Operetta between the Two World Wars at the Opera of the National Theatre in Maribor

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Just as in other provincial theatres, the musical-dramatic repertoire of the Maribor theatre in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth consisted largely of operettas, alongside rare performances of opera and ballet. The operettas of Offenbach, Suppé, Strauss, Millöcker, Zeller and other composers from the “Golden Age” of operetta, which had accounted for almost the entirety of musical-dramatic performance in Maribor in the second half of the nineteenth century, were joined at the turn of the century by those of Franz Lehár, Leo Fall, Oskar Nedbal, Emmerich Kálmán, Robert Stolz¹ and others, and together constituted practically the whole repertoire of the city’s permanent professional German theatre. While Viennese operetta predominated, the repertoire of the National Theatre Opera in Maribor also included operettas by Arthur Sullivan and Sidney Jones, which were relatively rare for the provincial theatres of the Habsburg Monarchy.²

It is worth mentioning that whereas the popular operettas of Jacques Offenbach, which dominated the operetta repertoire from the early 1860s to the late 1870s, arrived in Maribor with around a five-year delay; Maribor audiences were able to hear the latest Viennese operettas on average just

1 Stoltz was appointed second conductor at the Maribor theatre in the 1898/99 season and remained for three seasons – until 1901. It was also in Maribor that he composed his first musical-dramatic work, *Studentenulke*.

2 Dušan Moravec, ed., *Repertoar slovenskih gledališč 1867–1967* (Ljubljana: Slovenski gledališki muzej, 1967).

two years after their premiere performances. The rapid arrival of operettas was even more characteristic of the period following the turn of the century, since impresarios, eager to make money quickly, in most cases programmed them within a few months or, at the most, a year and a half, of their theatrical premiere.

Among the most popular operettas in Maribor before the start of the First World War was Hervé's *Mam'zelle Nitouche*, which first graced the Maribor stage in 1908. Not only was this operetta well received by the German-speaking bourgeoisie, but it also triumphed in Maribor again just a few years later among Slovene operetta enthusiasts. In 1910 *Mam'zelle Nitouche* was in fact staged with great success by the Dramatic Society, founded a year earlier, which in addition to dramatic productions also staged theatrical productions with music. Over the course of five seasons, the Dramatic Society played an important role in the national and cultural consolidation of Slovene consciousness in Maribor, and after the First World War evolved into the country's second Slovene national theatre: the National Theatre in Maribor.

First years of the Opera of the National Theatre in Maribor: a dearth of professional performers

It is thus no surprise that the theatre's first manager, Hinko Nučič, included Hervé's popular operetta in the programme of the very first season (1919/20). On 1 May 1920 it became the first musical-dramatic work to be performed at the National Theatre. Nučič had, in fact, highlighted the regular performance of musical-dramatic works as one of the institution's principal goals shortly after the theatre commenced activity on 27 September 1919. In this regard, he succeeded in engaging not only professional singers and dramatic actors working in Slovenia, but also the Drava Division Band, which for the most part was made up of amateur musicians. As well as Hervé's operetta, which was received with enthusiasm and apparently "*filled the theatre to the last corner*", the first season included three concerts and a dance evening. Thus the foundations were laid of a Slovene professional theatre in the city on the Drava.

Nučič also invited the composer Viktor Parma to Maribor during the theatre's inaugural season and installed the grey-haired maestro as honorary conductor of the National Theatre in Maribor. Now in the autumn of

3 Radivoj Rehar, "Kultura in umetnost," *Mariborski delavec* 3, no. 97 (3 May 1920): 2, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-M5AZLDRU>.

his life, Parma was thus given the opportunity to conduct his own works at the Maribor theatre. The next few years saw the successful performance of all his operas and three of his operettas – *Caričine amazonke*, *Nečak* and *Venerin hram*. It should be mentioned in passing that the composer was compelled by the censors to amend the title of the last of these for its Maribor premiere on 20 November 1924, so *Venerin hram* [“The Temple of Venus”] became *Apolonov hram* [“The Temple of Apollo”]. In other words, all of Parma’s operettas with the exception of *Zaročenca v škripcih* were performed in Maribor.

The first on the programme, with its premiere on 30 November 1920, was the operetta *Caričine Amazonke*, which enjoyed 12 repeat performances in its first season. This operetta is, in fact, the most frequently performed Slovene operetta both in Slovenia and abroad – with performances in Trieste, Prague, Zagreb, Osijek, Pilsen and Brno, among other cities. Reviewing the operetta in the *Marburger Zeitung*, the critic Richard Sonnes wrote that Parma “*proved himself to be an excellent conductor, while the direction and performers in the individual roles [were] also good.*”⁴ Only the chorus was below par, with entrances that in the critic’s opinion were “*rarely on time.*” It should be mentioned that, faced with a shortage of high-quality performers, both singers and instrumentalists, in the 1920/21 season, Nučič managed to engage the conductor Max Schönherr the elder, the leader of the *Südbahn-Werkstättenkapelle* (the band of the workers of the Southern Railway) in the city’s Studenci district, which enabled him to strengthen the ranks of the instrumentalists.

Generally speaking, professional performers were the biggest deficiency of the Maribor theatre in the period between the wars (although their number did include such notable performers as the tenor Belizar Sancin). At the end of the 1920/21 season, the director and actor Valo Bratina took over as manager of the National Theatre in Maribor, before being replaced after just a few months by Radovan Brenčič, an astute impresario. The latter then remained as manager right up until the start of the Second World War. By balancing the dramatic and musical repertoire, he succeeded in attracting an audience, while a prudent recruitment policy and a well thought out system of remuneration enabled him to form a more or less permanent artistic collective.

4 Richard Sonnes, “Theater und Kunst,” *Marburger Zeitung* 62, no. 120 (27 May 1922): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-4LTFFWHP>.

5 Ibid.

Anxious to ensure the highest possible quality of performance, Brenčič succeeded in engaging Andro Mitrović, then the manager of the Municipal Theatre in Varaždin and one of the first professional musicians to join the National Theatre in Maribor. In the 1923/24 season, Mitrović took up the positions of chief conductor and manager of the opera company. His first performance met with a positive reception, and the National Theatre in Maribor benefited from Mitrović's connections with the theatre in Zagreb, since there was a great shortage of professional singers in Maribor. One soloist who was particularly celebrated abroad for her performances in the title role of *Mam'zelle Nitouche* and who came to Maribor as a guest performer from the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb during Mitrović's reign as manager was Irma Polak, formerly a soprano at Vienna's Theater an der Wien.

Numerous criticisms of operetta: "a necessary evil"

Despite ambitions to stage more operas at the Maribor theatre, operas were still outnumbered by operettas. Operetta, which in financial terms saved many seasons at the Maribor theatre, was thus considered "*a necessary evil*" by the opera managers of the time.⁶ Or as the then manager of the theatre Radovan Brenčič put it:

*[Operetta] provided the essential framework that allowed us, with the help of one or two guests, to rehearse at least one opera per season, except in those seasons when we hosted visiting productions of the Ljubljana Opera.*⁷

It should be pointed out here that not even operetta was completely immune to the advent of new media. One of the greatest dangers as regards the decline in the theatre audience in that period was the ever-increasing popularity of "talking pictures". Evidence of this may be found in the newspaper *Mariborski večernik* "Jutra", in which the theatre management warned that:

The introduction of mainly German talking pictures not only represents serious and dangerous competition for the Maribor theatre,

6 I. l., "Andro Mitrović, ravnatelj opere v Mariboru (k 25 letnici njegovega dirigentskega delovanja)," *Slovenec* 55, no. 115 (22 May 1927): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-LVP6E4F3>.

7 Radovan Brenčič, "Gospodarstvo mariborskega gledališča," *Gledališki list SNG v Mariboru* 14, no. 1 (1959/60): 8–9.

*since the latter still does not have a fixed and permanent audience, but has significantly deepened the importance of this sole national cultural institution vis-à-vis a new German cultural influence. For if these German talking pictures may anywhere be said to represent a national peril, that place is undoubtedly Maribor, which is already acutely aware of the proximity of burgeoning German culture. [...] Operetta and light comedy are therefore here to fill the theatre's empty coffers and thus have in Maribor every right to exist, although we must be careful that the weed does not outgrow the crop.*⁸

Andro Mitrović was of a similar opinion, writing in the newspaper *Slovenec*:

*Today's operetta is degenerate, a necessary evil – its fist falls heavily on a pile of notes. The theatre is a temple of art, a place whose mission is to educate, not to entertain. Modern operetta is largely to blame for the fact that people no longer have a feeling for true art, that they do not come to see serious productions. Operetta inflames people's lowest passions and these destroy their sense of beauty. Ultimately, even the most boisterous operetta no longer attracts, since even for operetta there are certain limits beyond which it cannot go, yet people's greedy passion always wants more, and since new thrills are no longer to be found at the theatre, it seeks them in cinemas and in bars.*⁹

Attention was also drawn to the situation at the Maribor theatre by one of the city's most penetrating critics, Radivoj Rehar, who noted in his review of a performance of Ralph Benatzky's operetta *Pri belem konjičku* (*Im weißen Rössl*):

Anyone desiring to see a Spectacle of a kind never before experienced in Maribor, should therefore not miss this 'White Horse'! [...] It is hard to see ideals wither, to see how the general level falls, yet the love of theatre still yields a harvest: may these 'White Horses' triumph at the box office and thus permit at least something to be

8 Anon., "Mariborsko gledališče v novi sezoni," *Mariborski večernik »Jutra«* 11, no. 203 (6 September 1930): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-QTTD-F4UT>.

9 Mitrović, "Andro Mitrović, ravnatelj opere v Mariboru," 3.

*done for poor art, for that remaining fragment of it that still shines like a jewel in the mud!*¹⁰

The predominance of operetta meant that opera was always relegated to second place at the Maribor theatre, and this was another reason why operetta was the subject of numerous negative judgements, both from critics and from other professional musicians, in the period between the wars. In as early as 1922, one of the most important Czech musicians working in Slovenia, Josip Michl, wrote that Maribor should abandon all efforts in the sphere of operetta since the latter was nothing more than “*an unfortunate, artistically unaccomplished combination [musical form] that has done far more damage to the education of the populace than it has afforded pleasure [...]*.”¹¹

At this point it should be mentioned that this kind of criticism of operetta on the part of the musically most accomplished individuals was by no means uncommon. The latter accused the management of the Maribor theatre of being primarily concerned with making a fast profit at the expense of quality and artistic mission, with performances of apparently less demanding operettas, while in the same breath they resignedly admitted that this was nevertheless vitally necessary for the very survival of the theatre. It is worth pointing out that in most cases the almost universally superficial reviews that can be found in the Maribor press were not backed up by adequate arguments. Critics were generally content merely to provide a superficial description or appraisal of an individual performance. Attempts at a stylistic analysis of the work itself or more detailed consideration of specific aspects of interpretation are therefore rare. It should be emphasised that these and similar criticisms in the interwar period were not, in most cases, aesthetically justified positions against operetta like the critiques of operetta by Adorno and other like-minded critics, who considered it to be an aesthetically unwarranted musical genre.¹² Rather, they are a consequence of what was, for the most part, the low quality of operetta performance in Slovenia.

10 Radivoj Rehar, “Pri belem konjičku. Opereta v treh dejanjih,” *Mariborski večernik »Jutra«* 13, no. 293 (27 December 1932): 2, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-QD8LUVG8>.

11 Josip Michl, “K novi ureditvi slovenske Narodne opere,” *Ljubljanski zvon* 42, no. 5 (1922): 318, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-NUAA1P74>.

12 Theodor W. Adorno, “Leichte Musik,” in *Dissonanzen. Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 202.

Graph 1: Percentage ratio of operetta premieres to opera premieres at the National Theatre in Maribor by individual seasons between the wars.

The lack of interest in operas and symphonic concerts, combined with the increasing financial difficulties, led Andro Mitrović to leave the Maribor theatre at the end of the 1927/28 season. Along with Ferdo Herzog, Mitrović was one of the most important Maribor conductors and managers between the wars. It was during his reign at the head of the institution, that the Maribor theatre achieved its first more significant successes in the opera field.¹³ With his departure, opera performance at the Maribor theatre came to an almost complete stop and would not revive to a similar level as before Mitrović's departure until after the Second World War. One of the main reasons for the crisis at that time, apart from the dwindling audience interest in opera, was the reduction of the subsidy provided to the Maribor theatre by the state that began in 1928. As a result, the theatre found itself sinking ever further into debt.¹⁴ It found a way to resolve its uncertain financial situation with even more frequent performances of operettas, which were increasingly popular among the Maribor music-loving audience, as may be clearly seen from Graph 1. The percentage ratio of operetta premieres to operas increased considerably after 1928. From this time onwards, until the start of the Second World War, there were some theatrical

13 Manica Špendal, "Začetki slovenskega opernega udejstvovanja v Mariboru," *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 54, no. 1–2 (1983): 200.

14 Ibid., 199.

seasons in which not a single opera was performed at the National Theatre in Maribor.

Table 1: Number of individual premieres and percentage ratio of operetta premieres to opera premieres at the National Theatre in Maribor by individual seasons between the wars.

Season	Operetta – number of premieres	Operetta – % premieres	Opera – number of premieres	Opera - % premieres
1919/20	1	100	0	0
1920/21	9	75	3	25
1921/22	4	66,6	2	33,3
1922/23	6	54,54	5	45,45
1923/24	3	33,3	6	66,6
1924/25	2	25	6	75
1925/26	3	37,5	5	62,5
1926/27	6	54,54	5	45,45
1927/28	6	60	4	40
1928/29	7	100	0	0
1929/30	5	71,4	2	28,6
1930/31	8	80	2	20
1931/32	7	70	3	30
1932/33	5	83,3	1	16,7
1933/34	7	87,5	1	12,5
1934/35	5	71,4	2	28,6
1935/36	6	100	0	0
1936/37	6	100	0	0
1937/38	4	66,6	2	33,3
1938/39	3	60	2	40
1939/40	4	66,6	2	33,3

Repertoire analysis of operetta production in Maribor between the wars

A review of the productions staged by the Maribor Opera between the wars shows that operettas accounted for more than two thirds of the entire repertoire. Despite the thoroughly altered cultural, political and ideological context in the new state of the South Slavs after the end of the First World War, Maribor theatregoers clearly did not wish to renounce this popular genre. Operetta continued to predominate in Maribor right up until the start of the Second World War, when the theatre was compelled to close its doors.

Of the 146 musical-dramatic productions staged at the National Theatre in Maribor, 107 were operettas by various composers (13 by Slovene com-

Graph 2: Number of premieres of foreign and Slovene operettas at the National Theatre in Maribor between the wars.

posers and 94 by foreign composers).¹⁵ The predominance of foreign operettas over those by Slovene composers is shown in Graph 2.

Among the most frequently performed operettas by foreign composers (in terms of the number of repeat performances) at the National Theatre in Maribor, we find the following titles (see Table 2):

Table 2: Most frequently performed foreign operettas (in terms of number of repeat performances) at the National Theatre in Maribor between the wars.

Most frequently performed foreign operettas at the National Theatre in Maribor	Number of repeat performances
Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	48
Strauss: <i>Der Zigeunerbaron</i>	45
Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	39
Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlow</i>	37
Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	34
Fall: <i>Der fidele Bauer</i>	33
Lehár: <i>Das Land des Lächelns</i>	33

¹⁵ Matej Svetel, ed., *Repertoar slovenskega narodnega gledališča Maribor 1919–2004: drama, opera, balet* (Maribor: Slovensko narodno gledališče, 2004). See also: Moravec, *Repertoar slovenskih gledališč 1867–1967* and Smiljana Lunič, “Repertoarne smernice opere in baleta SNG Maribor med letoma 1919 in 2011” (master’s thesis, University of Maribor, 2011).

Most frequently performed foreign operettas at the National Theatre in Maribor	Number of repeat performances
Albini: <i>Barun Trenck</i>	32
Hervé: <i>Mam'zelle Nitouche</i>	32
Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	31
Fall: <i>Die Rose von Stambul</i>	29
Suppé: <i>Boccaccio</i>	27
Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>	26

Yet it was not only foreign operettas that were popular in Maribor: those by Slovene composers also enjoyed considerable popularity. Besides the three operettas by Viktor Parma already mentioned, the National Theatre in Maribor staged performances of operettas by Josip Jiranek (*Vse za šalo*), Pavel Rasberger (*Rdeči nageljni*, *Zaroka na Jadranu* and *Prebrisani amor*), Danilo Bučar (*Študentje smo*), Marjan Kozina (*Majda*) and Radovan Gobec (*Habakuk*) in the interwar period.

Table 3: Most frequently performed Slovene operettas (in terms of number of repeat performances) at the National Theatre in Maribor between the wars.

Most frequently performed Slovene operettas at the National Theatre in Maribor	Number of repeat performances
Parma: <i>Caričine amazonke</i>	24
Jiranek: <i>Vse za šalo</i>	23
Gobec: <i>Habakuk</i>	18
Parma: <i>Nečak</i>	14
Rasberger: <i>Rdeči nageljni</i>	14
Rasberger: <i>Zaroka na Jadranu</i>	11
Kozina: <i>Majda</i>	10
Bučar: <i>Študentje smo</i>	8
Rasberger: <i>Prebrisani amor</i>	6
Parma: <i>Apolonov hram</i>	5

By far the largest number of repeat performances in a single season of an operetta by a domestic composer – 23 in total – were given of the operetta *Vse za šalo* by the Czech musical immigrant Josip Jiranek, who had already proved himself to be a “skilful interpreter [...] and a dominant master of musicians, chorus members and soloists.”¹⁶ At the premiere of his operetta on 25 December 1938, according to the critic of the *Mariborski večernik*

16 Fran Vatovec, “»Nepravi nečak« ali »Postrešek št. 13«,” *Mariborski večernik* »Jutra« 12, no. 66 (23 March 1938): 4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-MRW-G3U9G>.

“*Jutra*”, Radivoj Rehar, “*the audience was exceedingly entertained, as by few other works, whether foreign or domestic.*”¹⁷ The theatre was once again completely sold out and the management was apparently even compelled to turn some people away. With this operetta, Jiranek achieved a success the likes of which no Slovene operetta composer before him had achieved. Further testament to the success of the operetta is the fact that a year later it was also enthusiastically received in Ljubljana, where it enjoyed 11 repeat performances.

It is also worth highlighting at least two other composers besides Parma who made contributions of the utmost importance to the development of Slovene operetta in the Maribor milieu. Marjan Kozina actually composed his only operetta, *Majda*, in Maribor. The success and enthusiastic reception enjoyed by this work, also demonstrated by the relatively large number of repeat performances (ten), are apparent from contemporary reviews. Meanwhile, Radovan Gobec was the Slovene composer who devoted himself most prolifically to operetta in the interwar period. His constant contact with vocal music and the various ensembles he founded awakened in Gobec a strong impulse for musical theatre. It is therefore no surprise to find among his early compositions, from the decade between 1928 and 1938, numerous “light” musical-dramatic works such as *V bratskem objemu*, *Pomladne cvetke*, *Beg iz harema*, *Hmeljska princesa*, *Planinska roža*, *Habakuk* and *Pastirček*, among others. At this point the question arises as to the genre that these works actually belong to.¹⁸ Some of them (e. g. *Beg iz harema*, *Hmeljska princesa*, *Planinska roža* and *Habakuk*) are undoubtedly operettas, while others might best be compared to Lortzing’s genre of *Spieloper*. Examples of the latter include *Tremerski dukat*, *Kri v plamenih* and *Trije muzikanti*, which the composer himself labelled as operas. Another remarkable curiosity is the fact that Gobec composed his four most frequently performed operettas in the period before he began his formal training at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana. It should, however, be added that, like Slavko Osterc, he had nevertheless obtained the basis of a good musical education at the Teacher Training College in Maribor under Emerik Beran and Hinko Družovič.¹⁹

17 Radivoj Rehar, “Krst operete »Vse za šalo«,” *Mariborski večernik »Jutra«* 12, no. 293 (28 December 1938): 4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-CI4C8XNB>.

18 Gregor Pompe, “Operete Radovana Gobca,” in *Skice za zgodovino slovenske glasbe 20. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2019), 73–4, <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610601623>.

19 Jernej Weiss, *Emerik Beran (1868–1940) samotni svetovljan* (Maribor: Litera, 2008), 50–1.

Of these four operettas, it is worth particularly highlighting *Habakuk*, which, unlike *Beg iz harema* and *Hmeljska princesa*, both of which were premiered in Žalec, received its first performance in Maribor on 25 December 1940. With the performance of Gobec's *Habakuk* and the fourth performance of Parma's *Caričine amazonke* on 22 February 1941, the period of the interwar activity of the National Theatre in Maribor came to an end after more than two decades. Operettas of course remained a constant part of the repertoire of the German municipal theatre – the *Stadttheater in Marburg* – during the Second World War, with thirteen operetta premieres in the first season alone.

Comparison of operetta production at the National Theatre in Maribor and the National Theatre Opera in Ljubljana between the wars

In the period between the two world wars, almost twice as many operettas – by both Slovene and foreign composers – were premiered at the National Theatre in Maribor as in Ljubljana. A total of 107 operettas were premiered in Maribor between 1919 and 1939, of which 13 were by Slovene composers and 94 by foreign composers, while Ljubljana saw just 60 operetta premieres in the same period, six of them by Slovene composers and 54 by foreign composers.

A survey of the most frequently performed Slovene and foreign operettas in the two main Slovene national theatres shows that the Maribor theatre changed operettas more frequently, while in Ljubljana the theatre tended to persist with individual tried and tested works. It should be mentioned that in Ljubljana, alongside the core Viennese repertoire, the operettas of the Czech composer Jara Beneš were extremely popular. Three of his works (*Auf der grünen Wiese*, *Der heilige Antonius* and *Die kleine Schwindlerin*) are among the most frequently performed operettas in Ljubljana between the wars. Despite the greater number of operetta premieres in the Maribor theatre, the total numbers of performances in Maribor and Ljubljana do not differ significantly. If Maribor saw a total of 1,173 performances, Ljubljana saw 948 in the same period, despite the fact that operetta performances were extremely rare in Ljubljana in the first years of the interwar period.²⁰ Which means that some operettas enjoyed significantly more repeat performances in Ljubljana than in Maribor.

20 Moravec, *Repertoar slovenskih gledališč 1867–1967*.

Graph 3: Number of premieres of Slovene and foreign operettas (in Maribor and Ljubljana) between the wars.

Graph 4: Total number of premieres of all (Slovene and foreign) operettas (in Maribor and Ljubljana) between the wars.

Table 4: Most frequently performed foreign operettas (in terms of number of repeat performances) at the National Theatre Opera in Ljubljana between the wars.

Most frequently performed foreign operettas at the National Theatre Opera in Ljubljana	Number of repeat performances
Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	86
Strauss: <i>Die Fledermaus</i>	50
Beneš: <i>Auf der grünen Wiese</i>	45
Beneš: <i>Der heilige Antonius</i>	42
Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	40
Abraham: <i>Ball im Savoy</i>	38
Tijardovic: <i>Mala Floramye</i>	36
Zeller: <i>Der Vogelhändler</i>	32
Abraham: <i>Viktória</i>	29
Suppé: <i>Boccaccio</i>	27
Lehár: <i>Frasquita</i>	25
Beneš: <i>Die kleine Schwindlerin</i>	24
Millöcker: <i>Der Bettelstudent</i>	22

Table 5: Most frequently performed Slovene operettas (in terms of number of repeat performances) at the National Theatre Opera in Ljubljana between the wars.

Most frequently performed Slovene operettas at the National Theatre Opera in Ljubljana	Number of repeat performances
Gregorc: <i>Erika</i>	17
Dobeic: <i>Ančka</i>	14
Šivic: <i>Oj, ta prešmentana ljubezen</i>	14
Golovin, Leskovic: <i>Helteja (Smaragdno srce)</i>	12
Parma: <i>Amaconke</i>	9
Šantel: <i>Blejski zvon</i>	3

It appears that the more successful organization of the Ljubljana theatre in terms of personnel and finances was a key factor that enabled it to function in a more continuous fashion and, consequently, to tackle more demanding scores. On the other hand, the less than impressive percentage of operetta premieres in Ljubljana was almost certainly in part due to the artistic vision of the theatre's then director Mirko Polič, whose primary focus was on the performance of the latest operatic works. As a result, the first Slovene operetta to be performed in Ljubljana between the wars (Pavel Šivic's *Oj, ta prešmentana ljubezen*) was staged more than a decade later than in Maribor, a fact that gives further support to the thesis that the operetta tradition was not as marked in the capital city as it was in the capital

Graph 5: Number of premieres of Slovene operettas in Maribor and Ljubljana between the wars.

of Lower Styria, whose theatre was evidently only able to survive through the constant staging of operettas.

As may be seen from Graph 5, the Maribor Opera favored operettas by domestic composers considerably more than the Ljubljana Opera did, generally staging at least one per season in the period in question. Despite the more modest number of operetta premieres in Ljubljana, however, guest performances by Ljubljana's operetta company in Maribor were relatively frequent.

In connection with operetta production in Maribor between the wars, it is possible to highlight at least three main reasons for the predominance of operetta in that city.

By far the most important reason is financial, and in particular the state's cutting of the subsidy to the Maribor theatre after 1928. The inter-war period could be characterised as a constant struggle for survival for the Maribor theatre. By continuously introducing new operettas to the repertoire, the theatre's management were above all seeking to make money quickly and maximize profits. Operetta, labelled "a necessary evil" by the management, thus rescued many a season at the Maribor theatre in financial terms.

The second reason, which is of course related to the first, is the shortage of professional performers (the late beginnings of activity at the Conservatory in Ljubljana, which was established a mere year before the Maribor Opera opened its doors, were covered extensively in last year's publication).²¹ Given the small number of professional singers and instrumentalists working in Slovenia, the theatre's management decision to opt for an apparently less demanding genre such as operetta is therefore no surprise.

The third reason is one that is specific to the Maribor milieu: a German-speaking audience that was remarkably well disposed towards operetta. The presence of such an audience in Maribor undoubtedly contributed to the regular staging of operettas in the city. In the face of the numerous changes that accompanied the transition to the new state and, consequently, a new geographical, political, economic, cultural and linguistic reality, the audience evidently sought refuge in operetta, a genre that had been extremely popular even before the war. Operetta was unquestionably also part of the genetic make-up of the Slovene middle classes after the First World War. At this point it is worth pointing out that in *Gorenjski slavček* Slovenes simultaneously have the first Slovene national opera and our first operetta. Both Igor Grdina and Vladimír Karbusický identify, in the libretto and the musical characteristics of the operetta version of *Gorenjski slavček* staged in 1872, a clear desire to shape a national emblem.²² Or as Franz Kafka – who loved operetta – put it in one of his last essays:²³ operetta had always been a proving ground for the realization of national tendencies. So despite the growing popularity of talking pictures, operetta survived in Maribor right up until the period following the Second World War, when some of the Slovene apparatchiks of the day placed it on the list of undesirable elements, as a result of which it disappeared from Slovenia's theatre stages for several decades.

21 Jernej Weiss, ed., *Konservatoriji: profesionalizacija in specializacija glasbenega dela* (Koper, Ljubljana: Založba Univerze na Primorskem, Festival Ljubljana, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.26493/978-961-7055-86-3>.

22 Igor Grdina, "Gorenjski slavček 1872," in *Začetki in dosežki slovenskega gledališča moderne dobe: ob 150-letnici ustanovitve Dramatičnega društva v Ljubljani*, ed. Štefan Vevar and Barbara Orel (Ljubljana: Slovenski gledališki inštitut, 2017), 228–40. See also: Vladimír Karbusický, "Gorenjski slavček – Prepad med domovino in tujino," in *Foersterjev zbornik*, ur. Edo Škulj (Ljubljana: Družina, 1998): 101–7.

23 Moritz Csáky, "Kafka, die Operette und die Musik des jiddischen Theaters," in *Franz Kafka und die Musik*, ed. Steffen Höhne and Alice Stašková (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2018), 53–79.

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