

2015

“The Astonishing Career of Heinrich Conried”

William Grange

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, wgrange@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/theatrefacpub>



Part of the [Theatre History Commons](#)

Grange, William, "The Astonishing Career of Heinrich Conried" (2015). *Faculty Publications and Creative Activity, School of Theatre and Film*. 26.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/theatrefacpub/26>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Theatre and Film, Johnny Carson School of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Creative Activity, School of Theatre and Film by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Astonishing Career of Heinrich Conried

Heinrich Conried was the most significant actor-director-manager the German theatre in the United States ever produced. In a career that spanned over three decades in theatres from the Bowery to the Metropolitan Opera Company, few individuals—regardless of the language in which they worked—matched his remarkable achievements. Beginning as an actor and *Oberspielleiter* in 1878, Conried worked in various professional New York venues continuously until his untimely death in 1909, and during that time there were only five years in which he did not work exclusively in the German language—and those five years were the ones he ran the Metropolitan Opera. He became an American citizen in 1887, but he knew as early as the year after his arrival that New York and the American milieu were more accommodating to his professional goals. His goals were numerous, but chief among them was running his own theatre under a persona he planned to craft carefully, namely that of an intellectual in the theatre who also understood the hard realities of the box office.

Conried was born September 13, 1855 in Bielitz, Austrian Silesia, to Joseph and Gretchen Cohn, Orthodox Jews who were Silesian weavers. Conried remained, according to his son Richard G. Conried, a Hapsburg enthusiast and Orthodox Jew all his life. Conried also remained somewhat closed-mouth about his beginnings. Nobody really knew much about his boyhood days. Like many immigrants, Conried wanted to re-invent himself in America. Conried had an advantage, for he had already put forth a substantial effort at re-inventing himself in Vienna. He later said he got his first taste of theatre in Bielitz, where he said he witnessed a Vienna Burgtheater production that may have been a touring through Silesia. He attended an Oberrealschule in Bielitz, but he apparently left the school at age fifteen and went to Vienna. His

elder brother worked at a bank in Linz, and Conried somehow used his brother's influence to get a job as an apprentice clerk at a bank in the Hapsburg capital. In that position he earned enough money for a room in boarding house, and he sometimes met actors in coffee houses. In one coffeehouse he became acquainted with a part-time assistant at the Burgtheater and this man somehow got Conried an audition in 1871. Against forty-two other applicants Conried was selected and offered a contract—which meant that he must have possessed some kind of talent, and at age sixteen, no less.

He worked as a walk-on and supernumerary at the Burg for two years and took private acting lessons by day. During this period he presumably took the stage name “Conried” as a variation on Cohn.¹ *He must also have learned a lot from the work of Burg director Franz Dingelstedt, a director of elaborate productions which proved enormously popular with Burgtheater audiences. The Meininger copied a great deal of what Dingelstedt did, but the Meininger had a far greater influence and earned a wider renown. The Meininger were known for three things in their productions: crowd scenes, fidelity of design to the historical period, and well rehearsed ensemble playing. Those same hallmarks Conried subsequently emphasized in his directorial career. Dingelstedt, for his part, was apparently impressed enough with Conried to send him out playing leading parts in one of the Burg's traveling companies, a tour which brought Conried back to Bielitz. Conried returned to the Burg as a supernumerary in several productions thereafter. He meantime earned extra money as a “Master of Declamation” at the Theater Akademie in Vienna. Conried's pedagogical aspirations corroborated his goals in America. He regarded the theatre itself as a kind of educational institution, based on his experiences at the Burg. “The German attends theatre,” he once stated, “in order to take*

¹Montrose J. Moses, *The Life of Heinrich Conried* (New York: Crowell, 1916) 11.

something home with him,” like “food for thought for many days after the performance.” The American theatregoer, on the other hand, “does not think. He never stops to consider,” he said, “the ridiculousness of electric lights bursting from an orange grove in a production of *L’Aiglon*, which takes place long before Edison was even born.”²

For the 1874-1875 season Conried went to Berlin, temporarily taking the name “Robert Buchholz” while doing supporting roles at the National Theater. The next year he went to the Leipzig Stadttheater and played alongside Josef Kainz, Adolf Sonnenthal, and Ludwig Barnay when they came in for guest engagements. In a production of *Othello*, Conried played Iago to Barnay’s Moor. There was a report of Conried’s insubordination in this production, which means he did not cooperate fully with Barnay’s interpretation of the play. Conried was developing, even at this early stage, a stubborn streak that manifested itself fully later in his career—but at this point in his career it got him fired at the end of the season. He left Leipzig for Bremen, whose Stadttheater hired him in 1877 as its *Oberspielleiter*. In Bremen, Conried again assumed the name “Heinrich Conried” and embarked on the managerial side of his career.

The position of *Oberspielleiter* remains to this day largely absent from most English-speaking theatres, but it has been a fixture in the German theatre at least since the founding of most permanent ensembles in the German-speaking theatre world. The closest analogy to the *Oberspielleiter* in the English-language theatre was the “acting manager,” that is, manager of the acting. The position usually required substantial acting talent from the individual in question, along with a combination of managerial competence, artistic creativity, and skills in psychological manipulation. The *Oberspielleiter* was often entrusted with the arduous task of staging plays outright in the absence of a *Regisseur*, or director in the modern sense. If indeed a

²Moses 121.

Regisseur had staged a production, then the *Oberspielleiter* carried out the director's instructions and functioned as what we would term today a stage manager. Conried had early on discovered he lacked patience with actors whom he considered egotistical, recalcitrant, or just plain lazy. But his acknowledged talents as an actor, along with his undisputed sense of the theatrically effective convinced the leaseholders in Bremen that he was the man for their theatre. In Bremen he caught the attention of Adolf Neuendorff, the manager of the Germania Theater in New York.³ *Neuendorff had a German agent who had heard of Conried, and Neuendorff offered Conried a contract worth \$200 per month to come to America in 1878.*

Conried's American career began auspiciously in the fall of that year, first as de Banville in Gringoire, a one-act by Betty Paoli and soon thereafter as Franz Moor in Schiller's Die Räuber. After seeing Conried's performance as Franz Moor, the theatre critic of the New Yorker Staatszeitung, the city's principal German-language newspaper, hailed him as an actor comparable to Bogumil Dawison—high praise indeed, given Dawison's New York triumphs in the late 1860s. The newspaper reported that the audience gave him twenty curtain calls—an indication that he had at least made a favorable impact on New York audiences. After Die Räuber, Conried scored again in Adolph L'Arronge's comedy Dr. Klaus. This play, like so many from the pen of L'Arronge, was the hit of the Germania season. It was performed thirty-four times; Conried finished out the season in character roles like Sergeant Just in Lessing's Minna

³Adolf Neuendorff was born in Hamburg in 1843 and arrived in New York shortly after 1848. He began working at the Neues Stadttheater in the theatre's orchestra as a teenager in the early 1860s. By the time he was only twenty-six (in 1869) he was the sole producer of the Neues Stadttheater. Among his numerous achievements there was the American premiere of Wagner's *Lohengrin* in April of 1871. The following year he premiered *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Die Walküre* at the Academy of Music on Fourteenth Street. In October of 1872 Neuendorff left the Neues Stadttheater in the Bowery and moved into the old Tammany Hall, re-naming it the Germania Theater. There he hoped to set up a real repertory theatre, one not dependent on touring stars. That was one of the reasons he hired Conried.

von Barnhelm and Mortimer in Schiller's *Maria Stuart*. Conried's contract expired at the end of that season, and Gustav Amberg hired him as his *Oberspielleiter* at the Thalia Theater at 514 Broadway. At the Thalia, the *Staatszeitung* reported, Conried helped raise the quality of acting which was then prevalent in New York, largely because he was a superb actor in his own right. He was so good, the paper said, that "he no doubt will get offers from theatres in Germany and return there." But in August of 1880 he was back in New York, contrary to expectations. Conried had found the American milieu more accommodating to his own professional goals than any which would have presented itself in Germany or Austria. He had several such goals in mind, but primary among them was running his own theatre under a persona he was carefully crafting, namely that of a cultivated man of intellect. Conried was always mindful that he lacked a formal education, so he over-compensated by founding a theatre school—among the first of such academies in New York to offer actor training in a language other than English.

There were at the time in New York numerous private teachers offering instruction to actors and singers in Italian, French, and other European languages as well as German, but Conried's academy—though he was himself the principal faculty member—offered courses in movement, declamation, and "dramatic exercise" (*dramatisches Unterricht*), presumably a form of scene study. Conried's instruction also differed from others because admission was by audition only and there was no tuition charged. Such an enterprise was merely the beginning of subsequent approaches he made to leading universities in the area. He later staged productions free of charge at Columbia, Yale, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania, and offering students of those institutions half-priced to his productions at the Thalia.

One may draw several inferences from Conried's establishing a theatre school in New York City, but at least two stand out. The first was a perceived need for German-speaking actors,

whose numbers could neither practically nor financially be filled by recruitment from the *Vaterland*. There are several instances of German-speaking Americans performing in productions under Conried and others, and they may very well have been Conried's students at one time, though no great star seems to have arisen from their ranks. A second inference is that in New York, there were enough individuals interested in studying German-language performance to warrant recruitment of them in the first place, and that those individuals were moderately well versed in German-language drama—well-versed enough, at least, to audition before him in the hope of tuition-free training. Conried's methods of operation at the Thalia studiously emulated the Meininger and emphasized ensemble work, which required actors schooled in, or at least familiar with his methods—methods which at times bordered on the ruthless. According to some of his colleagues, he was often “thoughtless of others, acting everyone's parts [in rehearsal], exhausting them, but outwardly never seeming to exhaust himself. . . . He never realized that the conditions in the American theatre were not what they were in Germany. In Germany, actors rehearsing during the day were not obliged to perform at night. But [with Conried] there were no alternating casts. He kept [us] working so late that there was neither time nor food nor rest. He would always go home, dress immaculately and theatrically, and return to the theatre looking calm and unconcerned. Then during the evening he would collapse backstage from exhaustion—but it never occurred to him that his actors might feel the same physical strain.”⁴ *He was also a perfectionist. Conried always read the play aloud to his actors before casting them in it, and then after it was cast he rehearsed the play in chronological sequence. He made it a practice not to move on to the second act until the first act was in performable shape. He kept his eye on every detail of scenery, staging, lighting, and*

⁴quoted in Montrose J. Moses, *The Life of Heinrich Conried* (New York: Crowell, 1916), 62.

costumes. In some productions he was said to dress as a chorus member and go about backstage to make sure things were running as he waned them to.⁵

The English-speaking theatre in New York was, while Conried was hammering together his ensemble at the Thalia, more prone to accepting the star system. That was true both in the larger cities outside New York and on the road where a star, managers thought, was needed to bring in crowds from the countryside. America has almost from its beginnings, and certainly from the beginnings of its theatre practice, tended to “encourage individualism and individual prosperity over centrally controlled social obligation. American society advocates mass consumption and champions self-assertion, while vilifying collectivism. Such a society would therefore confirm the development of a star system in its performing arts, a reflection of the power of the individual over ensemble.”⁶ In the twentieth century, the Antoinette Perry, or “Tony,” Awards for acting in the theatre, the Motion Picture Academy Awards (known as the “Oscar”), and even the Emmy Awards for acting on television bear witness to the American celebration of individual achievement in the performing arts. Conried successfully swam the tide at the Thalia, often with the editorial support of the Staatszeitung. “Stars sind und bleiben der Verderb [des] Theaters,” wrote an anonymous critic in the newspaper. “Sie demoralisieren das Publikum, sie nehmen demselben den Glauben an das reguläre Personal.”⁷ The Staatszeitung was the voice of that ever robust line of thought in German, the one celebrating the ideal of Theater als moralische Anstalt. The German intelligentsia in New York perceived Conried as representative of that noble tradition, and they prided themselves, as Germans, in somehow rising above the garishness of the usual American fare usually offered on Broadway. The

⁵Norman Hapgood, *The Stage in America 1897-1900* (New York: Macmillan, 1901) 147.

⁶David Krasner (ed.). *Method Acting Reconsidered* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 26.

⁷New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, April 29, 1891, n. pag.

problem with much American theatre and American acting, according to one of Conried's admirers, was its emphasis "on the actor's shoes and on the curtains in his room. The [American] audience in New York goes to theatre and talks about a local favorite in his new role, not about the essential elements of the play The audience applauds when a popular star makes her appearance or when a waterfall is revealed, not when the pauses in the dramatic story invite a relaxation of attention. . . . Goethe called such art 'pathological reality.'"⁸ *Ludwig Fulda largely corroborated those somewhat elitist views when he came to New York and favorably compared Conried's work with what he termed the "deplorable" state of the Broadway theatre.⁹ But even Conried (with Amberg, who after all was still the nominal manager of the Thalia) was clever enough to recognize that one could not run a theatre solely on ideals. He therefore also hired stars, but had subtly convinced critics and supporters alike that stars could be part of an ensemble. One noteworthy example of such an approach was the hiring of Friedrich Mitterwurzer (1844-1897) as a guest for the 1885-1886 season. Mitterwurzer was probably the most eccentric of all the German actors New York audiences had witnessed. He had appeared in many of the German-speaking world's best theatres, becoming most widely known at Vienna's Burgtheater. But unlike Adolf Sonnenthal, Ludwig Barnay, and other great stars, Mitterwurzer had made a name for himself at the Burg in smaller roles, to which he had devoted an unusual amount of individuation. Mitterwurzer played such roles with a proto-modernist sensibility. His Julius Caesar, for example, differed from the usual imperiousness most other actors of his era employed when playing the part. Unlike them, Mitterwurzer presented Caesar a man "deeply unsure of himself, crippled by superstition and paranoia."¹⁰ Mitterwurzer played*

⁸Hapgood 141.

⁹Ludwig Fulda *Amerikanische Eindrücke* (city, publisher, year) 84-85.

¹⁰Williams 134.

larger roles as a guest performer in several other ensembles in Germany and Austria, but in most of those venues he found himself unable to get along with his fellow artists. His work in New York was unfortunately marked by the same inability to accommodate himself with colleagues. The Thalia actors could not “play up to him, and the result was a series of uneven, slovenly performances.”¹¹ To Mitterwurzer’s credit, however, was his agreement with Conried to alternate “great” roles (*Richard III*, *Franz Moor*, *Hamlet*, and *Faust*) with farce roles. His most successful of these was the preposterous theatre director Immanuel Striese in *Franz and Paul von Schönthan’s* classic *Der Raub der Sabinerinnen*, which sold out houses for three consecutive weeks. Because of that comedy’s success, Conried hired two comedians as guest artists for the close of the next season (1886-1887). They were to concentrate on plays like Schönthan’s, but also to do operettas. They were Emil Thomas and his wife Betty Damhoffer-Thomas. Betty Damhoffer-Thomas had begun her career in a Viennese production of Raimund’s *Der Bauer als Millionär*. Franz von Suppé supposedly composed works for her at the Carl Theater in Vienna, but the most noteworthy change in her fortunes came when the actor-manager Emil Thomas in Berlin hired her for a season at his theatre in Berlin; during that season he married her. She went on to make her mark in Berlin in a series of self-parodies and of Viennese soubrettes in general, with *Therese Krones* by Karl Haffner and *So sind sie alle* by Wilhelm Mannstädt in particular. In these vehicles she toured throughout the German/speaking world, a tour that brought her and her husband ultimately to New York. For Conried she did *Die schöne Helene*—which resulted in another three weeks of sold-out houses. Given the string of successes Conried was achieving, William Steinway hired Conried to take over the sole artistic leadership

¹¹Zeydel, 270.

of a theatre he had leased for the next season (1893-1894), and thus began the most notable period in the history of German-language theatre in New York City.

That theatre Steinway had leased was the Irving Place Theatre, a name freighted with significance. It was an English-sounding name, derived from the theatre's location in Manhattan. Conried could have altered it to put a particularly "German" stamp on the place (as nearly all German theatre managers in New York had done) with names like Germania, Stadttheater, Thalia, and the like. Conried, however, wanted the name to retain its geographical identity for the sake of the English-language press and in the long run for the English-language audience in New York. He felt the German-language theatre was in a kind of ghetto and realized it could emerge from it, provided the New York Times, the New York Herald, the New York World, and other newspapers occasionally covered his productions. He also wanted to compete directly with other theatres in New York, and in this ambitious desire he revealed the somewhat quixotic nature of his aspirations. No matter how good his productions may have been and no matter how culturally significant the press might consider them, few non-speakers of German were going to venture down to Irving Place to see a production in German. Conried was determined to address that reluctance. He knew he could not attract the "average" New York theatre-goer, but he could appeal to the intelligentsia of New York, many of whom had a nodding acquaintance with the German language, its drama, and its theatrical traditions. He intended primarily to attract students, faculty, and alumni of the New York metropolitan area's major universities, and in this goal he was uniquely successful. He also succeeded, during his decade-long tenure as director of the Irving Place Theatre, in presenting doyens of American premieres of German plays; he featured star performers in superb productions; he won the attention of the English language

press, and he competed successfully with Daniel Frohman, the only other manager in New York who conducted his business along lines similar to Conried's.

When he opened the Irving Place Theatre on September 30, 1893 Conried retrained the operetta component he had developed the year before and he enlarged that portion of the repertoire consisting of *Lustspiele* and *Schwänke*. Over that first season he did 150 performances of either comedy or farce, with von Schönthan and Gustav von Moser sharing honors as most frequently performed playwrights. Of the straight dramas, Sudermann's *Heimat*, Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, Nordmann's *Gefallene Engel*, and Fulda's *Der Talisman* were most often on the bill. For the most part, Conried eschewed stars in favor of well-integrated ensemble playing, though he resorted comprehensively to type casting. Thus his desire to imitate the Meininger was frustrated, largely because actors with the versatility of the Meininger were rare and expensive to place under contract. For his second season (1894-1895) he re-invigorated the repertoire with newer plays like Paul Lindau's *Der Andere*, Felix Philippi's *Wohltäter der Menschheit*, Max Halbe's *Jugend*, and Zobelitz' *Ohne Geläut* and increased the number of German classics (*Emilia Galotti*, *Minna von Barnhelm*, and *Nathan der Weise*. Schiller's *Die Räuber* and *Wilhelm Tell* were added to *Kabale und Liebe* and *Maria Stuart* already in the repertoire. So were Shakespeare's *Othello* and Goethe's *Faust*). Box office business was almost uniformly good under Conried's administration.

During Conried's third season, the Berliner Börsen-Courier claimed that Conried had "regenerated" German theatre in New York.¹² In April of 1896 Conried gave Hauptmann's *Die Weber* its American premiere, and audience response to it was so positive that he added several

¹²Zeydel 283.

additional performances to accommodate demand. Earlier in the season Conried had presented Sudermann's *Schmetterlingschlacht* and *Das Glück im Winkel* and Philippi's *Dornenweg*, but none of them elicited the excitement of *Die Weber*. That was because Hauptmann's play was still perceived as somewhat revolutionary in 1896, though it had been in the repertory of Otto Brahm's Deutsches Theater for two years when Conried gave the play its American premiere. But Hauptmann's name signified more than being just "up-to-date" among New York audiences. Having his plays in their midst meant they were also "modern," a quality Brahm himself had so frequently ascribed to Hauptmann. Thus Conried staged another Hauptmann premiere, *College Crampton*, the next season and hired Agnes Sorma in 1897 to play Rautendelein in Hauptmann's *Die versunkene Glocke*. She attracted at least as many ticket buyers as had any star ever to appear in New York, but Conried was careful not to turn any production in which she appeared into a celebration of her renown. Agnes Sorma was considered a "serious" artist capable of tackling difficult modernist plays like Ibsen's *Doll's House* and Schnitzler's *Liebelei*. Those productions were particularly noteworthy, but Conried also cast her in the far less profound *Dora* by Sardou, *Dorf und Stadt* by Birch-Pfeiffer and *Chic* by Robert.

Throughout his tenure as head of the Irving Place Theatre, Conried remained convinced that theatre as an art form had an educational mission. Since he had no education to speak of himself, he approached colleges in the East Coast and its students eagerly and gave them half-priced tickets to matinees. He even took whole productions to Yale, Harvard, and other Ivy League schools and presented them at no charge. He cultivated friendships with outstanding professors at those universities, e.g. Kuno Francke at Harvard. He pleased Francke in particular when he brought a production of *Iphigenia auf Tauris* up to Cambridge on March 22, 1900, the sixty-eighth anniversary of Goethe's death. In January the following year, on Lessing's birthday

(January 22) he brought up *Minna von Barnhelm* for a benefit of Francke's German Museum. He later did the play at Yale and Penn. Daniel Frohman, however, topped any money Conried raised by far for Francke's Museum when in 1908 he brought up Maude Adams in Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans* in English and a cast of over 200. It played in Harvard Stadium and netted the Museum over \$10,000!

Conried also remained exponent of illusionism, or at least Meiningeresque and nineteenth-century in his aesthetic outlook. He decried the American tendency to view theatre merely as entertainment or amusement. He said the German attends theatre in order to "take something home with him," like "food for thought for many days after the performance." The American theatregoer, on the other hand, "does not think. He never stops to consider," he said, "the ridiculousness of electric lights bursting from an orange grove in a production of *L'Aiglon*, which takes place long before Edison was even born." He held up the Burgtheater as an ideal and frequently condemned type casting—a tactic the Burg frequently employed and continued to do so even as Conried condemned it. He remained attached to the Meininger tradition of ensemble playing in a season of plays rotating in a repertoire, a tradition which that was simply impractical for almost any American theatre.

The spring of 1903 proved to be the most eventful in Conried's career. It began with his premiere of Wilhelm Meyer-Förster's *Alt-Heidelberg*, which had premiered the season previous in Berlin and was based on Archibald Clavering Gunter's *Prince Karl*, published in 1886. After its Berlin premiere, it was re-translated back into English, again as *Prince Karl*.¹³ *The spring of*

¹³*Prince Karl* became a vehicle for the American actor Richard Mansfield (1857-1907) who was born in Berlin. He achieved his greatest successes in touring productions throughout America in vehicles like *Prince Karl*. *Prince Karl* in turn became the basis for Sigmund Romberg's enormously popular operetta in 1924, titled *The Student Prince*. The following year it became an

1903 is also notable for three German plays making their English-language premieres in Broadway theatres. Mrs. Patrick Campbell appeared in Sudermann's *Es lebe das Leben*, translated by Edith Wharton and titled *The Joy of Living*. Hauptmann's *Einsame Menschen* became *Lonely Lives* in a translation by Mary Morrison, and Max Nordau's *Das Recht zu lieben* became *The Right to Love*, translated by Mary J. Safford. Although none of these plays enjoyed particularly long runs on Broadway, their mere presence there was significant. It marked one of the first instances in many years when serious German drama had made the trip across the Atlantic, arriving in more or less the same shape in which it had departed; there had been numerous American adaptations of popular German plays over the years, usually transferring the setting to an American locale and giving the characters Anglicized names. But straight drama, accurately translated and presented in nearly unabridged versions? Conried deserves some of the credit that an audience for such plays in English had developed in New York. His directorship attracted the attention of newspapers like the Herald and the Tribune, and as his reputation for excellence grew, so did the reputation of German drama, even among those audiences who could not understand German.

Conried's achievements also attracted the attention of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera House in the spring of 1903. The Met's managing director Maurice Grau announced his retirement in March, and Conried's name was placed in nomination. The interesting thing about the directorship of the Met is that its "director" was expected to form his own company and make contracts with singers. The Met house, through the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, was leased to him in the fall of 1903. The Met Board paid his

extremely popular movie, again under the title *Prince Karl*; it was directed by Ernst Lubitsch and starred Roman Navarro.

company for its services, but the amount the board paid Conried's company was only the amount paid to its director, namely Conried himself, the amount of \$20,000 per year for five years. Thus Conried's principal task was to raise money through subscriptions and direct box-office sales

By most accounts, Conried's was a successful Metropolitan Opera management. He was feared among managers in Europe for contracting the best singers they had. He also created several new productions at the Met, and was said that he never repeated a production on a subscription night during his entire five years in New York, and only once was a scheduled production changed. Conried hired his business manager from Irving Place, Ernst Goerlitz, to be his business manager at the Met. For the 1903-1904 season, Conried did twenty seven different operas; 1904-04, thirty-two; 1906-07, twenty eight. The 1906-1907 season was probably his best at the Met. He premiered Puccini's *Mme. Butterfly* with Geraldine Farrar, largely with the help of David Belasco, whom he came to admire greatly. According to Moses, Puccini was so impressed with Conried and Belasco that he decided to create *Girl of the Golden West* based on Belasco's theatre production of the same. In 1907-08, Conried produced thirty-one operas, a season that boasted not only Geraldine Ferrar but also Enrico Caruso, Geraldine Farrar, Emma Eames, Nellie Melba, Fyodor Chaliapin, and several others who became fixtures at the institution. In that season, Conried's health began to fail. He had always been a heavy smoker, with fifteen cigars per day his usual total. Worse still, he began to think in grandiose terms about an American "national theatre," the kind of theatre he had run at Irving Place but on a much grander scale. He began to contact his the wealthy patrons who had supported him the past such as Henry Morgenthau, Otto Kahn, William Steinway, and others, proposing an essentially national literary theatre whose ultimate goal was to produce "an American Shakespeare," or at the least "the creation and interpretation of a national drama." Meantime the theatre was to offer

nothing but the best of European drama, abolish long runs, and hire actors for a contractual period of five years, much as singers were hired at the Met. It was to be called The New Theatre and run much as he had run the Met. Conried envisioned this theatre as an educational institution, establishing “a standard of correctness in speech, costume, scenery, and manners. It was to become the standard for a hundred and one things for which there is not and never yet has been, a standard.”

In other words, Conried was, as the second decade of the twentieth century was about to begin, completely fixed within the nineteenth century, securely confined within his own sense of immigrant inferiority. Heinrich Conried’s was in many ways a classic immigrant story. He discovered early in life that he possessed the means of escape from the situation into which he was born, and that means was his instinct for theatre. He never seriously considered doing anything else with his life, and he never hesitated in departing for America to make his real career. Though life was not exactly easy for him in his early days in New York, he never even considered returning to Germany and its theatre. He was decorated by European nobles for his work in America in Europe during his lifetime: the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen gave him the Ritterkreuz in 1891, the King of Belgium the Pour le Merite in 1901, the King of Italy the Order of the Calavaliere in 1902 , and in 1906 the Order of the Commandatore. Despite these accolades, or perhaps even because of them, he recognized in a non-sentimental way that German-language theatre had no real future in the United States. New York at best would remain a kind of outpost for German theatre, even though he was its most gifted avatar. When Conried died at a sanatorium in the Harz Mountains on April 27, 1909 he was praised in several obituaries both in Europe and the United States as one of the world’s finest directors, both of opera and theatre. His funeral was held at the Metropolitan Opera House and placed in the

setting of Verdi's *Falstaff* for the second act. His raised catafalque was surrounded by two minora and twenty bouquets of lilacs, as four thousand yards of black crepe surrounded the proscenium. The Rabbi who married Conried and his wife conducted the services. The Met Chorus sang, as did several soloists. He is buried in the Cypress Hills cemetery of Brooklyn.

William Grange
University of Nebraska