

PRESS INFORMATION

Friedrichstadt-Palast Berlin: Germany's largest entertainment theatre honours its Jewish roots on 100th anniversary

Berlin, 28 November 2019



The Friedrichstadt-Palast Berlin acknowledges its "Jewish roots since 1919" | Photo: Pedro Becerra

The eventful stage history of today's Friedrichstadt-Palast Berlin began one hundred years ago. On 29 November 1919, the Jewish theatre visionary Max Reinhardt opened the *Großes Schauspielhaus* – the predecessor to the Palast. Renamed the *Theater des Volkes* (Theatre of the People) during the Third Reich, the theatre was controlled directly by Joseph Goebbels' Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Operations resumed at the theatre located in the Soviet sector of Berlin after the war as early as summer 1945 and it was accorded its present-day name of the Friedrichstadt-Palast in 1947. Up until 1990, the Palast was the largest entertainment theatre in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – and today also in reunified Germany. In light of the resurgence of anti-Semitism and as a sign of solidarity for Jewish life in Germany, the Palast is proudly acknowledging its Jewish heritage during the celebrations with a flag bearing the Star of David.

Since the start of the 2019/20 anniversary season, the Palast has been reviewing the theatre's eventful history with a variety of activities. The most visited theatre in the German

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FriedrichstadtPalast Berlin

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Intendant/Geschäftsführer:
Dr. Berndt Schmidt

Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrates:
Dr. Klaus Lederer
Senator für Kultur und Europa



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capital has now hoisted a flag outside its main entrance bearing a Star of David and the inscription "Jewish roots since 1919" in German and English.

"Our founders of 1919 later suffered under the Nazis. Max Reinhardt as a Jew, Erik Charell as a Jew and homosexual, and Hans Poelzig as an expressionist architect. While Reinhardt and Charell went into exile, Poelzig was banned from pursuing his profession," tells Dr. Berndt Schmidt, General Director of the Palast. "It's part of our theatre's DNA and an obligation for the present. Especially in the wake of the attack on the synagogue in Halle and the assaults on rabbis and members of the Jewish community all across Germany."

Given its eventful history, the Palast today consciously stands for freedom, diversity and democracy.

Since 2014, the theatre has no longer invited the ambassadors of countries whose laws oppress homosexuals to its premieres. In 2017, Schmidt moreover publicly distanced himself from the racist and nationalist world views of the Alternative für Germany (AfD), a political party with far-right extremist elements that is also represented in the German Bundestag. A dispute erupted in the media and among theatremakers as to whether a state-owned theatre is allowed to make such public statements. Dr. Berndt Schmidt's perspective: "When we see freedom and artistic freedom in jeopardy, German theatres are not only allowed to – they even must. What else should the lessons from German history be?" At the height of the controversy on 7 October 2017, the entire theatre with almost 2,000 guests had to be evacuated for a short time due to an anonymous bomb threat.

Background information:

About the Palast's founders: Max Reinhardt was the most visionary impresario and theatre owner of his time. Hans Poelzig was an influential architect. Erik Charell conceived the revue shows of the 'Golden Twenties' in Berlin, discovered Marlene Dietrich and the Comedian Harmonists, and created the operetta 'Im Weißen Rössl' (The White Horse Inn) that was a global hit.

From 1933, the National Socialists barred all three from working in Germany. Their Jewish ancestry led Reinhardt and Charell to go into exile; as a homosexual and a Jew, Charell was particularly at risk. Poelzig was increasingly subject to reprisals due to his expressionist ("degenerate") architecture.

In 1980, the old Palast had to be closed and demolished due to structural damage to the building. On 27 April 1984, the new Palast opened as the last major construction of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). It still impresses today with the world's biggest theatre stage. The new Friedrichstadt-Palast seats 1,900 guests, making it the largest

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theatre in Berlin. With 700,000 guests every year, it is the most visited entertainment theatre in Germany.

For more information on the theatre's history, see: www.palast.berlin/history
Photos for download: www.palast.berlin/aktuelles

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