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## The Ljubljana Stage in the 1830s: Cultural Exchange and Institutional Dynamics

Tanja Žigon – Marko Motnik

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Carniola, Ljubljana (Laibach), Estates Theatre, repertoire, German drama, opera, society, bourgeoisie

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### Authors

Tanja Žigon  
Filozofska fakulteta Univerze  
v Ljubljani  
Oddelek za prevajalstvo  
Aškerčeva 2  
1000 Ljubljana  
Slovenija  
Email: [tanja.zigon@ff.uni-lj.si](mailto:tanja.zigon@ff.uni-lj.si)  
 0000-0002-3442-5790

Marko Motnik  
Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske  
akademije znanosti in umetnosti  
Muzikološki inštitut  
Novi trg 2  
1000 Ljubljana  
Slovenija  
Email: [marko.motnik@zrc-sazu.si](mailto:marko.motnik@zrc-sazu.si)  
 0000-0001-8938-4132

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### Abstract

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This study offers an overview of the organizational, structural and artistic dimensions of the Estates Theatre in Ljubljana during the period from 1830 to 1840, investigating whether the theatre operated as a national institution or merely as a local municipal venue. In doing so, the discussion encompasses not only the theatre's overall direction and audience, but also broader themes such as cultural transfer, actor mobility, professional networks and the theatre's integration into the Habsburg Empire's theatrical landscape. Additionally, the analysis critically examines the current state of research on this topic.

An overview of theatre life in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ljubljana, the capital of the Kingdom of Illyria and the Duchy of Carniola, reveals a complex and dynamic picture. The Estates Theatre emerges as a vibrant yet ever-changing institution throughout the “long” 19<sup>th</sup> century, characterized by a continual fluctuation between artistic successes and failures, an astonishingly diverse repertoire, economic and organizational challenges, frequent changes within the acting troupe and mixed reactions from critics and audiences. Despite these internal struggles and the external political and social upheavals of the period, the theatre demonstrated remarkable resilience. Although formally a theatre of the Estates, this article claims that the facility functioned as a typical municipal theatre and above all, as a German-language institution.

First, it is demonstrated how the historical fact that this is a German theatre has, to this day, hindered research from engaging intensively with this institution. Following an overview of the state of research and the sources available, insights are provided into the general characteristics and organizational structures of institutional dynamics, paying particular attention to the theatre practitioners active in Ljubljana. Furthermore, observations are made regarding the performed repertoire in light of cultural exchange and transfer, as well as on the audience and the role of the theatre in Ljubljana's social sphere.

Given the current state of scholarship, it will become clear that it is premature to analyse the possible ways theatre may have influenced

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social upheaval in Ljubljana. Instead, it seems more productive to consider how political, social and cultural environment shaped the overall direction and character of the city's theatre life. These questions form the focus of this article, which for pragmatic reasons, concentrates on the decade between 1830 and 1840. This specific period offers relatively rich source material, and the Estates Theatre experienced one of its first significant qualitative peaks during these years.

Before examining the theatre as a site and reflection of social upheaval, foundational research is essential to establish a comprehensive knowledge base. Just as individual structural elements of the theatre can only be understood within the context of the institution as a whole, Ljubljana's theatre life must be viewed as part of a larger network. This network encompassed not only the stages of neighbouring urban centres, but also other cities in the former Habsburg Empire, which influenced and exchanged ideas in a variety of ways.<sup>1</sup> While the approach promises fresh perspectives, the realization of such an ambitious and urgently needed research project remains a distant goal. For this reason, from a contemporary perspective, it is less meaningful to compare the organizational structures and artistic aspects of the theatre in Ljubljana with those in other cities of the Habsburg Empire, even though numerous similarities—as well as differences—may be assumed.

As a theoretical foundation, several socio-cultural concepts proposed in recent decades could be applied, including Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of cultural and social capital,<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson's notion of the audience as an imagined community,<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere,<sup>4</sup> or Sven Oliver Müller's investigations into the audience as an actor in the communication space,<sup>5</sup> among others. However, such models have been deliberately excluded; first, because the selection of a particular theory cannot only broaden but also constrain the perspective; second, because the period under consideration is too short; and finally, because the limited availability of sources scarcely allows for a comprehensive argument based on any of these theories.

The most important sources for researching the theatre history of the Ljubljana Estates Theatre include the collection of playbills housed in the Narodni muzej Slovenije (National Museum of Slovenia), referred to as the *Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung* (sign. 13085), which contains more or less complete volumes spanning 1801 to 1836. Additionally, there are printed theatre journals compiled by several different individuals, published annually under frequently

1 An example of the intensive cultural exchange between theatres is shown by LASLAVÍKOVÁ, Jana. From Province to Province: Theatre Journey from Olomouc to Pressburg. In *Musicologica Olomucensia*, 2023, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 7–24, DOI 10.5507/mo.2023.010.

2 BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Die feinen Unterschiede: Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*. Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1997; BOURDIEU, Pierre. Ökonomisches, kulturelles und soziales Kapital. In BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Die verborgenen Mechanismen der Macht*. Hamburg : VSA 1992, pp. 49–75.

3 ANDERSON, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London; New York : Verso, 1983.

4 HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1991.

5 MÜLLER, Sven Oliver. *Das Publikum macht die Musik: Musikleben in Berlin, London und Wien im 19. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

changing titles. To date, the journal for the year 1835 has not been located.<sup>6</sup> Primary sources also include advertisements, reviews and occasional discussions in daily newspapers such as *Laibacher Zeitung*, *Illyrisches Blatt* and *Carniolia*. Another key resource is the extensive, though not yet systematically catalogued, archival collection of the theatre management housed in the Arhiv Republike Slovenije (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia).<sup>7</sup> Lastly, letters written between 1832 and 1840 by a private correspondent, Franz Franz, to Baron Joseph Kalasanz von Erberg provide additional valuable insights.<sup>8</sup> Based mainly on the evaluation of archival sources and the analysis of newspaper reports, the article attempts to compare, contextualize and reconstruct the overall picture.

## German vs. Slovenian Theatre and the Implications for Research

In examining theatre history during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to note that the Estates Theatre in Ljubljana attracted both German-speaking and Slovenian-speaking audiences. In practice, much of the urban elite, who constituted the regular theatre audience, were likely bilingual. Not only was this the sole theatre establishment in the country's capital at the time, but there was also no clear national distinction between cultural spheres, a divide that would become more pronounced in the latter half of the century. Even Slovenian national poet France Prešeren (1800–1849) was a frequent attendee of German-language plays in Ljubljana.<sup>9</sup> The theatre served as a venue where he engaged with numerous intellectuals and prominent figures in Slovenian cultural and political life.<sup>10</sup>

The first Slovenian-language comedy, *Županova Micka* (The Mayor's Daughter), was written by Enlightenment playwright Anton Tomaž Linhart (1756–1795), based on Joseph Richter's (1749–1813) German play *Die Feldmühle* (The Mill on the Field). It premiered in late December 1789 at the Estates Theatre, performed by a group of amateur actors.<sup>11</sup> However, this performance

6 ULRICH, Paul S. *Deutschsprachige Theater-Journale / German-Language Theatre Journals (1772–1918): Bibliographie / Bibliography*. Wien : Hollitzer, 2023, pp. 270–273.

7 Arhiv Republike Slovenije (AS) 13, Ljubljana, Slovenija, Višja gledališka direkcija v Ljubljani, TE 10, Facs. 17, volumes from 1833, 1836, and 1838–1840.

8 AS 730, Gospostvo Dol, Fasc. 46–47. Digitized and transcribed letters by Franz can be viewed at <https://sistory.github.io/LatNemKronike/franz.html> [last viewed on 2 November 2024]. For transcriptions and further information, see: PREINFALK, Miha (ed.) *Pisma Franca Franza baronu Erbergu (1832–1840)*. Ljubljana : Založba ZRC SAZU, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.3986/9789610508977>.

9 Prešeren was bilingual, composing poetry in both Slovenian and German. His Slovenian poems were translated into German as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by figures such as Luitza Pesjak (1828–1898), Anton Pace (1851–1923), and Edward Samhaber (1846–1927). Notably, his first published work, the poem *Dekl'cam* (To the Girls), appeared in the German-language *Illyrisches Blatt* on 27 January 1827, in both the original Slovenian and a German adaptation. For more on Prešeren, see: BAUM, Wilhelm. France Prešeren, ein slowenischer Dichter in Österreich. In *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur*, 1999, vol. 43, pp. 107–117; BOGNER, Ralf Georg – BRANDTNER, Andreas (eds.) *Interkulturelle Asymmetrie: Edward Samhabers Übertragung des slowenischen Nationalautors France Prešeren; Mit einer Edition der Prešerenklänge (1880) von Edward Samhaber*. Wien; Köln; Weimar : Böhlau, 1999.

10 SLODNJAK, Anton. Prešeren, France (1800–1849). In *Slovenska biografija*, <http://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi463215/#slovenski-biografski-leksikon> [last viewed on 2 November 2024].

11 VIDMAR, Luka. Prevajanje posvetne dramatike v razsvetljenstvu. In POKORN, Nike K. – GROŠELJ, Robert – MIKOLIČ JUŽNIČ, Tamara (eds.) *Zgodovina slovenskega literarnega prevoda. Volume I: Pregled zgodovinskega razvoja*. Ljubljana : Založba Univerze v Ljubljani; Cankarjeva

remained an isolated incident, as did the translation—and likely adaptation—of August von Kotzebue’s comedy *Der Schauspieler wider Willen* (The Reluctant Actor), which was unexpectedly performed in 1822 amidst the theatre’s predominantly German-language repertoire.<sup>12</sup> Two further plays are worth mentioning for which the playbills displayed both German and Slovenian titles. Presumably, these were either bilingual theatre texts or simply advertising strategies to attract a Slovenian-speaking audience. On 21 December 1821, a biblical tableau (*biblisches Gemälde*) in four acts entitled *Noetova barka, ali sploh potòp / Die Arche Noah’s, oder Die Sündfluth* (Noah’s Ark, or The Deluge) was performed.<sup>13</sup> On 2 December 1828, a theatre playbill announced a comedy based on Carlo Goldoni’s play *Trüffel, der Diener zweier Herren, oder: Smotnava na vsih koteh* (Trüffel, the Servant of Two Masters, or All Around Confusion).<sup>14</sup> However, significant efforts to establish a Slovenian-language theatre began to intensify only after 1848.

In this context, it can be argued that “the Slovenian audience largely perceived the German-language theatre as an important segment of their own cultural identity.”<sup>15</sup> Evidence from the catalogues of the Slovenian Dramatic Society<sup>16</sup> suggests that the activities of the German-language stage in Ljubljana significantly influenced the development of Slovenian theatre in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many productions performed at the Estates Theatre during the 1830s were adapted or translated into Slovenian by the Dramatic Society after 1848. Notable examples include Ernst Raupach’s folk play *Müller und sein Kind* (Miller and His Child) and Johann Nestroy’s works, such as *Der böse Geist Lumpacivagabundus* (The Evil Spirit Lumpacivagabundus).

It should be evident that no individual phenomenon can be fully understood without situating it within the broader, multifaceted theatre system. Nonetheless, research into the history of theatre in Ljubljana has for decades predominantly focused on the national elements and achievements of Slovenian theatre.<sup>17</sup> Scholarly works examining the Estates Theatre’s primary repertoire—German drama—remain scarce, with only a few isolated case studies available. The importance of German theatre for the cultural life of the city and the country has been largely ignored in research, which surprisingly, continued to be distinctly shaped by ideology until very recently. The only comprehensive study of German theatre up to 1790 was written by Dušan Ludvik in the 1950s, which includes the following characteristic assessment:

The German theatre in Ljubljana is an import from a foreign cultural and linguistic sphere, as it is evident that it could not have developed organically on Slovenian

založba, 2024, pp. 171–186.

12 Narodni muzej Slovenije (NMS), Ljubljana, Slovenija, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, sign. 13085, 28 March 1822.

13 NMS, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, 21 December 1821.

14 NMS, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, 2 December 1828.

15 BIRK, Matjaž. The German-Language Drama Production at the Estates Theatre Ljubljana (Lai-bach) in the Vormärz. In *Sprachkunst*, 1999, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 213–226, specifically p. 214.

16 TRSTENJAK, Anton. *Slovensko gledališče: Zgodovina gledaliških predstav in dramatične književnosti slovenske*. Ljubljana : Dramatično društvo, 1892, pp. 86, 95.

17 The most recent research project, “The Beginnings of Slovenian Secular Drama and Theatre (1670–1848),” at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Ljubljana under the direction of Luka Vidmar, has a similar thematic orientation.

soil. The German theatre in Ljubljana is the product of specific circumstances: a politically subjugated, small, belated, and territorially fragmented nation, and the natural consequence of the expansion of German theatre, which sought new opportunities for survival under economic pressures and due to its excessive growth. [...] In Ljubljana, German theatre relied on the support of the German-oriented aristocracy, the civil service, and the military, while the Slovenian population at most attended performances that were visually and aurally appealing.<sup>18</sup>

This critique, however, does not extend to opera, which appears to have been excluded from national debates. Slovenian musicologist Jože Sivec addressed the subject in detail in his study.<sup>19</sup>

## General Characteristics and Organizational Structures of the Estates Theatre in Ljubljana

As an introduction and starting point for the following questions and reflections on the theatre as a place and medium of socio-cultural communication, a retrospective characterization will be used, which was published in January 1846 in the *Allgemeine Theater-Chronik* in Leipzig and describes the theatre in Ljubljana as follows. Although written with a considerable historical distance, the statement pertains precisely to the 1830s discussed in the article:

At the very edge of the German-speaking world, on the threshold of Italy, the Ljubljana Theatre stands as the last German theatre in this region. Owned by the Estates of Carniola, the building, constructed 80 years ago, features 54 boxes. The surrounding area of Ljubljana, with its breathtaking natural beauty, often tempts residents to admire nature itself rather than its imitation during the summer months. As a result, the theatre season is confined to winter, running from September to Palm Sunday. This seasonal limitation makes it difficult to secure artists seeking year-round engagements, forcing theatre managers to expend the resources of the winter season and spend summers traveling to recruit new talent for the following season. Consequently, the audience, accustomed to the novelty of change, often favours the unfamiliar over the tried and tested, prioritizing novelty over consistent quality.

The theatre audience, primarily composed of immigrant foreigners or members of the commercial class, is well-versed in the artistic offerings of Vienna and the operas of Trieste. This familiarity raises their expectations, presenting a significant challenge for theatre managers. Despite these circumstances, the theatre has seen several successful seasons of drama and opera. Notably, the most brilliant period occurred during the Congress of Vienna in 1821 and the years 1836–1838, under the leadership of the enterprising Friedrich Funk, who is remembered with gratitude and whose contributions have left a lasting legacy. While many excellent individual performances have followed in later years, it is under the insightful direction of Director Thomé, particularly in drama, comedy, and parody, that the theatre has achieved an ensemble capable of meeting every reasonable expectation, given the challenges of its circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

The passage quoted above succinctly captures the general artistic trajectory of the Ljubljana stage while highlighting the significant challenges the theatre faced in the decades surrounding its publication. These challenges extended beyond artistic concerns, encompassing social factors that influenced both the

18 LUDVIK, Dušan. *Nemško gledališče v Ljubljani do leta 1790* (Ph.D. thesis). Ljubljana : Filozofska fakulteta univerze v Ljubljani, 1957, p. 163.

19 SIVEC, Jože. *Opera na Stanovskem gledališču v Ljubljani od leta 1790 do 1861*. Ljubljana : Slovenska matica, 1971.

20 *Allgemeine Theater-Chronik: Organ für das Gesamtinteresse der deutschen Bühnen und ihrer Mitglieder*, 28 January 1846, p. 54.

audience and the theatre's employees, as well as complex interactions between artistic, organizational and personnel-related issues. During the "long" 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ljubljana theatre typified the stages of smaller cities of the Habsburg Empire, striving to cater to a relatively small but socially diverse population. To meet these varied demands, an extensive repertoire was offered that included spoken theatre, singspiels, parodies, operas, dance balls, and even novelty or exotic events reminiscent of fairground performances rather than professional theatre.

The theatre was marked by frequent changes of management and a high personnel turnover, which did not significantly alter the core repertoire, surprisingly. Many works were staged repeatedly over the years, ensuring a degree of continuity despite the instability in leadership and ensemble composition.

Table 1. Overview of the Theatre Directors of the Estates Theatre in Ljubljana, 1829–1840

Season	Theatre Entrepreneur(s)
1829/1830–1831/1832	Joseph & Franz Glöggel
1832/1833	Eduard Neufeld & Heinrich Börnstein
1833/1834–1834/1835	Amalia Maschek
1835/1836	Franz Zwoneczek
1836/1837–1838/1839	Friedrich Funk
1839/1840	Joseph Glöggel

The theatre season in Ljubljana traditionally began in early September and concluded before Easter. In the summer of 1830, the Glöggel brothers, who were then serving as directors of the Ljubljana theatre, introduced a summer theatre initiative. In a playbill dated 10 July 1830, they explicitly informed the audience about the planned summer performances, while assuring theatre goers that this new venture would not compromise the quality of the productions in the upcoming winter season:

Exalted! Gracious! Most Honoured Guests!

Relying on the favour and grace you have so often shown us, we dare to invite you, Gracious Lady or Gentleman, to these performances we are offering for the summer months, with the assurance that everything will be done to assemble both an excellent opera and drama company for the winter season.

The Glöggel Brothers.<sup>21</sup>

These and similar justifications frequently appear on theatre bills and occasionally in newspaper advertisements, reflecting a palpable sense of audience mistrust regarding both the quality of performances and the theatre's organizational processes. Several sources indicate that public interest in theatre performances was notably low during the warmer months of the year.<sup>22</sup> This phenomenon can be understood quite literally, as evidenced by the obser-

21 NMS, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, 10 July 1830.

22 The actor Heinrich Börnstein, for instance, recounts the emptiness of the city during the summer of 1831 in his memoirs, which made it impossible for him and his wife to supplement their income through private lessons. BÖRNSTEIN, Heinrich. *Fünfundsiebzig Jahre in der Alten und neuen Welt: Memoiren eines Unbedeutenden. Erster Band*. Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1881, p. 204.

vations of Franz Wilhelm Lippich, a physician working in Ljubljana during the 1830s. In his 1834 *Topography*, he remarked: “[...] theatrical and dance performances take place mainly in winter. With the arrival of spring, the urge to be outdoors awakens.”<sup>23</sup>

The provincial government, or more precisely the provincial parliament, owner of the theatre building on Kongressplatz, leased it to several different theatre entrepreneurs through multi-year contracts. Typically, theatre directors terminated their engagements after just two or three years, whether due to more lucrative opportunities in other cities, disagreements over artistic performance or other organizational challenges. Financial resources in Ljubljana were limited, creating tension with an audience that was on the one hand, highly demanding but on the other hand, not particularly willing to pay. Contemporary accounts frequently include complaints about the system of private box ownership, which had a detrimental impact on the theatre’s financial stability.<sup>24</sup>

According to Heinrich Börnstein’s accounts, the life of an actor in Ljubljana resembled that of performers in most provincial theatres of the time, “One day you played a major role, the next, you sang in the chorus.”<sup>25</sup> Given these circumstances and the challenging financial situation, the Ljubljana Theatre was rarely able to attract major stars, aside from a few brief guest appearances.<sup>26</sup> However, this does not imply that only second-rate actors and singers performed in Ljubljana. In many cases, the performers were young and highly motivated artists, often at the start of their careers, who viewed their engagements in Ljubljana as a stepping stone to larger stages or merely as a temporary opportunity.

The city’s geographical location also played to its advantage. Franz Wallner (born Franz Seraph Leidesdorf, 1810–1876), who later became a celebrated actor, recounted that he accepted an engagement in Ljubljana as a way to visit Trieste and Venice:

The guest performance in Ljubljana turned out as hoped; the sum of 80 Florins, which at the time was an enormous amount for me, was exchanged—except for a very small remainder—for the bliss of seeing the two wondrous cities of northern Italy and their splendours, by sea and by land [...].<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, in memoirs published in 1881, actor and later theatre entrepreneur Börnstein recalled that in September 1830, he chose an engagement with Glöggel’s troupe in Ljubljana over other cities specifically to be closer to Trieste and Venice.<sup>28</sup>

23 LIPPICH, Fr. Wilhelm. *Topographie der k. k. Provinzialhauptstadt Laibach, in Bezug auf Natur- und Heilkunde, Medicinalordnung und Biostatik*. Laibach : Joseph Blasnik, 1834, p. 116.

24 The boxes were primarily owned by the nobility and were considered a symbol of prestige. Vlado Kotnik notes that over the course of the century, an increasing number of boxes came under the ownership of the theatre fund, while fewer remained in the hands of the privileged audience. After 1850, there remained an active trading of boxes, which could cost well over a thousand gulden. For a list of box owners in 1814 and the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, see: KOTNIK, Vlado. *Operno občinstvo v Ljubljani: Vzpon in padec neke urbane socializacije v letih 1660–2010*. Koper : Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2012, pp. 85–86, 138–139.

25 BÖRNSTEIN 1881, p. 199.

26 A rare exception is the celebrated Viennese prima donna Marie Ehnes, who was engaged in Ljubljana during the 1836–1837 and 1837–1838 seasons. SIVEC 1971, pp. 108–111.

27 WALLNER, Franz. *Aus dem Tagebuche des alten Komödianten*. Leipzig : Otto Wigand, 1845, p. 2.

28 BÖRNSTEIN 1881, pp. 197–198. Börnstein returned to Ljubljana in the autumn of 1832 and was entrusted with the management of the Estates Theatre for the 1832–1833 season with his brother-in-law Eduard Neufeld (whose real name was Johann Michael Weißenhorn).

Fascinating sociological insights can be gleaned from the lives of theatre entrepreneurs, directors, actors, and singers who worked in Ljubljana for varying lengths of time. However, detailed information is available for only a select few. One illustrative example is a married couple, the Palmers, whose performances during the 1829–1830 season created a sensation in Ljubljana while also significantly shaping the artistic direction of that season. Their story exemplifies the characteristic mobility of theatre professionals during this period.

Georg Palmer (1796–1830) and Josephine Palmer (1795–1863) were married in Vienna in 1823. Georg Palmer (originally Frall) was an actor and director at the Theater an der Wien, while Josephine was the daughter of Karl Ignaz and Karoline Demmer. Josephine achieved considerable success at the Theater an der Wien, where she began performing in 1811. In 1827, after unsuccessful attempts to secure engagements at the court theatres, the couple moved to Lviv. By the late 1820s, they had relocated to Ljubljana, where they became leading actors at the Estates Theatre.<sup>29</sup>

Georg Palmer directed and performed in the ensemble, specializing in roles as “bon vivants” and “intriguants.” He excelled in a variety of roles, including the prince in *Hotel de Wibourg*, the antagonist in Schiller’s *Räuber* (The Robbers), and the usurper in *L’Abbé de l’Épée*. With his wife, he also performed in Holbein’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, staged on 29 September 1829. Josephine Palmer, who portrayed “mimic parts and naive girls,”<sup>30</sup> made her Ljubljana debut as Katinka in the drama *Das Mädchen von Marienburg* (The Girl from Marienburg), a character depicted as the chosen consort of Tsar Peter the Great. Critics praised her as a talented, intelligent, and versatile actress well-suited to a wide range of roles.<sup>31</sup>

In February 1830, the Palmers decided to leave Ljubljana, where Josephine had recently received acclaim for her title role in the opera *Silvana* by Carl Maria von Weber, which she had choreographed herself. They returned to Lviv, where Georg Palmer was appointed director of the Lviv Theatre before his untimely death on 9 September 1830. The following year, Josephine married actor, singer, and composer Andreas Scutta, with whom she had been acquainted in Ljubljana. She subsequently accompanied Scutta to Vienna and Graz, eventually settling in Vienna. There, she performed for over three decades at the Leopoldstädter Theater (later the Carltheater) and also taught declamation.<sup>32</sup>

The Palmers’ departure in March 1830 left a significant void in Ljubljana’s theatrical scene. Theatre entrepreneur Glöggel sought to fill the gap with

29 Demmer, Josephine (1795–1863). In *Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gesamtausgabe*, <https://weber-gesamtausgabe.de/de/A0016D1.html> [last viewed on 28 December 2023].

30 *Illyrisches Blatt. Zeitschrift für vaterländisches Interesse, Wissenschaft, Unterhaltung und Belehrung*, 12 September 1829, p. 148.

31 *Illyrisches Blatt. Zeitschrift für vaterländisches Interesse, Wissenschaft, Unterhaltung und Belehrung*, 19 September 1829, p. 152.

32 REITTERER, Hubert. Scutta (Maria Theresia) Josefine. In *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon*, [https://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1\\_S/Scutta\\_Josefine\\_1795\\_1863.xml](https://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_S/Scutta_Josefine_1795_1863.xml) [last viewed on 15 December 2023]. For more on Palmers, see: ŽIGON, Tanja – SMOLEJ, Tone. Ihr wohl-durchdachtes Spiel wirkt so elektrisch auf das Publicum: Die Theatersaison 1829/30 im Ständischen Theater in Laibach (Ljubljana). In NEUHUBER, Christian – PAPPEL, Kristel – TAR, Gabriella-Nóra (eds.) *Deutschsprachiges Theater im interdisziplinären und transnationalen Fokus*. Wien : LIT Verlag, 2024, pp. 103–135.

parodies of operas and dramas. In March 1830, a parody titled *Die schwarze Frau* (The Black Lady) was staged, modelled on *La Dame blanche* (The White Lady), an opera by François-Adrien Boieldieu with a libretto by Eugène Scribe that had been performed in Ljubljana since December 1829. Carl Meisl, the librettist of *Die schwarze Frau*, set the parody in an Austrian milieu. Its success led the Theater an der Wien to commission Meisl to write additional parodies. Meisl chose Shakespeare's *Othello* as his next subject, given its popularity with Viennese audiences—Ferdinand Kringsteiner's parody, *Othello, der Mohr in Wien* (Othello, the Moor in Vienna), had been a staple of the Leopoldstädter Theater for over fifteen years.<sup>33</sup>

Meisl's parody, *Der Mohr von Wien, oder Othellerl, der Mohr von Wien* (The Moor of Vienna, or Othellerl, the Moor of Vienna), premiered in Vienna in June 1829, with its Ljubljana debut following on 10 March 1830.<sup>34</sup> The work retained the central relationships of Shakespeare's characters but "domesticated" them. Meisl transformed Othello from the dark-skinned nobleman into the personal valet of a wealthy man, while his father-in-law Brabantio, originally a senator and father to Othello's wife, Desdemona, became Schroll, a simple janitor. Cassio was no longer a Lieutenant but rather a barber's assistant from the countryside. Although the characters were "demoted," a touch of intrigue remained. Jealousy and the symbolic handkerchief persisted as central elements, but the parody eschewed the tragic carnage of Shakespeare's original. Instead, it concluded with forgiveness and celebration.

Meisl employed a variety of stylistic devices to allude to Shakespeare's original work. For instance, Othellerl's ironic address to his acquaintances referenced both "parasites and riffraff" and "noble Venetians." Additionally, he humorously alluded to *La Dame blanche*, saying that "the white woman" would become his wife that same afternoon.<sup>35</sup> Curiously, Shakespeare's *Othello* had never been performed in Ljubljana during this or prior seasons. This absence raises questions about whether the local audience could fully appreciate the parody's wit, irony and numerous allusions to the original text.

## The Repertoire

The repertoire and reconstruction of the theatre programme in Ljubljana reveal a characteristic trend of 19<sup>th</sup>-century theatre: all theatre entrepreneurs in the city sought to entertain audiences with the widest possible variety of works

33 SATO, Fumihiko. *Die literarische Parodie des Wiener Volkstheater am Beispiel Karl Meisl* (Ph.D. thesis). Innsbruck : University of Innsbruck, 2004, p. 130.

34 Interestingly, the name Carl Meisl does not appear in the reviews of the premiere nor on the playbills; however, on the playbill for the performance on 8 January 1833, in Vienna, the author of *Othellerl* is referred to as the author of *Der Schwarzen Frau* (The Black Lady), see: SATO 2024, p. 128. Similarly, on the playbill of the Ljubljana Estates Theatre from 10 March 1830, Carl Carl is named as the author and Adolf Müller (1801–1886) as the composer. Although it is undoubtedly a work penned by Carl Meisl (see: MÜLLER-SCHWEFE, Gerhard. Shakespeare-Parodien im deutschsprachigen Raum: Karl Meisl Othellerl, Der Mohr von Wien. In *Jahrbuch / Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West*, 1989, pp. 266–290, here p. 267; WURZBACH, Constant von. *Meisl, Carl*. In *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich* [...], vol. 17. Wien : k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1867, pp. 284–288), Meisl was only gradually recognized as the author of the text in the 1830s.

35 SATO 2004, pp. 169–170.

for the stage.<sup>36</sup> This approach was not unique to Ljubljana; audiences in other cities also expected to see a diverse array of plays in rapid succession. However, as a relatively small city, Ljubljana's audience quickly grew oversaturated of a given performance and soon demanded a new production.

The new and unknown, mentioned in the opening quote from the *Allgemeine Theater-Chronik*, which the audience “often favours [...] over the tried and tested” is likely not just a poetic description of the situation. Variety was also the guiding principle in the design of individual theatre evenings, during which several one-act plays, musical interludes, concert performances, and similar pieces were often presented in a colourful mix.

Table 2. Number of Theatre Performances at the Estates Theatre in Ljubljana by Genre, 1830–1840

	1829/1830	1830/1831	1831/1832	1832/1833	1833/1834	1834/1835	1835/1836	1836/1837	1837/1838	1838/1839	1839/1840
Comedy (Lustspiel)	47	32	28	28	35	31	31	49	38	39	34
Tragedy (Trauerspiel)	1	1				1	2		3	1	4
Play (Schauspiel)	19	12	19	16	21	37	40	25	33	27	14
Farce (with Singing), Local Farce (Posse, Lokalposse, Posse mit Gesang)	9	14	10	11	20	30	5	28	17	9	30
Drama	14	6	5	4	7	8	11	4	4	9	9
Fairy tale (Märchen, Zaubermärchen)	7	7	4	6	3	4	5	2	3	1	3
Dramatic tableau (Dramatisches Gemälde)	5	3	9	3	5	4	7	8	2	2	12
Parody (Parodie)	2	1			4			2	1		3
Singspiel	3	7		10				1			
Opera (Oper)	55	51	52	54	44	27	41	34	35	55	45
Melodrama	2	5	1	2		3					1
Hybrid forms (Quodlibet, Potpourri)	4	4	7	2	3	2	1	3			1
Historic knight play (Ritterschauspiel)	3		6	2	4	1	8		3		2
Prologue, Pantomime, Legend,	8	9	4	4	6	3	4	2		3	1
Total number of evenings played	163	130	135	124	137	126	123	135	153	122	140

The sheer number of works genres, and categories presented by the Ljubljana theatre can be considered a significant achievement, particularly given the remarkably low rate of repetition. Understandably, this diversity sometimes came at the expense of quality. Scholarly assessments frequently characterize the dramatic productions of the Ljubljana theatre as mediocre, often assuming

36 A reconstruction of the theatre programmes for the years 1833–1840 is included in MOTNIK, Marko – ŽIGON, Tanja. Pregled repertoarja stanovskega gledališča v Ljubljani od sezone 1833/34 do sezone 1839/40. In PREINFALK, Miha (ed.) *Podobe bidermajerske Ljubljane*. Ljubljana : Založba ZRC, 2024, pp. 209–251, DOI 10.3986/9789610508984\_09.

that the audience was primarily drawn to light entertainment.<sup>37</sup> While it is true that comparisons with Viennese theatres highlight the limitations of the Ljubljana theatre, such judgments must account for the fact that Ljubljana was, at the time, a provincial town. Overly general assessments fail to capture the nuanced realities of the theatre's context. A more precise evaluation would require comprehensive comparative studies, which remain challenging, particularly when attempting to measure quality. Nevertheless, reports consistently highlight the years under Friedrich Funk's directorship (1836–1839) as a high point for the theatre's artistic quality during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup>

Evidence from a comparative perspective is particularly valuable in evaluating the Ljubljana theatre. An illustrative example is Matija Čop's letter to his friend Tomaž Ramovš, dated 13 November 1816. While in Vienna, Čop applauded August Klingemann's performance of *Faust* at the Theater an der Wien as "terribly beautiful," as well as praising other productions he attended. However, in reference to a performance of Adolph Müllner's tragedy *Die Schuld* (The Guilt), Čop remarked:

I didn't like *Die Schuld* at all the other day, and it is certainly no worse when it is performed in Ljubljana. In a word, I much preferred going to the theatre in Ljubljana; it felt like home, and your actors are actually not all that bad.<sup>39</sup>

Another example comes from the pen of the Polish scholar Emil Korytko, who was sentenced to internment in Ljubljana as a political offender in the mid-1830s. He touched on the theatre scene in Ljubljana in a letter to his parents on 2 October 1837, claiming "The theatre in Ljubljana is very good. The operas are better than in Lviv. Miss Ehnes, the prima donna, sings very softly and very well. The other singer, Fux, is the sister of Iovska [...]"<sup>40</sup>

"The provincial theatre has ample space for the not-so-numerous enthusiasts of (German) drama; however, for operas, the crowding is often all the more burdensome," observed the physician Lippich in 1836.<sup>41</sup> Opera was, and remains, an economically risky venture, and it goes without saying that it was also much more challenging to manage organizationally than spoken theatre. The contractual obligation, evident from the preserved documents, for theatre entrepreneurs to stage about five to six new productions of operas unfamiliar to Ljubljana audiences per season<sup>42</sup> proved unachievable for any of the administrations. Nevertheless, over the years—and in contrast to spoken theatre—there emerged an increasingly clear focus and establishment of a repertoire canon, within which the operatic works of Vincenzo Bellini received the greatest attention.<sup>43</sup>

37 KIDRIČ, Francè. *Prešeren 1800–1838. Volume II: Življenje pesnika in pesmi*. Ljubljana: Tiskovna zadruha, 1938, p. 106; BIRK, Matjaž. "[...] es flogen Äpfel, Eier und andere Gegenstände [...] auf die Bühne": Zu einigen Merkmalen der Nestroy-Rezeption in einer südslawisch-österreichischen Provinz im Vormärz und darüber hinaus. In *Nestroyana*, 2004, vol. 24, no. 3/4, p. 185.

38 COSTA, Heinrich. *Reiseerinnerungen aus Krain*. Laibach: Eger, 1848, p. 33.

39 SLODNJAK, Anton – KOS, Janko (eds.) *Pisma Matija Čopa. Volume I*. Ljubljana: SAZU, 1986, p. 33.

40 KORYTKO, Emil. *Korespondencja z rodziąą (1836–1838). Volume I*. Ljubljana: SAZU, 1983, p. 77.

41 LIPPICH 1836, p. 116.

42 SIVEC 1971, pp. 97–98. In the contract with Franz Zwoneczek for the 1835–1836 season, however, only three operatic novelties are mentioned. SIVEC 1971, pp. 106–107.

43 SIVEC, Jože. Začetki uprizarjanja Bellinijevih oper v Ljubljani. In CIGOJ KRSTULOVIC, Nataša – FAGANEL, Tomaž – KOKOLE, Metoda (eds.) *Muzikološke razprave: In memoriam Danilo*

In addition to the substantial financial costs associated with staging operas, several other obstacles had to be addressed. Heinrich Börnstein observed that the audience in Ljubljana demanded a high level of artistic quality “because Trieste and Venice were very close, and many citizens of Ljubljana travelled there regularly to listen to Italian opera.”<sup>44</sup> A further challenge was not necessarily assembling an opera ensemble but rather the shortage of instrumentalists.

During the 1832–1833 season, when Börnstein managed the Estates Theatre alongside his brother-in-law Eduard Neufeld, they successfully recruited talented young singers. However, assembling an orchestra proved to be a persistent difficulty. Orchestra members were typically drawn from the ranks of regimental bands,<sup>45</sup> but the city did not host a permanent garrison and as a result, musicians could decamp at short notice, “[...] so we were without an orchestra, as had happened to our predecessor in the management, who spent three months in Ljubljana with a full opera company and was unable to put on any operas.”<sup>46</sup>

Despite all these challenges, the 1830s witnessed an extraordinary surge in opera production. Artistically ambitious and significant works were included in the repertoire. At the beginning of the decade, efforts were still being made to attract audiences with works composed specifically for the Estates Theatre. Under the direction of Joseph and Franz Glöggel, the grand romantic opera *Der Harfner* (The Harpist) by Ludwig Wilhelm Reuling (1802–1877), the then Kapellmeister in Ljubljana, was performed on 30 November 1830. Reuling had composed the work “explicitly for this stage.”<sup>47</sup> On 8 March 1831, Reuling’s setting of Börnstein’s libretto *Die Feuerbraut* (The Fire Bride) had its premiere.<sup>48</sup> Börnstein’s melodrama *Die Gründung Laibach’s oder Das Frauenlager am Laibach-Flusse* (The Founding of Ljubljana or The Women’s Camp on the Ljubljanica River) with music by composer Johann Gallus, premiering on 11 January 1831, can likewise be counted among these works.

Additionally, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Austrian National Library) houses an autographed score by Reuling titled *Silphide das Seefräulein. Music von Joseph Drechsler für das St. Theater zu Laibach instrumentiert von*

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Pokorn. Ljubljana : Založba ZRC, 2004, pp. 89–97.

44 BÖRNSTEIN 1881, p. 220.

45 Theatre management apparently found it worth mentioning to explicitly announce regimental bands, as for example, on the occasion of the performance of the opera *Der Kreuzritter in Egypten* (The Crusader in Egypt) by Giacomo Meyerbeer on 30 October 1830. The musical pieces were to be “performed by the entire band of the commendable Imperial and Royal Regiment No. 17 stationed here.” NMS, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, 30 October 1830.

46 BÖRNSTEIN 1881, pp. 219–220. Archive records reveal that Börnstein and Neufeld had to specially engage a brass ensemble from Vienna. At the same time, it was contractually stipulated that musicians from the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana should also participate in the orchestra. SIVEC 1971, pp. 96–98.

47 *Allgemeiner Musikalischer Anzeiger*, 18 December 1830, p. 92, mentions the performance as follows: “In Laybach (Ljubljana), a benefit performance for the local theatre conductor Wilhelm Reuling took place on 30 November, featuring an opera composed by him: *Der Harfner, oder das Gericht zu Dublin*, performed for the first time.” A repeat performance occurred on 4 December 1830. The author of the text does not appear anywhere.

48 “In Ljubljana, I also wrote the text for the romantic opera *Die Feuerbraut*—a kind of female Faust—which Kapellmeister Wilhelm Reuling, later of the Court Opera Theatre, composed and which we performed in Laibach to great applause!—also vanished!—forgotten!—lost!” BÖRNSTEIN 1881, p. 201.

*Wilhelm Reuling im Juli 1830* (Sylphide, the Sea Maiden. Music by Joseph Drechsler, orchestrated for the Estates Theatre in Ljubljana by Wilhelm Reuling in July 1830).<sup>49</sup> This raises the question of why Reuling would orchestrate a work that had already been arranged. Presumably, Drechsler's work was available neither as a full score nor as instrumental parts but only as a piano reduction. Reuling apparently re-instrumented it into an orchestral version.<sup>50</sup>

Reuling appears to have been one of the few musicians who composed explicitly for the Ljubljana stage. However, none of the works by this “local composer” remained in the repertoire for long, nor could they compete with the internationally popular works of Bellini and later, Donizetti.

Performances at the Ljubljana theatre that might be described as “cheap and cheerful” entertainment were often staged outside the main season and frequently included postcolonial elements such as Orientalism and exoticism, but also content that was simply curious or absurd. To illustrate, two examples are provided. First, *Azil, oder Abentheuer einer jungen Eskimo* (Azil, or the Adventures of a Young Eskimo) performed on 21 January 1834, in which “the life story of the wild young Eskimo” was told in four theatrical scenes.<sup>51</sup> Subsequently, a police investigation revealed that the characters were actually a Bohemian woman accompanied by an Italian man named Paganini.<sup>52</sup> Second, in the 1838–1839 season, the performances of the artist Schwarzenberg, known as the “Fire King,” caused a sensation. He experimented with Bengal fire on stage and performed alongside a monkey.<sup>53</sup>

## Cultural Exchange and Cultural Transfer

Since very few texts or scores of the theatre pieces and operas performed in Ljubljana have survived to the present day, it is difficult to speak of cultural transfer processes in the commonly accepted sense of horizontal cultural transfer—that is, the adoption of cultural phenomena between different cultures. Cultural transfer is understood to occur when the adopted work is adapted to the target audience and modified in some way. If this criterion is not met, the process can at best be regarded as cultural exchange or a simple adoption. While there are some indications of such processes, they are more to be assumed than definitively proven.

The thematic orientation of the theatre programmes varied in detail from season to season and likely depended on the respective management. However, as theatre critic Leopold Kordesch emphasized in early 1839, the repertoire was indeed aligned with the standards of the capital city, Vienna:

49 Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Musiksammlung, Mus. Hs. 8299.

50 Individual pieces appeared in a piano arrangement published by Vienna music publisher Tobias Haslinger in 1828. The romantic-comic magic farce in two acts was written by Therese Krones and was occasionally performed in Ljubljana starting on 13 November 1830. NMS, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, 13 November 1830.

51 NMS, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, 21 January 1834.

52 “It is said today in the city that the female Eskimo, who was ultimately produced for the theatre—a born Bohemian, and the man traveling with her, H. Paganini—should have already been spoken to by the police regarding this matter.” Franz Franz to Joseph Kalasanz von Erberg, 24 January 1834. PREINFALK 2024, Pisma, p. 120.

53 PREINFALK 2024, Pisma, pp. 788, 791.

The repertoire of our theatre, which truly came into its own only after the departure of the opera company, must indeed be called excellent, as we are presented with almost exclusively the most recent pieces that adorn the repertoire of the Royal and Imperial Hofburg Theatre in Vienna.<sup>54</sup>

All participants, including the theatre directors, performed on a variety of stages throughout the Empire, both before and after their engagements in Ljubljana, fostering a dynamic cultural exchange through their extensive personal networks. However, since the script books have been preserved in only a few cases, it is now nearly impossible, in terms of cultural transfer, to determine in which adaptations and formats the works were actually presented in Ljubljana. Processes of adaptation and appropriation can at most be inferred from the titles, which seemingly or actually refer to the local context. Examples include Adolf Bäuerle's Zauberspiel *Laibach, Paris, London und Konstantinopel oder Überall ist es gut, zu Hause aber am besten* (Ljubljana, Paris, London and Constantinople or Everywhere is Good, but Home is Best) premiered on 12 January 1834. Similarly, Bäuerle's *Aline, Königin von Golkonda* was staged in Ljubljana under the subtitle *Laibach in einem andern Welttheile* (Aline, Queen of Golkonda, or Ljubljana in Another Part of the World).<sup>55</sup> This "localized" piece, as later described by local historian Peter von Radics,<sup>56</sup> was performed in Ljubljana in December 1824, two years after its Vienna premiere.

The surviving theatre programme briefly describes the elements of the set design: in the first act, the waterfalls of the Ljubljanica River at Kaltenbrunn (today Fužine); in the second act, the garden and Leopoldsrue Castle (Cekinograd), along with part of the Schischka suburb (today Šiška); and in the third act, Rosenbach Hill (Rožnik) with its tavern and church, then—as now—a popular leisure spot. However, whether or not the dramatic text itself was adapted to local circumstances cannot be determined.

The independent contribution of dramatic works in Ljubljana was, in any case, rather limited. Carl Meisl (1775–1853), an extremely prolific representative of Viennese popular comedy, known for more than 200 works including many successful opera parodies and travesties, was originally from Ljubljana. Nevertheless, although his productions were regularly performed on the regional stage, he cannot be regarded as a local playwright. Meisl's life and career took place almost exclusively in Vienna until his death. The local farce *Der*

54 KORDESCH, Leopold. Theater in Laibach. In *Carniola: Zeitschrift für Kunst, Wissenschaft und geselliges Leben*, 22 February 1839, p. 344. See: MILADINOVIC-ZALAZNIK, Mira. *Deutsch-slovenische literarische Wechselbeziehungen II: Leopold Kordesich und seine Zeit*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2008, p. 42.

55 Performed on 6 and 27 November 1836, as well as on 4 February 1838. Bäuerle's original version, titled *Aline, oder Wien in einem andern Welttheile*, was first performed on 9 October 1822, at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt. It was described as a folk and magic opera, with music composed by Wenzel Müller. The work is a parody of Henri-Montan Berton's opera *Aline, Reine de Golconde* (1803). Other "adaptations" to the respective performance locations in other European cities are also found, for example, *Aline, oder Dresden* [...], presumably from the year 1834, or *Aline, oder Düsseldorf* [...] from 1838.

56 RADICS, Peter von. *Die Entwicklung des deutschen Bühnenwesens in Laibach: Kulturbilder anlässlich der Eröffnung des Kaiser Franz Joseph-Jubiläumstheaters*. Laibach: Ig. v. Kleinmayr & Fed. Bamberg, 1918, pp. 98–99.

*Kirchtag in der Schischka, oder Die beiden Nachtwändler* (The Church Fair in Schischka, or The Two Night Wanderers) performed under his name starting in October 1830, is thus merely an adaptation by another hand.<sup>57</sup>

Actual “fatherland dramas” were extremely rare and because of their rarity, were explicitly noted. On 21 February 1829, the historical-patriotic drama in four acts *Eva von Gall, oder Krain's Treue* (Eva von Gall, or Carniola's Loyalty) was performed, and *Herbart Freiherr von Auersperg* was performed on 17 December 1831, both were written by Carniolan Joseph Anton Babnigg (1798/1802–1873).<sup>58</sup> In this work, the author depicted the conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in Carniola at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The previously mentioned melodrama *Die Gründung Laibach's* by Heinrich Börnstein can also be counted among the few “fatherland dramas.”<sup>59</sup>

### The Audience: Reactions, Reception, and Impact of the Theatre in the Social Sphere

In the personal correspondence of different individuals examined so far, references to the theatre are rare and detailed reports are entirely absent. One such brief mention in private correspondence reads, for instance, in a laconic tone “Once, I took advantage of your sister-in-law's generosity and went to the theatre with her. The actors are quite good this year, which is why the theatre is always very well attended.”<sup>60</sup>

Beyond such general remarks and audience assessments, performances rarely seem to have provoked stronger reactions. At the end of September 1833, the town was still ridiculing seamstress Franciska Mally, who had taken offense to the role of the tailor Zwirn in Johann Nestroy's *Der böse Geist Lumpacivagabundus oder Das liederliche Kleeblatt*.<sup>61</sup> She was reportedly so outraged that she sent her husband to the town hall to demand that the play never be performed again.<sup>62</sup> The couple's request was not granted, and the piece remained in the repertoire for a long time. Nestroy's social satires would not polarize audiences

57 This was likely Meisl's farce *Der Kirchtag in Petersdorf*, which premiered at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt in Vienna in August 1819. For more on Meisl in Ljubljana, see: SMOLEJ, Tone – ŽIGON, Tanja. Stanovsko gledališče v Ljubljani v sezoni 1838/39: Od Carla Meisla do Friedricha Halma. In *Jezik in slovstvo*, 2024, vol. 69, no. 1/2, pp. 89–103.

58 Babnigg (Slovene: Babnik), who wrote in both German and Slovene, established himself as a poet, dramatist, and storyteller during the Vormärz period in Carniola. See: GRDINA, Igor. Babnik, Jožef Anton. In *Slovenska biografija*, <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi1016560/> [last viewed on 12 January 2024]. The work was performed again on 21 November 1829.

59 “For the benefit of the actress Carolina Kröning—along with her invitation to this piece about the eventful patriotic history.” NMS, Comedien-Zettel-Sammlung, 11 January 1831.

60 Josephina Costa to Josephina Terpinč, Ljubljana, 19 March 1839. Cf. BUDNA KODRIČ, Nataša. *Korespondenca Jožefine in Fidelija Terpinč. Volume II: Pisma za Jožefino (pred 1821–1871)*. Ljubljana: Arhivsko društvo Slovenije, 2022, p. 61.

61 Johann Nestroy's work premiered on 11 April 1833, in Vienna as a benefit performance for the poet and was published in print in 1835.

62 “A ridiculous incident is being told here. The wife of the master tailor Mally, residing here, is said to be so outraged by the disreputable role played by the tailor Zwirn in the play Lumpaci-Vagabundus, which—according to her esteemed judgment—greatly dishonours the respectable tailoring guild due to its light-hearted and frivolous portrayal, that she supposedly directed her husband to go to the local town hall and demand from the authorities that this play no longer be performed, as it insults the honourable tailoring guild! Without a doubt, it is especially the scene where the distinguished and wealthy Mr. Zwirn, during a gathering held for him, becomes highly offended by one of the guests after explaining gas lighting and the filling of a gas balloon, that has so upset Mrs. Mally.” F. Franz to J. K. von Erberg, 24 October 1833. PREINFALK 2024, Pisma, p. 85.

for the last time. Just over two years later, on 10 November 1835, the reaction to the magic play *Familien Zwirn, Knieriem und Leim, oder Der Welt-Untergangs-Tag* (Families Zwirn, Knieriem and Leim, or the Day the World Ended)<sup>63</sup> escalated far beyond the discontent of a single couple. The uproar became so severe that police and military intervention were required.<sup>64</sup>

Whether the rejection by the guild of tailors also led to substantive changes and interventions in the plays and their productions is conceivable but not documented. Matjaž Birk's attempt to interpret this incident as a sign of the cultural mediocrity of the population seems premature, especially since—as the author himself notes—Nestroy was regularly polarizing audiences in both the capital Vienna and smaller towns at that time.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, such episodes at least indicate that theatre in Ljubljana was occasionally capable of provoking stronger reactions than the usual approval or disapproval.

A far richer and more detailed source for the public impact of theatre is official theatre criticism, which however, remained rare or completely absent in daily newspapers until the late 1830s.<sup>66</sup> There was evidently no consensus on whether writing theatre reviews for smaller towns was even worthwhile.<sup>67</sup> It was broadly agreed that criticism should remain silent, particularly during phases when the theatre was unable to achieve a minimum standard of quality.<sup>68</sup> However, whether the absence of reviews automatically reflects the low level of performances or whether the contemporary press deemed the mediocre events on stage unworthy of attention remains open to debate. It seems to have been a tacit agreement between theatre managers and critics not to further tarnish the often already poor reputation of the theatre. In such cases, the absence of sources can, under certain circumstances, become meaningful in itself.

## Conclusion

Despite the decades-long tradition of research on the Ljubljana Estates Theatre and the considerable number of existing individual studies, one cannot shake the impression that the study of this theatre is still in its infancy.

63 The work from 1834 is, as is well known, a sequel to *Lumpaci-Vagabundus*.

64 “When the play *Lumpaci-Vagabundus* was performed last Tuesday and had concluded, a short man heavily cloaked in a mantle is said to have passed by the beneficiary—actor Wallner—and whispered in his ear: ‘You! If you perform this play again, you will be booed!’ Without a doubt, it is due to this remark that the play was repeated on Wednesday. When the performance reached a certain aria that Wallner (Zwirn) was to deliver, which contains some offensive remarks about tailors, a large number of potatoes, eggs, etc., were suddenly thrown from the gallery onto the stage, forcing the performance to stop and the continuation to be interrupted until the commotion settled. However, by the end of the play, the police had intervened, securing the exits with military and police presence and detained 18 to 19 tailor apprentices who, without further punishment, were released yesterday after their arrest, having fasted. [...] It is said in the city that the tailor apprentices were summoned through an official circular from all workshops to attend the theatre, where they gathered en masse, while their masters claimed to have no knowledge or involvement.” F. Franz to J. K. von Erberg, 13 November 1835. PREINFALK 2024, Pisma, pp. 350–351.

65 BIRK 2004, p. 186.

66 Theatre criticism in Ljubljana has already been extensively analysed by MILADINOVIĆ-ZALAZNIK 2008, pp. 40–53.

67 *Carniolia: Zeitschrift für Kunst, Wissenschaft und geselliges Leben*, 8 October 1838, p. 188.

68 *Carniolia: Zeitschrift für Kunst, Wissenschaft und geselliges Leben*, 30 September 1839, p. 176.

A comprehensive examination of the Ljubljana theatre in terms of its integration into the Central European cultural space—with its extensive networks, cultural transfers and diverse interrelationships—has yet to be undertaken. For a proper understanding of the Ljubljana theatre, it is essential to emphasize that it was evidently not primarily a “national” theatre but rather a “local” one. Despite its designation as an Estates Theatre, investigations into both the organizational structures and the artistic operations point to the characteristics of a typical municipal theatre in a provincial town of the former Habsburg Empire.

Engaging with the sources on Ljubljana’s theatre history naturally raises many further questions. Of particular interest would be a deeper understanding of audience reactions to the various theatrical genres on offer and whether different social strata attended different types of productions. However, sources that provide a more profound insight into the role of theatre within Ljubljana’s social fabric in the 19<sup>th</sup> century do not appear to exist for the period under consideration.

As a next step and a promising avenue for future research, the integration of Ljubljana’s theatre into the broader network of Central European theatres presents itself—whether in relation to neighbouring or more distant cultural centres. Comparative studies would be particularly fruitful, not only in terms of cultural transfer concerning repertoire and performers but also with regard to linguistic diversity, organizational structures and the possibilities of exerting influence or responding to socio-political developments.