

# THE MUSES GO OUT IN SUMMER

Although in June or July of every year the generously-subsidized German theatres and opera-houses close for the summertime, theatrical and musical events are likely as not to be offered. The stages that are chosen for the summertime theatrical and musical events are likely as not to be the courtyards and gardens of castles and palaces. These often provide settings more splendid and enchanting than any indoor stage's painted canvas can offer.

## *Authentic Settings for Historical Dramas*

What is more, on some of these outdoor stages an unsurpassable authenticity of setting can be achieved—namely, when a play is enacted at the very place where the events that it portrays took place.

An excellent example of this is picturesque Castle Jagsthausen, in the south-western part of Wurttemberg. This castle was once the seat of the famous knight Gotz von Berlichingen; now, every year in July and August, Goethe's drama *Gotz von Berlichingen* is performed in its courtyard.

A similarly appropriate event takes place at Rothenburg, on the Tauber, which, with its well-preserved medieval houses, is a great tourist attraction at any time of year. There, a play entitled *Der Meistertrunk* (The Master-Draught), recalling an event of the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648), is performed. History has it that Rothenburg's burgomaster saved his town from being ravaged by accepting a challenge. He managed to drink at one draught a beaker of wine so

large as to confound his challenger Field Marshal Tilly. The Flemish strategist had stipulated the successful downing of the "master draught" as the condition on which the town might be saved—and, in expecting the burgomaster to fail, underestimated a Rothenburger's capacities under stress of patriotism.

Every summer, too, the courtyard of Nuremberg Castle serves as a stage for folk plays by Hans Sachs. This 16th-century shoemaker and poet of Nuremberg was later immortalised by Richard Wagner in his *Meistersinger*.

#### *Cloisters and Town Walls as Backdrops*

Besides courtyards, a great number of other venerable settings are used as stages for summertime theatre festivals, whether or not they happen to have any historic links with the subject-matter of the plays performed.

One of the most striking examples of such setting is the thousand year old cathedral church in Bad Hersfeld, which has been a singularly picturesque, roofless ruin ever since it was war-damaged in 1761. It is the scene of an annual theatre festival that is under the patronage of the Federal President. Not

long ago, the producer William Dieterle—of Hollywood fame—was put in charge of the Hersfeld festivals. This year, the plays he staged there included works by Aeschylus, Shakespeare and the contemporary American play-wright Archibald MacLeish. And Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Das grosse Welttheater*—ideally suited as it is for outdoor presentation—is performed every year at Bad Hersfeld.

Another place where this Austrian author's works are a familiar part of every summer is the small Wurttemberg town of Schwabisch-Hall. There, on the broad steps of St. Michael's church, one or another of his plays is performed year after year.

Among the more notable outdoor festivals, one with an entirely "classical" repertoire, is a summertime event at Luisenburg (Franconia). In the same "classical" category are the performances in the cloister of the monastery at Feuchtwangen (Franconia). So are those at Augsburg (Swabia), which take place in front of a particularly beautiful gate in the old town wall.

#### *Along Rhine and Ruhr*

Even places as world-famed as the Rhine and its Lo-

relei are recruited as theatre settings in summer.

On the waters of the Rhine at Koblenz there is a floating, anchored stage where comic-opera performances are offered. In an open-air theatre on the Lorelei Rock, high above those same waters, well-known actors and actresses interpret the classics of German dramatic art: the plays of Goethe and Schiller.

An especially lively evening is promised by a visit to the open-air theatre of Bad Segeberg, in the northern province of Holstein. This theatre is devoted to dramatic versions of the works of Karl May, whose romantic adventure stories about American Indians have fired the imaginations of several generations of German boys and girls—and their parents.

Special mention is due the Ruhr Festival at Recklinghausen. It stands out not only for its scope and quality but also for the fact that it is organised in particular for miners and steel workers of West Germany's chief industrial area.

#### *Music in Baroque Castle Gardens*

Not only dramatic art, however, comes into its sum-

mer-time splendour in outdoor settings replete with historical reminiscences. Music goes outdoors, too. Favourite settings for summer concerts are Germany's Baroque palaces, with their spacious parks and terraces. Concerts and operas are presented at the Hanoverian Schloss Herrenhausen (which has one of the loveliest gardens of its kind in all of Europe), Schloss Pommersfelden (Franconia); Schloss Nymphenburg (Munich); Schloss Bruhl (between Cologne and Bonn); Schloss Schwetzingen (near Mannheim); Schloss Eutin (Holstein) and Schloss Ansbach (Franconia). Nor does the Heidelberg Schloss, dearest of all to the hearts of countless tourists, fail to provide music in its courtyard on summer nights.

But for music, as for works of the theatre, other types of outdoor settings are also chosen. Then concerts that take place in the Gothic cloister of the former Monastery Alprisbach (Black Forest) are particularly popular events of the German summer.

#### *The International Level*

Another category of summer festivals devoted to the arts is that of the big, international, often world-famous

events. Some of these take place not in borrowed settings but in their own theatre buildings. First among them, no doubt, is the Richard Wagner Festival in the theatre that has been specially built for it at Bayreuth. This year, as every year, well-known Wagner operas will be performed there—*Tannhauser*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Parsifal*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Ring der Nibelungen*.

Summer festivals are also sponsored by the opera house of Munich in the old *Residentztheater* and the *Prinzregententheater*, both of which look back on a long stage tradition. This year, the programme includes a contemporary opera—by Hans Werner Henze—and Wagner, Strauss and Mozart operas. Towns that regularly devote their summer festivals to a single composer are Wurzburg, with its Mozart Festival, and Stuttgart, with "Beethoven Days". Hitzacker, a small town situated on the western bank of the Elbe River, directly on the demarcation line that separates West Germany from the Soviet Zone, initiated its "Summer Days of Music" shortly after the end of the war; they are devoted chiefly to

chamber music, and have become increasingly popular year by year.

Only the most significant theatrical summer events have been mentioned here. The visitor to Germany at this season will, however, find many another place throughout the country where artists and audiences are making the most of the long twilights and mild weather of the Central European summer.

Many of the less famous events have the same elements of charm that characterize the outdoor festivals for which people make reservations weeks—or months—in advance. For example, the visitor to Bonn during the warm time of the year might do well to learn if a chamber-music concert happens to be scheduled in the circular court, open to the sky, of the Poppelsdorf Schlob, which is on the outskirts of the Federal Republic's capital.

Whether world-known, or merely "local" and casual, these outdoor events in the German cultural calendar all have pleasing elements in common. They blend the music of instruments or the human voice with the forms of time-mellowed architecture, under a ceiling of summer skies.