

Wilhelm Malte I Prince of Putbus (1783-1854) and his idea of a residence and a seaside resort are at the beginning of this story about the theatre in Putbus on the island of Rügen. Besides the construction of residential and commercial buildings, hotels and pensions the prince also gave great interest to cultural entertainment and diversion. In 1818 a theatre was established in a carriage show of the old riding stable by Count Karl Friedrich von Hahn-Neuhaus, a student friend of Wilhelm Malte I.

J. C. Krampe was the first acting director in Putbus when the first season opened in 1818. First performances were „The Freemasons“, a comedy by August von Kotzebue, and „The Governess“, a one-act play by Theodor Körner. Further performances took place in a theatre in a small house built behind the „Hotel Fürstenhof“.

Astonishingly quickly, as early as 1819, the construction of a permanent theatre building began on the market. The architect is still unknown today. Construction drawings from this time may have been lost due to the castle fire in 1865. An architect's fee is not recorded in the princely ledger. For decades the Putbuser Theatre was assigned to the princely master builder Wilhelm Steinbach. However, he later studied civil engineering and was then in princely service.

On 20 July 1820 the opening of the Putbus Playhouse took place. The „Stralsundische Zeitung“ reported on the opening programme: a prologue with thoughts by Dr. Carl Schöne and the play „Life a dream or horoscope“ by Calderón de la Barca.

As early as 1826, the theatre was rebuilt and building defects were remedied under the direction of Johann Gottfried Steinmeyer (1780-1851), a student friend of Karl Friedrich Schinkel. To improve the acoustics, the auditorium ceiling and the roof were modified. The gable on the market side got its present form with clock and kythara. The triangular gable gave the portico its present appearance.

The Princely Playhouse was described at that time as having 600 seats. In the stalls there were benches up to the main curtain and numerous standing places. If an orchestra was needed, it sat in front of the stage. For this purpose some rows of seats were taken out. In the 1st tier there were dainty chairs. The 2nd tier was reserved exclusively for standing room. It was only played during the summer months. For this purpose the prince leased the theatre to a director, who brought his troupe with his repertoire as well as costumes and decorations.

Prince Wilhelm zu Putbus (1833-1907), a grandson of Prince Wilhelm Malte I, intended to have the theatre converted into a church in 1882. However, the district building officer proved that it would be cheaper to convert the former Kursalon into a church than to convert the theatre. Thus the district administration saved the theatre at that time.

In 1910 the theatre building got a completely electric lighting. In the same year, for the centenary of the foundation of the village Putbus „Putbus Anno 1810“ - a time picture in four acts was played by Prof. Dr. V. Loebe.

During the First World War the theatre remained closed. In 1914 the management of the court actor Adalbert Steffter, who managed the house for 15 years, also ended the longest period of service of a director in the history of the house.

Under the direction of Schauspielhausdirektor Alfred Schlömer from 1920 on the theatre was renovated and the theatre train between Putbus and Bergen was running again. In 1923 a telephone connection with the number 203 was installed. The municipal theatres of Stralsund and Greifswald tried to take over the summer play operation. In 1937 the Reichstheaterkammer assigned the Putbus theatre to the municipal theatre of Greifswald. In 1939 the Putbuser Haus was hardly playable because of humidity and mould. Until 1945 there was no play operation, the premises of the theatre served as a food store.

Already in December 1945 the „Künstlergemeinschaft Heyn-Motal“ was granted a playing permit. Due to financial irregularities, Kurt Brüßow was given the temporary playing permit in 1946. With a cross-section of opera and operetta the theatre started into the new era.

In 1947 a collective leadership under Hans Ohloff was established. With the performance of the operetta „Das Schwarzwaldmädel“ by Leon Jessel the new programme began. Contemporary witnesses reported that theatre guests „paid“ with coal for the ovens in the hall and natural produce.

At the beginning of the 1950s, it was decided in the GDR to put the existing theatres back into operation. In places whose theatres had been destroyed, alternative venues were used, some of which still exist today. The Putbuser Theater was rebuilt from 1952 to 1953 within the scope of the possibilities at that time. The stage was renewed and received an orchestra pit for 30 musicians. Parquet, 1st and 2nd rank got folding chairs. The theatre had 300 seats at that time. Workshops were created little by little. The era of the artistic director Ernst Saueracker began, who built up the ensemble and led the house very successfully.

On 29. 08. 1953 the Putbus theatre could be reopened with Lessing's play „Minna von Barnhelm“.

In 1954 the second branch of her work began with music theatre. Despite a lack of housing, material shortages and poor transport conditions, sophisticated theatre was performed, and visitors came in droves. Companies and schools signed up for rights and organised trips to the theatre. In 1956 the house at Alleestraße 10, the former Fürstenhof, was taken over as a theatre residence. In 1958-1960 further improvements of the technical facilities (installation of a circular horizon and modern lighting systems, installation of central heating, extension of a scenery magazine) had become possible.

In the 1955/56 season the Putbus Theatre was awarded the Conrad-Ekhof-Prize. On the 10th anniversary of Gerhart Hauptmann's death on 6 June 1956, it was remembered that the Putbus Theatre played a special role in the poet's Sturm und Drang period. Hauptmann visited Putbus several times and described a theatre performance on the occasion of the princely birthday. This performance was processed in his book „Im Wirbel der Berufung“, which was published in 1936. During his second visit to Putbus in 1893 his „Book of Passion“ was written about this time.

The television of the GDR regularly broadcast live theatre performances at that time. Several productions were also broadcast from Putbus. Thus the theatre became known beyond its catchment area. A possibility of electronic recording was still not very common. Therefore there are unfortunately no recordings in the archive.

In 1963 the theatres of Greifswald, Stralsund and Putbus were merged to form „united theatres“. Ernst Saueracker, who had opposed this, was replaced. However, this theatre marriage did not last long. Already in 1968 the city of Greifswald got an independent theatre again. The ensemble from Putbus was incorporated into the Stralsund Theatre, Putbus became „Abstecherbühne“ of the Stralsund Theatre and supplemented the programme with guest performances.

The Putbus Theatre celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1971. In 1976 it was again subordinated to the council of the district of Rügen. It worked in this organizational form until the political turnaround. By the way, the interior shone in the meantime, as usual in many theatres, in white and red with gold.

Despite some renovation measures in the 1980s, the building fabric deteriorated. The roof was leaking, the foundations suffered from the increasing road traffic. In 1992, during a performance, a part of the hall ceiling collapsed, the 2nd tier was in danger of collapsing. Short-term funds were made available for the renovation of the roof and the foundations. However, sponge infestation and further damage became apparent at the start of construction. It had to be fundamentally renovated.

The theatre continued to operate in the former house of the NVA (Nationale Volksarmee-d. A.) in Prora and later in the partially renovated Marstall. The district of Rügen and the district council decided to maintain the theatre as a playable theatre despite the high costs.

Until 1998 the foundations were secured, the building was now held together by a ring anchor, the roof truss was secured, the roof was newly covered with slate and an air conditioning system was installed. The house got a new lighting and sound system, the stage was renovated and a new curtain caused a lot of discussion because of the grey colour. New seating (244 seats) and a chandelier were installed in the hall, the painting of the hall was reconstructed and paintings were restored in the hall perimeter and in the upper foyer. In a new annex there was space for artists' dressing rooms, a magazine and offices.

On 2 May 1998 the theatre was ceremonially reopened, now as an institution of the district of Rügen. The relocation of the theatre holidays to the beginning of the year made a continuous operation possible over the summer.

At the beginning of the 1998 season, a ticketing system was introduced which made it possible to set up numerous advance booking offices which could sell tickets via the Internet. Within a short period of time, the proportion of tickets sold on the Internet rose to over 10%. That was remarkable at the time. This system is now used by the entire Theater Vorpommern and enables worldwide ticket sales.

Despite enormous financial difficulties due to cuts in state subsidies, which could not be absorbed by the county, the theatre was able to reach many visitors with over 70% capacity utilization. The entitlement rings were expanded due to the increased interest. The summer schedule was changed several times until a variant was found that met the interests of the holidaymakers and the locals. Contrary to the usual practice of performing each piece only once, or twice in case of attractive offers, popular pieces were repeated weekly during the summer months. For example on Tuesdays a comedy, on Thursdays a classical play and on Fridays an operetta in small cast with piano accompaniment. For many years, the ensemble „Klassik am Meer“ has given guest performances of impressive productions.

In 2003 „PERSPECTIV - Society of Historical Theatres of Europe“ was founded as a registered association in Bad Lauchstädt. Theater Putbus is a founding member and is represented by the Förderverein Theater Putbus e. V. Since then PERSPECTIV has enormously promoted the cooperation of the 120 historical theatres in Europe. Every two years conferences have been held to deal with the problems of the houses and operators. Twelve routes of the historical theatres enable interested parties to visit many houses. A travelling exhibition has also been created in cooperation with theatre museums. Within the Germany route, the Theatre Putbus forms the transition to the Nordic route with the theatres of Scandinavia.

Since there were repeated water ingresses in the basement of the theatre after the renovation, another pump sump was installed to pump off groundwater. The room with the water reservoir for the sprinkler system and the reservoir itself were renovated.

In the year 2000 the island theatre Putbus received about 230.000 DM from state funds. Measured against the total budget of DM 740.000, this was 31.08%. DM 340.000 was raised from admission fees, which made up 45.84% of the total of the 13 theatres in the state. These were good prerequisites for the thinking models of a theatre limited company to be able to operate more flexibly.

In 2003, 50 years after its reopening in 1953, the Putbus Theatre celebrated its anniversary with a performance of Lessing's „Minna von Barnhelm“, a guest performance of the Bremerhaven City Theatre. 2003 was the financially most successful year since 1998. 32,000 visitors saw 181 events, which corresponds to a 73% capacity utilization.

After the search for partners for the Theaterbetriebs-GmbH was unsuccessful in 2004, District Administrator Kerstin Kassner wanted to secure the operation in the future through a special purpose association. The Vorpommersche Landesbühne Anklam also offered a cooperation.

The theatre summer 2004 brought a new record attendance with „Nathan the Wise“, „Caveman“ and the comedy „Fish for four“ in a musical version.

The state government threatened to halve the subsidies for the Putbuser Theater. In order to avoid a takeover by the Anklam Theatre, a theatre merger with Theater Vorpommern GmbH with the venues Greifswald and Stralsund was examined. This gave in to pressure from the state government. Starting in summer 2005, a joint programme could be prepared with Theater Vorpommern. A new subscription with the productions of Theater Vorpommern expanded the offer.

200 YEARS

A brief history of the Putbus Theatre

by Klaus Möbus (Translation by the author)

In 2006 the administrative district of Rügen became a co-partner of Theater Vorpommern GmbH. In the theatre summer 2006 „Galileo Galilei“, „Jedermann“, „Caveman“ and „Die schöne Galathée“ were offered. With well over 100 performances of „Caveman“ it became the most performed play in the long history of the Theater Putbus. The record was previously held by the fairytale opera „Hansel and Gretel“. With the X. Rügen Cabaret Regatta, the events of which were gradually moved from several places on the island exclusively to Putbus, the founder of Kleinkunst Rügen e.V., Christa Gruhn, handed over the helm to the theatre support association. The association thus became responsible, together with the Theater Vorpommern, for two series of events, the Putbus Festival and the cabaret regatta.

On November 12, 2006, the 250,000th visitor came to the Putbus Theater after its reopening in 1998. CC-Film from Berlin shot crucial scenes in 2011 for the multiple award-winning film „Wunderkinder“ at the Putbus Theatre. Gudrun Landgrebe, Konstantin Wecker, Kai Wiesinger, Gedeon Burkhard were also present.

In preparation for its 200th anniversary, the Putbus Theatre received a new coat of paint in 2019, Kythara and the wall frieze „The Muses“ were renovated, the theatre café got a new video window. The theatre anniversary was set for July 19, 2020, because in 1820 there was already a report about an opening of the princely Putbus Playhouse, although the theatre could not have been finished yet. The district of Vorpommern-Rügen is keeping its theatre in good condition and thus honours an important building of classicism and the oldest and most beautiful theatre in the country.

The author is the chairman of the association of supporters of Theater Putbus.
www.theater-putbus.de
<https://www.erht.eu/page/en/routes/german.php>

Captions

Fig.1: Friedrich Rosmäler: The Theatre in Putbus, 1821

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Fig.2: postcard of copperplate 1826 by Friedrich Rosmäler

Fig.3: postcard 1909, © J. Wieland & Co., Berlin, stamped 1909

Fig.4: The Orchestra 1946, © Archives Theater Putbus

Fig.5: The theatre 1964, postcard, © Bild und Heimat, Reichenbach Vogtland

Fig.6: Auditorium 1970s, © Archives Theater Putbus

Fig.7: The theatre after the reconstruction, © Elisabeth Lassen

Fig.8: Porticus: the wall frieze shines like new again, © Klaus Möbus

Fig.9: auditorium and stage today, © Pocha Woditz GbR