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2001

## “The Popular Repertory and the German-American Audience: the Pabst Theater in Milwaukee, 1885-1909”

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## **German-Language Theatre in Milwaukee, 1885-1909**

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The history of German-language theatre in Milwaukee is bound together with the history of German-speaking settlers in Wisconsin and with the theatre culture of Germany as it unfolded after the 1848 revolution. The two histories at first glance seem to have nothing to do with one another; upon closer analysis, however, one discovers a fascinating association between the two—in fact, there are even instances of the two influencing each other. This essay attempts to evaluate the contributions of artists who were most instrumental in creating and maintaining a theatre culture in Milwaukee, a community whose German identity is well known and equally well documented. Here, however, is a documentation and appraisal of the kind of dramatic works Milwaukee audiences enthusiastically supported, and not because those dramatic works were the revered “classics” by Goethe and Schiller with which every “good German” is supposed to be familiar. Those works, which today are almost completely forgotten and rarely performed, enabled the theatre tradition in Milwaukee to remain vital and vibrant, just as it did so many theatres of the Wilhelmine Era in Germany.

German-language theatre in Milwaukee reached its pinnacle in 1895 with the construction of the Pabst Theater, and there it flourished until 1909. The first theatre performances in Milwaukee, however, had taken place at mid-point in the nineteenth century. The first influx of Germans to Wisconsin came in 1848. These settlers came largely from already established German settlements in Pennsylvania and New York. They encountered resistance from “Yankee” nativists at first, but the Germans soon overwhelmed all other settlers numerically. By 1850, Germans already accounted for 54% of Wisconsin’s entire population. That number in Milwaukee grew

topped 70% by the end of the century, coinciding with the construction of what today remains the most conspicuous monument of German-speaking theatre culture anywhere in North America.

Increases in European population of Wisconsin did not occur until after the Black Hawk War of 1832. Then English and Irish settlers arrived, followed by French. First production in Milwaukee settlement area of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* in English in 1842 by a traveling stock company on a platform in the John Hustis Building at corner of Third Avenue and Juneau Street. Joseph Kurz (1800-1855), an Austrian from Salzburg, started the initial German-language theatre in Milwaukee. He was the nephew of the well-known Viennese actor Josef Kurz, famous for his creation of the stock character Bernadon, a facsimile of the Germanic Harlequin known as Hanswurst.<sup>1</sup> Joseph Kurz arrived in Milwaukee with his family in 1847 (wife, two daughters, one son, and one nephew), bringing with him his "genuine Vienna piano, which gave him immediate entry into the city's musical societies."<sup>2</sup> Kurz initiated an organizational meeting of German-language theatre enthusiasts in December of 1849, and amateur productions of Kotzebue's *Der Hahnenschlag* and *Die barmherzigen Brüder* followed, presented during Fasching Week of 1850 in the half-finished gunsmith store of Matthias Stein on Milwaukee's Marktplatz (present-day site of the Marshall & Ilesley bank building at 800 Water Street). Kurz charged twelve and one-half cents per ticket, while English-language troupes were charging twenty-five and fifty cents. The organization called itself Das deutsche Liebhabertheater, and their efforts proved so popular and

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<sup>1</sup>Hanswurst himself is entitled to an entire chapter in German theatre history. Though the idea of a Germanic Harlequin is to many observers patently ridiculous, the character's lineage can be traced to beginnings with the "englische Komödianten" who arrived in the late sixteenth century and remained a vital part of German-speaking theatre culture well into the nineteenth. One of the best and most extensive treatments of the character may be found in Otto Rommel's *Die Alt-Wiener Volkskomödie: ihre Geschichte vom barocken Welt-Theater bis zum Tode Nestroys* (Vienna, Schroll, 1952).

<sup>2</sup>Gadberry, Glen. "The Early German Theater of 'Deutsch Athen' Milwaukee, 1848-1853." Unpublished MS. Milwaukee County Historical Society, 8.

socially acceptable that women were permitted to join the club. Performance venues improved the next year with the move to Military Hall on Oneida Street, but their activities ceased when it was revealed that their receipts for 1851 had been stolen. That misfortune proved to be only a temporary setback, however, for on January 3, 1852 Kurz renewed theatrical activities with a Kotzebue double bill at the upstairs “Mozart Hall” in the Market House on Water Street. Those productions marked the appearance of Kurz’s nephew Heinrich Kurz, and through him the German-language theatre in Milwaukee began its lineal descent to 1931. Audience attendance continued to increase in 1851, so Kurz enlarged the hall, installing a new stage and additional seating. Casts included Kurz and his family (a wife, one son, two daughters, and the aforementioned nephew), along with sons and daughters of German families. They did additional melodramas by Kotzebue, as well as comedies by Ernst Raupach (1784-1852) and Roderich Benedix (1811-1873). They were forced to leave Mozart Hall when it changed leaseholders and moved into a Lutheran Church on Prairie Street in August of 1852. There they did Nestroy’s *Einen Jux will er sich machen* and *Der böse Geist Lumpazivagabundus*. They lasted one year at the Lutheran church, and then it was back to Market Square, at the site of the present-day City Hall. They leased the top floor (which sat above “Mozart Hall”) of Market House and arranged seating for 500. Their initial production there, on July 16, 1853 was *Die Schule des Lebens* by Raupach and was sold out.

The company’s fortunes reached a high point during that summer when their re-named (in English) “German Dramatic Society” received a charter from Wisconsin legislature. The charter meant nothing except respectability (the state government then, as now, had neither the means nor the will to provide any form of subvention), but with the following year German-language theatre enjoyed its most conspicuous season to date. Kurz was able to hire eight professional performers,

opened the season with last season's hit, *Die Schule des Lebens*, and made a \$1,000 profit. The next season, however, Kurz left Milwaukee for Chicago, where he died only a year later. The German Dramatic Society of Milwaukee then foundered and went out of business in 1856.

German-language plays appeared from time to time in Milwaukee until the fall of 1868, when Kurz's nephew Heinrich Kurz built the Stadt Theater on Third Street between Cedar and Wells Streets, dedicating it solely to the performance of German-language drama. It cost \$22,000, seated 1,000, and opened with a production of Körner's *Der glückliche Familienvater*.<sup>3</sup> Kurz at first did not operate the Stadt Theater himself but hired a manager along with guest artists from Germany, among them Emil von der Osten, who spent four years in Milwaukee before accepting an offer from the Königliches Schauspielhaus in Dresden. Siegmund Selig and Lina Wassmann were other professionals hired from Germany; they were versatile performers, noted for their talents in tragedy, comedy, and operetta. Performers hired for work in Milwaukee had to be versatile, as audiences could not support a repertoire dedicated solely to one genre.

There was some dispute among Heinrich Kurz and his colleagues in 1883, however, about the direction German-language theatre was to take. Even in Milwaukee there were calls for the "modern" drama of Ibsen, Dumas *films* and Hebbel (although the calls were faint and went largely unheeded), while other constituencies wanted more operettas and even the grand, and difficult to stage, operas of Wagner. The Stadt Theater went into a kind of hibernation for a year, to regroup the following year under Chicago actors Julius Richard, Ferdinand Welb, and Leon Wachsner.

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<sup>3</sup>Deuster, Oscar. "The Story of the German Stage in Milwaukee." Unpublished MS Milwaukee County Historical Society, 10.

This trio's assumption of leadership paralleled the rise to prominence of German-American industrialists in Milwaukee, who began to subsidize the theatre to an unprecedented extent. The partnership between Thalia and Vulcan fostered what became the "Golden Age," *ein goldenes Zeitalter* of German-language theatre for the next quarter century.

The Richard-Welb-Wachsner partnership began when the three men rented the Stadt Theater in 1884 and scored a massive hit in January of 1885 with Franz and Paul von Schönthan's *Der Raub der Sabinerinnen*, a comedy that had premiered the year before in Germany. This play was so successful that the troupe repeated performances five more times that month to accommodate demand. January of that year also saw productions of Oskar Blumenthal's *Die grosse Glocke* and Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*. Victorién Sardou's *Cyprienne* (*Divorçons*; the English title critic and scholar Eric Bentley has given it is *Let's Get a Divorce!*) followed in February, along with other comedies and farces. This repertoire distinguished the Richard-Welb-Wachsner management from its predecessors, who had relied upon sentimental affection for the "old country" and a hazy conception of *Kultur*. The new management realized that their fortunes as professional theatre men required a ability to attract a large audience, appeal to its more cosmopolitan tastes, and consequently to entertain that audience. In other words, they did what all businesses must do: attract customers with a sound product and continue to keep the customers satisfied. That is the language of business, whether spoken in German, English, or Hindustani.

They did not abandon long-established pillars of German theatrical culture, however; the venerated Schiller and Goethe made their obligatory appearances in the repertoire, and even more recent notables like Gerhart Hauptmann, Hermann Sudermann, Ernst von Wolzogen, or Max

Halbe were there too, often in American premiere productions. The backbone of the Milwaukee theatre, however, was the light, frivolous comedy by Blumenthal, von Schönthan, Gustav Kadelburg, August Conradi, Felix Philippi, Adolf L'Arronge, and Emil Pohl. These playwrights were men of business themselves who were amassing fortunes in royalties paid by theatres throughout Germany and Austria.

August von Kotzebue (1761-1819) had been a popular playwright and had intentionally written works with wide audience appeal, but never before had playwrights in such numbers created so many lucrative vehicles for performance in the German theatre, vehicles which in turn dominated so much of the repertoire in so many theatres. The success of these playwrights was so extraordinary, in fact, that a brief description of their products (which I have described elsewhere as “industrial comedies”)<sup>4</sup> is in order. The first of them was *Mein Leopold* by Adolph L'Arronge (1838-1908), which had premiered in Berlin during the 1873-1874 season. Its success was so stupendous that it continued to run for years afterwards, performed thousands of times in scores of productions all over Germany. In many ways, it was a chronicle of the newly unified Germany and a humorous audit of the moral climate pervading the *Gründerjahre*.<sup>5</sup> It portrayed an anxious yet prosperous parvenu, who was at the same time a beleaguered father but nonetheless proud member of the “new” Establishment. He is Gottlieb Weigelt, originally a cobbler but whose footwear manufacturing business has expanded to include several employees and ownership of an

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<sup>4</sup>*Comedy in the Weimar Republic* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 1996), 9-21.

<sup>5</sup>*Gründerjahre* is an idiomatic phrase in German which, like *Biedermeierzeit* before it, connotes a certain nineteenth-century social and political milieu. The *Gründerjahre* were the “foundation years” of the Second Reich, a period of about two decades after 1871, years marked by rapid industrial expansion, real estate speculation, and a transformation of traditional values. English equivalents might be “Gay Nineties,” the French “belle Epoque,” or the Italian “Risorgimento.”



apartment building. His success has made him oblivious to the profligacy of his beloved, wastrel son Leopold, who in many ways embodied the “new Germany,” that is, the Germany based on materialism, luxury, and pretentiousness.

Leopold differs profoundly from the character of administrative magistrate Heinrich Zernikow, who is an example of the dutiful *Beamter* (civil servant) of which pre-unification Prussia was once proud. Zernikow and his devoted wife Natalie live modestly in Gottlieb Weigelt’s building with their three daughters, one floor above Weigelt. The play opens with the Zernikows happily celebrating father’s birthday, having presented him with a new judge’s robe. He finds it altogether too extravagant, but his wife Natalie (whom he calls “Hanswurst”) insists that he wear it when he presides in court. The new German Reich, she furthermore insists, should be ashamed of itself for failing to supply its “best and most intelligent civil servants” with appropriate official attire. Their landlord Gottlieb Weigelt unintentionally appears uninvited at the party and boorishly seeks Zernikow’s assistance with a legal matter.

Weigelt is a “Second Reich” type if ever there was one. He is in many ways a walking parody of the Wilhelmine self-made man, benefitting from postwar expansion of the *Gründerjahre*. In addition to being fairly well off, he is barely literate (though he boasts of his leather-bound collection of Schiller and Goethe, “the former in cowhide and the latter in pigskin”); add to that touches of brutishness and greed, along with a full helping of over-indulgence towards his son Leopold. In this instance, Weigelt wants Zernikow to help him have a poor family occupying a shanty in his courtyard evicted in order to install a stable, so that Leopold can keep a horse and impress everyone as a gentleman of leisure.

The next two acts humorously chronicle a series of Weigelt's misadventures over a period of two years, and by the play's final act he is a contrite man. Forced to liquidate all his assets in order to pay off his son's debts, he works alone at his cobbler's bench. Through the benevolent subterfuge by one of Zernikow's daughters, he becomes reconciled with his own daughter, whose kindly husband has been supporting Leopold in America. Leopold, it turns out, had run up staggering debts and had offended the honor of a young lady before running off to an unnamed German-speaking community in America. Leopold's business ventures have failed in there, and he is coming back to Germany a fully repentant prodigal for a reunion with his father. Discoveries, benevolent subterfuges, reversals, mistaken identities, overheard conversations, and other formulaic plot twists are the hallmarks of this non-literary work for the stage, and it became the prototype for a comedy fit for an industrial age, both in Wilhelmine Germany and in rapidly industrializing Milwaukee.

*Mein Leopold* established a precedent for hundreds of German comedies which were to follow in imitation, and the Pabst Theater company performed them hundreds of times. They were plays closely connected to the German bourgeois world and its accompanying *moralische Stimmung*, or moral climate. There was a conscious effort in such plays to present affirmative images of middle class life, a life that was becoming increasingly secure and prosperous. Prosperity had to be assured, for financial concerns would distract from the major focus, the comic situation. The characters had relationships with each other that went only so deep as to further that situation.

They had no previous conflicts with one another; their feelings, their views, and their interests were explored only insofar as complications enabled further comic situations to develop.<sup>6</sup>

*Der Raub der Sabinerinnen*, however, was the play that initiated the Richard-Welb-Wachsner operation. It was the great success that in many ways set the tone for the producers' subsequent endeavors over the next quarter century, a period which was to see over 530 productions of this and other plays on the Pabst stage. *Der Raub der Sabinerinnen* was written in 1884 by Franz von Schönthan with his brother Paul, both Austrian aristocrats with no ambitions whatsoever for literary legitimacy. Literary legitimacy, indeed, is one of several casualties in this comedy, whose central character is Martin Gollwitz, a mild-mannered provincial school teacher who dreams of literary legitimacy as a playwright. He has written a play based on early Roman history titled *Der Raub der Sabinerinnen* ("The Rape of the Sabine Women"); one day the head of a touring theatre troupe comes to town and offers to produce the play. Gollwitz is both astonished and delighted, but he must hide the fact from his wife, who on moral grounds opposes any form of theatrical activity. When Gollwitz finally sees his play produced he is disgraced, because even he must acknowledge that the play he wrote is awful. He also perceives that his wife has been right all along—the theatre is at best a waste of time. The subplot featuring a love affair between Gollwitz's daughter and an actor in the company ends happily as the actor agrees to give up his artistic ambitions and settle down with a steady job. This comedy proved to be among the most successful of all comedies ever written in German.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Wilms 18.

<sup>7</sup>The appeal of *Der Raub der Sabinerinnen* has puzzled critics of the German theatre for decades. It has been pilloried as farcical nonsense by nearly everyone who considers himself a "serious" observer of drama and theatre history, everyone from the great Otto Brahm, founder of the Freie Bühne, to Hermann Westecker, the Nazi "authority" on what was the best in "legitimately German" comedy. *Raub's* popularity

The playwriting team of Oskar Blumenthal (1852-1917) and Gustav Kadelburg (1851-1925) was responsible for the most popular plays and most numerous productions staged by the Pabst company. Their *Die Großstadtluft* (premiered 1891) is an example of how the industrial comedy “matured” along with its audience. In this play, written nearly two decades after *Mein Leopold*, the protagonist is no longer a semi-literate tradesman *cum* entrepreneur but a sophisticated and wealthy business executive. The comedic dilemma, in this case, is that his business partner is his father-in-law, and their place of business a provincial city. The protagonist, named Willi Flemming, longs for the eponymous “big city airs,” and he escapes to Berlin as often as he can “on business.” On one such trip, his suspicious wife follows him, suspecting him of all manner of adulterous goings-on. She discovers, after some hilarious “investigations,” that absolutely nothing is amiss between her and her husband. Meanwhile she herself develops a taste for “big city airs,” and so do a number of their neighbors—with whom she has several unforeseen encounters while making inquiries about her husband.

In Blumenthal and Kadelburg’s *Hans Huckebein* (which had premiered in 1897 and appeared in the Milwaukee repertoire the next season) the industrial comedy exploited as a comic device the fascination with the new art form of motion pictures (and the “nickelodeons” in which films were shown), a fascination prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic. While on a business trip, Martin Hallerstädt was filmed meeting a young woman in a Berlin park. The filmmaker is now showing the film in local nickelodeons (known as *Kinematographen* in German) throughout Berlin

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among audiences remained unabated through the Wilhelmine years, the First World War, the upheavals of the Weimar Republic, and the terrors of the Third Reich. It was one of the few unscathed survivors on the German theatrical landscape after World War II, for the first play to be performed anywhere in Germany after the collapse of the Hitler dictatorship and the conclusion of hostilities was *Der Raub der Sabinerinnen*, in Berlin during July of 1945.

under the title *Strandleben in Ostende*. Hallerstädt tries desperately to hinder his wife Hildegard from seeing the film, but his efforts are unsuccessful. Hildegard Hallerstädt sees the film, is outraged, and threatens Martin with a divorce. By play's end we (along with Hildegard) discover that Hallerstädt was totally innocent, the victim of an improvised scene set up by a filmmaker and the beautiful model he had hired to accost gentlemen walking though the park.

The plays of Blumenthal and Kadelburg were also among the most popular and frequently performed plays in Berlin, enjoying extended and nearly exclusive runs at the Lessing Theater (located on Friedrich Karl Ufer in Berlin, where *Hans Hucklebein* and numerous other Blumenthal/Kadelburg comedies had made world premieres).<sup>8</sup> They also formed important and substantial parts of repertoires in dozens of theatres throughout the Reich and in Vienna. The Richard-Welb-Wachsner management copied the success of theatres like the Lessing in Berlin and in other German metropolitan areas, but their success formula contained a significantly different ingredient. They had the financial backing of Milwaukee's leading industrialists, whose roster included the names of Uihlein, Harnsischfeger, Usinger, Schlitz, Vilter, Pfister, and Pabst, who agreed to subsidize the theatre's operations. At the conclusion of the 1895 season, for example, supporters gave Richard-Welb-Wachsner \$2,000 to develop further the German theatre in Milwaukee, which for the most part meant finding plays popular in Germany and presenting them in Milwaukee. That support increased year by year until by 1905, Leon Wachsner was given \$40,000 in development money alone—aside from his substantial earnings as the theatre's

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<sup>8</sup>The Lessing Theater was owned by Oskar Blumenthal, which also explains why so many Blumenthal/Kadelburg plays premiered and continued to run there. But that fact alone does not explain the popularity of the plays. Blumenthal and Kadelburg were businessmen, and they rarely continued run plays which did not attract large audiences.

producer. No theatre producer anywhere in the German-speaking world could boast that level of community support. Of course, the economic situation for theatres in Germany was on a completely different footing, and some theatres, such as Max Reinhardt's in Berlin, did receive funds as investment capital from backers. Rarely did industrialists, however, give outright grants to producers the way they did in Milwaukee.

The producers called their organization the German Stock Company, which was different from a traditional German repertoire theatre. A stock company hired according to *Fach* or type, and then presented different plays during weeks of the season. A repertoire theatre, such as the one Georg II, Duke of Sachsen-Meiningen perfected, and the type Otto Brahm ran in Berlin or the kind Anton Lölgen administered in Hannover, presented plays in rotating repertory.

The second season of the Richard-Welb-Wachsner administration had three performances weekly; patronage increased, and at the end of the season they had completed 113 performances by fifty-one authors—and they had created twenty new productions. In the summer of 1886 they renovated the interior of the Stadt Theater, enlarging the auditorium and galleries, adding boxes and loge seats, bought a new house curtain, and commissioned new settings. They remained in the Stadt Theater until 1890, the year Julius Richard died. The company then moved to the Grand Opera House, site of the present Pabst Theater on the northwest corner of Wells and Water Streets. 1890 was also the year Frederick Pabst began to take an active role in the production of German theatre in Milwaukee.

That year also marked the pinnacle of Frederick Pabst's industrial career. He was the son-in-law of Jacob Best, the Rhinelander who had brought lager-style brewing to Milwaukee in 1840. Pabst married Best's daughter in 1860 and took over the Best brewery on Plank Road. By 1895 Pabst was brewing over a million barrels of beer *per annum* and was the largest real estate holder in the city. Pabst paid \$150,000 for the Grand Opera House, an already an antiquated structure, built in 1871 by Jacob Nunnemacher and his brother. Pabst renamed the facility (grandiosely referred to as the "Nunnemacher Opera House") the Stadt Theater. It caught fire in 1893 and did \$123,000 worth of damage. About half the cost was covered by insurance, but Pabst was determined to have professional German theatre in Milwaukee and restored it in time for the 1893-94 season. On January 16, 1895 fire again broke out and this time the structure was completely destroyed. Pabst was in Europe at the time and cabled back instructions to start building immediately on the site of the burned-out ruin.

The Pabst Brewery architect, Otto Strack, designed and built the new theatre as a showplace of the very latest in industrial design. Unlike any other theatre at the time, it had steel cantilevered arches set in concrete as wall and roof frames, topped by a tile roof. The absence of wood framing reduced the danger of structural damage by fire, and if indeed a fire were to occur, the roof would fall on the arched beams and slide downward toward the street level instead of bearing on the brick walls, bringing them down with the roof. There were no columns to support balconies, providing unobstructed views from anywhere in the house. The balconies were built of solid iron and attached to the steel girders for support. Backstage featured a hemp-line counterweight system for moving scenery, and acoustics were enhanced by the horseshoe shaped auditorium formed by hollow interior walls, which in effect were sounding boards imparting

reverberation. The theatre had the largest lobby of any theatre in the Midwest, the lighting was electric with no auxiliary gas jets permitted. City Hall across the street, built in the same year, was equipped with both. City Hall architects figured if electricity didn't work out, the politicians could always fall back on gas.<sup>9</sup>

The Pabst Theater opened in November of 1895 with (what else?) an industrial comedy by Gustav Kadelburg and Franz von Schönthan titled *Zwei Wappen*, followed by Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* as a nod to the exalted concept of *Theater als moralische Anstalt*. After that, it was back to business with the American premiere of Blumenthal and Kadelburg's *Im weissen Rößl* and Mayer-Förster's *Alt-Heidelberg*. Soon thereafter, the English-language version of the former (titled *The White Horse Inn*) became a hit in English, and the latter, as *Prince Karl*, became a vehicle for the American actor Richard Mansfield.<sup>10</sup>

Over the years they presented now-forgotten standards of the popular repertoire, *Comtesse Guckerl* (likewise by Schönthann and Kadelburg), Emil Pohl's *Der Goldonkel*, Gustav von Moser's *Aus Liebe der Kunst*, Georg Engel's *Der Ausflug ins Sittliche*, Eduard Bauernfeld's *Ewige Liebe*, Julius Stern's *Hochzeit des Reservisten*, and scores of other popular favorites scores of times. Their personnel budget averaged about \$40,000 per year to hire talent. That was the major cost of the operation, since Welb and Wachsner attempted to use as many professional native-

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<sup>9</sup>The theatre remained in family hands until 1953, when it was sold to the Pabst Theater Foundation, which then sold it to the city for \$250,000 in 1961. In that year the Pabst Management Co. leased it from the city. In 1967 it was given national landmark status, and it continues to function today as a venue for road shows, concerts, and some local theatre production. It is in use approximately 300 nights per year.

<sup>10</sup>Richard Mansfield (1857-1907) was born in Berlin. His mother was American, and he achieved his greatest successes in American cities like Milwaukee in touring productions.



speaking German actors as possible every season. The cost of scenery was the second most important item in the budget, although production photographs reveal that production values were substantial though never lavish. The reason they eschewed improvident expenditures on settings and costumes was more significant than economics: the plays they most often did made an aesthetic virtue of modesty and constraint *in mise en scene*.

The industrial comedies in particular had a cast size of no more than a dozen characters, so there was no extraordinary financial demands upon the theatre's personnel budget. Few such comedies required more than one general playing area. There was usually no change of location between acts, and certainly none between scenes. Such changes would have disrupted the tempo, and the action must courses along in a rapid, ever-peaking series of situations. There were likewise few extraordinary demands placed upon the technical capacity of a theatre, even though the Pabst's scene-changing apparatus could have accommodated them. Extraordinary scenery would have distracted the viewer from focus upon the comic situation; most industrial comedies took place in a single room somewhere in a provincial city or town. In that spot characters met their comic misfortune. No unusual lighting effects were necessary; most costumes were contemporary clothing, and no peculiar or expensive props were required. The scene designer had the somewhat unimaginative job of providing a "general" playing area with necessary entrances, levels, and exits. The design could be simple, indeed primitive, and still be effective. Any additional decorative effects were to be avoided anyway, as they would distract from the "closed environment" in which the central character usually found himself. To be sure, most Schiller plays required huge and varied settings; but Schiller accounted for only seven productions altogether during the entire Richard-Welb-Wachsner administration, while industrial comedies numbered over 200.

While the repertoire was overwhelmingly dedicated to the entertainment of its audience, an audience the amangement hoped to maintain as broad as possible, plays considered daring and even risqué appeared at the Pabst—but under the auspices of the “Freie Bühne” organization and not offered to regular subscribers. For example, Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths* (its German title is *Nachtsyl*), Ibsen’s *Ghosts* (*Gespenster*), Schnitzler’s *Liebelei*, and Sudermann’s *Das Glück im Winkel* all materialized at the Pabst, but they were not well attended and were rarely revived. Admission prices helped defray expenses but they never supported operations entirely. Seat prices were twenty five cents and fifty cents for Wednesday matinees, twenty five, fifty, and seventy five cents for Saturday matinees and twenty five, fifty, and seventy five cents for evenings, with loge and center-orchestra seats going for \$1.00.

In 1900 Welb had a falling-out with Wachsner and accepted an offer from the St. Louis German Theater. Leon Wachsner then continued alone for the next nine years as the firm had always done, with a company of twenty eight versatile performers capable of performing several kinds of genres. His administration flourished until his untimely death in 1909 aboard a train bound for Buffalo, New York. After Wachsner’s death, the company fell apart and struggled for the next two decades, finally disbanding in 1931.

The German Stock Company in Milwaukee was in many ways a unique undertaking, not least because it survived so long as a fully professional theatre troupe operating in German in the United States. It benefitted like no other theatre in America (or in Germany) from a level of community financial support and it operated in a first-class facility which remains one of the best

venues for theatre performance in Milwaukee today. All of these attributes mark the Milwaukee company as distinctly parallel to its counterparts in any number of analogous provincial cities Germany, where both actors and audiences would have felt completely at home. That is no doubt one reason why so many native German actors agreed to spend a season in Milwaukee; to many of them it was no different from a job in Oldenburg, Karlsruhe, or Halle. The salaries they earned in Milwaukee may even have been better; the average contract totaled about \$500 for an entire season in Milwaukee, and several performers, according to archives in the Milwaukee County Historical Association earned much more than that. All performers, furthermore, received first-class steamship and rail transportation to Milwaukee.

One of the most curious and ultimately tragic, engagements of an actor in Milwaukee was that of actor Heinz Gordon. He was born in Tarnowitz, Upper Silesia in 1871, and came to Milwaukee at age twenty six to play several roles. It was his first professional engagement, and in Milwaukee he came to see first hand the way comedies by Blumenthal, Kadelburg, Pohl, L'Arronge, and others really functioned in performance. Such comedies are, as noted earlier, not intended to be read like a piece of literature, and reading them scarcely provides the reader with neither their charm nor their impact upon an audience. He tried his hand at writing similar kinds of comedies and was moderately successful when he returned to Germany, the most notable of which were two, both premiering in 1919: the first was *Die Rutschbahn*, written with Curt Goetz, premiering in Breslau; the other was written with Kadelburg, titled *Der ehemalige Leutnant*, which premiered in Berlin. Gordon continued working steadily until 1933, when he was arrested on unspecified charges and sent to a concentration camp. In some unknown location under circumstances not entirely clear, Heinz Gordon was killed sometime between 1934 and 1945.

