

13 Berlin Operetta

TOBIAS BECKER

Paris has Jacques Offenbach, Vienna Johann Strauss and Franz Lehár, London Gilbert and Sullivan but which Berlin operetta composer has made an enduring international name for himself? Theatrically Berlin is associated either with high cultural, artistically experimental stage productions of the Reinhardt-Piscator school or, thanks to *The Blue Angel* and *Cabaret*, with cabaret. Berlin is much less associated with operetta and this despite producing some domestically as well as internationally very successful examples of the genre – why is this?

There is more than one reason. Firstly, Berlin entered the popular musical stage comparatively late in the last year of the nineteenth century, when Paris, Vienna and London had already successfully established themselves as capitals of popular musical theatre. Secondly, Berlin's time in the limelight was comparatively short-lived. After 1933 the majority of its most talented composers, writers, actors, directors and managers either left the country or found themselves barred from the stage, if not faced with the threat of deportation and death because they were Jewish. Simultaneously, Berlin was cut off from artistic developments and markets in other countries. Finally, Berlin operetta, though popularly successful, lacked intellectual support. German critics either ignored or panned operetta as trite, vulgar, worthless mass entertainment. Long before Theodor Adorno took on the American culture industry, he cut his teeth excoriating Weimar era operetta.

Such judgements partly determined how operetta was seen after World War II and to some extent is still seen today. In contrast particularly to Britain and the United States, the Berlin operetta heritage was, apart from some die-hard enthusiasts, not preserved and celebrated. This might also partly have to do with operetta's association with stuffy Victorianism and, worse still, National Socialism (Hitler was a known operetta lover). A younger generation dismissed the German tradition in popular entertainment as old-fashioned, bourgeois and fascist, embracing American rock and roll and, if they cared at all for musical theatre, Broadway musicals. While some operettas, especially those by Offenbach and Strauss, were performed by opera houses and became a mainstay of provincial theatres, no self-respecting intendant would have dreamed of

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touching Berlin operetta. This has changed since the 2010s, when Berlin-based directors like Barrie Kosky at the Komische Oper or Herbert Fritsch at the Volksbühne began to revive the lost tradition of local popular musical theatre, drawing attention to its subversive potential. However, as this essay will show, there is still a lot to rediscover. It starts off by looking at the early history of Berlin operetta before focussing on the period between 1900 and 1933. It concentrates on the most important works, theatres, composers, writers and managers and the international traffic in operettas.

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Around the middle of the nineteenth century, Berlin, the capital of Prussia, was by far the largest German city with just over 400,000 inhabitants. However, it was only after the Franco-German war of 1870–1, when Berlin became the capital of a unified Germany that it began to grow both in population and in political and cultural importance. When World War I broke out, it was the third largest European city after London and Paris. Its rapid growth gave the city a new and modern appearance, especially compared with older European cities. Mark Twain compared it to Chicago. This growth was largely due to immigration from rural parts of Germany, particularly from eastern territories such as Silesia. As many of the newcomers were Jews the make-up of the city changed and became much more cosmopolitan.

Fast-growing Berlin was a city in search of an identity. In this process, media took on a particular importance. The popular press demonstrated how to find one's bearings in the new – and, for many people from the countryside, certainly also frightening – environment, contributing to what one sociologist has called 'inner urbanization'.¹ The theatre fulfilled a similar function. Inventing Berlin characters, using Berlin dialect and representing Berlin problems on the stage, it held up a mirror to old residents and newcomers alike and helped them to come to terms with the changing city and their roles in it. It was on the stage that Berlin first claimed to be a metropolis on a par with the other capitals of the world. When the writer David Kalisch gave one of his farces the subtitle 'Berlin becomes a world city', it was meant as a joke.² Soon, however, it became a rallying call for Berlin's ambition to be on an equal footing with Paris and London.

Obviously, Berlin was not as politically and economically important as London, the heart of a global empire, and it was certainly not as beautiful as Paris (even many Berliners decried its ugliness). Neither could it look back on as long a history as these cities. But in the fields of entertainment and nightlife it claimed to surpass both – a bold claim given Paris's status in

that regard. Population growth, the gradual rise of wages and the increasing leisure time produced an ever-growing demand for entertainment, which led, in a comparatively short span of time, to the opening of many new theatres, variety theatres, music halls and countless cabarets, pubs and summer gardens. Depending on location, size and ticket prices, these venues were showing local as well as international entertainments, among them many operettas. Offenbach was as popular in Berlin as anywhere in Europe, and both he and Johann Strauss conducted their works in Berlin. In 1886 an English touring company brought *The Mikado* to Berlin. Despite performing in English, this visit was a big success, prompting some journalists to question why German writers and composers were unable to produce similar entertainments.

It would take another decade for Berlin operetta to emerge and two decades until it would reach other countries. Paul Lincke is often seen as the father of Berlin operetta and is practically the only composer of Berlin operettas born in Berlin. He started out as a musician, playing the violin and bassoon. He then moved into light music, composing as well as conducting the orchestra of the Apollo-Theater, one of Berlin's foremost variety theatres. As a conductor, Lincke was a dandified showman, always appearing in his trademark black coat-tails, top hat and white gloves. Surprisingly, for someone so strongly associated with Berlin, he moved to Paris for two years, where he conducted the orchestra of the Folies-Bergère, Europe's foremost variety theatre. After his return to Berlin in 1899, Lincke had his first big success – and, indeed, the biggest of his career – with the operetta *Frau Luna*. Originally a one-act piece and part of a variety bill, Lincke would expand and adapt the score throughout his life.

Frau Luna successfully brought together a mixture of influences, namely operetta of the French and Viennese school and Berlin burlesque. What the cancan had been for Offenbach and the waltz for Strauss, the march became for Lincke. His most famous was 'Das ist die Berliner Luft' (This is the Berlin air) by which, to quote the historian Peter Gay, Lincke 'did not have meteorology in mind but an incontestable mental alertness'.³ Lincke wrote for Berlin audiences, and Berlin was the topic of his operettas. *Frau Luna* featured typical Berlin characters speaking in Berlin dialect, such as the engineer Fritz Steppke, who invents a balloon and flies to the moon with his friends, where they get up to all kinds of mischief. It was adapted in Paris (as *Madame de la Lune* in 1904) and in London (as *Castles in the Air* in 1911) but – probably because of its Berlinness – did not find much success in either city.

Trying to capitalize on his success, Lincke quickly turned out a string of operettas, most of which followed the same plot of the bumbling comic

young Berlin man blundering into some exotic locale. More important than the plot was that most of them had at least one or two hit songs eagerly picked up by dance orchestras and barrel organists, who turned them into bona fide folksongs one could hear at every street corner of Berlin. In due course, Lincke became rich and founded his own publishing house, but with success his productivity decreased until he wrote hardly anything new.

While *Frau Luna* is still remembered and regularly performed today, the same cannot be said for the operettas of Lincke's contemporary Victor Hollaender, who is chiefly remembered as the father of the better-known writer and composer Friedrich Hollaender. From a Jewish family in Silesia, Hollaender came to Berlin to study music. Afterwards he worked as a conductor in Germany, Europe and the United States and wrote music for the stage. In 1899 he settled in Berlin, where he became the house composer of the Metropol-Theater.

The Metropol was the first Berlin theatre to stage annual revues, a genre imported from Paris which satirized social, political and cultural events of the past year. The Metropol revues quickly became the toast of Berlin and attracted visitors from all over Germany. They also launched the career of Fritzi Massary. The daughter of a Jewish merchant from Vienna, she became one of the biggest German theatre stars and *the* German operetta diva both before and after World War I.

For a while Hollaender was one of the most popular German composers, earning enough money to build a mansion in the expensive Grunewald district on the outskirts of Berlin. Some of his songs were international hits, such as his 'Schaukellied', written for a revue in 1905. It became popular in Britain as 'Swing Song' and as 'Swing Me High, Swing Me Low' in the United States, where Florenz Ziegfeld incorporated it into his *Follies of 1910*.⁴ His operettas, however, were less successful and after World War I he found it increasingly difficult to keep pace with changing musical tastes.

Even before the war, Lincke and Hollaender began to be sidelined by a new generation of Berlin composers, namely Walter Kollo and Jean Gilbert. Like so many of his peers, Kollo began by working and writing for the thriving cabaret scene, soon moving into the theatre. His first success was *Große Rosinen* (Big Raisins) in 1911, followed by the even bigger success of *Wie einst im Mai* (Like One Time in May) in 1913, which told the story of two Berlin families over four generations. Kollo continued very much in Lincke's vein, writing operettas about Berlin for Berliners.

Kollo's biggest rival was Jean Gilbert, the most prolific of all Berlin operetta composers. Born as Max Winterfeld in Hamburg in 1879 into a Jewish family, Gilbert was hardly eighteen years old when he started to

conduct at provincial theatres and began to compose. His first success, *Die polnische Wirtschaft* (literally Polish Business but really ‘monkey business’) of 1910, ran for 580 consecutive performances, an enormous number for Berlin at that time. The next year’s *Die keusche Susanne* (Chaste Susan) was even more successful. Based – as so many Berlin operettas were – on a French farce, it mocked the moral reformers of the day. Gilbert may, as his critics alleged, not have been a first-rate composer, but he certainly knew what the audience liked, and he was more than ready to give it to them, turning out two or more operettas per year, touring with his orchestra and producing an endless outpour of gramophone recordings.

In the years preceding World War I, Kollo and Gilbert wrote at least one successful operetta each year – once even about the same subject: the rise of the film industry. Kollo’s operetta *Filmzauber*, premiering in 1912 at the Berliner Theater, told the story of a dodgy film director, whose ill-fated attempt at shooting a biopic about Napoleon produces comic confusion. It was followed by Gilbert’s *Die Kino-Königin* (The Cinema Star), in which a businessman campaigning against the dangers of the cinema is secretly filmed wooing a diva only to become an involuntary film star himself.⁵ Much has been made of the competition between the popular stage and the cinema at the time as well as retrospectively. Yet, while happy to mock the film industry, operetta composers did not hesitate to work for the new medium. Walter Kollo wrote the score for a dozen films, while Jean Gilbert was under contract by a film studio as *Die Kino-Königin* came out. Indeed, operetta had a remarkable impact on the early German film industry. Already during the silent film era many operettas were turned into films.

For operetta, and especially for Berlin operetta, to tackle a contemporary subject like the cinema was not unusual. On the contrary, pre-war operetta delighted in taking up topical phenomena, fashions and fads. With the beginning craze for North as well as South American dances, European composers felt compelled to utilize the new rhythms. Jean Gilbert, for instance, used the tango in an operetta titled *Die Tangoprinzessin* (The Tango Princess). Yet, despite Lincke’s penchant for the march, Berlin operetta capitalized on the waltz as much as Viennese operetta.

Gilbert’s works were more cosmopolitan than those of the Berlin-centric Kollo. *Die keusche Susanne* was set in Paris, *Die Kino-Königin* in Philadelphia. This might have helped them to be adapted abroad. However, operettas by both these composers increasingly found their way on to the stages of other European cities, thanks not least to the enormous global success of Franz Lehár’s *The Merry Widow* in 1907. Suddenly, every theatre manager in Europe and even outside Europe became aware of the selling power of German operetta. Whether they originated in Vienna or Berlin often did not make much of a difference.

Gilbert's *Die keusche Susanne*, for instance, played in Vienna and in Madrid (*La casta Susanna*) in 1911, in Warsaw (*Cnotliwa Zuzanna*) in 1911, in London (*The Girl on the Film*) and in Budapest (*Az ártatlan Zsuzsi*) in 1912, in Paris (*La chaste Suzanne*) in 1913, in Sydney in 1914 and in New York (*Modest Suzanne*) and in Naples (*La casta Susanna*) in 1915. In the summer of 1914, four West End theatres were showing operettas by Kollo and Gilbert. As composers realized that there was money in international sales, they reacted by writing less locally specific, more universal operettas.

Composers benefited from the overall growth of the theatre industry across Europe. The growing number of theatres led to a growing demand for new content that the domestic market was often unable to satisfy. Theatre managers therefore increasingly looked abroad for new shows, especially as theatre became more and more costly. A show that had succeeded elsewhere raised hopes that it would be successful once more. Managers, publishers and agents eagerly observed what was going on abroad and stayed in constant contact with their colleagues in other countries. The internationalization of the theatre industry, then, was driven by its development into a big – potentially extremely profitable, potentially hazardous – business. Nothing illustrates better how international it had become than the situation operetta theatres found themselves in when World War I broke out. Many had to withdraw current shows because they had been written by composers from now enemy nations and were no longer welcome. Often these shows were replaced by well-established classics or by improvised patriotic shows, which leaned more towards revue than operetta.

In Berlin, both Kollo and Gilbert wrote jingoistic shows calculated to raise the morale. This in turn made their operettas even less acceptable in London and Paris. With habitual celerity, Jean Gilbert, quickly exchanging his French-sounding pseudonym for his original German name, turned out the music for two war plays in 1914: *Kamrad Männe* (War Comrade Männe) and *Woran wir denken* (What We Think Of). Like most war plays, *Kamrad Männe* took its cue from the mobilization of the army. Its first act took place before, the second during and the third right after the declaration of war, showing how Germans from all classes and regions – and especially Germans and Austrians – stood together. Popular theatre actively contributed to the war effort or at least did its best to make it appear that way to make people forget how international and cosmopolitan it had been before the war.

Like *Kamrad Männe*, Walter Kollo's *Immer feste druff!* (Beat Them Hard!) invoked the solidarity of all German people. It ran for over 800 performances, from October 1914 all through the war till the abdication of the

German emperor. This was unusual because audiences quickly got tired of propaganda as the war dragged on and began to favour escapist, sentimental plays that enabled people to forget the war for two or three hours. The two biggest wartime hits, *Die Csárdásfürstin* and *Das Dreimäderlhaus*, couldn't be further removed from the reality of war. Originating in Vienna, they were performed over 900 times in Berlin.⁶

The war years were very good years for the Berlin popular stage. Both people at home and soldiers on leave flocked to the theatre for entertainment and distraction. The slump came with looming defeat and the spread of Spanish influenza in 1918. People were scared to go to the theatre, and the box office turned sour; its fortunes improved only in the economically relative stable twenties.

After the war, Berlin became the capital of the now democratic Germany. Much like the country, its capital was rapidly changing. With the Greater Berlin Act of 1920, the city incorporated a lot of suburbs – some of them cities in their own right – and rapidly grew to more than four million inhabitants. It was now one of the largest cities in the world, almost the size of Paris. The hedonism that followed post-war austerity expressed itself on the stage in the form of grand, spectacular revues. Thanks to the abolition of theatre censorship in 1918, they could freely revel in an abundance of naked flesh never seen before or since on the Berlin stage. But apart from this, in their bombastic scale and their even more fragmented plots, they continued a pre-war tradition.

This was true for Weimar culture in general, which was not as new and original as may appear retrospectively. It often drew on forms and genres of the imperial period, and some traditions from that period not immediately associated with Weimar culture continued in the post-war period. Weimar theatre, for instance, was not all spectacular shows, avant-gardist agitprop or candid cabaret. To take an example, the fad for revues did not last very long. With the onset of the economic depression in the late twenties, shows flaunting extravagant opulence no longer seemed appropriate. All this time operetta remained a mainstay of Berlin theatres and reached a new peak in both output and popularity.

Berlin now even outstripped Vienna as operetta capital. This had partly to do with Vienna's loss of political and cultural importance and partly with Berlin's new status. With its enormous audience, its dynamic theatre industry, its star actors, its theatre publishers and its links to other capital cities, Berlin became the foremost theatre city in the German-speaking world. It is therefore not surprising that many Viennese composers decided to bring out their new pieces in Berlin. Franz Lehár's later works, for instance, such as *Friederike* (Frederica, 1928) and *Das Land des Lächelns* (The Land of Smiles, 1929), premiered at the Metropol-

Theater. The main part in both operettas went to the tenor Richard Tauber, who had started out as an opera tenor before becoming the most famous male operetta star of interwar Europe. He also appeared in the London adaptation of *The Land of Smiles* in 1931. Subsequently, he became a regular guest on the British stage, emigrating to London in 1938.

Oddly, Tauber never appeared together with the other big operetta star Fritzi Massary. Her career, substantial even before the war, now reached a new height. Oscar Straus practically wrote exclusively for her, beginning with *Der letzte Walzer* (The Last Waltz) in 1920 and culminating in *Eine Frau, die weiß, was sie will* (A Woman Who Knows What She Wants) in 1932, in which she played what could be called a disguised self-portrait: an ageing operetta diva with an illegitimate daughter. In between, Massary starred in Leo Fall's *Madame Pompadour*.

While Lehár, Straus and Fall as well as Kollo and Gilbert continued to be active in the interwar period, a new generation of composers emerged with Hugo Hirsch and Eduard Künneke leading the way. Hugo Hirsch, like many other operetta composers of Jewish descent, burst on to the Berlin scene in the 1920s. His operetta *Der Fürst von Pappenheim* (The Prince of Pappenheim, 1923), partly set in a department store, partly at a seaside resort, delighted audiences in Berlin and elsewhere. In the following year, four Berlin theatres premiered operettas by Hirsch.

After studying music in Berlin, Eduard Künneke worked as a music teacher and conductor writing music on the side. His first operetta, *Wenn Liebe erwacht* (Love's Awakening), came out in 1920. It was followed by *Der Vetter aus Dingsda* (The Cousin from Nowhere) in 1921, Künneke's biggest success. Despite its well-tried mistaken-identities plot, *Der Vetter aus Dingsda* seemed fresh because it broke with the sumptuous wartime operettas by reducing the ensemble and the sets, by doing away with the chorus and by incorporating new musical styles like the Boston, the tango and the foxtrot.

World War I had severed the network between the theatre industries of the warring nations. Soon, however, managers set out to revive it. In 1920 the British impresario Albert de Courville, eager to import German operettas, wrote to *The Times*:

are we still at war with Germany or not? America evidently thinks not. I am told that Lehár is going over and Reinhardt has been invited. Are we in the theatrical world free to buy plays from the late enemy in the same way as we buy razors? Are we at liberty to reawaken public interest in a class of show highly delectable before the war?⁷

De Courville's answer to this question was, of course, an emphatic yes. As anti-German resentment began to fade, he and his colleagues imported the latest successes as well as the wartime hits British audiences had missed out

on due to the boycott of German culture. In 1921 *Wenn Liebe erwacht* ran in London as *Love's Awakening*, followed, in 1922, by Gilbert's *Die Frau im Hermelin* (*The Lady of the Rose*) and Straus's *Der letzte Walzer* (*The Last Waltz*), in 1923, by *Der Vetter aus Dingsda* (*The Cousin from Nowhere*) and Fall's *Madame Pompadour*, in 1924 by *Der Fürst von Pappenheim* (*Toni*), in 1925, by Straus's *Die Perlen der Kleopatra* (*Cleopatra*) and Gilbert's *Katja die Tänzerin* (*Katja the Dancer*), in 1926, by Gilbert's *Yvonne* (specifically written for the West End), and in 1927, *Mädi* (*The Blue Train*) by Robert Stolz (1880–1975). Most of these plays were also adapted in Paris, New York and other cities.

Undeniably, Berlin had returned to the centre of international popular musical theatre. Not all of these plays fulfilled the expectations their continental success had aroused, though. Consequently, in the late 1920s, slightly fewer Berlin operettas crossed over to Britain and the United States. The fate of Eduard Künneke was in many ways representative. Thanks to the success of *The Cousin from Nowhere*, managers abroad hired him to write for their theatres, something few composers before him had experienced. He wrote *The Love Song* (1925) –effectively a medley of Offenbach songs – and *Mayflowers* (1925) for Broadway and *Riki-Tiki* (1926) for the West End. Unfortunately for Künneke, neither of these efforts resonated with audiences, and so he returned to Berlin.

Though the 1920s saw a lot of new operettas by well-known as well as younger composers, they were mainly associated with spectacular revues. If pre-war Metropol revues had been praised for their lavishness, the revues of the twenties were bigger in every sense: with the most numbers, the most expensive stars and settings, the latest dance rhythms and the longest chorus lines. It was one long glorious summer between post-war inflation and the Depression of 1929. No one did more to push the genre to its limits than Erik Charell. Charell had started out as a dancer and actor in Max Reinhardt's ensemble. After Reinhardt's plans to bring the classics to the masses had faltered, Reinhardt asked Charell to take over the management of the Großes Schauspielhaus, which with 3,500 seats was Berlin's biggest theatre. Charell did not balk at the challenge. He believed he knew what the masses wanted. He began to stage revues aspiring to be larger, more inventive and spectacular than those of his competitors. He also began, in 1926, to overhaul hits from the pre-war era such as *The Mikado*, *Wie einst im Mai*, *Madame Pompadour* and *Die lustige Witwe* by giving them the revue treatment, creating what came to be called revue-operetta. While some Berlin critics enthused over his *Mikado*, the Berlin-based British critic C. Hooper Trask was incensed: 'Outside of the necessary modernisation of topical allusions, hacks of the Austrian operetta factory should be made to keep their paws where they belong', he chastised Charell.⁸

The Mikado was followed by *Casanova* in 1928, *Die drei Musketiere* (The Three Musketeers) in 1929 und *Im weißen Rössl* (White Horse Inn) in 1930 – success, success and yet more success. To stage *Im weißen Rössl* must have sounded like a risky idea, based as it was on a farce from the 1890s about the adventures of some Berlin tourists in the Austrian Salzkammergut. Its success speaks much for Charell's artistry as a director and his feel for popular tastes. However, Charell did not take any chances, bringing together some of the best writers Berlin had to offer at that time, such as the universally talented Ralph Benatzky, a composer, lyricist, writer and poet, who had already collaborated with Charell on his previous productions. *Im weißen Rössl* had everything: a well-trying plot and topical jokes; sentimental songs and topical dance tunes; the old emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria, who embodied the retrospectively idyllic pre-war Europe, and a modern jazz band. But especially it had settings no one had ever seen before, settings that grew from the stage into the auditorium. Even the exterior of the theatre became part of the show, as the Großes Schauspielhaus was made to look like an Alpine inn.

While Charell modernized well-known operettas, new operetta composers began to appear on the scene. The most talented of them was the Hungarian Paul Abraham. Abraham had begun by writing chamber music, but this only got him a job as a bank clerk. It was his *Viktoria und ihr Husar* (Viktoria and Her Hussar) that saved him from a fate behind the counter and brought him to Berlin via Vienna. The first piece he wrote for the Berlin stage was *Die Blume von Hawaii* (The Flower of Hawaii) about the Hawaiian princess Layla, who had been deposed from the throne by the US Army. In the end, Layla decides against a plot to reinstate her, renounces the Hawaiian throne and moves to the French Riviera. This plot was somewhat reminiscent of Germany's own recent history: former emperor Wilhelm II, who had been disposed in 1918, now lived in the Netherlands, where he passed his time chopping wood.

Die Blume von Hawaii was a big success, as was Abraham's following operetta, *Der Ball im Savoy*, about a couple suspecting each other of infidelity in the comfortable surroundings of the French Riviera. Abraham was an inventive composer. While effortlessly turning out sprightly waltzes, he was also open to new influences, making use of new American dances – the tango and the pasodoble being favourites – and instruments like the saxophone, almost unheard of in operetta before. He also profited from working with two experienced librettists, Alfred Grünwald and Fritz Löhner-Beda.

It is a matter of debate whether an overview on Berlin operetta should also include Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera). The title identifies it as an opera, but the

Dreigroschenoper was much closer to operetta, not least because it was not through-composed but a play with songs. Weill himself admitted that he and Brecht wanted to break into the commercial theatre industry to reach a wider audience. The communist director Erwin Piscator had led the way in the mid-twenties by appropriating revue in the hope of revolutionizing the masses and spreading communist ideas. Now Brecht and Weill followed his example with operetta.

The *Dreigroschenoper*, based on John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and set in Victorian London, but really about Weimar Berlin, was an overnight success and some of its numbers became instant *Schlager*, hit songs. Four months after its premiere in Berlin, it ran in nineteen German cities. In the summer of 1929, there were allegedly 200 productions together accounting for more than 4,000 performances. Politically, however, it was less successful. The bourgeoisie it lampooned either did not get or ignored its political message. In 1933, Mack the Knife (aka Adolf Hitler) became chancellor, the *Dreigroschenoper* was cancelled and its authors fled the country.

The *Dreigroschenoper* reached the London stage only in 1956, and then it was not very successful. Brecht's clichéd fantasy version of Soho must have struck British audiences as very strange indeed. In contrast, many of the successful Berlin operettas of the late twenties and early thirties were almost instantly adapted abroad: Lehár's *Friederike* (Frederica) in London in 1930, *Das Land das Lächelns* (The Land of Smiles) in London in 1931 and Paris in 1932, Straus's *Eine Frau, die weiß, was sie will* in London (as *Mother of Pearl*) in 1933 and Abraham's *Ball im Savoy* (*Ball at the Savoy*) in London in 1933.

The popular success of Charell's *Im weißen Rössl* also caught the attention of the British manager Oswald Stoll. Stoll was looking for a show to revive the fortunes of the Coliseum Theatre, the floundering flagship of his entertainment concern. With 2,500 seats, it was the biggest variety theatre in London at that time. He hired Charell, hoping that he would repeat his Berlin success in London. Charell remained true to his original concept. As in Berlin, he relied on overwhelming the audience with sheer excess. Again, the complete interior of the theatre was turned into a version of the Alpine uplands. The production featured 160 actors, three orchestras, live animals and a real rainstorm resulting in staggering production costs. However, Stoll's investment paid off: within twenty-four hours the box office reported bookings worth £50,000. The reviewers were suitably impressed. 'Indeed, London can never before have seen a musical play produced on such a scale', reported the *Daily Telegraph*, 'or beheld such mass movements by crowds perfectly drilled and co-ordinated, and such a succession of quickly moving scenes rich in varied (and often

gorgeous) colour.⁹ The *Morning Post* called it the ‘success of the century!’¹⁰ In view of the German origin of the production, the partly German cast and the Austrian setting, the *Sunday Referee* found it important to emphasize the ‘all-British chorus’ and the ‘all-British workmen’ – one of many examples of the complicated relationship between the cosmopolitan and the national.¹¹ The theatre’s readiness to look for inspiration and content abroad could and often did provoke raised eyebrows if not open opposition.

In any case, Charell found himself in great demand. Stoll immediately rehired him to produce a show in 1932, which became *Casanova*. At the same time, Charell oversaw the production of the Paris adaptation of *Im weißen Rößl, L’Auberge du Cheval-Blanc*, which ran for four years. An American production followed in 1936 in New York, where Charell had fled from the Nazis. That Charell looked after all these productions personally was new. Up to then, theatre managers used to buy the rights to a play and score, taking care of the production themselves. However, in the case of *White Horse Inn*, plot and music were less important than Charell’s ground-breaking *mise-en-scène*. This left theatre managers no alternative other than to hire the director himself and his team. Charell thereby could be said to have pioneered the method by which a play is sold as a complete package as would become common in popular musical theatre later in the twentieth century.

For a German director to work abroad was extremely tempting in the 1930s both to escape the menacing political atmosphere in Berlin and to earn foreign currency. The Great Depression hit the German economy especially hard and led to steeply rising unemployment. For many people, going to the theatre was a luxury they could no longer afford. This again plunged the theatre industry into crisis, and many Berlin theatres closed. Those that remained open were either state-owned or part of one of just three theatre trusts. When the biggest of them, the Rotter Trust, comprising around thirty theatres in Germany, went bankrupt in January 1933, it meant further closures.

There can be little doubt, though, that the Berlin theatre industry would have revived after the end of the economic crisis as it did in other European capitals. However, by that time, Hitler had been appointed chancellor and the Nazis were in power. They ruthlessly exploited the fact that the owners of the Rotter Trust were Jewish. Claiming Jews had destroyed the German theatre, they systematically removed Jewish managers. Increasingly, Jewish artists had to fear for their lives. Many left the country, fleeing to Austria, Czechoslovakia, France and Britain, and from there often to the United States. Among them were Oscar Straus, Jean Gilbert, Hugo Hirsch, Paul Abraham, Robert Stolz, Ralph Benatzky, Erik Charell, Bert Brecht, Kurt

Weill, Fritzi Massary, Richard Tauber and many more. Not all who left were Jewish, some, like Brecht, were wanted because they were communists, others, like Marlene Dietrich, simply hated the Nazis. Those who did not get out in time were persecuted or killed, like Fritz Löhner-Beda, who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1942.

The mass exodus of Jewish talent, that had shaped Berlin theatre since the beginning of the nineteenth century, necessarily made it much poorer, but it also meant that non-Jewish writers and composers profited from the situation. Because operettas by Jewish composers were forbidden, they now found it much easier to get their works performed. Paul Lincke, Walter Kollo and Eduard Künneke, who had been sidelined by other composers, all witnessed something of a comeback during the Nazi period. Some new talents emerged. In December 1933 Berlin saw the premiere of *Clivia* by Nico Dostal, who until then had mainly worked as a conductor and arranger for more successful composers. *Clivia* was his first operetta and became an instant hit. The operetta was named after its heroine, a famous American actress who has come to the made-up South American republic of Boliguay to star in an American film. The whole project is thrown into jeopardy when the government is toppled by guerrillas and can only be saved if Clivia agrees to marry a Boliguayan gaucho.

Meanwhile back in reality, the German government had been toppled and the Germans had become married to the Nazis. For people who were not Jewish and not interested in politics, everyday life at first did not seem to change that much. Despite their attacks on Weimar culture, the Nazi regime did not replace cosmopolitan operetta theatres with pseudo-Aryan open-air *Thingspiele*. *Clivia* did not differ that much from the operettas before 1933, and it did not promote a political message. Apart from a sometimes less, sometimes more overt anti-Semitism this would remain so throughout the Nazi period. The regime saw operetta as a distraction not as a tool of propaganda. But, of course, it purged operetta of any trace of openness, subversiveness and cosmopolitanism. Foreign shows were no longer welcome in Berlin and neither did Berlin shows travel outside of Germany. Much more than World War I, World War II disrupted the network between the major theatrical hubs in Europe and abroad.

After the war, Berlin was divided into two cities, both of which did little to rescue the heritage of Berlin operetta. The nationalization of theatres that had begun in the Weimar Republic continued during the Nazi period until almost all theatres in Germany were in government hands. In both German countries, this development was not reversed. Even after 1945, theatres remained publicly funded and state-controlled, with appointed

intendants. The commercial-theatre industry, once making up 90 per cent of Berlin's theatres, never revived. The publicly funded theatre saw its mission as to provide highbrow, educational fare. Operetta by contrast had been wedded to the commercial theatre from its beginning. The absence of such a commercial sector partly explains why operetta did not return. Offenbach's and Strauss's operettas, now elevated into perennial classics, were sometimes picked up by opera houses to improve attendance figures. Berlin operetta, on the other hand, was largely forgotten, the only exception was Lincke's *Frau Luna*, a perennial favourite with provincial theatres in the vicinity of Berlin.

With no new operettas coming out, the genre ossified. Compared to the Broadway musicals now performed across Germany, it looked more and more old-fashioned. It can be no surprise, then, that Berlin never regained the position in the world of popular musical theatre it had occupied before 1933. Like the city itself, its theatre became provincial. *Im weißen Rößl* was the last Berlin operetta to be staged in London, Paris and New York. Henceforth, popular musical theatre history was made in the West End and on Broadway, not on Friedrichstraße or Kurfürstendamm.

Notes

1. Gottfried Korff, 'Mentalität und Kommunikation in der Großstadt. Berliner Notizen zur "inneren" Urbanisierung' in Theodor Kohlmann, Hermann Bausinger (eds.), *Großstadt. Aspekte empirischer Kulturforschung* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 1985), 343–61; Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
2. David Kalisch, *Haussegen, oder Berlin wird Weltstadt! Vaudeville in einem Act nach Brazier* (Berlin, [1866]).
3. Peter Gay, *My German Question: Growing up in Nazi Berlin* (New Haven, London 1998), 14.
4. Tobias Becker, 'Die Anfänge der Schlagerindustrie: Intermedialität und wirtschaftliche Verflechtung vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg', *Lied und Populäre Kultur* 58 (2013): 11–40.
5. Tobias Becker, 'The Arcadians and *Filmzauber*: Adaptation and the Popular Musical Text' in Len Platt, Tobias Becker and David Linton (eds.), *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 81–101.
6. On the theatre during the First World War see Martin Baumeister, *Kriegstheater. Großstadt, Front und Massenkultur 1914–1918* (Essen: Klartext, 2005); Eva Krivanec, *Kriegsbühnen: Theater im Ersten Weltkrieg. Berlin, Lissabon, Paris und Wien* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011).
7. *The Times*, 8 April 1920, 8.
8. C. Hooper Trask, 'The Berlin Stage', *The Stage Year Book 1928* (London: Carson and Cummerford), 152. On Charell's revue-operettas see Marita Berg, "'Det Jeschäft ist richtig!' Die Revueoperetten von Erik Charell' in Ulrich Tadday (ed.), *Im weißen Rößl. Zwischen Kunst und Kommerz* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2006), 59–79; Kevin Clarke, 'Im Rausch der Genüsse. Erik Charell und die entfesselte Revueoperette im Berlin der 1920er Jahre' in Kevin Clarke (ed.), *Glitter and Be Gay. Die authentische Operette und ihre schwulen Verehrer* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag, 2007), 108–39.
9. 'A Spectacular Triumph', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1931.
10. 'The White Horse Inn', *Morning Post*, 9 April 1931.
11. 'A Magnificent Spectacle', *Sunday Referee*, 5 April 1931.

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