

Sychrov Theater



Fotografie: Ivan Uhlíř

Castle Theatres of the Waldstein-Wartenberg Family



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English version

The exhibition has been prepared by the Litomyšl State Castle Administration (National Heritage Institute – Local Heritage Administration at the Sychrov Castle).

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1
Josef Platzer's stage decoration, the Litomyšl Castle Theatre, 1797



2

The theatre at the Litomyšl Castle, dating back to 1797, is the most famous of the Waldstein family's theatres

Castle theatres of the Waldstein-Wartenberg family

Private castle theatres began to emerge in our country in the 17th century, first as an imitation of the theatre at the royal court and theatres at monastery schools. During the 18th and 19th centuries, castle theatres turned into a private pastime, losing the element of representation over time. A theatre, or at least a makeshift theatre hall, became a regular feature of many castles, as did a chapel, a dance hall and a riding hall.

Most of these theatres later succumbed to modernization, fires or just a lack of interest after they stopped performing plays. The theatres that have survived to this day are all the more valuable. Several such theatres have been preserved at castles owned by the Waldstein-Wartenberg noble family.



3

Count Jiří Josef Waldstein-Wartenberg (1768–1825) had a theatre built at the Litomyšl Castle

Waldstein-Wartenberg Theater



4

The castle in Mníchovo Hradiště with its theatre dating to 1833 was one of the most important residences of the Waldstein-Wartenberg family



In 1758, the Waldsteins obtained a permission to add the surname Wartenberg to their family name and to extend their coat of arms



1
Josef Platzer's stage decoration,
the Litomyšl Castle Theatre, 1797



2
A wide view
of the castle theatre
in Litomyšl

Castle theatre in Litomyšl

The castle theatre in Litomyšl is the second oldest theatre with the original equipment in this country after the theatre in Český Krumlov (1766). In addition to a decorated auditorium with a balcony and loges, the complete stage equipment (machinery) used for changing painted decorations as well as parts of the lighting system have been preserved here. The large set of decorations is also valuable.

The first theatre, built by Count Jiří Kristián (1743–1791) in 1767, burned down before it was completed. The theatre that has survived to this day was built by Count Jiří Josef (1768–1825) in 1797. The Count used to act in the theatre himself, especially in popular conversational comedies, and so did other members of his family and his friends as well as castle servants and employees. The theatre was in operation until the 1840s, with amateur actors from Litomyšl performing in it occasionally later in time.

www.zamek-litomysl.cz



3
A renovation of the damaged Garden scene was completed in 2019



4
Noble guests watched
plays from loges
on the first floor



5
The stage machinery made it
possible to swap one decoration
for another very quickly



6
Another device was used to create
simple lighting effects, e.g. release
of the front ramp

Photos:
National Heritage Institute (1), Ivan Ulrych (2, 4–6), Jiří Bláha (3)



Josef Platzer's stage decoration, the Litomyšl Castle Theatre, 1797

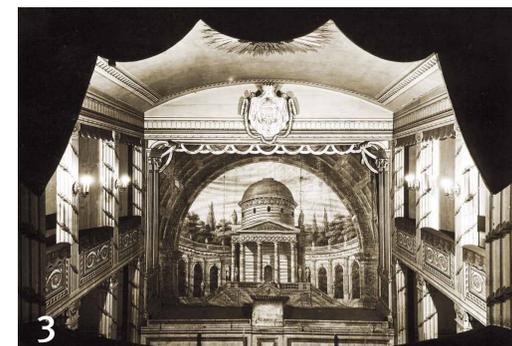


The scenes of rooms were the most important decorations used in popular conversational comedies

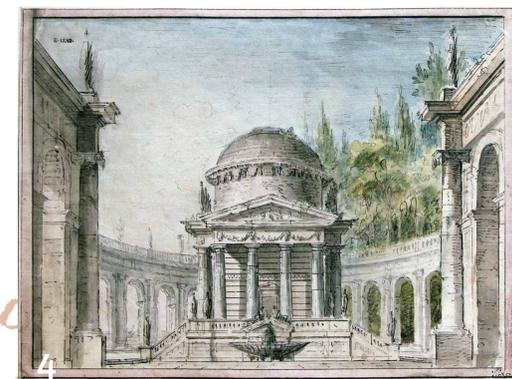
Decorations of the castle theatre in Litomyšl and Josef Platzer

Stage decorations form an important part of furnishings of the Litomyšl theatre. They were painted by the imperial court's theatre painter Josef Platzer (1751–1806) in Vienna. He started his career by painting a stage set for the Nostitz Theatre (later the Estates Theatre) in Prague (1783). In the 1790s, he painted decorations for the court theatre in Vienna (Burgtheater).

The large set of stage pieces contains almost twenty sceneries, which could be combined and modified with small additions. For some of them, Platzer used his older designs, which have been preserved at the Vienna Academy. In addition to halls, rooms and town streets, the scenes include dungeons, a sea shore and two curtains. The stage machinery allowed for a quick swap of one scene for another right in front of the audience, and the strong impression was enhanced by the typical dim lighting.



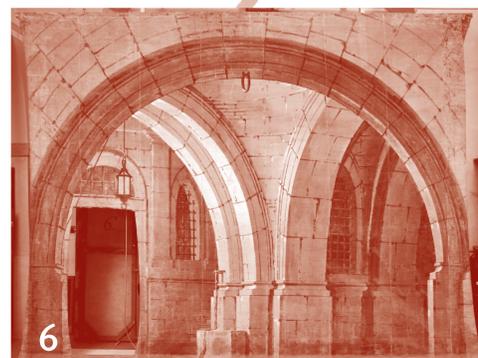
The set of decorations included two curtains with architectural motifs



Most of Litomyšl's decorations were based on Platzer's drawings



The interiors are decorated with a number of trompe-l'œil objects as well as light streaming from window paintings



The interiors of dungeons were among Platzer's favourites, although they probably did not find much use in Litomyšl



Exterior stage sets include two variants of a town street

Photos:

National Heritage Institute (1, 5–7), Petr Svojanovský (2), a postcard from the author's collection (Čestmír Šíla, 3), the Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (4)



1

Josef Platzer's stage decoration, the Litomyšl Castle Theatre, 1797



The stage of the castle theatre with a fenced space for musicians in front

Castle theatre in Mnichovo Hradiště

The first theatre at the castle in Mnichovo Hradiště was built by Count Johann Vincenc Ferrerius (1731–1797) in the 1780s. The theatre that has been preserved to this day was founded under Count Kristián Vincenc Arnošt (1794–1858) in 1833 on the occasion of the meeting of the three Holy Alliance rulers, the Austrian Emperor, the Russian Tsar and the Prussian Crown Prince. The Count's family continued to perform plays here, but the theatre was probably no longer used from the middle of the 19th century. The theatre, most likely built by the workshops of the Estates Theatre in Prague, has been preserved with most of its furnishings. A balcony in the auditorium and the stage were built into a former dance hall. We can find here simple machinery used for changing decorations, an almost complete collection of stage pieces and parts of the original lighting – argand lamps. A part of the rich collection of theatrical costumes and props is also on display at the theatre.

www.zamek-mnichovohradiste.cz



A view of the balcony in the auditorium from the stage



A part of the remarkable collection of costumes is displayed in the theatre dressing room



Castle depositories also contain a number of theatre props



A simple technical device enabled to shade the lighting ramp, among other things

Photos:
National Heritage Institute (1), Lubomír Stiburek (2, 3, 5, 6),
David Brunner (4)



Josef Platzer's stage decoration, the Litomyšl Castle Theatre, 1797



The theatre is located in the front wing of the hunting lodge

Theatre at the Kozel hunting lodge

The Kozel hunting lodge on the Štáhlava estate dating back to 1784–1789 was owned by the Waldstein family from 1816. A small family theatre was established in a former stable in 1830 by Count Kristián Vincenc Arnošt (1794–1858), who also built the theatre in Mnichovo Hradiště later. Almost nothing is known about performances in the Kozel theatre. In the 19th century, mostly family festivities, parties and plays for children probably took place here. The miniature auditorium comprises just one double bench and a stand for musicians. Some stage decorations have been preserved on the stage, among them a forest scene with a view of the nearby Radyně Castle. Behind the scenes, we can see remarkable fragments of the original lighting system.

www.zamek-kozel.cz



The stage displays the only forest scene that has been preserved completely

Štáhlav's Theater



The miniature auditorium is decorated with portraits of the lodge builders



The stage holds a number of remarkable technical details



The local stage was illuminated by a ramp on the sides of the prompt box too

Photos:
National Heritage Institute (1), Jiří Bláha (2–6)



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Josef Platzer's stage decoration,
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Duchcov

Plays at the Duchcov Castle were staged mostly at the time when Giacomo Casanova (1725–1798) lived here, including the first years of the 19th century. Nothing of the theatre, which was described in detail in an inventory from 1808, has been preserved to this day

www.zamek-duchcov.cz

Other theatres

Schloß Theater

at the Waldstein family's residences

We know just a little about theatres at other castles belonging to the Waldstein family. Organising occasional family performances or festivities did not require having a fully equipped theatre. In many cases, it sufficed to slightly modify one of the castle rooms. When the nobles did not act in the theatre themselves, plays were performed by travelling theatre companies or local amateur actors.



Třebíč

There is only one mention of a theatre at the manor of Třebíč – an account of its construction from 1792. However, nothing is known about the operation or the exact location of the theatre

www.zamek-trebic.cz



Doksy

We do not have much information about the theatre at Doksy either. All we know is that several comedies were performed here in a family circle in the 19th century

www.zamekdoksy.cz



Sychrov?(Waldstein Palace in Prague?)

A curtain depicting the façade of the Waldstein Palace in Prague has been preserved at the Sychrov chateau, which was owned by the Waldstein-Wartenberg family in the 18th century. Nevertheless we have no information where and when the curtain was used

www.zamek-sychrov.cz

Photos:

National Heritage Institute (1, 2, 5), Vysočina Museum Třebíč (3), Klára Dedková (4)