to new construction projects, no major influx of the Czech population is recorded though, as Czechs concentrated mostly in the close-by villages and suburbs. The city, until then operating in a relative harmony, turned into a patriotic battleground.<sup>35</sup> The situation at the municipal theater reflected the general state of affairs. The institution, until then open to Czech pieces produced by local communities or itinerant Czech companies, banned all Czech productions in 1884. The reason behind this decision was the following: when the season was over, Václav Svoboda's company presented a series of productions at the venue. One of the productions featured a song performed by Jindřich Mošna, a guest artist from the National Theater in Prague. Unfortunately, the lyrics were interspersed with

33. *Olmützer Zeitung* 2/20 (2 April 1876), 6; *Die Neue Zeit* 29/75 (1 April 1876), 4.

34. Smetana's opera *Dalibor* (premiered in 1868) provoked diverging reactions in the Czech community. Those in support of it were referring to inspiration by Wagner as a positive thing for Czech music, those against the so-called Wagnerianism rejected Smetana's third opera as an expression of the corruptive influence of the German culture on the Czech opera scene, a scene that was otherwise developing independently.

35. Jaroslav Horejšek, "Měšťanstvo ve druhé polovině 19. století a jeho politická, společenská, sociální a kulturní aktivita (dlouhodobé tendence na příkladu Olomouce a olomouckých měšťanů)" [The townspeople in the second half of the nineteenth century and their political, social, and cultural activity (Long-term tendencies on the example of Olomouc and Olomouc townspeople)], in *Studie k sociálním dějinám 19. století* [Studies on the social history of the nineteenth century], vol. 5, eds. Jana Macháčová and Jiří Matějček (Opava: Slezský ústav Slezského zemského muzea Opava, 1995.), 8–55.

criticism of the city council, the members of which would not miss their chance to backfire and had come with the ultimate ban on Czech productions at the theater (it was lifted as late as in November 1918).<sup>36</sup> As a result, the Municipal Theater in Olomouc turned into an exclusively German institution. Furthermore, all plays created by Czech and Slovak artists were dismissed from the theater’s repertory, as the program had to be approved of by the city council on a weekly basis. The repertory in Olomouc was hence dominated by German pieces, despite the fact that for example the Vienna opera, a role model institution for Olomouc, presented the work of artists of Slavic roots regularly and with great success. The German theater directors found themselves in a paradoxical situation, struggling for the possibility to present the works of Slavic authors against the nationalist German association *Deutscher Verein*, among the members of which were numerous city councilors.

In the 1880s, the German theater was coping with falling attendance rates brought about by a number of factors. First of all, the German population of Olomouc was scared to death by the monstrosity of fires that destroyed the Vienna Ringtheater and the Prague National Theater, both unfortunate events occurring in 1881. Besides, the population was weakened by the general economic and agricultural crises of the early 1880s and the number of those who could afford to attend theatrical performances fell radically. In the wake of the 1884 ban, the Czech audiences who, until then, regularly attended German productions at the theater, joined the boycott of German works, a fact mentioned frequently in directors’ complaints and supplies for subvention at the city council.<sup>37</sup> The directors at the time were reluctant to invest into projects that were far from profitable, thus the quality kept declining.

### The triumph of Smetana’s Bartered Bride

The Czech public could attend drama and opera productions by František Trnka and his company at the inn *U města Olomouce*. Despite many legislative hindrances, during the mid-1880s, the Czechs had managed to break into the fortified part of the city and buy a house from a German proprietor, in spite of strong opposition from the German community. They have rebuilt it into the Czech National House, “a stronghold of the Czech spirit.” With its prominent position in the city center and being the largest hall in Olomouc, the National House was considered a fully-fledged art institution, this despite the fact that in was not operated by pro-

36. Štefanides, *Kalendárium dějin divadla v Olomouci*, 67.

37. “Die tschechische Bevölkerung bleibt dem Theater principiell ferne” – stated a complaint from Emanuel Westen, formulated in a letter to the City Council on 4 March 1888. Olomouc Archives, Economic Registry, 1874–1920, *Divadelní ředitelé* [Theater directors], 1897–1918, carton 766, sign. L 2 – item 359.

fessional bodies but by the Association of Amateur Community Theaters when it came to drama, and the musical Žerotín association with opera. Since Czech productions, especially Smetana's operas, "attracted a lot of attention from both the Czech and the German public,"<sup>38</sup> the director of the Municipal Theater, Carl Berghof (on the post from 1890 until 1896), struggled to stage one of Smetana's operas himself as such an accomplishment would regain his theater's popularity. Eventually, he managed it towards the end of his last but one season, 1894/1895, with the Olomouc premiere of Smetana's *Bartered Bride*. The production gained major critical acclaim and the reactions of the public were enthusiastic. Reviews came up with curious explanations of the thirty years delay in presenting Smetana: his talents had reportedly been hidden in the Czech National Theater and it was only owing to Vienna that the genius could see the light beyond his national environment. Smetana was compared to Mozart in terms of genius,<sup>39</sup> and to Lortzing in his humorous approach to music.<sup>40</sup>

Critics tried to explain that it was only and exclusively owing to Smetana's talent that what once was raw national material of the Czech culture had been "refined," which is why his pleasant melodies can mediate a spiritual experience.<sup>41</sup> *The Bartered Bride* was described as having the sound of the Czech nation, "the true Slavic tinge" manifesting itself in the characteristic voice of the violins and clarinets.<sup>42</sup> The staging of the Czech opera at the Municipal Theater was also under the scrutiny of the Czech press that otherwise deliberately ignored the German institution. The Czech journal *Pozor* had the following to say: "*The Bartered Bride* has finally been allowed to the 'Chapel of the German Muses in Olomouc,' she enters victoriously, ... the whole German community in the city is bewitched by Smetana's music." The Czech press is also heavy with hope about the possibility of the German party changing its stance to Czech operas at the Municipal Theater: "Let us hope that after such success, the German community shall realize that their stance towards Czech music, their slamming the door in the face of music that has been triumphing the educated world for years now, has not been exactly fortunate."<sup>43</sup>

A curious epilogue is connected with *The Bartered Bride* at the German Municipal Theater. The show was on the two last nights before Easter and the first performance offered an unusual scene: following each act, a part of the audience shouted at the director Berghof who was standing at his conductor stool: "Berghof

38. Report on the activity of the musical association Žerotín in Olomouc in the first quarter of the century, (Olomouc, May 1905), quoted from *Přehledné dějiny české literatury a divadla v Olomouci* [Synoptic history of Czech literature and theater in Olomouc], vol. 1: *Od počátku do roku 1918* [From the beginning till 1918], ed. Jiří Stýskal (Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1981), 111.

39. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 16/58 (11 March 1895), 5.

40. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 18/56 (10 March 1897), 5.

41. *Die Neue Zeit* 48/58 (11 March 1895), 6.

42. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 16/58 (11 March 1895), 5.

43. *Pozor* 2/31 (12 March 1895), 2.

hinaus!” The hateful screams did not reflect on the poor quality of the show. On the contrary, the singers were called back on stage and rewarded with flowers. The incident was described by the press as a demonstration and the following night, the last re-run of the show in the season, saw a major turning point. Berghof’s appearance at the conductor’s stool, decorated with laurel, was awarded with frantic applause and laudatory cries. The Olomouc journal *Die Neue Zeit* suspected the scene to be choreographed and paid for by Berghof.<sup>44</sup> Considered in the context of the events to follow, it is likely that certain nationalist forces played a role in the incident.

In his last Olomouc season, Carl Berghof introduced another opera of a Czech composer: *V studni* [In the well] by Vilém Blodek (premiered in 1867 on the stage of the Provisional Theater), the second most popular Czech opera after *The Bartered Bride* in the Czech Lands and abroad until the end of the nineteenth century. Berghof probably decided to include the production after its premiere at the Vienna Theater in 1894, also, he got to know the piece better when it was performed by the Olomouc music association *Žerotín* in the same year. The press in Olomouc welcomed the production and its more general interpretative style, referring to inspiration from Smetana, Mendelssohn, and even Wagner’s sense of harmony.<sup>45</sup> As much as the critics called for multiple re-runs of the opera so that the audience could get used to it, it was dismissed from the repertory and has never returned to Olomouc.<sup>46</sup>

The audience was particularly struck by the performance of the young Czech singer Anna Slavíková, presented under the Germanized name of Anna Slawik, who was just on the onset of a very successful career mostly connected with the National Theater in Prague. Berghof also engaged other singers who were later to appear at the leading Czech venue in Prague (among them Emanuel Kroupa and Eduard Aschenbrenner). His successor, Stanislaus Lesser (on the post of the director from 1898 until 1904), himself a Polish Jew, was even more in favor of hiring singers of Czech or Slavic provenience. Among the big names at the National Theater who started their career in Olomouc after being hired by Lesser were Emil Pollert, Gabriela Horvátová, and Theodor Schütz-Prohaska (his proper name being Bohdan Procházka). Another renowned artist went by a Germanized stage name: Mizzi (Maria) Jeritza (her proper name was Marie Jedličková) who debuted in Olomouc in 1906 and later became a star of the Vienna Volksoper and Hofoper, the New York Metropolitan Opera and the Prague National Theater.

44. *Die Neue Zeit* 48/81 (8 April 1895), 4.

45. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 16/249 (29 October 1895), 5.

46. *Die Neue Zeit* 48/249 (29 October 1895), 6., and *Mährisches Tagblatt* 16/249 (29 October 1895), 5.

## Smetana's *Dalibor* and the ban on Czech operas

When first staged in Olomouc, *The Bartered Bride* was on for six weeks and was sold out ten times. The later theater director Stanislaus Lesser was well aware of the production's commercial potential and presented *The Bartered Bride* six times in the season of 1896/1897 and three times in the following season. It may have seemed at the time that the German scene had opened to Czech operas once and for all. The highlight event of the first half of the season 1897/1898 at the Municipal Theater was to be another work of Smetana. Inspired by the success that Smetana's *Dalibor* had at the Vienna Court Opera House – the piece was on the program eleven times from October to December 1897 –,<sup>47</sup> Lesser decided to offer the production in Olomouc.<sup>48</sup> Once again, Smetana's music was appraised by German critics: the Czech composer, they said, “knows the tones that get straight into the heart,” some of the parts are the most beautiful one has ever heard in a modern opera and the interpretation and the direction was very accomplished.<sup>49</sup>

The Czech press was also very positive: “*Dalibor*, this great historic opera, has been provided the financial investment, devotion and sets that it deserves.” The music was also appraised: “The singing was very accomplished, the performance of the orchestra even more so.” The Czech journal *Pozor* remarked resentfully that there were many Czechs in the audience, appealing to the Czech community not to attend shows at the German theater: “May the Czech spectator be an exception at the hall!” Another hostile aspect of Czech criticism is detectable in the statement that German audiences in Vienna and Olomouc are not apt to understand the exceptionally subtle and refined style of Smetana and the success of Smetana's *Dalibor* with the Germans is therefore “merely a German coquetry with what is true Czech culture.”<sup>50</sup>

The first re-run of *Dalibor* was postponed to 20 November due to an illness of singer Milada Marie Rochell. On the very day, the management of the theater announced in the press and on posters around the city that the show was cancelled, no further explanation was offered. A short notice in the same issue of the paper announced that the committee of the Olomouc German Association (*Deutscher Verein*) had decided to file an application to the City Council to cancel all re-runs of the Czech opera *Dalibor* at the German Theater. During the upcoming session of the City Council that was held only a few days later, the councilors officially

47. Franz Hadamowsky, *Die Wiener Hoftheater (Staatstheater) 1811–1974: Ein Verzeichnis der aufgeführten und eingereichten Stücke mit Bestandsnachweisen und Aufführungsdaten*, Bd. 2 (Wien: Brüder Hollinek, 1975), 88.

48. The premiere of Smetana's *Dalibor* in Olomouc took place a year earlier (4 November 1896); it was produced by František Trnka's theater company. The Olomouc-based company Žerotín came with the opera rather late, in 1902. See Stýskal (ed.), *Přehledné dějiny české literatury a divadla v Olomouci* Stýskal, 110–111.

49. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 18/261 (15 November 1897), 5–6; *Die Neue Zeit* 50/261 (15 November 1897), 4.

50. *Pozor* 4/131 (16 November 1897), [2].



accepted the application and submitted it to the Theater Committee to decide the matter.<sup>51</sup> The radical reaction of the *Deutscher Verein* was provoked by an article published in the Czech journal *Pozor* which appealed, rather militantly, to the Czech public not to attend performances at the German Theater. *Dalibor* has thus fused a new nationalist conflict at the Municipal Theater.

The *Deutscher Verein*, whose main agenda was to support the national interests of the Olomouc Germans, pointed out in a letter to the City Council the provocations against the Olomouc Germans arising from the re-introduction of Czech operas in the German theater. The Municipal Theater, operated at the expense of municipalities, is to be a German educational institution and, in order to preserve this basic mission, the municipality should exercise its influence and prohibit any incorporation of Czech plays into its repertory. This, the association claims, is especially important at the time, when Czechs are settling in ever larger numbers in what had been a German language territory. The association further accuses the German director Lesser that in this difficult time, for reasons of business and publicity, he introduced Czech operas and thus encouraged the Czech element. He is said to have gone so far as to sell the Czech lyrics of the opera so that he could present it as a Sunday afternoon show, to which he was going to get many Czechs from nearby villages by special trains. The association reminded the city officials of the fact that such demonstrations by Czechs may incite replies from Germans and that it would thus be in the city’s interest to prevent any such unleashing since the security authorities would have to interfere and even confront their fellows in order to maintain the general order.

As much as the *Deutscher Verein* admits that art should be an international matter, this idea can only be implemented in conditions different from those in Olomouc, that is in purely German towns where Czech or Slavic operas can be approached equally to, for example, French operas. The association appeals, by the intermediary of its president Robert Primavesi<sup>52</sup> and its agent Theodor Knaute, to the City Council to ban any further representation of the opera *Dalibor*, as well as any other Czech and Slavic operas at the German Municipal Theater.<sup>53</sup>

As a result, director Lesser decided to call off the re-run of *Dalibor* planned for the Saturday, November 20. The journal *Pozor* claimed that the decision was also motivated by the fact that the *Deutscher Verein* was threatening to “organize massive demonstrations right at the theater.” The association reportedly distributed a memo in which the German population and more particularly students of lo-

51. *Protokoll über die Sitzung des Stadtverordneten Collegiums der k. Hauptstadt Olmütz um 23. 11. 1897*. Olomouc State Archives, M1 – 1, Knihy [books], Sign. 2077.

52. A large-scale industrialist and manufacturer, Robert Primavesi was also a member of the Theater Committee, influencing its attitude to Smetana’s *Dalibor* and the introduction of Czech operas to the German theater scene.

53. The letter of the German Association in Olomouc, deposited in the State Archives of Olomouc, AMO, carton 403, was translated into Czech by Jitka Balatková in her study, “Opery slovanských skladatelů,” 32.

cal German schools were supplied to attend the demonstration. The mayor of the city, Mr. Brandhuber, joined the German party and put up a drama about returning his ticket to the Saturday show. Naturally, the mobilization of the German party provoked yet another Czech round on the pages of *Pozor*. The journal writes to the effect that it is hardly understandable that only a week ago the German public was enthusiastic about Smetana's music and the beautiful sets of *Dalibor* and now they want to fight against it. Further on, *Pozor* indulges in a hateful discourse that emulates the nationalist tone of the German association: "The whole world kneels in front of Smetana's work but not the Germans in Olomouc. They will rather stick their fingers into their German ears so they do not hear a single defective Czech tone! Well, that is the difference between the whole world and Olomouc, the former has people, the latter has Germans!"<sup>54</sup> The German press would not develop the dispute in any way, probably owing to the fact that the city officials had no intention of further provoking the nationalistic mood in the city. Two months later, though, the City Council was presented with a report from the Theater Committee on the above-mentioned application from the German association regarding the ban on Czech shows at the theater. The theater director was ordered to "avoid in the future any productions that might be considered provocative or insult in any way the German population".<sup>55</sup> *Dalibor* was therefore the last Czech opera at the German Theater until 1918: shortly after the establishment of the new Czechoslovak Republic, the Žerotín ensemble staged Smetana's *Bartered Bride*.

### **"Our" German theater and Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades***

In the first decade of the new century, the national mission of the theater was a relatively frequent topic of local journalism as well as a source of sharp rivalry between the two national camps that could hardly tolerate one another. In an extensive article in January 1906, the *Mährisches Tagblatt* sought to defend the ban on works by Czech and Slavic composers at the German Theater. The text suggests that at the time when the city council allowed for Smetana's opera to be presented at the theater, the Czech party claimed that the works by Czech composers would help the German scene to stand on its feet – a complete nonsense according to the author of the article. Even without the works of Slavic composers, the author further explains, the city of twenty-thousand inhabitants now has a much higher attendance rate at the theater than other similar cities: this is a clear proof of the quality of the repertoire. "Only a Czech fanatic could assert today that there is a lack of high-quality works among German dramas or operas." The author adds

54. *Pozor* 4/134 (23 November 1897), [2].

55. *Protokoll über die Sitzung des Stadtverordneten Collegiums der k. Hauptstadt Olmütz um 11. 1. 1898*. Olomouc State Archives, M1 – 1, Knihy [books], Sign. 2078.

that there are many excellent works still waiting for their first release at the local theater. "Smetana's operas together with all the other pieces of Czech composers would not be enough to uphold a permanent Czech venue. This we are saying not with the aim to harm. It is a mere commentary on the reality of facts, the same as our admitting that here are many German citizens who are keen on Smetana's music." What follows is by far less generous as the author claims that the Czech population is strictly rejecting to have anything to do with German arts. He illustrates the accusation by mentioning that within the 25 years of its existence, the concerts of Žerotín offered the works of Russian, Italian, and Spanish provenience, but hardly any German works, despite the fact that Germans play first violin in the field of arts. Even the Czech Opera House in Prague has German works on its repertoire, he reminds us and adds that it is extremely unusual for the Czech party to ask the German Theater in Olomouc to open its door to Czech works. "It would be great, indeed, if art was immune to any political disharmony," he admits while refusing any eventuality that may change the status quo.<sup>56</sup>

A year later, however, the management of the German Theater managed to circumvent the ban of the City Council and opened its door to Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, which was supposed to become the pinnacle of the 1906/1907 season. Prior to the Olomouc premiere, the German press had emphasized that the opera was on the repertoire of the Vienna Court Opera House,<sup>57</sup> by which they wanted to justify the presentation of a work of one of the forbidden Slavic composers on the stage of the local theater.<sup>58</sup> However, they did not fail to add that the theater management would have done better by choosing *Siegfried* or another important opera by a German composer.<sup>59</sup>

The Czech press would not miss the pejorative undertones of the German coverage and backfired before the premiere: "The German community is once again calling to arms against *The Queen of Spades*." The Czech journalists welcomed the decision of the Municipal Theater and took this as an opportune moment to overview the history of Czech and Slavic operas at the venue. "Czech operas (*Dalibor* and *The Bartered Bride*) and Slavic operas used to be so successful at the German venue that the radical representatives of the German population got to be scared of losing the 'city's German character' and enforced the ban on Czech and Slavic plays with the city council." *Pozor* also reminds that the ban lead to the financial crisis under theater director Lesser who, sure of the potential of the

56. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 27/10 (13 January 1906), 5.

57. Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* opened at the Vienna Court Opera House on 9 December 1902. Its adaptation with the sets by Anton Brioschi remained on the repertoire from 1902 until 1906. See Hadamowsky, *Die Wiener Hoftheater (Staatstheater) 1811–1974*, 354.

58. The theater in Brno dared to present Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* only on 14 April 1910. Jarmila Zatloukalová, *Brněnské divadlo: Repertoár v letech 1848–1914* [Brno Theater: Repertoire from 1848 until 1914], vol. 2 (Brno: Archiv města Brna, 2002), 184.

59. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 28/64 (18 March 1907), 5.

Czech operas, invested large sums into their staging. “The public lamented the ban equally, supplying it to be lifted.” The Czech press is also very understanding towards the decision of the theater to stage these operas at a time when German productions exhibit very unsatisfactory attendance rates.<sup>60</sup>

On the day of the premiere of *The Queen of Spades*, *Mährisches Tagblatt* published a text on the genesis of the opera and its reception so far. The author of the article, written in a somewhat mocking tone, clearly disputed the fame of this opera. In his words, the work would be a disappointment to Tchaikovsky, who expected it to bring him much more fame. In fact, the opera was accepted warmly only at the premiere in Moscow and later at the Prague release, the author claims, explaining the local success by the Pan-Slavic ideology, denying the work any major artistic quality.<sup>61</sup>

After the premiere, however, the same author is convinced that “Tchaikovsky’s music may be fascinating at moments,” but he does not fail to note that it is only owing to the excellent work of the conductor Schottlander and especially the outstanding performance of Mizzi Jeritzka as Lisa and Theodor Schütz-Prohaska as Herman. The last performer mentioned is, however, reproached the difficulty with the German language. The German critics thus, the same as in the case of all non-German operas written in the last 25 years, detected a strong influence of Wagner and the tones of Mozart’s *Magic Flute*.<sup>62</sup>

“A small stage, the lack of financial means and an under-average orchestra and the cuts and abbreviations applied on the opera – these are the main reasons behind the fact that the production was not as successful here as it is at large stages,” so far the review of the premiere from the *Czech Pozor*. The accusation of the German adversary is soon to follow: “The Germans in the city, including the *Tagblatt*, are scandalized that the ban on Slavic operas has been defied and call for the exclusivity of German operas at German venues.” *Pozor* reminds of the pragmatic level of the problem – the struggling of the German Theater with attendance rates, also claiming that: “the theater has not seen such huge audiences since the times of *Dalibor* and *The Bartered Bride*.” Once again, the paper reminds that the director Lesser was deprived of the option to present Smetana’s operas at the venue against his will and contradicts the statement of the German press that *Dalibor* would not be sustainable at the venue anyway. “If *Dalibor* is viable as part of the repertory of the Royal Opera in Vienna as well as other leading German houses, it would certainly have thriven at our local venue.”<sup>63</sup>

The German reaction did not take long to wait: the following day the German press once again argued that the success of Smetana’s *Dalibor* in Vienna was over-

60. *Pozor* 14/56 (19 March 1907), 4.

61. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 28/65 (19 March 1907), 4–5.

62. *Mährisches Tagblatt*, 28/66 (20 March 1907), 4.

63. *Pozor* 14/58 (21 March 1907), [4].

rated. "It is a lie, similarly to Smetana's other operas *Hubička* and *The Bartered Bride*, *Dalibor* hardly ever gets on the repertoire," the German paper says, adding that they have no intention whatsoever of fighting the patriotic war through Smetana and the arts in general.<sup>64</sup> The paper adds that their stance towards *The Queen of Spades* was by no means anchored in nationalist views and they only wanted to express their preference of the new German operas. Such opinion is to be completely valid, as it is legitimized by the most recent presentation of *The Queen of Spades* in Berlin, a production featuring the biggest names of the local opera house, still one to end up as an average piece, the author claims victoriously.<sup>65</sup>

It was probably in fear of the public debate giving rise to a larger ethnic conflict that *The Queen of Spades* was withdrawn from the repertory right after the first re-run and it did not return to the German theater in the seasons to come. The discussions around Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, dating from the same period, also indicate the fears of the German language island from the ever more explicitly declared Slavic conviviality. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the national specifics of Olomouc, like in other German-Czech towns, have mirrored in particularly in the areas of cultural and social life. So as not to put the German majority in danger, the City Council, as the proprietor of the theater, would not allow theater directors to offer a truly international program. The incidents accounted for above clearly illustrate that the German party systematically hindered all eventualities that may have encouraged Czech national confidence. The directors of the theater were not allowed to respond to the public's demand and the needs of the business. The Germans had found themselves in a schizophrenic situation: they were bewitched by the work of a composer of the hated nationality, the nationality with which they had to share their city. The operas of Slavic provenience were, undeniably, very much admired even by those who were banning them from the Olomouc Theater.

64. The German press was not completely wrong: Smetana's *Dalibor* was on again at the Vienna Opera once in 1904 and then only in 1912, in a new adaptation. *Hubička* [The Kiss] was last presented in 1895. The case of *The Bartered Bride* was different, though, as it was a regular part of the repertory every year. Cf. Hadamowsky, *Die Wiener Hoftheater (Staatstheater) 1811–1974*.

65. *Mährisches Tagblatt* 28/68 (22 March 1907), 5.

