



100 years of
FREILICHTBÜHNE
an der Zitadelle
1921—2021

English version

100 YEARS OF FREILICHTBÜHNE AN DER ZITADELLE 1921-2021

Location

On the western outskirts of Berlin lies the district of Spandau, whose most famous building is the Citadel. In its immediate vicinity is the Freilichtbühne an der Zitadelle (open-air stage at the citadel), which can be reached by walking from the Am Juliusturm road towards the Citadel and, after crossing the first bridge, turning right towards the Zitadellenpark. Guarded by a statue of Ares, the god of war, the route meanders through idyllic green spaces. After passing the weir, which offers a wonderful view over the Spandauer See (Lake Spandau), you reach the entrance to the Freilichtbühne.

Introduction

This exhibition was created as part of the 100th anniversary of the Freilichtbühne. It gives an overview of the past and present of the stage and looks at what might be happening in the future. Focusing on historical highlights, this non-exhaustive survey is designed to give you a flavour of what has happened here in the past, from theatre, concerts and musicals to film screenings and sports events. The exhibition also includes insights into the Freilichtbühne's history and reminiscences from visitors, artists and staff. More information can be found in the accompanying brochure.

Signpost to the open-air stage with the bronze figure of Ares in the background, © Kulturhaus Spandau



CHRONOLOGY

100 YEARS AT THE FREILICHTBÜHNE

- 1921 Founded by Otto de Nolte
- July 3, 1921 Premiere at 4pm: Grillparzer's Sappho
- 1923 onwards Lease of site by, and construction assistance from, the district of Spandau. The theatre continues to operate until 1942.
- 1946 Takeover and restoration by the Spandau Office for the Arts under the direction of Ewald Blume.
- 1961 The Freilichtbühne celebrates its 40th anniversary.
- 1986 Altstadt Theater Spandau takes over programming under the direction of Achim Grubel, Gabriel Rein-king and Matthias Diem.
- 1988 onwards The programme runs under the title Spandauer Sommer Festspiele (Spandau Summer Festival).
- 2000 The district office of Spandau appoints Ulrich Funk, director of the Kulturhaus, to manage the Freilichtbühne. Events are initially organised in partnership with the Cantiamo chamber choir and then with the Magma Theater Spandau.
- 2011 Start of the popular Umsonst und Draußen programme, featuring free Sunday morning concerts by local orchestras, choirs and ensembles.
- 2013 Britta Richter takes over the management of the Kulturhaus and the Freilichtbühne.
- 2020 FKS Freunde Kulturhaus Spandau founded as the new official partner for staging events.
- 2021 Anniversary season: 100 years of the Freilichtbühne.

THEATRE

ACT 1

“Well then, let us quietly grant this small pleasure to the people of Spandau.” With these words, the then military chief of the Citadel is said to have given permission for the theatre to open.

After founding the Spandauer Volksbühne, with which he put on guest performances in various theatres, Otto de Nolte finally found his own venue in 1921: the Freilichtbühne am Juliusturm. “It all happened by chance,” said de Nolte of his first encounter with the terrain on which he built his modest theatre. “I went for a walk and suddenly found myself standing among tall maple trees in a forest clearing.”

Initially focussing on drama, the theatre’s first production was Grillparzer’s Sappho, but from the mid-1920s onwards, the programme increasingly included farces and comedy to satisfy popular tastes. From 1928, the range of events expanded to include concerts as well as singing sessions open to the public. By the end of the decade, there were about 60 events taking place per season. In the 1930s, as theatre began to be eclipsed by the advent of cinema, theatre performances were soon outnumbered by other events.

26.06.1921, Premiere at the Spandauer Volksbühne, Sappho Act 5,
© Archive of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Spandau



THEATRE

ACT 2

From 1933 onwards, all theatre programmes had to be pre-approved by the People's Enlightenment and Propaganda department, which led to an increase in touring productions by the Deutsche Bühne association. The theatre continued to operate until 1942, albeit with only a few performances. After that, outdoor performance became impossible due to air raids.

After the war, the theatre reopened in 1947 under the direction of the Spandau Arts Office. Up until the 1970s it was managed by various theatre groups until, in 1986, the Altstadt Theater Spandau took over, and classical theatre returned. Productions included *Lysistrata*, *The Love Birds*, *The Robbers*, *William Tell*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Figaro's Wedding* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Since 2000, theatre performances have been only a small part of the Freilichtbühne's diverse programme, which now includes comedy, cabaret and other small-scale performing arts.

1957, *Jan the Wonderful*, © Archive of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Spandau, photo: Franz Freytag



FOLKLORE

BIRD CIRCUSES AND ORIENTAL NIGHTS

Ever since the 1930s, a major part of the Freilichtbühne's offering has been Foklore and folk traditions. The Wandervogel Zirkus (Migrant Bird Circus) involved young people giving performances of songs, dances and sketches.

In the 1960s, the theatre also offered an insight into the cultural lives of other countries. In 1964, the leader of the French zone in Berlin invited locals to the theatre to celebrate Bastille Day.

Other regions of Germany were also represented. In 1972, the Harzklub Harlingerode, from Germany's Harz region, took to the stage for displays of yodelling, whipcracking, folk dance and songs, and sketches from woodcutters' and miners' lives.

In the period 2006-2018, a programme called Oriental Nights captured the flair and fairy-tale mystique of the East. And folklore continues to make up parts of the programme today, mainly in the form of live music (e.g. Irish or Latin American).

12.08.1972, Harzer Rollen event of the Harlingerode Harz Club,
© Archive of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Spandau, photo: Claus Rehfeld, Spandau Presse Büro



SPORTS AND FILM SCREENINGS

In the 1920s, theatre was performed only on Wednesdays and Sundays. On other days, the stage was turned over to sports clubs and other regional groups. The Prussian College of Physical Education, which was located in the Citadel at the time, used the opportunity to give gymnastics performances demonstrating the benefits of physical exercise. In the 1960s, cultural and sporting exchange events between countries, known as Begegnungsveranstaltungen, saw sports and gymnastic being showcased. In 1996, the venue was even host to an American football game with local team the Berlin Stars. Equally popular have been film screenings. In 1992, as part of the Spandau Summer Festival, the theatre partnered with Sputnik Kino, which screened movies after theatre performances. Each performance was a logistical challenge, because before the cinema audience could enter, the theatre audience had to leave. After three seasons, the Spandau organisation Filmriss, which until 1997 also ran the cinema in the Kulturhaus, took over the film screenings. After that, open-air cinema at the Freilichtbühne came to an end.

1967, ladies with hoops, gymnastics event, © Archive of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Spandau, photo: Claus Rehfeld, Spandau Presse Büro



CONCERTS

CHORAL SINGING MEETS HARD ROCK

Concerts were given at the Freilichtbühne from as early as the 1920s, including children's singing concerts as part of Germany's Jugendmusikbewegung (youth music movement). From 1933 onwards, the National Socialists began to make their presence felt. SA bands played here, and the Hitler Youth held summer evening concerts. Ultimately, however, the stage never really became an established platform for the party.

In the post-war period, concert life was slow to get going again and often took the form of brass and orchestral music. In the 1960s, light concerts and 'serenade evenings' proved popular. From the 1950s onwards, jazz and rock music began to make their presence felt. Tribute bands were especially popular, as were the Umsonst und Draußen concerts, which have been held on Sunday mornings since 2011. Today the concert programme ranges from orchestral and choral to jazz, acapella and rock.

7.7. 1979, Rock festival, © Archive of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Spandau, photo: Claus Rehfeld, Spandau Presse Büro



OPERA & MUSICALS FROM THEATER DES WESTENS TO FRH. VOM STEIN

From 1986, under the direction of the Altstadt Theater, opera was also performed. While individual arias and excerpts from operas had always been sung as part of the serenade evenings, entire productions were now staged, such as *The Magic Flute* in 1995. In the long run, however, such elaborate productions couldn't be financially sustained.

When the Kulturhaus took over in 2000, it focused on popular musical theatre. For example, when the Theater des Westens closed for good in 2003, its orchestra gave a guest performance with an adaptation of the musical *Falco*. Between 2011 and 2018, the diversity of the genre was demonstrated by performances by Musical AG from the Freiherr-vom-Stein-Gymnasium, and by productions by the Musikala ensemble, which specialises in gala performances and productions of well-known classics.

1998, *The Marriage of Figaro*, © Archive of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Spandau, photo: Peter Giese



THEATRE

AKT 3

In order to reach the youngest audiences, Punch and Judy shows were performed as early as 1928. On August 22, 1928, the Spandauer Zeitung reported that “one of the best Punch and Judy puppeteers, Mr. Alfred Gutheit, understands perfectly how to entertain the children with his games and stories.” From puppet theatre to clown shows to children’s circuses, there children’s programme was a rich and varied one.

In 2000 on, the family programme was taken over by the Kinder-MusikTheater, which continues to manage the site today. In 2005, the Berliner KinderTheater was also brought on board. Since then, as part of the family theatre programme, a play has been performed at the Freilichtbühne every summer. Over the years, many children’s classics have been performed, including Pippi Longstocking, Pettersson & Findus, The Jungle Book, My Friend Wicki and Michel from Lönneberga. Even a real horse has put in an appearance on stage.

2008, Ulf and Zwulf, Dackel Düsenfuß, © Dieter Engelmann



BUILDING HISTORY

THE STAGE GETS A MAKEOVER

In 1921, the Freilichtbühne was little more than a clearing in the forest. In 1924, municipal funding allowed for a more formal construction. The next year, the Citadel was demilitarised, and in 1927 the stage became a permanent structure, largely thanks to funding from Berlin's mayor, Gustav Böß. The stage was given an orchestra pit and the audience area was framed by arcades. Benches were installed, two buildings were erected as dressing rooms and a shed was built for props.

After the war, all the movable furniture had to be replaced, but the facility itself was still intact. Over the years, however, there was a constant need for renovation and repair. Benches and electrics had to be renewed, lighting and sound systems were installed, the stage was covered with an overhead sail-like structure, and various updates were continually being carried out.

In 2017, nearly twenty trees were felled by storm Xavier. Today, major efforts are underway to preserve the historical structures of the Freilichtbühne and yet give it a contemporary look. After this extensive work, the Freilichtbühne can look forward to at least another century of performances.

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