

## HISTORY OF THE LATVIAN NATIONAL OPERA HOUSE



The evolvement of our opera house did not have an easy path nor does it offer an easy vantage point. It all started on Große Königstraße (Great King street), now Richard Wagner street in the stone theatre financed by Otto Hermann von Vietinghoff in 1782. Until 1863, it was known as the *Musse-Theatre* as this Association was the principal donor for the theatre as well as the Riga City Theatre.<sup>1</sup>

On the 4th of March 1829, too many guests had arrived for the wedding of the theatre's doorman Taurit that he had decided to celebrate in the dance hall. In the theatre underneath, during a performance of François-Adrien Boieldieu opera *La Dame blanche*, the ceiling joists started to crack creating panic amongst the audience. Understanding the

fear of Riga's inhabitants and their trepidation at visiting such an unsafe venue, on the 6th of August 1829 the Government of Riga, Marquis Filippo Paulucci suggested that the city should support the *Musse* Association with funding, not to renovate the old, worn out and inadequate theatre building, but in fact to build an entirely new theatre. Although his suggestion received support from the Council of Magistrates, on the 9th of November Paulucci again returned to the issue of building a theatre. The Marquis proposed the establishment of a theatre construction fund overseen by the Estates' Committee. Thus, significant funds were collected<sup>2</sup> that were necessary for the work, or at least to begin such. The 1850 design for the combined Riga City Theatre, Stock Exchange and Great Guild buildings by the St Petersburg architect Harald Julius von Bosse were on far too grand a scale for the, as yet still, walled city. His many subsequent variations were also not accepted, however that doesn't diminish his significance as he thus repeatedly focused attention on the problem of the Theatre.

In 1853, representatives of the Estates founded a separate Theatre Building Committee whose function was to oversee the appropriate utilization of the collected funds at the time, and in the future. A powerful impulse for events to gather speed was a grand ceremony in honour of Czar Alexander II's visit to Riga on the 27th of May 1856. The cramped premises and the legendary damp and airless state of the Riga City Theatre thankfully accelerated plans for better conditions for both art as well as grand state occasions. On the 26th of August 1857, Alexander II gave permission to tear down the historic fortifications that were hampering the development of the city. After this work commenced on the 15th of November 1857, space became available on the *Neupfort Bollwerck*, so-called Pancake Bastion's foundations.

The 1859 theatre design by Berlin architect Carl Ferdinand Langhans exceeded the funds (195,000 roubles for the building itself, but 213,000 roubles in total, including the stage machinery) at the disposal of the Theatre Building Committee. Friedrich Wilhelm Hess was charged with reducing the scale of the project, and so, its costs (not changing Langhans' basic idea, he managed to reduce the costs to 152,000 roubles). Hess' version however did not offer a significant increase in audience capacity (if necessary, the old

theatre building could squeeze in 1027, but the new, Hess' version, could take only 1280). The Governor General of Riga Alexander Suvorov<sup>3</sup> rejected this version and instead gave the theatre project to a German architect from St Petersburg, Ludwig Bohnstedt. On the 4th of August 1860, the heir to the Russian throne Nicholas<sup>4</sup> laid the cornerstone for the new Riga City Theatre building. A month and a half later, in his residence at Tsarskoye Selo, Czar Alexander II personally reviewed and accepted Bohnstedt's design. Considering that the population of Riga in 1860 was 73,609, the scale of the building was quite outstanding.

Bohnstedt's design left a very convincing impression. The few Riga dignitaries, who would have preferred a Neo-Gothic theatre building, expressed dissatisfaction that the hanseatic character of the city was not respected. The notional Grecian style<sup>5</sup> seemed too cold for some patriotically inclined citizens – too stiff for the historic roots, the landscape and unsuitable for the climatic conditions of the Baltic.<sup>6</sup> The Governor General Suvorov had to listen to polemic discussion about how given the situation where there was no precise cost estimate for the building, would the city not be exposed to extreme risk if funds proved to be insufficient to cover the costs of the building's construction. These concerns later proved to be well grounded as Bohnstedt's design in the end proved to be far more expensive than Langhans' rejected proposal.<sup>7</sup> The funds available to the Estates' Committee quickly ran out. The construction of the building and its interior fittings cost, in total 354,000 roubles – exceeding the funds accrued over many years two times. The building itself cost 304,009 roubles and 58 kopeks, the surrounding cobblestone works 10,000 roubles, furniture, stage sets and costumes were given 40,000.

For the opening ceremony on the 29th of August 1863, the stage was given over to a real parade of muses in Wilhelm August Geertz's celebratory ode *Apollo's Gift*. In addition to the Master of the Muses' usual entourage, they were joined by three other symbolic characters aspiring to this status: the Germanic *Germania*, the Slavic *Ruthenia* and the master of synthesis *Riga*, in whose lap fell Appollo's long awaited gift – the new Riga City Theatre.

On the 18th of June 1867, when the regular visit to Riga by the monarch of Russia, Czar Alexander II was being celebrated in the new theatre, it was possible to appreciate the restrained monumentalism of Bohnstedt's design. The facade, rhythmically marked by 6 Ionic columns was crowned by Apollo with a five point star on his lyre, and his muses, as well as the Genius of the Arts, a youth able to tame wild imagination. This youth, with a six point star in his hair holds the mask of a life's experience through theatre in his hands. Below him is where Apollo's suite resides, some intoxicated with art and life, and on the other side of Apollo's lyre, some representatives of the eternal themes of drama (Love, War and Death).<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Bohnstedt's solution to audience traffic flow was more impressive than an interpretation of the sculptural embellishments. He separated those that arrived in vehicles from all the others who arrived on foot. The elegant driveway to the front entrance was reserved for the first group. Bohnstedt gave the archway a womanly curve, seemingly preparing the audience for the curves of the balconies and the stage portal inside.<sup>9</sup> The audience, who less prestigiously arrived on foot, didn't use the main foyer but climbed to their seats via various side entrances. The audience in the upper balconies had the use of special foyers that also served the purpose of separating and delineating social class and status.<sup>10</sup> The primary concern however, was the safety of the audience in case of an evacuation during a fire. This design reduced congestion and allowed for swift evacuation, for at the time, there were 1300 seats (today there are 940, ensuring more room and greater comfort for the public).

As funding had been severely overspent during the construction, the meeting of the Estates decided to hand the newly constructed theatre building over to the city, thereby relieving itself of the responsibility for maintenance, heating, land tax etc. Officially this took place on the 8th of December 1868. Nevertheless, subsidization of the City Theatre's artistic institution remained solely in the hands of the Estates Committee until 1887. This fact explains why the Baltic German community believed that it was ostensibly a German drama theatre which the theatre ensembles of other nationalities in

Riga had no right to use, as they had not only supported the construction of this most impressive building for Riga of the time, but had also supported it for a long time.

Therefore, considering the aforementioned presence of the city's financial support already in the construction phase (the difference between the available funds of 170,000 and the final bill of 354,00) and the fact that Latvians and Russians also contributed to the city's coffers by taxes, especially as the city's rapid industrialisation grew exponentially and the number of Latvians living in the city also increased dramatically – one could argue that the right for the Latvian National Opera to reside in the premises of the German Theatre is quite legitimate, not only by dint of force majeure due to the change in the status of the nation state in 1918 and 1919, but also due to some measure of historical equity as Latvians had contributed their taxes to the city up to 1918.

On the 14th of July, 1882, tragedy struck. It severely damaged the financial state of the Riga City Theatre; however it didn't diminish its standing in the community. *On the 14th of June 1882, about quarter to 12 midday, the city's bells heralded a fire. Prior to this, smoke emanating from the roof of the theatre, at first faintly, but increasingly gathering strength, caught the attention of passers-by. The smoke was quickly followed by fire and news of the burning theatre had attracted a crowd who watched the flames engulf the entire roof. The fire spread very quickly with a great deal of force so that when the fire brigade arrived, there was no hope of saving the building itself. Due to the wind, the fire threatened buildings on the other side of the road, where glass shattered and window frames started to catch fire. The fire brigade succeeded in protecting this sector, and the wind changed direction leading the fire in the direction of the new prop storage annex. It's clear that the fire wasn't started by a gas leak in the ceiling. It's also highly unlikely that the presence of the Head Lighting Technician Conrad Schaub in the ceiling area that day had anything to do with the fire, nor is it likely that some accidental action by any other person was the cause. For various reasons, it's possible that the fire was due to arson. However, the manner in which the fire started cannot be objectively ascertained, nor is there enough evidence to suspect or charge any person with a crime.* 11

The theatre costumes in the newly finished apse-like extension to the building were completely destroyed in the fire, as well as the greater part of the stage sets. On the 9th of November 1882, the Interim Theatre designed by Heinrich Scheel was opened. This wooden structure with a notable absence of embellishments cost the Estates Committee 78,000 roubles. At the outset, the management of the Interim Theatre abstained from presenting not only grand historical French opera productions but also from any new productions at all, for support for “high art” was limited and audience attendance clearly indicated the taste of the audience of the time. It was hardly surprising then that the only significant opera that premiered in the premises of the Interim Theatre was the Georges Bizet opera *Carmen* on the 13th of May 1883.

Attempts to raise financial support for the remonstrance of the theatre from the general public via notices in the press were a failure. The Estates organizations were so disappointed by the attitude of the citizens of Riga that they removed the term “City” from the title of the Interim Theatre and for three years it was known as the Estates’ Interim Theatre (*Ständisches Interims-Theater*). Low-brow culture prevailed. It was only after three years of negotiations with the Estates Committee that the insurance companies agreed to pay up the due compensation 55,247 roubles and 68 kopeks. Finally, work could commence on the reconstruction of the burnt out Riga City Theatre.

The era of the Interim Theatre in the history of the Riga City Theatre proved this institution’s ability to overcome the problems caused by the 1882 fire, having robbed the audience and the artists of a suitable place to perform. More importantly, merely by its existence, the German Interim Theatre of the 1880ies showed that there was demand for, and an increasing level of culture. This was in contrast to the first half of the 19th century when from 1835 to 1837 when the old premises of the Riga City Theatre were being renovated, the inhabitants of Riga didn’t try to create something similar and easily survived life without a theatre, without a fuss.

Notwithstanding the findings by the investigative committee set up to enquire into the cause of the 1882 fire which were, that *the theatre fire was not caused by a gas leakage*

*in the ceiling*, the Theatre Building Committee was of the opinion that it was time to forgo the unsafe gas lighting. The Chairman of the reconstruction planning group, the eminent Riga City Architect Reinhold Schmaeling designed a temporary city power plant on the edge of the canal, right next to the theatre. It was the first of its kind in the Baltic provinces. This seemingly technical event marked fundamental changes in the artistic history of the Riga City Theatre. As candlelight was replaced by gas lighting (in Riga this was done in 1862 after the founding of the first gas supply plant), and gas was replaced by electricity from the temporary electricity plant for the reconstructed theatre in 1887, the lighting of the stage improved, as did the lighting in the orchestra pit. Testimony to the exacting conditions that conductors endured; working in half-light for years, burrowing through handwritten scores; was the tragic loss of eyesight that befell two of the first Kapellmeisters of the Riga City Theatre – Friedrich Rietz and Julius Ruthardt, during this era of gas lighting, causing them to give their professions.

The improvement in visibility facilitated by the switch to electrical lighting, resulted in greater expectations from the audience. This applied mainly to the style of stage scenery, as the former two dimensional painted scenery, the so-called sheets, went out of fashion as they were no longer able to fulfil the demands of an illusion of reality that the audience craved. The audience wanted to see built scenery even though from the theatre's point of view, they created new problems – an increase in the expense of creating scenery as well as the extra space that was required to store it in the theatre. The length of performances also increased as given the limitations of 19th century stage technology, the time required for scene changes significantly increased.

In order to better understand the period in question – from the erection of the building to the fire – and the prevailing management, a short insight into the future of the theatre is necessary as the 1887/1888 season in the reconstructed theatre came up against a different structure of decision making in the operation of the theatre. On the surface, these changes may not seem significant: the Small Guild resigned from the Estates' Committee because it was divested of various lucrative areas of control like the gas and water supply and the City's grazing lands which were handed over to the care and control

of the city. In 1887, the Council of Magistrates was also facing the beginning of the end, for, notwithstanding the special wishes of the Baltic Germans in the Baltics and the lively power struggles in St Petersburg for the preservation of these rights, the time had come to face up to the Russian empire's desire to unify and subject all of its cities to the same laws.

In this case, the Great Guild took over control of the theatre, at the same time clarifying the relationship with the city<sup>12</sup> and with voluntary guarantors. The control of overseeing the upkeep expenses, a function that was previously fulfilled by the representatives of the Small Guild at present at meetings, was relaxed. The symbiosis between merchants and craftsmen in the history of the management of the theatre was very interesting due to the fact that faced with having to cover a shortfall from their own funds, the merchants who knew the price of goods, and craftsmen who knew the price of labour (including the creation of scenery and costumes), ensured a system of checks and balances and so keeps expenses low. When the small guild could no longer participate in the co-funding of the theatre and hence was disbarred from the Estates Committee, loyalty towards the theatre from the third estate noticeably diminished. Correspondingly, as discounts decreased, craftsmen charged more for their services and the total expenses of the theatre increased.

Therefore, one can talk about two differing management philosophies in the history of this theatre. Up to the end of the 1886 / 1887 season, a "petit-bourgeois" mind-set prevailed where the pursuit of artistic excellence was weaker than the desire to balance income and expenditure. In this sense, the theatre was potentially a profit earning enterprise. From the 1887/1888 season onwards, having moved to renovated and more ornate premises,<sup>13</sup> under the control of the Great Guild, a vision of rapid development emerges that could notionally be termed *haute-bourgeois*. It encompasses the understanding of the theatre as elitist and potentially a loss making institution, its existence, however being vitally important to the spiritual well-being of the city's inhabitants.



The evenly undulating curve of the usual highs and lows in artistic quality of the Riga City Theatre was cut by the outbreak of the WWI in August 1914. From the moment that Germany and Russia were at war, anything that could underscore national emotions for Germans living in Russia, including performances of drama or opera in the German language were prohibited. The title *Die Stadt den darstellenden Künsten*, was swiftly removed from the facade and only the Angarov and Rudin Russian Theatre troupe was allowed to perform there.

Since the second half of the 19th Century, Latvians were keen supporters of the German Riga City Theatre, thereby also supporting it financially. However, the first professional Latvian opera troupe, Latvian Opera founded by Pāvuls Jurjāns in December 1912, after the guest performances there by its chorus during WWI, was deemed unwelcome. The most eminent music critic of the first half of the 20th century as well as the Director of the National Opera Jānis Zālītis; called this building that the German artists were forced to vacate, but which still remained under the supervision of the Head of the Great Guild, Nikolay Kymmel jun., - a genuine Baltic-German bastion of privilege.<sup>14</sup>

Until WWI, the scores, books, costumes and sets belonged not to the City of Riga, but to the Great Guild. Therefore it is no surprise that the Germans – representatives of the City Theatre, had taken the valuable library from the annex and secured it for safekeeping in the belief that they would return to the building as the rightful custodians. It's possible that this happened at the last minute at the end of December 1918 when it became clear that German occupation forces that arrived in September 1917 would not be able to hold out and that the Bolsheviks would soon arrive.

The hiding place of this library was revealed during the reconstruction works of the theatre in 1991. It extended from the lobby of the second balcony under the wooden stairs, throughout the seats in the auditorium on this level and the gallery. The dark space was full of scores and documents covering a great deal of time from the 18th to the 20th century. It included some dismantled lighting equipment. It is especially heart-warming to think that these materials, being hidden in this manner, also escaped both destruction

from a fire that broke out in the annex on the 2nd of January 1919, as well as from ideological purges of the Opera's archives from time to time after WWII.

On the 23rd of January 1919, the employees of the *Latvju Opera* that had been founded on the 15th of October 1918 in the 2nd City Theatre, moved to the spacious premises of the 1st City Theatre with the blessing of the Education Commissar. On the 9th of February 1919, by a decree of Pēteris Stučka's government, the "Latvju Opera" company that had the status of a co-operative, was nationalised and called the State Opera, and ensuring it state funding. Re-named the Soviet Latvian Opera, the company continued to perform the old productions and worked on new ones. Initially, conditions in the theatre were not ideal; *the stage hadn't suffered in the fire at all, but it seems that the burnt end allows the Northern winds to move more freely, shake up the curtain and blow cold on the audience. The audience seems ok, but what do the singers say! The smell of smoke hangs in the air, otherwise its ok.*<sup>15</sup>

Those who were hardened by war were not perturbed by the few inconveniences caused by the fire in the annex. Depending on the personal sympathies of any particular recorder of history, various versions of blame were apportioned: *The pride of the German patricians, the first Riga City Theatre fell victim to the retreating German occupying forces who set fire to it on the night of the 2nd and 3rd of January 1919. Thankfully it was possible to localise the fire and the barbarians succeeded in damaging just the stage end of the building and some inventory.*<sup>16</sup> The lack of eye witnesses makes it equally difficult to prove or refute the opinion expressed in Boris Shalfeyev text: *The last misfortune to befall the theatre took place in January 1919, when as the communists arrived; unknown villains set fire to the opera building. English sailors rescued the building.*<sup>17</sup>

Soviet Latvia's opera company re-instated its former name *Latvju opera* after the fall of Stučka's regime on the 22nd of May 1919. Keen to retain their acquired advantages, the opera artists continued to perform in June and July. Notwithstanding, their efforts were in vain as they lost their home again, for, from a pre-soviet legal point of view, the German

theatre was under the auspices of the Great Guild and the theatre building legally continued to belong to Riga's Germans. The status of a State Opera with a guarantee of a venue disappeared as the entity that had issued this status no longer existed (rather, it remained as an ideological template for future Soviet power structures in Latvian history).

In order to preserve the unity of the *Latvju opera* company, it was attached to Colonel Balodis' First Latvian Brigade, or the First Courland Division. The Great Guild, who had ensured the operation of Riga's German theatre for many decades, believed that the contracts signed previously were still legally binding regardless of the new historical circumstances. The unification of Latvian opera art and the military forces gave light to a different view on certain things: *But the City of Riga didn't ever build a new building for Latvian theatre . . . that's why even on the 16th of August 1919 the secretary of the cultural sector of the city government addressed a letter to the Great Guild with the following content: "In consideration of the fact that as the German population in Riga is falling and so the utilization of the Riga City Theatre for this sector of the population becomes more untenable, it is proposed that the theatre be handed over to the needs of the Latvian population, i.e. that the grand theatre building, the First City Theatre building be handed over for the use of the Latvian opera company. Therefore, we ask that the Great Guild notify in writing, what would be the conditions under which it would rescind its current contract with the city". An unfruitful correspondence ensued, but already on the same day, the city government received news that the headquarters of the First Courland Division had requisitioned both city theatre buildings for the purposes of staging Latvian performances and concerts . . . And so it transpired that Latvian riflemen were "conquerors" in the history of Latvian theatre as well.*<sup>18</sup>

The reaction of the Baltic Germans was reserved. Evidence in the German press in Riga shows that in the latter part of the between war period, critics did not hesitate to laud the great artistic achievements of the National Opera. Nevertheless there were other German texts that were dominated by unrestrained bitterness: *Already in 1919, Germans were forced to conclude that German property suddenly became the property of the entire*

*Latvian nation (...) hence, as a result of the most obscene intrigue, many properties were lost (...) the German opera has now become the Latvian State Opera (...) these changes were deeply disastrous both from an economic as well as from a cultural point of view; from now on, Latvians would boast about their properties and monuments to their foreign visitors as being their own “cultural” artefacts.*<sup>19</sup>

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia approved the regulations on the National Opera at its meeting on the 23rd of September 1919.<sup>20</sup> Although the law on the Latvian opera and the Latvian theatre only came into force on the 15th of March 1920, as of the end of September 1919, there was no longer any need for fear that the Great Guild might try to regain control of the theatre. The company once again had a venue and state funding guaranteed by law that ensured the continuation of successful development. Some soon believed that for the purposes of fuelling patriotism, it would be opportune to start the success story here. That is what they did, however it is abundantly clear that the makeup of the opera company as well as its productions in the 1918.1919 and 1919/1920 seasons was an unbroken continuum: *Latvju Opera* = Soviet Latvian Opera = Latvian National Opera.

To declare the 2nd of December 1919 as the birthday of the Latvian National Opera when the company was performing Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*,<sup>21</sup> would be honouring nothing more than the name itself – The Latvian National Opera. It's important to remember that after repairing the damage caused by the 1919 fire and the “Bermond-Avalov affair” half of the subsequent years of this institution's life it has sung, danced and played under different names. Some of them are elegant, others suitably ponderous. For example, from 1956 to 1989, the title was – the Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia's State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre Honoured With the Red Work Flag award. Its length reminding one of the long queues for goods in short supply in the twilight of the soviet era. Notwithstanding, also these years, full of significant personalities are part of the opera's history.

The Latvian Opera theatre in the former Riga City theatre building has developed under the control of various ruling powers, however they all have something in common: the belief that it's enough to change the name of the institution and its design in order to consider that everything starts almost anew. This attitude allows for a free interpretation of events and allows the existing power to write the founding of the opera theatre into the balance sheet of the prevailing government. In German occupied Riga, the Latvian National Opera company with the historic title of *Latvju Opera* performed *The Flying Dutchman* for the first time in the current National Theatre premises on the 15th of October 1918. This date was inappropriate for celebration both for the Republic of Latvia, as well as for the SSR Latvia. This would have been a reminder of Paul Hopf the Captain of the German Army Reserve and the representative of Kaiser Wilhelm II who at the time was supporting Latvian artists so that they could start working in the former Russian or the Second City Theatre building.

Times have changed and so have governments, however, an understanding about the unique role of the opera theatre has allowed the Latvian National Opera and the national ballet company to not only survive but also to develop. It's a logical explanation of why not only does the state support the Latvian National Opera because the Latvian National Opera is, in essence, the Latvian State Opera and the artistic process, and funding for the opera and ballet companies is guaranteed by law, but it is also supported by the City of Riga who take care of the maintenance and operation of the home of the opera.

The title, The Latvian National Opera, that was reinstated on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1989, reflects the belief that it is precisely the promotion of a national culture that is the main premise for the existence of both this opera theatre as well as the state itself. Over time, society's perception of what the essence of this national aspect is, that needs to be promoted, has changed. The mission of the Latvian National Opera is far broader than the initial goal which was to perform operas in the Latvian language to ensure that the text was understandable as well as to establish the use of the Latvian language in the public sphere. The role of the national opera today is to be a representative vehicle for the development of high quality art in Latvia.

Emīls Melnagailis' observation about music in the second half of the 19th century, to wit – according to the taste of the intelligentsia of the time, *music should have been similar to German but with the condition that the composer is Latvian*<sup>22</sup> – could just as easily be applied to the first attempts by Latvian artists to prove themselves in the opera field. One could go as far as a simple rephrasing: Latvian accomplishments were similar to those seen on the stage of the German Riga City Theatre, with the provision that the soloists are Latvian.

The Riga City Theatre was a role model for other Latvian theatres until WWI, and continued to set an example even after the era of German and Russian cultural dominance had come to an end. Even the local soviet government's gazette, usually more attracted by class war and revolutionary activities than aspects of a national nature, stressed: *German opera that had hitherto inhabited this building was always (except for the war years) of a high standard, and we must show that Latvians can achieve the same, that we don't lack singers or other artists who are capable of such.*<sup>23</sup>

From a historical perspective, in 1919, the Latvian National Opera company gained not only the building of the German City Theatre, but inherited an audience with a well-formed notion about opera, well-schooled within the walls of the Riga City Theatre for many decades.

The composition of the pediment on the facade of the Riga City Theatre / The Latvian National Opera reminds us that everything is inter-connected. Apollo, whose artistry is capable of influencing living things from the depths of the ocean to the heights of the heavens, is in the centre. Next to the swimming dolphin, the wise friend of music, in the left-hand corner, lies a confident image of the antitheses of Apollonian art – Dionysus who has grabbed a goat essential for his rituals, by the horns. The birth of tragedy here looks more like a comedy, but does that makes it no less important? Cheeky boys support Dionysus' teacher Silenus who has sunk to his knees in front of Apollo.

Has he come to enjoy the artistic performance or is he attracted by the buffet, the half full goblet of wine? The Master of the muses pays little attention to these excesses, turning instead to those on the right side: the young cupid and militant Mars who has laid down his shield to enjoy a moment of art together with Venus, are all enthralled by Apollo's music-making. Right next to them, Venus and Mars' bird has spread his wings in a swan song, followed by Charon, deep in thought with a boat ready for the last trip over the waters of the Styx. When music's friend the dolphin enters these waters, the circle will be completed and everything can start anew.

Ludwig Bohnstedt's facade exudes harmony, which seems deceptively simple. The eternal themes are present, and no-one from Apollo's entourage has been banished. No element on this facade is superfluous, just as in history there is no period that is irrelevant or unnecessary. Each of them can be considered instructive in the unrelenting quest to attain both mastery as well as the inspiration that is so essential to art.

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<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that this building was regularly financed by the City of Riga. Until 1863, this term – *Stadt-Theater* – was used in the metaphoric sense – as the theatre that the entire city was interested in.

<sup>2</sup> Figures vary between various sources of information: 160 000 (Brunstermann, Friedrich. *Die Geschichte der Kleinen oder St. Johannis-Gilde in Wort und Bild*. – Riga: Stahl, 1902, S. 584), 170 000 roubles (*Das neue Theater in Riga*. Riga: Mueller, 1860, S. 7).

<sup>3</sup> The Prince of Italy and the Count of Rymnik Alexander Suvorov was the Governor-General of the Baltic Provinces from 1848 to 1861. From 1858 to 1923, the street that is now called Krišjāņa Barona iela, as well as the bridge behind the theatre, were named in his honour. The opening of the new theatre building however, took place during the term of the next Governor, Wilhelm Heinrich von Lieven.

<sup>4</sup> The heir to the throne, Nikolay Romanov didn't become the Czar as he died barely 22 years old on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1865. The Riga City Theatre of course was closed as befit the imperial tradition for an official period of mourning which in this case was only 10 days. He had laid the foundation stone of the Riga City Theatre's new building, and *Tronfolger-Boulevard* (The Heir to the Throne Boulevard) was named in his honour. In 1919 it was renamed Karl Marx Prospect, but since 1920, known as Rainis Boulevard, that is, not counting an intermezzo from 1942 to 1944 when it was called Alfred-Rosenberg-Ring.

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<sup>5</sup> When Ludwig Bohnstedt won the design competition for the Riga Mineralwater Authority's building, he wrote: *I don't think we are right nowadays to strictly adhere to an old style (...) We should capture the spirit and vitality of the best examples of a bygone era (...) in order to understand a way of creating harmonious unity.* Campe, Paul. *Professor Ludwig Bohnstedt und seine Rigaer Bauten.* – Riga: R. Ruetz & Co, 1933, S. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Das neue Theater in Riga.* – Riga: Müller'sche Buchdruckerei, S. 16

<sup>7</sup> Of course there is no way of knowing how much the Langhans design would have cost if it had indeed been built.

<sup>8</sup> Not only did the life of Alexander II leave an impression on the history of this theatre, but so did his death: on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1881, the monarch was assassinated in St Petersburg and a period of mourning was announced throughout Russia, banning opera and theatre performances until the 18<sup>th</sup> of April. The City Theatre used the unexpected break productively by commencing work on an apse-like extension to house costumes and scenery.

<sup>9</sup> Reinhold Schmaeling kept Bohnstedt's original design of the façade for the reconstruction of the theatre that was completed in 1887. He altered only the rounded archway of the driveway with definite angular lines. Without going into psychological explanations, suffice to say that this change makes it a lot easier to date photographs of the theatre into pre and post the 1882 fire. The appearance of the smokestack of the electricity power plant design by Schmaeling is not a reliable element for dating an image as often the image was simply retouched as the structure was deemed an ugly addition. At the time it was considered to be a far too prosaic reminder that it was not only art that illuminated the theatre.

<sup>10</sup> Dolgner, Dieter. *Architektur im 19. Jahrhundert: Ludwig Bohnstedt. Leben und Werk.* – Weimar: Böhlau, 1979, S. 94.

<sup>11</sup> The findings of the Riga Council of Magistrates at the conclusion of the criminal investigation of the fire at the Riga City Theatre: *Gutachten der Criminaldeputation des Rigaschen Rathes in Sachen betr. den Brand des Stadttheaters.* // *Beilage der Rigaschen Zeitung*, 1883, Nr. 58, 12. März.

<sup>12</sup> The contract that was entered into on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1887 between the Great Guild and The City of Riga stated, that the city gives the care and control of the theatre building to the Great Guild. The heating, lighting and insurance expenses are to be shared by the Great Guild and the city, but the interior cleaning and maintenance costs are to be borne by the Great Guild whereas the costs of maintaining the building's facades and the stage machinery would be borne by the city.



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<sup>13</sup> The reconstruction of the theatre cost 400,000 roubles. It was more than the construction cost in 1863 (304,000 for the building + 50, 000 for the interior and furnishings).

<sup>14</sup> Bērziņa, Vizbulīte Jānis Zālītis. – Rīga: Liesma, 1978, page 134.

<sup>15</sup> Oktāvs. *Latvju Opera*. // *Uz priekšu*, 1919, Nr. 21, 30. Jan.

<sup>16</sup> Dziļleja, Kārlis. *Rīga – teātru pilsēta*. // *Rīga kā Latvijas galvaspilsēta*. – Rīga: Rīgas pilsētas valdes izdevums, 1932, page 711.

<sup>17</sup> Šalfejevs, Boriss. *Teātra sākumi Rīgā. Vēsturiska izziņa sakarā ar Nac. operas 10 gadu svētkiem*. // *Atpūta*, 1929, Nr. 280, page 16.

<sup>18</sup> Dziļleja, Kārlis. *Rīga – teātru pilsēta*. // *Rīga kā Latvijas galvaspilsēta*. – Rīga: Rīgas pilsētas valdes izdevums, 1932, page 707.

<sup>19</sup> Peege, Hans-Bernhard *Lettische Angriffe auf die kulturelle Herrschaftsstellung der Deutschen in Lettland* (Dissertation). – Greifswald: Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität, 1938, S. 46.

<sup>20</sup> The “Regulation” about the LNO signed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1919 by the Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis and the Education Minister Kārlis Kasparsons, in its first paragraph states: *The National Opera is a state institution; it is financed by the state*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph describes the basic function of the LNO as it was to continue throughout the between war period: *the goal of the National Opera is –to promote the development of national music art*. – *Valdības Vēstnesis*, 1919, Nr. 50, 30. Sept.

<sup>21</sup> The premiere of Richard Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* on the 10th of May 1919 was performed in Latvian with Teodors Reiters as Conductor, directed by Dimitrij Arbenin and stage design by Jānis Kuga.

<sup>22</sup> Emīlis Melngailis *Kas dziedāšanas svētkos būtu dziedams* // *Rīgas Avīze*, 1903 Nr. 138 (21st of June)

<sup>23</sup> *Cīņa*, 1919 Nr. 15 (26th of January)