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Part Two

The Royal Theater in Dresden
The Tradition and Re-inception of the Royal Theater

Even in appearance, the royal theaters of the eighteenth century were unlike the grand opera theaters to come. Often integrated into the royal residence or, as in Vienna, Berlin, and Dresden, situated conveniently close by, they were by no means public institutions. Their primary function was to entertain the court and its guests and to provide a platform for the royal families. Each major European court vied with the next to host events with the best musicians and star singers.

The royal seat of Dresden became renowned for its theater in the eighteenth century. The Saxon princes, until 1763 also rulers of Poland, had a passion for lavish baroque display. Under August the Strong and his successors, opera performances featuring the best Italian singers could turn into celebrations lasting several days. The director of the royal theater was a directeur des plaisirs: his duty was to entertain the court, whatever it took.1 Theater interiors were tailored to suit the court and its rulers. Seating was arranged in a classic horseshoe shape so that the centrally positioned royal box could be seen at least as well as the stage from most seats.

Even the stage was used for purposes of royal display. As Matthew Wikan- der describes in his book Princes to Act, kings and their families frequently took to the stage themselves. These episodes served to relax the strict court protocol and test moral and political boundaries. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, royalty abandoned such dilletantist pastimes but resumed them again in the Restoration period after 1815. The Saxon Wettin dynasty stood out as particularly active lovers of music theater. King Anton, who reigned 1829–1836, was a prolific composer, contributing dozens of volumes to the royal music collection. His successor, Friedrich August II, was formally trained in music and an
excellent bass who sang at minor theater performances until his accession to the throne in 1836. Princess Amalie, who received her musical training from Carl Maria von Weber, wrote cantatas and short operas from a young age. One of her compositions, the “Flag of Victory” (Siegesfahne) was performed at the royal theater in 1834.

Like the Habsburgs, the Wettins were closely involved in the running of the theater. Right up until the mid-nineteenth century, Kings Friedrich August II and Johann I appointed and dismissed conductors, soloists, and musicians, awarded pay rises and influenced performance schedules. The convenience of the royal family could play a decisive role in the fate of a work, as Richard Wagner was to find out. He conducted his first major opera, the over four-hour long work Rienzi, shortly after his appointment as Principal Conductor in Dresden. As the aging princesses Amalie and Augusta were not willing to remain seated for so long, the opera was divided into two parts. The first two acts were coupled under the heading “Rienzi’s Greatness” (Rienzis Größe) and the remaining three acts, for which Wagner was obliged to compose an additional overture, were performed the following evening. This incident illustrates the imbalance of power at the royal theater. But while Wagner complied in this instance, he resisted the many sacred duties the orchestra and opera choir were expected to perform in the royal chapel. The increasing confidence of nineteenth-century artists, and their conviction that art should be autonomous, was beginning to clash with the traditional royal theater and its power hierarchy.

Artists and intellectuals in prerevolutionary Dresden asserted their creative prerogative much more than those in Vienna or Berlin. The process of change that this triggered—toward professionalism in the theater— is discussed in the following chapter. How was a royal theater, established with the sole aim of pleasing the monarch and the royal court, transformed into a professionally run, public institution from the 1860s? What factors contributed to Dresden becoming a center of German opera, first under Richard Wagner in the 1840s, then in the early days of the German Empire and again after 1900 at the dawn of musical modernism? These questions can only be answered in the light of the social and political contexts of the time. In other words, one must look at the history of Saxony to understand the development of German opera.

Ironically, the triumphant rise of Dresden’s royal theater in the nineteenth century began with Saxony’s catastrophic defeat in the Napoleonic Wars. After the Battle of Nations at Leipzig in 1813, Prussia and Russia made Saxony a gouvernement under the Russian prince Repnin-Wolkonski. A foretaste of the occupation rule of the twentieth century, this arrangement enabled the authorities to exploit the region’s manpower and material resources at the same time as establishing order in a land that was ravaged by war. At the Congress of Vienna two years later, Saxony lost half its territory and was reduced to a medium-sized state (Mittelstaat).
With the support of Saxon advocates of the Enlightenment, Repnin-Wolkonski initiated a number of reforms during his tenure as governor, which he and other members of the Russian nobility had previously championed in Tsarist Russia. He believed the monarchy should fundamentally alter its relationship to its subjects, and gained enduring popularity in Dresden by opening the main royal garden to the general public. Inspired by recent theater reforms in Russia, he also ensured that the court retained control of the theater and the royal orchestra, rather than leasing them to an impresario.

On his return to Dresden in 1815, King Friedrich August overturned some of Repnin-Wolkonski’s administrative reforms but approved the changes at the royal theater—his most renowned cultural institution—and continued to invest in it. Count Vitzthum von Eckstädt was appointed General Director of the royal theater and orchestra. He promptly wooed Carl Maria von Weber away from Prague’s Estates Theater to run a new German opera ensemble, which was established in 1817, supplementing the Italian opera. Vitzthum’s actions were motivated by political as well as artistic considerations. A year previously, he had urged the king that “Saxony should now more than ever use the means at its disposal to distinguish itself by promoting the arts and sciences, as every other manner of gaining fame and standing is lost to us.” To him, an active cultural policy was the only way to compensate for Saxony’s political relegation.

The vision of Saxony as a cultural prime mover motivated the Saxon government to also invest in other institutions including the art academy, picture gallery and academic colleges. The newspaper *Dresdner Abend Zeitung*, edited by Friedrich Kind and Theodor Winkler, became a leading German-language journal for literature. Ludwig Tieck’s salon drew Hegel and other illustrious visitors to the city on the Elbe. Ernst Rietschel, a prominent sculptor of the day, Ludwig Richter, a renowned painter, and the still young architect Gottfried Semper occupied important positions in the city’s various royal and state cultural institutions. As a major center of art and learning in the German lands, Dresden was able to maintain some of its historical influence on Poland stemming from the Polish-Saxon union, 1697–1763, and it attracted many Polish refugees fleeing punishment after the quashed uprisings of 1830–31 and 1863. Richard Wagner noted with respect that the Polish “theater aristocracy” could clinch the success of an opera performance. Dresden also cultivated close links with Prague and Vienna, and these rapidly intensified after completion of the railroad to Bohemia.

Two years after his accession to the throne, King Friedrich August II (1836–1854) commissioned academy professor Gottfried Semper with the construction of a new royal theater. Semper had previously distinguished himself by designing a number of smaller buildings and an expansive public forum linking the ward (Zwinger), the palace, the Brühl Terraces and the Elbe, thereby creating a symbolic bond between the old monarchy and the rising middle class. A convinced
liberal, Semper designed one of the most sociopolitically significant theaters of his day. While keeping the formal requirements of a royal theater, such as a separate entrance for the monarch and a generously sized royal box, he added amphitheater-like stalls which dominated the auditorium and allowed visitors of any rank to sit shoulder to shoulder—as at the Leipzig municipal theater. In this way, Semper created the prototype public theater, with the stage forming the focal point and a good view guaranteed from nearly all seats. The architecture’s symbolic representation of a more egalitarian social order was especially striking in contrast to Berlin’s Linden Opera, which had been rebuilt after a fire in 1843 as a faithful copy of the mid-eighteenth-century original, with boxes predominating, as if society had not changed at all. Furthermore, Semper’s theater was to some extent able to absorb the vibrations of the music, endowing it with remarkably good acoustics. In this respect too, then, Semper’s “ringing instrument” eclipsed the Berlin Opera and most other contemporary theaters.

Figure 2. Interior of the Semper Theater.

Despite the theater’s progressive character, it brought the Saxon parliament (Landtag) into opposition to the king. In 1838, Friedrich August II had ordered the theater to be built at his own cost without consulting the representatives of the estates. But the following year he decreed that the Landtag should pay, in breach of its budgetary rights. This provoked vehement protests from liberal diet members from Leipzig and other cities. In the heated debates that followed, however, most
were eventually convinced by the argument of Saxony’s mission to be a center of culture. The king invoked the educational function of the theater and declared it the “glory of the crown” before appealing more directly to Saxon pride: “In all the more highly civilized nations the dramatic arts have played an important role . . . It is surely not in the interest and intentions of the nation to fall behind other nations, whose financial circumstances are less favorable, in this respect.”

The total cost of construction rose to 386,000 talers—considerably more than the projected 260,000 talers—and devoured nearly 10 percent of the state budget for the year 1841 combined with personnel costs. In terms of economic policy, this was akin to a return to absolutism. In the end, in a grand gesture of artistic patronage, Friedrich August and two of his sisters covered much of the cost. Thus the monarchy gained a resounding victory over the liberals in a struggle which illustrates the political significance of the opera.

In the long term, the new, attractive theater with a two thousand-seat capacity was expected to be more economical to run than the old opera. For some months after the grand opening, at which Goethe’s Tasso and Weber’s Euryanthe were performed, the king’s investment seemed sound. The royal theater’s deficit shrank to 9,200 talers in 1841—about a quarter of the subsidies required in previous years. This was largely thanks to increased ticket sales, up by more than half compared to 1840. After a while, however, it proved difficult to attract consistently large audiences. About ten percent of Dresden’s total population, plus the court, could be classified as theater-goers. With less than 100,000 inhabitants, the audience potential in the Saxon capital amounted to no more than 10,000. In these circumstances, the same guests would have to be enticed to the theater several times a week. As the theater attempted to provide ever more thrilling innovations, costs rose but takings fell. By 1844, the theater’s deficit had increased again to 40,000 talers—a record for the new theater—with the orchestra consuming an additional 45,000 talers annually. To legitimize this burden on the civil list, the Wettins stressed the theater’s educational qualities, thus adopting an originally middle-class, Enlightenment conception of theater and, like the Habsburgs, using the arts to support the monarchy.

When the first Semper Theater was destroyed by fire in 1869, it became clear how firmly the vision of Saxony as a cultural center and pride in the royal theater had taken root in the minds of the population. Dresdeners urged the government to rebuild the theater without delay, since it was “a credit to the nation, a national characteristic,” as a conservative member of parliament put it, sparking heckles from the liberals that Saxony was not actually a nation. No objections were made, however, to a further conservative comment describing the Saxons as the “most cultured people in the world.” The Landtag continued to approve ever increasing expenditure until the second Semper Theater was finally completed at a cost of 1,184,000 talers. Following the founding of the German Empire in 1871,
subsidies of almost half a million marks were invested in the theater annually.\textsuperscript{16} Despite the king’s occasional admonitions to economize, the deficit continued to grow—mainly due to the rapidly rising fees for soloists and cost of lavish stage sets and costumes. The royal theater came to resemble a bottomless pit into which more and more civil list money was thrown.

![The Second Semper Theater in 1878.](image)

Was the royal theater worth such tremendous sums? From an artistic point of view, the answer is a definite yes. The Dresden Opera presented a number of sensational artistic successes in the nineteenth century and in the years preceding the First World War, establishing Dresden’s reputation throughout Germany and Europe as a center for the arts and culture. The Wettins exploited the widespread opinion that theater could educate and enlighten to their own ends and used the Semper Theater to show themselves as a dynasty of art lovers and patrons. Emphasizing Saxony’s role as a cultural center implicitly contrasted it with the hated Prussian military state.\textsuperscript{17} The rich cultural life of the royal seat provided a welcome diversion from the political problems arising in the wake of the failed 1848 revolution. The Semper Opera was one of the few places where the growing gulf between the monarchy and society could be bridged, both physically and mentally, by the universal appeal of the arts.
A Platform for the Royal Family

Since the emergence of the German national movement, the Wettins had an acute problem proving their legitimacy. They represented the ancien régime which had brought about Saxony’s ruin in 1763 and in 1813. They ruled one of the medium-sized states on which the German Confederation was based and which precluded the formation of a German nation-state. Not only that, they were a Catholic dynasty in a Protestant land. The constitution they introduced in 1831 helped to consolidate their position for a time. Many contemporaries now saw a beacon of hope in liberal Saxony, in contrast to the military powers Prussia and Austria. In the 1840s, however, unrest grew as further reforms were rejected and Saxony became one of the hotspots of the 1848 revolution.

With the revolution crushed, the monarchy resumed control but its political dilemma remained. A return to the ancien régime was impossible, but so was obvious compromise with the liberals. King Friedrich August II, and later his successor Johann I, therefore tried to engage somewhat with the people and guide their disoriented souls, seduced by demagogues, as they saw it, back to righteousness. The royal theater provided an ideal setting for the Wettins to meet the public. Here they could show themselves to society’s elites within a controllable public space.18

The curtain was raised on the royal theater’s very own monarchy in April 1850, almost a year after Dresden’s May Uprising of 1849. On April 23, 1850, a “contest of the gods” (Götterwettstreit) was mounted in honor of the marriage of Princess Maria Elisabeth to a Savoy prince. Featuring excerpts of the works of German and Italian writers, the program was an amalgam of various allegories on art, glorifying the two dynasties and highlighting the Wettins attachment to their people.19 The entire performance, set to compositions by principal conductor Carl Gottlieb Reissiger, was repeated the next evening. It was not, then, a unique celebration but a reproducible art work. In this way, it could contribute to filling a repertoire diminished by censorship and purged of works by liberal authors and composers. More gala performances followed to mark various occasions in the ensuing years. The largest celebration of the nineteenth century in Dresden’s royal theater was held on three successive days to mark the golden wedding anniversary of Johann I and his wife Amalie Augusta. The theater was festively illuminated and decorated and the ensemble played special jubilee overtures and prologues, with operas forming the climax of each evening.

Where the Wettins had previously sought entertainment in a courtly setting, they now basked publicly in the glory of opera. Theater-goers could witness the entire royal family in the royal box, enjoying the scene, the atmosphere, and the rousing music. An evening’s amusement began with the monarchy arriving in decorated coaches, clad in fine gowns and jewels and waving graciously to
the people. Although these were not spontaneous but staged displays of majesty, they conveyed to the public a sense of participation in royal life. The realities of everyday hardship and political oppression were momentarily forgotten in the glow of alliance with the monarchy. The Wettins, for their part, showed that they were willing to adapt to the demands of the ascending middle class.\textsuperscript{20} But in this way they also imposed their cultural habits and preferences on their subjects. Royal mourning was brought into the public domain as well as celebration. When King Friedrich August II passed away in 1854, the theater was closed for several weeks, denying the public its usual diversion and underlining the solemnity of the situation. When King Albert I died in 1902, the curtain was dropped mid-performance as a mark of respect, leaving the audience no other option but to go home in dejection.

![Figure 4. The royal box in Dresden.](image-url)
At the start of the new century, the Wettins’ attachment to the royal theater faded along with the family’s fortunes. Friedrich August III endured a scandalous divorce a year before his accession and subsequently avoided public appearances in the theater. Thus the tradition of art-loving sovereigns died out with the last king of Saxony. Friedrich August III lived for the countryside and outdoor pursuits, shooting 600 deer, 1,200 stags and 23,000 pheasants over the course of his life. This left little time for the arts. Richard Strauss joked that considering “his Catholic Majesty’s understanding of music,” the lighting technician or cashier could take the conductor’s place without the king noticing. Now the seats in the royal boxes often remained vacant. Although the era of active royal theater patronage was over, its role in stabilizing the monarchy at critical times—after the revolution and Saxony’s defeat by Prussia in 1866—should not be underestimated. The Wettins’ cultural policy was one of the few issues on which they were able to achieve a broad social and political consensus.

Emancipation from the Court

In order to secure the success of the new theater, in both artistic and educative terms, King Friedrich August II enlisted the help of notable academics and artists. Richard Wagner, Eduard Devrient, Karl Gutzkow, and many other distinguished and influential figures of the prerevolution era came to work in Dresden in the 1830s and 1840s, definitively raising levels of achievement at the royal theater and opera. Wagner was an innovative conductor whose interpretations of works by Mozart and Beethoven were groundbreaking. Gutzkow set new standards as the theater’s dramaturge and Devrient was one of the best-known actors of the day and an insightful theater reformer.

The Wettins soon found, however, that they could not keep these progressives under control. Wagner caused a stir with his essay “On the Royal Orchestra,” in which he called for limiting the amount of church services and intermission music to be performed by the orchestra. Devrient and Gutzkow also published proposals for theater reform, demanding that authority be removed from court officials. These were no doubt inspired by General Director von Lüttichau, who had held his position at the royal theater since 1824, thanks to his connections at court more than his expertise. Indeed, Lüttichau, a former hunting page and chamberlain of the king, had not applied for the position on account of his special interest in theater but because he could no longer endure “the physical strain that my current profession involves . . . and especially service on horseback.” While his bid to exchange the saddle for the director’s chair was successful, his subsequent path as director of the royal theater was strewn with conflicts.

With their open criticisms, the creative minds at the theater demonstrated unprecedented levels of confidence and self-awareness. They asserted
themselves as the experts with the necessary qualifications to run a theater with an educational mission. Wagner, Director of Music August Röckel, Gottfried Semper, and many other intellectuals and artists employed by the royal court actively participated in the revolution in 1848–49. In Dresden, the theater was the epicenter of the unrest.

Once the revolution had been suppressed, the royal theater remained closed for several weeks. It was rumored that King Friedrich August was so angered at the theater staff’s disloyalty that he was going to dismiss the entire ensemble. In the event, Röckel was imprisoned for many years, Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, the leading female German singer of the prerevolution period, was charged with high treason, and a warrant was issued for Wagner’s arrest. Lüttichau, however, returned to his post and proceeded to ban all politically suspect works from the repertoire, including the operas of Richard Wagner. The situation in many ways paralleled the concurrent state of affairs in Vienna, where all critical pieces were taken off the program and the Kaiser revived the tradition of Italian stagione.

In Dresden, as in Vienna, the postrevolution period proved to be Meyerbeer’s big moment. The Prophet was premiered in January 1850 and went on to be staged an incredible 87 times by 1862. It was an opera that suited the reactionary mood of the time, showing political activism in an extremely negative light. It told the story of the Anabaptist leader John of Leyden, an antihero who put personal convictions before the welfare of society and even that of his own followers. The opera contains much bloodshed, not in the course of social or religious strife but as the outcome of lies, betrayal, and jealousy. Insurgent peasants are portrayed as an easily manipulated mass, best restrained. In essence, the opera denounced the revolution and especially the revolutionaries. Contemporary critics praised the opera’s “historical accuracy” and were impressed by its mass scenes and opulent historical costumes and set. The antipolitical programming at the Dresden Opera lasted until the mid-1860s. Wagner’s works were mostly avoided or dropped after a couple of reprises. As in Vienna, this was a time of artistic stagnation and relatively few world premieres. The newspaper Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung put it in a nutshell when it reported a mood of “cozy contentment” at the royal theater.

Artistic momentum was resumed after Lüttichau’s retirement in 1862. Following the death of his immediate successor a few years later, no suitable replacement could be found within the royal court, and attentions turned to Baron (Freiherr) Julius von Platen-Hallermund (1816–1889). The former director of Hanover’s royal theater had been made suddenly redundant when Hanover was annexed by Prussia and the royal court dissolved in 1866. In view of his excellent credentials and experience, the Wettins appointed him General Director in Dresden, thus entrusting a professional with the task, rather than someone at court, for the first time.
Platen maintained his distance from the court, despite being elevated to the “senior courtly ranks” (*Ober-Hof-Chargen*) in 1873, only ever communicating with King Albert via the Ministers of the Royal House. The new king, proud victor of several battles in the Franco-German War, was much less interested in the theater than the two monarchs before him had been. While Friedrich August I had taken part in devising programs, casting roles and even producing the occasional performance, Albert, whose primary interest was the military, was content to be a passive audience member. The mood within the theater changed. Comparing the new general director to Lüttichau, one observer wrote: “He never looks down on one as a Baron, Chamberlain, or His Excellency, despite being distinguished by very dignified behavior.”

Under Platen, the theater staff enjoyed far greater artistic freedom. The young director of music, Ernst Schuch, in particular, seized the opportunity to improve the orchestra’s performance and increase the number of world premieres. A key figure in the history of the royal theater, he is considered in greater detail in the chapter below.

The main problem confronting Platen was the theater’s financial state. Its steady deterioration was to have considerable repercussions on artistic developments as well as his relationship with the court. The theater was run on the principle that when funds ran out, the king paid. In 1875, the royal treasury (*Hofzahlamt*) granted a subsidy of nearly 450,000 marks, plus costs for the orchestra—almost as much as the proceeds from ticket sales. As expenditure was not controlled by a regular budget—unlike at the civic theaters of Prague or Leipzig—the theater continued to make a loss. In 1879, the royal treasury was obliged to supply 150,000 marks to prevent the theater from going bankrupt. And in November that same year, the lavish sets for operas including Goldmark’s *The Queen of Sheba* (*Die Königin von Saba*) left the theater a further 80,000 marks in debt. The deficit rose to such dimensions after Platen’s death in 1889 that remittances were paid a year late. Even the wealthy Dresden court could no longer afford the royal theater in these circumstances. To make matters worse, its constant overexpenditure was causing the standard of artistry to fall. Since the theater could no longer pay soloists competitive fees, they often sought work in Berlin or Vienna instead. The low morale of poorly paid chorus members and junior musicians and the high ensemble turnover did nothing to improve the situation.

When thirty-year-old Count Nikolaus Seebach, son of the Saxon ambassador in Paris, was appointed new General Director of the royal theater and orchestra in 1894, King Albert’s main hope was that he would reorder the theater’s finances. At his installation, the Royal Minister reminded Seebach that “the contribution His Majesty is compelled to pay for the maintenance of His orchestra and theater must be kept within strict limits and only drawn upon if absolutely necessary.” Initially, King Albert personally supervised the theater’s accounts. Remaining firm on the issue, he pledged a regular subsidy of 480,000 marks,
raised to 560,000 marks from 1903, barring any further payments. Seebach rose to the challenge, not overstepping his budget and even making a profit some years. Yet the secret of Seebach’s success was not rigid economizing—he explicitly warned the king against this—but increasing the number of performances at the Semper Opera. Spoken drama was transferred to a separate venue in the central Neustadt district of Dresden. Ticket sales now amounted to 50 percent and more of the total budget—a level which today’s central European state theaters can only dream of.

Finally, Seebach put an end to the confusion of bonuses, special fees, and individual salary increases. The king was henceforth content to withdraw to a purely figurehead role, leaving Seebach and Schuch with more artistic latitude, which they took full advantage of in the new century.

In the name of economy, Seebach even restricted the royal family’s privileges. In 1907 he ruled that the king could only give away tickets if he made up the loss, and the number of complimentary seats reserved for the court was significantly reduced. An invoice from that year charging King Friedrich August the sum of 5,736 marks for revenue shortfall due to a charity performance shows how stringently Seebach pursued his economic policy. If the king wanted to invite people to the royal theater, he had to pay like any other customer. In short, the royal family was now a paying guest in its own theater. In March 1908, Seebach finally gained legal autonomy from the king. Friedrich August invested him with the authority to “represent Me in all matters concerning the general direction of My orchestra and My theater, especially to conclude or annul contracts in My name, and to represent Myself in and out of court within his sphere of activity.”

A fundamental change had occurred in Dresden. Control of the royal theater had begun to elude the court with Platen’s appointment as director shortly before the accession of Albert I. Professional and opinionated dramaturges, conductors, and theater directors had then begun to pursue their ideas with confidence—even more so than before the 1848 revolution—and displaced the ruling dynasty and its court officials.

The emancipation of the royal theater under Seebach coincided with its greatest artistic heyday since the days of Weber and Wagner. Opera fans from all over the German Empire and neighboring Austria came to Dresden to hear stars like Therese Malten, Marie Wittich, and Karel Burian sing and to witness the newly ennobled conductor Ernst von Schuch in action. The ensemble stabilized, providing Schuch with familiar singers on whom he could rely for his many new productions. The most spectacular successes in the new century were the world premieres of four operas by Richard Strauss, which might have sunk in a storm of controversy had it not been for Seebach’s clever diplomacy. "Salome" in particular scandalized the public at its premiere, but the devoutly Catholic royal family did not intervene either here or at the premiere of "Elektra" in 1909. The only objections from above were raised against "Der Rosenkavalier (The Knight of
the Rose), and these came not from the Wettins but from Seebach himself. Count Seebach, scion of an ancient Saxon line, protested against the obvious caricature of the nobility embodied by the character Ochs von Lerchenau. Strauss, in turn, complained about Seebach’s “moralizing tone” in a letter to Schuch and refused to cut out the offending lines in the first act.\(^{38}\)

At first glance, the new economic framework, greater autonomy, and changes in the repertoire established since the opening of the second Semper Theater may appear to signify a middle-class takeover of the royal theater. Indeed, Seebach’s short inauguration speech, stating that he intended to serve the royal theater “with tireless effort, selfless fulfillment of my duties and consistent subordination of any personal interests,”\(^{39}\) perfectly encapsulated the middle-class work ethic. The Ochs von Lerchenau incident, however, is a reminder of the importance of the aristocracy.\(^{40}\) Schuch and the star soloists at the royal theater aspired to an aristocratic way of life, complete with titles.\(^{41}\) Conversely, even at the turn of the century, members of the chorus and many orchestra musicians lived on such meager salaries that financially they fell below middle-class norms.

In view of this, the changes at the royal theater between 1815 and 1914 should not be attributed simply to a process of *embourgeoisement* (or *Verbürgerlichung*) but more accurately described as a gradual emancipation from royal influence. The royal theater’s withdrawal from the court took place in several stages. In the run-up to the revolution of 1848, a new generation of artists sought freedom for art. Wagner, Devrient, and Gutzkow rebelled against Lüttichau—to them, the embodiment of royal control—and tried to gain independence for the royal theater and orchestra. Their endeavors were interrupted by the suppression of the revolution but resumed from the 1860s as the theater fell into the hands of an increasing number of professional agents. Von Platen’s appointment as General Director of the royal orchestra and theater saw professional qualification prioritized for the first time. In a striking parallel, qualified experts were now also appointed to the highest positions at the royal opera in Vienna, as only they could fulfill its educational mission and ensure its success on an international level.\(^{42}\) In the years that followed, kings and the court became less involved in the theater until almost complete autonomy was granted to the royal theater and orchestra under Count von Seebach. This development occurred by a process of modern differentiation,\(^{43}\) prompted by the desire for artistic freedom and propelled by the dynamism of a professional theater on a quest to educate.

**Notes**

1. The personal files of Dresden theater directors were archived under this heading up until the nineteenth century. See the section *Directeur des Plaisirs re. Anno 1763* (SHAD, loc. 15132).
2. On Friedrich August’s singing talents see also Brescius, *Die königliche*, 10; Börner-Sandrini, *Erinnerungen*, 12.


6. Other German *Mittelstaaten* like Bavaria and Baden also pursued a similar policy of investing heavily in the arts as a substitute for other political fields of activity, especially after the founding of the empire. See Langewiesche, *Nation*, 73–74.

7. On Dresden’s significance as a city of culture, see Jäckel, *Aspekte*, 422.

8. Poles could count on considerably more support in Saxony than in Prussia. This is evident in newspaper reports on the Polish revolt in the Grand Duchy of Posen. See “Polens Verdächigung.” in *Dresdner Journal und Anzeiger*, published from 1851 under the shorter title *Dresdner Journal*, April 16, 1848, 1–2.


11. On the architecture of various royal theaters, see Lange, *Vom Tribunal*.


13. On this debate see the files of the *Landtag* from the years 1839–40, *Beilagen zu den Protocollen der zweiten Kammer*, Dresden, 109–18; Files of the *Landtag*, 1839, *Dritte Abtheilung, die Protokolle der Ilten Kammer enthaltend*, vol. 1, Dresden, 270–76. The constitutional crisis and parliamentary debates are also discussed in Mütterlein, *Gottfried Semper*, 78.


16. See the files on the *Landtag* from the years 1873–74, *Berichte der zweiten Kammer*, vol. 2, 97–106. See also the list of subsidy payments 1877–1895 in SHAD, MdKH, loc. 41, no. 25, 40; loc. 43, no. 19, 60; and loc. 44, no. 25, 63. On the amount of subsidies from the civil list, see Blaschke, *Hof und Hofgesellschaft*, 204.

17. On Saxon disapproval of Prussia, see Weichlein, *Sachsen zwischen Landesbewußtsein*. On Saxon domestic policy see also Retallack, *Sachsen in Deutschland*.

18. On Johann’s activities in this period, see Kretzschmar, *König Johann*, 25.

19. On this performance, see *Tagebuch 1850*, 27


21. On Friedrich August III, see Fellmann, *Sachsens letzter*; the citation here is from 23.

22. The emergence of a “music theater field” can be made out here, comprising the personnel of the royal theater and other royal cultural institutions. On the formation of a “literary field” in Paris, see Bourdieu, *The Field*, 145–214.


24. His application can be found in SHAD, loc. 15132, 103–104.


26. Meyerbeer was also tremendously popular at the Vienna Royal Opera. *The Prophet* was performed 33 times in 1850 and 174 times by 1869. See Hanslick, *Musik*, 310; Jahn, *Metamorphosen*, 180.

27. On the context of the creation of The Prophet, its political content and reception, see Fulcher, *French Grand Opera*, 146–63; Gerhard, *Die Verstädterung*, 222–27. On the
opera’s positive contemporary reception see *Dresdner Journal und Anzeiger*, Feb. 1, 1850, 6. In 1850 alone, operas by Meyerbeer were performed on 37 evenings. See Prölls, *Geschichte des Hoftheaters*, 602. Meyerbeer’s opera *Nordstern* followed in 1855 and *Dinorah* in 1860.


29. See *Das Dresdner Hoftheater 1888*, 7.

30. See SHAD, MdHK, loc. 41, no. 13, 1–2.

31. A report on his installation in office can be found in “Kunst und Wissenschaft,” *Dresdner Journal*, March 7, 1894, 1.

32. See SHAD, MdHK, loc. 44, no. 25, 156–57.

33. See SHAD, MdHK, loc. 44, no. 32, 127.

34. An overview of the budget from 1906 can be found in SHAD, MdHK, loc. 44, no. 40, 111. Annual budgets are listed in ibid., no. 38, 129–37; no. 45, 128–41; no. 46, 115–28.

35. See SHAD, MdHK, loc. 41, no. 16, 93 & 113.

36. See his correspondence with the ministry in SHAD, MdHK, loc. 44, no. 38, 138.

37. Authorization of March 20, 1908 in SHAD, MdHK, loc. 44, no. 6a, 70.


40. This theory is condensed in Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert*, 121–22.

41. On Schuch’s taste for honors and titles, see SHAD, MfV, no. 14430, 96; Knaus, *Richard Strauss*, 98.


43. On the development of autonomous systems in society, see Luhmann, *Differentiation of Society*. 