

Entertainment on the Ruins of Berlin

The Spadoni Agency and the *Palast Varieté*, 1945–1947

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Abstract. The study introduces the brief history of *Palast – Das Variété der 3000* (today *Friedrichstadt-Palast*) in Berlin. Founded by Marion Spadoni, the daughter of the renowned Berliner impresario Paul Spadoni, it opened in August 1945 and produced new shows every month continuing the city's *Großvariété* tradition. Her shows had to meet the expectations of the audience as well as those of the Soviet authorities while bounded by the lack of materials, infrastructure, and staff. Being a private enterprise in the Soviet Occupation Zone, two years later she was accused of collaboration, and her business was expropriated. As the venue—despite its significance—is still often overlooked by theater historians, a foundational research is necessary comparing and synthesizing various primary sources. The Spadoni Agency's documentation was destroyed in 1944, however, a fragment still exists in the *Stadtmuseum Berlin* and the *Landesarchiv Berlin*; as well as the fonds of the *Magistrat der Stadt Berlin*, Marion Spadoni's unpublished memoirs in different versions, and the reviews and press articles related to the house. The current management of the *Palast* attempts to establish a new narrative of the venue's origin, claiming Max Reinhardt and Erik Charell as its founding fathers. The present study shows that this narrative is far from the reality: Spadoni's establishment was not even rhetorically related to the former defining creative talents residing in the house, but to the heritage of the three *Großvariétés* destroyed during the war: the *Plaza*, the *Scala* and the *Wintergarten*.

Keywords: variété, revue, entertainment, *Friedrichstadt-Palast*, post-war, theater, Berlin

Hardly three months after the capitulation of Berlin, a new entertainment venue opened in the destroyed city: the *Palast Variété* (1945–1947; today: *Friedrichstadt-Palast*). Its creators, the Spadoni family, managed to set up and operate a theater whose cultural relevance at the time seems to have been greater than indicated by the cultural and theater literature of the post-war era.¹ The only study about this enterprise is a short essay by Angelika Ret, who during her employment in the

1 E.g. Schivelbusch, *Vor dem Vorhang* does not mention it at all; current works only mention the *Palast* at best, e.g. Preuß, *Theater im ost-wespolitischen Umwelt*, 59.

Stadtmuseum Berlin had a chance to work with primary sources; but it lacks an analytical aspect, the confrontation and synthesis with other source types and a cultural contextualization.² The *Friedrichstadt-Palast*'s own literature is biased regarding the period: writers did not have access to the most important sources and had to serve the former GDR's cultural narratives. More recent works published in the past thirty years have adapted these distorted conclusions.³ The current management of the venue dates the venue's origin from the 1920s: in 2015, a sculpture was erected in front of the house named "The memorial to the founding fathers of the *Friedrichstadt-Palast*"⁴ commemorating Max Reinhardt,⁵ Erik Charell,⁶ and Hans Poelzig.⁷ Following this logic, in 2019 the management launched an extensive campaign promoting the "100 years' stage jubilee" of the house. This study is fundamental in confronting the current narrative and the role of the claimed forefathers with the venue's actual sources. In parallel, it sheds some light on the so far mostly overlooked cultural phenomenon of variety entertainment and its significance in Berlin after 1945.⁸

Sources

The history of the Spadoni Agency began in 1918. Paul Spadoni (1870–1952) was a renowned Berlin-born strongman juggler (*Kraftjongleur*) at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁹ After ending his active performing career due to a war injury, he opened his office in downtown Berlin. By that time, directors and managers were

2 Ret, *Variété und Wärmehalle*.

3 Even a recent PhD dissertation is blurring the *Palast-Variété* with the *Friedrichstadt-Palast*. See Machals, "Extravaganza."

4 *Das Denkzeichen für die Gründungsväter des Friedrichstadt-Palastes, Friedrichstraße 107, Berlin-Mitte*

5 Max Reinhardt (1873–1943): director, theater entrepreneur. One of the most prominent German directors in the twentieth century. In 1920, he established the Salzburg Festival with Hofmannstahl's *Everyman (Jedermann)*. Head of *Großes Schauspielhaus* from 1919 to 1924.

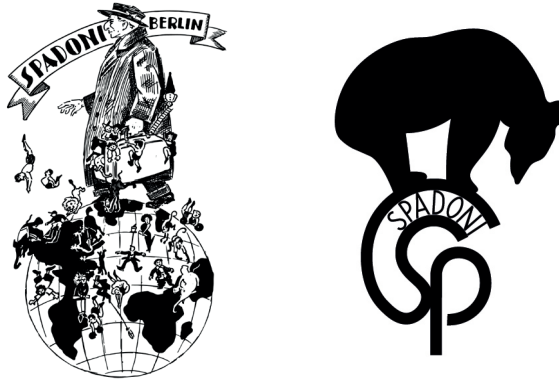
6 Erik Charell (1894–1974): assistant of Max Reinhardt, who made a career in staging revues and operettas in the 1920s. He took over the artistic direction of the *Großes Schauspielhaus* in 1924. Being Jewish and homosexual, he left Germany in 1932.

7 Hans Poelzig (1869–1936): architect, chairman of the German Association of Craftsmen (*Deutscher Werkbund*). During 1918–1919 he renovated the *Großes Schauspielhaus*.

8 The history of entertainment business requires compiling very small fragments of information—each of them will be referenced. I am currently unable to publish pictures from public collections due to financial and copyright issues; nevertheless, I will reference them in footnotes. English translations are by the author, unless indicated otherwise.

9 His born name was Krause; he chose Spadoni as a stage name.

unable to keep track of the latest (and best) acts on the continent, thus, the agents' role was becoming more and more prominent in the business.¹⁰ Agents were professionals who travelled, discovered, and sometimes put together acts; they knew their whereabouts and contacts, tracking and keeping records of their past and upcoming engagements.¹¹ Spadoni very soon became a renowned agent; when the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo opened diplomatic relations between the German Republic and Soviet Russia, Anatoly Lunacharsky invited him to launch the new state circuses in Moscow.¹²



Figures 1–2 Paul Spadoni's advertisement from the 1920s

Spadoni logo on the *Palast*—playbills from 1945. Digital reconstructions by the author.

The agency was always keen on featuring its home city in its brand.¹³ Paul Spadoni's office between 1936 and 1944 at the *Neustädtische Kirchstraße* was a particularly symbolic location: its window was overlooking the *Wintergarten*,¹⁴ one of the city's famous *Großvarietés*. These were variety venues with 2,500–3,000 seats in their auditorium and presenting a new show each month. In the 1930s, Berlin had

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- 10 “The agent is a necessary evil [...] The agent is the counsel for both the artist and the director, in other words for two parties who are not always in agreement.” Jaerell, Joh. “Agenten/Agents/Agents.” *Das Organ der Varieté – Welt*, 1 December 1935, no. 16, 2–6.
- 11 See the large filing office and archives: *Paul Spadoni – The world's theatrical exchange* SMB Paul Spadoni.
- 12 The opening program of the First State Circus of Moscow featured Paul Spadoni as its “house agency” (*Hausagentur*). *Moskau Erster Staatszirkus, Das Programm* 28 October 1923, no. 1125, 13. cf. MS1 232–235.
- 13 In his advertisement from the 1920s, Paul Spadoni was walking through the whole globe with a suitcase but kept Berlin in the title; likewise, his daughter, Marion Spadoni named her enterprise Berlin Touring Company (*Berliner Gastspielunternehmen*).
- 14 Beim Agenten, *Die Deutsche Artistik* 22 March 1936, no. 12, 31. When the *Wintergarten* was destroyed on 21 June 1944, so was Spadoni's office and his documentation. A single document survived referring to the agency's earnings in 1928. LAB A Rep. 342 – 02 Nr. 46620 Spadoni Künstleragentur—Fragebogen Amtsgericht B—Mitte 27 February 1928.

three such theaters: the *Wintergarten* (1887–1944), the *Scala* (1920–1944) and the *Plaza* (1929–1944). These were the most prestigious venues for artists: performing there for a month meant that their act was first class;¹⁵ and the only way to appear in the show was being recommended by a prominent agent, such as Spadoni. These mass entertainment theaters reached a representative status during the *NS-Zeit*; to the point that the *Plaza* and the *Scala* were taken over by the *Kraft durch Freude* organization,¹⁶ and occasionally even Adolf Hitler attended their shows. Their significance increased during the war—serving as a distraction and keeping the illusion of normality.¹⁷ All three were destroyed in the bombing. In March 1944, the entire documentation of the Reich Theater Chamber’s department for artistry (*Reichstheaterkammer Fachschaft Artistik*, RTK FA) was also lost in a fire.

Paul Spadoni was planning to publish a biographical book in 1947, but only excerpts were released in a professional journal;¹⁸ its complete manuscript is probably lost. Only a short biography was written thirty years after his death.¹⁹ His second daughter, Marion Spadoni (Marinka Krause, 1905–1998) was also an artist; she started her career as an equestrienne (*Kunstreiterin*), then became a successful magician.²⁰ Her bequest is deposited in the *Stadtmuseum Berlin*. In the spring of 1994, she wrote her memoirs in two books.²¹ The first one introduces her family history, and the second covers her management of the *Palast-Variété* between 1945 and 1947. Both are unpublished manuscripts; she produced different versions and edits while searching for a publisher. Three of the copies are in the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* today (with most of the original documents and press cutouts);²² one is deposited in

15 Some of the former performers could still ring a bell for circus enthusiasts: the clown Grock, the Rivels group comic acrobats (allegedly their act was put together in the *Scala*), or the 3 Codonas aerial acrobats whose act redefined their genre.

16 “Strength through Joy” It was a part of the national labor organization promoting ideology and organizing leisure and tourism. After 1939, its profile changed to front and military entertainment.

17 “The *Wintergarten* is one of the enterprises that must be maintained at all costs.” Antrag auf UK—Stellung durch Austausch für Heinrich Speziali gegen Franz Haydowski, 27 April 1943 BARCH R55/10360.

18 Linden, Hermann. “Paul Spadoni – Ein Artistenleben.” *Variété* October 1947, no. 10, 6.

19 Groth, *Die starken Männer*, 95–99.

20 A magician colleague remembered her in a professional journal. Maldino, Fred. Marion Spadoni. In *Magicol* May 1999, no. 131, 18–20. In German: Erinnerung an Marion Spadoni. *Magie* July–August 1998, 372–74. Another short portrait is Cartens, Höver and von Ow, *Frauen an der Spree*, 82–83.

21 Titled “*Circus Dynastie Renz Schumann – Paul Spadoni vom Weltstar zur Weltumspannenden Agentur*” and “*Palast Gross – Varietee im Haus am Circus 1. Kaleidoskop*”.

22 The former management had plans to publish them in 1996. To my knowledge, these are to be deposited in the *Stadtmuseum*.

the *Stadtmuseum*,²³ and another copy is in the possession of Dr. Bernhard Römhild, her former doctor. The latter is identical with the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* copy.²⁴ As this is the longest version of the manuscript, it will serve as the basis of my references.²⁵

The manuscript gives a unique insight into the Spadoni theater management in the ruined city. However, she hardly mentions her and her family's activity during Nazi rule.²⁶ She writes in a very diplomatic way about the emigration of Erik Charell or about the “non-Aryan” Jules Marx, the former manager of the *Scala*; while she was clearly close to them and must have known about the political pressure on them. (She also decided not to disclose any information about her private relationships.) Even though the Spadonis were neither Nazis, nor members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), after 1933 they managed to keep their position. After introducing the racial laws, they were likely to have less competition in their business;²⁷ although the pool of employable artists was reduced as well. Paul Spadoni remained close to the RTK FA, which sent a big bouquet of flowers for the jubilee of his agency,²⁸ asked him to be one of the organizers of the 1939 *Variétéball*,²⁹ and commemorated his birthday in their official journal.³⁰ Marion Spadoni had been touring Europe with her artist company since 1928; appearing in the *Großvarietés* of Berlin from time to time.³¹ During the war, she led several *Wehrmacht-Tournees* entertaining German soldiers behind the Eastern Front.³² All her acts were booked by her father. She attempted to obtain a *Großvarieté*—license during the *NS-Zeit* but not being a party member, her request was denied.³³ In 1945, after twenty years of touring and performing, she was almost forty years old and she must have thought that it was time to finish her active performing career and make a transition to management.

23 Until recently, this version has been restricted for research.

24 MS “Arzt Komplett 1–2.”

25 I am using the page count of the folder, because due to the numerous editing versions, sometimes three different page numbers are marked.

26 Cf. with the evaluation of the memoirs of circus director Paula Busch, Eifert, *Unternehmerinnen im Nationalsozialismus*, 117–41.

27 In addition, by the end of 1935, managers were not allowed to contract foreign performers unless they were represented by a German agent. Rundschau/Revue/Review – Berlin, *Das Organ der Variété – Welt* 27 October 1935, no. 11, 11.

28 Zwanzig Jahre Weltagentur Spadoni, *Die Deutsche Artistik* 7 August 1938, no. 32, 7.

29 Der Variétéball 1939, *Die Deutsche Artistik* 29 January 1939, no. 5, 2.

30 Paul Spadoni – 70 Jahre, *Artisten – Welt* 9 October 1940, no. 19, 10.

31 *Scala*: August 1933; *Plaza*: May 1938, May 1939.

32 See *Artisten – Welt* December 1940 – July 1943.

33 Marion Spadoni an den Henschel – Verlag GmbH, 31 May 1994 MS “Buch 3” One of her touring companies at the Eastern Front was also named *Frontbühne I – Großvarieté*. See *Artisten – Welt* 9 September 1941, no. 17, 82.

A fragment of both Spadoni's bequests can be found in the *Stadtmuseum Berlin documenta artistica*—alongside with the posters and playbills not just regarding the *Palast* but also the three preceding *Großvarietés*.³⁴ Local and federal archives keep records and documents of the era: based on the fonds of the local government, we can reveal more about the administrative and official side of the enterprise. The fonds of the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* have recently become available for research: they have few documents from the period but include the non-commercial photo albums³⁵ of the 1947 shows. Reviews, articles (and after 1947, the professional press such as *Das Programm*) will also contribute to the analysis—providing information and reflecting on certain events. Only after conflicting and synthesizing different kinds of sources can we attempt to place the theater's traditions in Berlin's cultural life and find the reasons behind its existence and fall.



Figure 3 Marion Spadoni in the playbill of the *Palast*, April 1947. From the author's collection.

Licensing and opening the *Palast*

After the capitulation in May 1945, Berlin had about half of its former population and 600,000 buildings were destroyed.³⁶ The Soviet occupation meant a *tabula rasa* in cultural life: performing licenses had to be issued anew by the cultural department of the Soviet *Kommandantura* (*Kulturabteilung der Zentralkommandantur*).³⁷ On 16 May 1945, the new municipal authority, the *Magistrat der Stadt Berlin*, was established; followed by the Chamber of Artists (*Kammer der Kunstschaffenden*) on 6 June 1945, by the order of the Soviet *Kommandantura*. After 25 July 1945, turning to the Cultural Office of the *Magistrat* (*Amt für Volksbildung*) was the first step of applying for performing licenses; they forwarded those eligible to the *Kommandantura*,

34 Luckily, the museum acquired the bequest of the artist and circus memorabilia collector Julius Markschiess-van Trix.

35 Before video tapes, photo albums were compiled to “record” a particular show and, just like recordings, these were not published.

36 Krenn, *Chronik*, 9.

37 Before 1933, performing licenses were issued by the city's Police Commissioner (*Polizeipräsident*). After 1933, licensing was taken over by the Goebbels – led Propaganda Ministry, which delegated the task to the RTK FA.

where the decision was made.³⁸ The license obtained only permitted the activity of the performer: for the performance itself, a further license was necessary from the *Kommandantura's* censorship office. Prior to the show, this second license had to be submitted to the *Magistrat* of the district where the performance was to take place, with the complete text of the show attached.

The first session of the *Magistrat* deemed the *Titania-Palast* cinema a suitable theater for variety shows.³⁹ At the same time, the Spadonis received the approval of the Soviet *Kommandantura* to open a new variety venue in the former *Großes Schauspielhaus*. The earliest surviving document of this agreement was issued on 11 June: a power of attorney granted to father and daughter, directing all military and civilian offices to help them establish a venue.⁴⁰ In her memoirs, she writes:

“With the procurement of the Russian *Kommandantura*, [I] managed to get the building material (because the German offices at the moment do not have any available) and now the remaining repair work is already taking place. It was the *Kommandantura's* condition of delivering the materials that the venue should be opened as a *Großvarieté*. [...] until today by the commission of the Cultural Office I had non-negligible expenses for sets and costumes, because the opening should happen soon. I am in any case eager to open the venue in a usable condition in two or three weeks and spare no work and expense to achieve this goal.”⁴¹

The day of the opening was determined by the “authorities”—as Marion Spadoni referred to the Soviet *Kommandantura*.⁴² The opening was a priority for the Soviets, but the originally planned date (within a month) proved unrealistic. The building authority (*Baupolizei*) gave consent for the house to be opened two months later,

38 Schriftwechsel des Magistrats mit der Alliierten Kommandantur 20 July 1945, LAB C Rep. 120 Nr. 14. 13. cf. Erteilung von Lizenzen für Veranstaltungen auf dem Gebiet der Musik, des Theaters und der Artistik issued by Major Mossjakoff, 17 October 1946 LAB C Rep. 120 Nr. 1226. The orders were published in *Das Programm*, 12 Januar 1947, 4.

39 Konstituierende Sitzung des Präsidial – Ausschusses der Kammer der Kunstschaffenden Berlin, 6 June 1945 LAB C Rep. 120 Nr. 83. 15. A month later, the Magistrate took over several other theaters of the city. See The decision of taking the theaters into municipal control, 17 July 1945. In *Berlin – Quellen*, 498.

40 Vollmacht issued by Bezirksamt Mitte, Amt für Volksbildung, 11 Juni 1945 LAB C Rep. 031-01-02 Nr. 1215a. Copies of this document can also be found in the memoirs of Marion Spadoni. This refers to a contract signed by the Spadonis. In her application dated in July, she mentions she has been working on the house already for a month.

41 Antrag von Marion Spadoni auf Erteilung der Spielerlaubnis für des Grossvarietés „Kolosseum“, 1 July 1945 LAB C Rep. 031-01-02 Nr. 1215a She asked the Dresdner Bank to release 50,000 RM from her account covering the costs.

42 Marion Spadoni's letter to the Dresdner Bank, 9 July 1945 SMB Fotoarchiv Marion Spadoni.

following the necessary security and renovation work.⁴³ In another letter, Spadoni claimed that the *Magistrat* did not issue her papers in time, so she had to trust the power of attorney issued to her earlier.⁴⁴ She received a certificate of approval from the city after the opening, which was valid until the end of 1945, on the following conditions: securing 30,000 *Reichsmark* (RM) as a deposit; regular payment of workers and reporting in advance if they planned to raise ticket prices. In case she should lose the right of disposal over the theater, or if circumstances should arise that would preclude granting the license, it could be immediately cancelled.⁴⁵

It is hardly possible to trace back the informal discussions between the Spadonis and the *Kommandantura* about opening a *Großvarieté* among the ruins. As a prominent professional, Paul Spadoni was present in the first cultural meetings of the new city assembly, and her daughter had ambitions of managing a *Großvarieté*. Marion Spadoni claimed that she obtained the license because of her father's activity in the first Soviet circuses, which the Soviets "did not forget";⁴⁶ but this is unlikely. It was a priority for the Soviet military administration to relaunch the city's cultural life, and Paul Spadoni's extensive professional network seemed to be a guarantee that he could organize regular performances on short notice.⁴⁷ The reason behind prioritizing variety in particular might have been because its productions did not require any language skills, and the genres of the elite culture could hardly have entertained a foreign army.⁴⁸

The building: the *Großes Schauspielhaus*

Spadoni was committed to opening her venue in a particular building: in the former *Großes Schauspielhaus* in the Soviet Occupation Zone. In the 1920s, it was the home of Erik Charell's and Max Reinhardt's productions. Prior to that, Albert Schumann's circus had performed there between 1899 and 1918. Schumann was Marion Spadoni's great uncle, and as a child she spent much time at the circus.

43 An das Bau – Amt Berlin – Mitte, 21 July 1945 MS "Original – Das erste Jahr Palast."

44 Kammer der Kunstschaffenden an Marion Spadoni, 5 August 1945 MS "Originale."

45 Zulassungsurkunde von Magistrat der Stadt Berlin, 31 August 1945 SMB Fotoarchiv Marion Spadoni cf. Lizenz Nr. 2 von Major Mossjakoff 8 July 1946 MS "Zum vorzeigen" The original Soviet license from 1945 might have been lost. According to the memoir, Lizenz Nr. 1. was saved for the *Staatsoper*, MS2, 10. The *Staatsoper* (*Staatskapelle*) indeed gave its opening concert on 23 August, eight days after the *Palast* opened; however, several theaters had opened earlier, including the *Städtische Oper* on 15 June.

46 MS "Original – Das erste Jahr Palast," 22.

47 When the war was over, artists came to his house looking for work. MS2, 15.

48 As Spadoni put it: "Heavy plays and sophisticated music were not for soldiers, and certainly not for rubble women." MS2, 14. She was considering whether to display the seating plan and the price list in Russian as well. MS2, 141.

Aside from their emotional connection, in 1945 this was the only suitable building that could host a *Großvarieté*. The location (*Am Zirkus 1*) was perfect: just like its predecessors, it was within walking distance of a railway station in the city center (*Bahnhof Friedrichstraße*, not very far from the ruins of the *Wintergarten*) where several suburban and other transport lines met. Nevertheless, in the first couple of months, public transport services were extremely limited.

The theater was hit by thirty-six bombs.⁴⁹ Max Reinhardt's famous revolving stage was completely destroyed and the roof was open to the sky; making the house playable again required a great effort.⁵⁰ As a temporary solution, "the iron curtain was straightened, [and] an iron frame was erected on it to hold the lights and later the curtain."⁵¹ To make it stand still, it was walled up from the back. This meant only a depth of one meter was left of the original stage, which had to be extended towards the auditorium. The supplement made the final stage six meters deep and eighteen meters wide; still it was a rather wide podium. The complete internal communication system (lights, loudspeakers, telephones, etc.) was missing: children helped during the shows, running back and forth.⁵² The infrastructure determined the nature of productions.

"It was very important that every act should be in the right place [...] because there was no backstage, which is necessary for a smooth run. [...] On a stage which is only six meters deep, every centimeter was needed."⁵³

"There were no curtains. Backdrops, as well as any scenery, were "conspicuous for their absence". The iron stage curtain, now our backdrop, was covered with fabric, then painted with blue paint, the only color we could find. Stars were cut out and were shining on it as decoration. [...] Only the absolutely necessary lights were installed."⁵⁴

They were unable to complete the roof before the opening, and the theater was still a construction site.⁵⁵ Progress was delayed by the lack of materials and bureau-

49 See the photos LAB F Rep. 290-06-06; 219–21 Friedrichstadtpalast Mitte, 1945.

50 "The former dressing rooms were covered in meters of sawdust, saturated with blood and water, and teeming with worms." MS2, 100.

51 Spiel vor dem eisernen Vorhang, *Der Abend* 14 April 1947 cf. Die Rückseite, *Revue* 17 April 1947 cf. with a drawing of the backstage: Im Nervenzentrum des Palast. (Cutout from an unidentified paper) SMB Bequest of Marion Spadoni.

52 MS2, 27. Light signaling was the key communication method in large houses during the shows.

53 MS2, 48.

54 MS2, 26.

55 "Building and repair work were constant during the two years when I was in the house." MS2, 171. Raining made parts of the auditorium wet on the opening night; still, the audience stayed for the show with umbrellas. MS2, 30.

cracy; the official curfew limited the working hours.⁵⁶ Due to the lack of paper, the management could not print posters. Distributing flyers was generally banned, so employees were asked to “forget” the advertisements in the city.⁵⁷ On the opening night, the house had about 130 employees; up to that point, all the staff and even the construction companies had been working on trust.⁵⁸ The *Palast* was not financially supported by any authority, its income came from ticket sales and from the so-called ‘income on the side’ (*Nebeneinnahme*; the buffet, playbill, toilets, etc.). Marion Spadoni’s business model was based on three rules she had learned from Erik Charell and Jules Marx:

- “1. Do not spare on the performance;
2. The venue must be large;
3. The rent should be so low that its income on the side should cover it.”⁵⁹

By 1946, the monthly rent of the *Palast* had reached 12,000 RM a month,⁶⁰ and by that time she had started making money. She received a significant extra sum by leasing the venue for sports events.⁶¹ According to a statement Spadoni made in 1947, she had invested about 300,000 RM into the theater and paid 2,500,000 RM in taxes to the city.⁶²

The creative team

In the beginning, Spadoni did not have a professional team to work with.⁶³ Nevertheless, by the middle of 1946, she had managed to assemble a group of established professionals. The technical head of the venue was Curt Röder, who had been working in the house for twenty years,⁶⁴ just like the stage manager Karl Rosenbaum.

56 “An approval for every sack of cement, every brick, every roll of tar paper [...] every worker [...] for paper, for printing [...]” MS2, 19.

57 MS2, 35. By the middle of 1946, the first graphic posters appeared on the advertising pillars. *Kostenausstellung von Reklame – Agentur K. E. Goerz, 27 August 1946 SMB Fotoarchiv Marion Spadoni.*

58 MS2, 34.

59 She added one more condition: “As long as neither Hitler nor Stalin come in between.” MS1, 276.

60 2. Pacht – Vertrag zwischen Marion Spadoni und die Deutsches National – Theater AG, 12 December 1946 SMB Spadoni – Nachlass.

61 “Every sports event was held in the *Palast*.” MS2, 214. This meant mostly box matches, see the numerous cutouts in SMB Spadoni – Nachlass. According to her contract, in this case the landlord received quarter of her income. 1. Pacht – Vertrag, 28 November 1945 SMB Fotoarchiv Marion Spadoni.

62 “Palast” so und anders, *Telegraf* 10 October 1947.

63 “Almost the whole crew was new and [...] they came from different professions.” MS2, 26.

64 Theaterhasen jenseits der Rampe, *Telegraf* 4 July 1946.

In December 1945, Paul Seltenhammer joined the team as the head of design—he had been working with Marion Spadoni in her first touring revue in 1928 and designed most of the *Palast's* revue scenes.⁶⁵ Ralph Zürn took over the musical lead and the conductor's position from Paul Böhm in March 1946, because of his affinity for jazz, which the audience demanded.⁶⁶

Various skills and professions are necessary to create shows. However, in the beginning they had to do with Spadoni's improvised sets and costumes and Max Reinhardt's old carpenter (who installed the 3,000 chairs).⁶⁷ Even if the traditional professional know-how was available, due to the lack of materials, they needed to demonstrate various skills.⁶⁸ Sets and costumes were mostly improvised, using the materials available on the black market (sometimes in exchange for Spadoni's jewelry)⁶⁹ or even *Wehrmacht* supplies. For example, the costumes of the *Fata Morgana* dance scene were made of umbrella silk.⁷⁰ (Ideally, the audience did not recognize the original materials in the show because that would have broken the illusion.) When the show choir was re-established, fifty to sixty new dance costumes were needed each month. To help the production team, Spadoni cooperated with sewing schools, finally moving the tailor's shop of the Berlin Fashion School (*Textil und Modeschule der Stadt Berlin*) to the *Palast*.⁷¹ The first proper sets were four giant masks laminated onto waste in the February 1946 show, and finding a box of feathers led to the North American indigenous cultures-themed *Indianola* scene.⁷²

The shows and their marketing

Although the *Palast* did not have any competition in the city, the positioning and marketing of the venue was important from the beginning. Rather than claiming to create something new or unseen, the shows and the marketing relied on the local

65 Only one scene of the July 1946 show was designed by Wolf Leder, a frequent designer of the *Großvarietés* in the 1930s. Later, he became an employee and the main designer of the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* for almost fifty years.

66 MS2, 109.

67 MS "Original übergang 1946 Fata Morgana" 70. About the role of the crafting industry in revue productions, see Perault, *Une approche ethnologique du costume de spectacle*.

68 The house used to have a prop and costume collection (*Fundus*), which "had been relocated in the last year of the war. In response to many inquiries, I always had to answer that none of the old employees knew where it had been moved." MS2, 105. An inquiry: Letter to Max Lipscher, 21 November 1945 MS "Originale für beide Bücher."

69 MS2, 113.

70 "A huge pile of molton sheets saved the Christmas – scene." MS2, 113.

71 Wir besuchen Marion Spadoni, *Berlins Modenblatt* March 1947, 26.

72 MS "Vom ersten Ballet bis Ende," 122.

representative *Großvarieté* traditions. From its first show, the theater was advertised as the *Haus der 3000*, similarly to the former *Plaza* (*Theater der 3000*, used between January 1934 and February 1938). “The leading variety” (*Das führende Varieté*) line on the *Palast* playbill had been a permanent slogan of the *Wintergarten* (introduced in July 1933). The *Palast* was positioned as its successor, advertising itself as the most prestigious variety venue in Germany. The disclaimer which lets the management make occasional changes in the program, the self-advertisements, and even the cloakroom information in the playbills were taken over verbatim from the playbills of the *Scala*.⁷³ Using such well-known speech patterns probably provided a sense of continuity in public consciousness.

In the second half of the 1930s, the Berliner *Großvarietés* had a similar show structure. Shows were produced monthly, with each featuring thirteen or fourteen individual acts of different kinds (*Nummernprogramm*) with one intermission in the middle. These productions were often untitled and were referred to by the month (e.g., *Oktober Programm*) or by the leading act (*Zugnummer*). Acts were usually produced by the artists themselves.⁷⁴ The key was to arrange them in the right order—not just aesthetically, but in such a way that the necessary transitions (installing and dismantling sets and other requisites) for each act were smooth and flawless. Spadoni’s first playbill warned that her show would not follow the old practice of featuring only weaker acts in the beginning and in the end. This practice was developed on the audience’s behavior:

“The doors of a *Varieté* cannot be simply closed at the beginning of the performance, as you do in a concert hall or opera house. In the *Varieté*, visitors want to come and go casually; it may be annoying for the guests who arrive on time or stay until the end; and it is no less unpleasant for the artists appearing in the first and last acts.”⁷⁵

Artists did not favor the first or the last spots. Therefore, shows usually opened and ended with the orchestra playing, and after the overture, the master of ceremonies occasionally welcomed the audience, thereby making the first, in fact, the third. However, this show structure had completely disappeared by the second half of the 1930s. The aforementioned warning paragraph about this practice was used by the *Scala* from 1923 to November 1933 (when their playbills changed to an A5 format), and this warning may not always have had the same relevance over these ten years.

73 “Führend in der Programm – Gestaltung! Zeitgemäß in der Preis – Gestaltung!” *Scala Programm* October 1932, “Garderoben – Ablage – In 7 Minuten [...]” *Scala Programm* May 1932.

74 Sometimes with the cooperation of an agent.

75 According to an aphorism, “every variety show should actually begin with the second act and end with the penultimate.” *Die erste Nummer*, *Die Deutsche Artistik* 14 November 1937, no. 46, 3.

Spadoni—maybe unconsciously—used the pattern that originated from her youth and the beginning of her professional career. From her first *Palast* show to the last, she had on average fifteen acts in a show, split into two parts by an intermission. Each part was opened with a musical piece played by the orchestra and finished with a very effective finale. Because of the curfew, shows had to start as early as 17:30.

7 2 KOROWINS
Kombinations-Springakt

8 GESCHWISTER NAMPING
Beste chinesische Equilibristik

9 LILLO
Die Königin der Luft

10 SOUVENIR AUS WIEN
mit Valivia
2 Kavaliers: Kara Kalning, Erika Bachstein
Sängerin: Margot Michaels
Solofanz: Valivia und das Palast-Ballett
Bühnenbild: Paul Seelenhammer
Kostüm-Anfertigung: Atelier, Erik

11 RALPH ZURN und das Palast-Schaorchester
„Zum Tanzen geboren“ von Berking

12 ING BORG NAMPING
Stepanz

13 3 BELCANTOS
Internationales Gesangsterzett

14 RALPH ZURN und das Palast-Orchester
Arrangement über:
1. Du sollst der Kaiser meiner Seele
sein, von Robert Scholz
2. So stell' ich mir die Liebe vor, von
Friedrich Schröder
3. Waldesrauschen, von Bullermann

15 FREDDY MICHAELIS
in neuen Parodien von Marika Röök,
Kudi Gauden, Jase Werner u. a.

16 DANCE PHANTASTIQUE
mit Valivia
und dem Palast-Ballett
Bühnenbild: Paul Seelenhammer
Kostüm-Anfertigung: Atelier, Erik

PAUSE

ENDE

Nicht zu spät kommen! Nicht zu früh weggehen!
Den alten Brauch, am Anfang und Ende weniger gute Nummern zu bringen, machen wir nicht mit. Das Programm wird so zusammengestellt, daß möglichst eine pausenlose Vorstellung stattfindet.

Städt. Feuerversicherungsanstalt Berlin
Berlin W 35 · Am Karlsbad 4/5
Feuer, Einbruchdiebstahl, Leitungswasser,
Sturmschadenversicherung
Haftpflicht, Kraftfahrzeug, Transportversicherung
Nächste Geschäftsstellen: N 58, Stargarder Str. 12 a
Charlottenb., Berliner Str. 137 · Reinickendorf-Ost, Hauptstr. 62

PROGRAMM
50
PFENNIG

PAUL BLOHM
Seifen, Wirtschaftsartikel, Kosmetik
Berlin N 54, Rosentaler Straße 1
Such' nicht lange, geh' zu Blohm,
Da findest Du das Richtige schon!

Spielfolge. Umstellung der Spielfolge oder Kürzungen, hervorgerufen durch verspätetes Eintreffen, vorzeitiges Abreisen, Erkrankungen usw., behält sich die Direktion hiermit ausdrücklich vor.

Figure 4 Palast-playbill from March 1946. From the author's collection.

The Spadonis put together twenty-seven *Nummernprogramm*.⁷⁶ All of Marion's acts were represented by her father's agency, which established a new office in the *Palast*. But finding quality acts for each month was not easy in a ruined and occupied country. In the first months, they had to rely on the acts at hand: Edith Crocker's closing bear act in the first shows was easy to find, since Crocker and her bears were seeking refuge in the house two months before the opening. In October, the Jewish Carl Schwarz performed again his mirror-act (*Die zerbrochene Spiegel*), celebrating his 50th stage jubilee. He was the former (and current) president of the reassembled professional organization of German artists, the *Internationale Artisten-Loge*.⁷⁷ Dance acts were essential and not very demanding in terms of costumes and scenery. The very first one in the first show which opened the venue was the Borry Trio,

76 According to the playbills of SMB *documenta artistica*.

77 From 1947, its official journal (*Das Programm*) was published again; picking up the numbering after their last issue in 1935.

performing “Russian whirlwind dances”. Nevertheless, in the first period, large dance scenes were lacking: instead, mostly solos and duos were performed using classical music and the new original choreographies of Sabine Reiß⁷⁸ each month. Soviet authorities did not favor Western themes,⁷⁹ but tap dancing and cowboy acts were not banned. Artists from outside Berlin were allowed to travel to the city only after 18 January 1946; but it was still uncertain if they would arrive in time.⁸⁰

“The »3 Arabellas«, who recently performed in the *Palast-Variété* for a month, and afterwards were engaged in *Monte Carlo am Zoo* in Berlin’s British sector [...] are now obliged to [perform] in the »Orangerie« located in the American sector, between 1st and 15th July. For this last engagement, their performing license has been rejected with a notice that performances which are not based in Berlin [...] require a permit from the cultural committee, and the manager who engages an external act like this has to apply for approval five or six weeks before the beginning of the engagement. [...] it seems strange why an act which has already appeared in the British and the Russian sectors should need approval from the American sector.”⁸¹

Such circumstances made it very difficult to plan shows ahead. Despite the negative feelings many developed towards Germany during the war, numerous foreign artists looking for work contacted Spadoni.⁸² Meanwhile, the management tried to keep up the appearance of a world class program mostly by contracting acts that, because of the racial laws, had not been staged for many years (Ralph Zürn’s jazz orchestra;⁸³ Black artists of the “20 Original Suaheli”;⁸⁴ Zimmermann’s Great Midget Revue, etc.).⁸⁵ Still, Paul Spadoni had to rearrange the acrobatic act of the “5 Simontis” (from the October 1946 show), who with repainted wigs, a different

78 Sabine Reiß (or Röss, 1904–1985): German dancer, choreographer. Her troupe appeared regularly in the *Großvarietés* of Berlin during the 1930s. Between 1947 and 1951 she was the ballet master of the *Komische Oper Berlin*.

79 “The Majors did not agree with Western tastes.” MS2, 121.

80 The 24th session of the four allied *Kommandanturas* decided on several reforms in the city. This included which theater and musical venues were allowed to operate. Performers, who were at the moment in an occupied zone, were free to travel to Berlin but they were subject to the approval by the Allied *Kommandantura*. *Identitätskarten für Berlin, Neue Zeit*, 20 January 1946, no. 14, 1. See also MS2, 160.

81 Heinz Fuss (P. S. Marvelly)’s letter to the *Magistrat*, 27 June 1947 LAB C Rep. 120 Nr. 1675.

82 Agenturen, *Das Programm* March 1947, no. 1736, 15.

83 Jazz was banned from radios since 1935. Verbot des Niggerjazz im Rundfunk, *Die Deutsche Artistik* 20 October 1935, no. 7, 2.

84 September 1946: The performances of Black people – regardless of their nationality – were banned on 28 March 1941. See Neger und Negermischlinge, *Artisten – Welt* 9 September 1941, no. 17, 19.

85 November 1946.

backdrop and new music appeared in the May 1947 show as a new act under the name of the “6 Glinseretis”.⁸⁶ The shows might not have been first class productions but they were likely to be the best to have been produced under such circumstances.

Marion Spadoni’s idea of shows was based on Eduard Duisberg’s *Scala*-style, the so-called *Variété – Revue*; a mixture of acts and spectacular revue scenes.⁸⁷

“My idea did not come through Charell, who rarely hired a variety act for his revue, but through the *Scala Berlin*. Eduard Duisberg, the last director of the *Scala* had spent years learning the craft of shows in my father’s agency, and in 1934 successfully took over my idea of dressing the artists and presenting them in a suitable frame story.”⁸⁸

Marion Spadoni produced two touring revues in this style: in 1928 *Aus alter Zeit ins Tempo von heute* [From old times to the pace of today] and in 1933 *Eine Frau reist um die Welt* [A woman travels around the world]. The *Scala* presented its first *Etwas verrückt* [Something crazy] show in January 1934. Her claim might be legit, as Duisberg had earlier been closely involved with the Spadonis.⁸⁹

The *Palast-Ballett* first appeared in the playbills in March 1946⁹⁰ (scenery and costume designed by Seltenhammer)—creating the revue element of the *Variété-Revue*. Male roles were performed and danced by female dancers, because most young men were dead, handicapped, or prisoners of war.⁹¹ The casting for the house ballet received much publicity and had numerous applicants. Aside from the dreams of fame, such work was less demanding than being a *Trümmerfrau* [rubble woman]. The ballet master had the final word; the main criteria were dancing skills and the shape of the ladies’ legs.⁹² Sixteen girls were selected for the troupe.⁹³ Their dance scenes were generally

86 MS2, 163.

87 Vom Variété zur Revue, *Artisten – Welt* 9 December 1942, no. 23, 4–5.

88 Marion Spadoni an Alexander Iljinski, Intendant des Friedrichstad-Palastes, 14 November 1994, MS “Presse” cf. MS2, 153. The press of the *Palast* sometimes also compared her shows to Charell’s. See Wie einst bei Charell, *Telegraf* 5 March 1947.

89 “As Jules Marx, the manager of the *Scala Berlin* had to emigrate, asked Spadoni [...] on his advice to whom he could entrust the theater, thinking that every Nazi spat would soon pass. So Paul Spadoni recommended his employee Eduard Duisberg [...]” MS1, 286. Duisberg was already an NSDAP member at the time. For the discrimination and removal of the “non-aryan” manager Jules Marx see Riedel, *Und abends in die Scala!*, 123–72. Parallel to this, Marion Spadoni was contracted by the *Scala* as an act of the August 1933 show.

90 According to the memoir, the house ballet first appeared in the August jubilee show. MS2, 105.

91 See the photos: LAB C Rep. 727 Nr. 168: 833/13, 833/27. This drag element made the shows similar to the Japanese Takarazuka Revue’s all female cast productions.

92 Wer ist geeignet?, *Telegraf* 27 February 1947.

93 *Palast* playbill, May 1947.

based on cultural or national themes ([La] *Nuit parisienne*, *Bella Cubana*, *Puszta*, *Venezianische Vision*, *Frühling in Hellas*, *Im spanischen Hafén*, etc.).

Spadoni employed local choreographers in a rotation system⁹⁴ and often invited soloists of the *Berliner Staatsoper*.⁹⁵ This method and the use of characteristic national themes intended to avoid repetition and provide a certain novelty each month. From January 1946, another old *Scala* invention appeared in the *Palast* shows: the number girl (*Fräulein Nummer*).⁹⁶ Overall, the shows met with a huge demand: weekend shows became so popular that it was necessary to insert an afternoon performance on Saturday as well.⁹⁷

Beside the regular monthly shows, Marion Spadoni put on primarily text-based holiday specials for children.⁹⁸

This idea originated from the *Plaza* managed by the German state-operated leisure organization *Kraft durch Freude*: from September 1939, they produced shows based on fairy tales, serving educative and propaganda purposes, teaching “what every German child must know.”⁹⁹

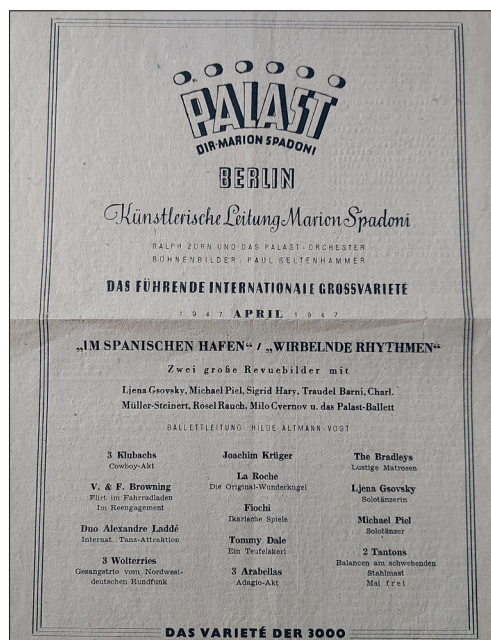


Figure 5 *Palast*-advertisement in *Das Programm*. 8 April 1947. Nr. 1736 p. 18. From the author's collection.

94 MS2, 122.

95 The very successful *Indianola* was choreographed by Frank Pal (František Karháněk), a dancer at the *Berliner Staatsoper*, who was very happy to make money in another venue. Hoggard, *Married to Dance*, 122.

96 A minor “role” in variety shows; a woman who enters between acts carrying a sign displaying the upcoming act (or its number) according to the program. Similar to ring girls in boxing, her entrée was frequently used to fill the gap between scene changes. Allegedly, the *Scala* was the first in Berlin to introduce this role instead of a mechanical display. Um den Varietéstil, *Artisten* – *Welt* 9 October 1941, no. 19, 3.

97 *Palast* playbill, April 1946. Sunday performances used to be the ones when people from the suburbs came to town to see the show. *Die erste Nummer*, *Die Deutsche Artistik* 28 November 1937, no. 48, 9–10.

98 She produced four fairy tale shows. In her memoirs she mentions that after the first, one child “urgently begged for new fairy tales. For many, these were the first fairy tales they have seen in their young lives.” MS2, 75.

99 *Plaza* playbill, September 1939.

Censorship

Licenses in the Soviet sector were issued on condition that performances had to be censored first, making sure they did not contain any Nazi propaganda or anti-Soviet sentiments. The censorship was focusing mainly on written text,¹⁰⁰ although this was not the main element of variety shows.

“On every first day of the month, when we changed the program, the show was harshly censored. In the early afternoon, the show ran before a Russian military commission, without an audience.¹⁰¹ [...] It was very difficult for the artists to perform in the large empty auditorium without the encouraging applause. [...] [Nevertheless,] this gave me the opportunity to go through the show and introduce changes and cuts.”¹⁰²

Censorship worked on two levels: first, the commission censored the plans of the show, and a day before the opening, the performance was given in front of the commission. This second round of control relied on personal opinions rather than clear guidelines. In regular practice, decorative work and stage sets are usually finalized long before the opening night. However, this method of control sometimes requested major last-minute changes. This meant that the entire creative team and their staff had to be present to redesign and execute the necessary changes in a few hours.¹⁰³ The stylized bar scene was censored in the finale of the August 1947 show (*Alt – Berlin*) because it was deemed “immoral and spoil the youth.”¹⁰⁴ Spadoni suspected that the real problem was that the names of liquors (not even the bottles!) were displayed, which was considered to be demoralizing for soldiers. During an earlier performance, a drunken Soviet soldier was sick on the officers sitting in front of him. After this incident, the *Kommandantura* did not allow the house to sell stalls (*Parkett*) tickets to soldiers. They were only allowed to buy tickets in the upper circles, so as to be less exposed to the audience in case there was an incident of this type. In addition, the bar scene was given a further criticism:

100 The first show had an acceptance ceremony a day before the opening night. The text—prose and song—had to be submitted beforehand and all of the artists had to be present, otherwise the performance was not allowed to happen. Bezirksamt Berlin-Mitte Amt für Volksbildung to the Palast, 10 August 1945. In photocopy: MS2, 21.

101 The performers’ contract included the condition of working for free. See Josef Flohr’s contract with the Palast, 12 November 1946. SMB Spadoni – Nachlass.

102 MS2, 48.

103 MS2, 111.

104 MS2, 115. See the bar scene’s original and final designs with and without the bar LAB C Rep. 727 Nr. 168: 874/4, 831/2.

“the Major continued: »In Russia many dancers—one woman. In Germany, many women—only one dancer.«¹⁰⁵ It was on me to explain to him why the boys were made out of papier-mâché in the next revue scene, in the same way as the saxophones.”

“At the end of the performance, [the Major] said: »Woman alone sit at table—immoral«. ¹⁰⁶ Now I understood [...] a woman does not go out alone. Four young men had to be found with tuxedos by the evening in a hurry.”¹⁰⁷

After this case, Spadoni decided to submit the sketches in advance to minimize the need for major changes at the last minute. For the next show, Seltenhammer designed an idyllic Russian rural scene, but it was rejected to control the representation of Russian culture. Anything that might be interpreted as challenging Soviet hegemony was banned.¹⁰⁸ The Russian officers’ general attitude towards the local audience was rather suspicious: since Berliners created shows (mostly) for Berliners, the *Kommandantura* worried about a possible conspiracy and their misjudgments led to more fear from the gathered locals.

“For a change, instead of the number girl, I had a clown display the next comic act: he held the number seven high into the air with his feet. He was not allowed to enter the stage anymore. I thought that the striped clown costume displayed some undesirable flag. But after a lot of inquiries, I learned that the reason for the annoyance I caused was that the number seven is a hidden swastika. [...] [On another occasion] one dancer wore only a small pair of trousers. There wasn’t any place on his shorts for big decorations. Following the lines [seams] there was the embroidery of a tinsel motif, a kind of butterfly. After gazing at the motif for a while through opera glasses, the officers’ faces darkened. On the shorts, they recognized Hitler’s emblem.”¹⁰⁹

“Despite their addiction to doubt, which was more like an obsession, the commission was often mistaken about the Berliners’ mood. Despite distrustful searching, forbidding, and censoring, in the evening they watched

105 The memoir quotes the Major’s lines in broken German: “In Russland viele Tänzer – eine Frau. In Deutschland viele Frauen, nur ein Tänzer.”

106 “Frau allein, Tisch sitzen, unmoralisch.”

107 MS2, 119.

108 Spadoni mentions an escape artist, whose act was to unleash himself from the bondage of audience members. After freeing himself from the knots of two Soviet soldiers, his act was banned. MS2, 164.

109 MS2, 49. See the “evil 7”: Paul Seltenhammer: *Faschingstanz* (Februar 1946) SMB Bequest of Marion Spadoni.

in horror the effect [the performance had] on the audience, which was very surprising for them [Soviet leaders]. Only a Berliner could understand these outbursts of emotions [...] The words, sounds, and images were so harmless that there was nothing to ban by any stretch of the imagination.”¹¹⁰

Spadoni mentions a case when the complete censoring process missed something—perhaps due to their cultural ignorance: on the opening night, the refrain of the song *Berlin kommt wieder* (Berlin will return) generated “frenetic rousing applause through the house”.¹¹¹ The song was banned immediately and Spadoni had to pay a fine of 5,000 RM.¹¹² This was the only occasion when such a measure was taken.

From Spadoni’s perspective, the *Palast* was a private institution of entertainment. Being the *de facto* rulers of that part of the city, the Soviet *Kommandantura*, on the other hand, considered the theater as theirs. Its symbolic expression was taking over the highlighted seats, then the theater itself – without payment.

“The big central box was constantly requisitioned by the Russian *Kommandantura* [...] it was the state box, which Hitler had installed [...]”¹¹³

“Once a year the theater was requisitioned by the Russian General staff for their big political assembly. [From] soldiers of the army [to] high officers like Zhukov were present.”¹¹⁴

Due to its size and having Soviet and Berliner leaders as regulars, the *Palast* soon became a representative venue of the city (Spadoni herself also emphasized this through several channels), which led to its political use and extortion. The Communist and Socialist Parties also demanded the *Palast* for their assemblies—and Spadoni had to pay for the lighting and other costs.¹¹⁵

“Around the end of 1946, came the surprising order to propagate the Communist Party. [...] For a couple of months, I specially commissioned the repertoire of the conferencier so that the tendentious sayings should be short and mild. Since the text was witty, the audience endured. But it was too harmless to the ears of the commanders. That’s why they imposed one of their men on me.”¹¹⁶

110 MS2, 130.

111 MS2, 130.

112 The sum was used in favor of the home comers. 5,000 RM Strafe zugunsten der Heimkehrer, *Berliner Zeitung* 5 November 1946, also *Neue Zeit* 6 November 1946.

113 MS2, 53.

114 MS2, 65.

115 MS2, 68. See also *Betriebe wollen Einheit, Nacht – Expreß* 16 March 1946, no. 64.

116 MS2, 145.

Introducing a conferencier was the easiest way to convey political propaganda in non-text based genres.¹¹⁷ The comedian assigned to Spadoni was Harry Heinz Neumann, whose explicit direct propaganda for the Communist Party led to a scandal on 3 October 1946: he was booed and had to leave the stage.¹¹⁸ Soviet soldiers were there to control the audience, which was not interested in political propaganda in a variety show.

Leading a representative house, Marion Spadoni was keen on charity: she gave money to various causes.¹¹⁹ During the extremely cold winter of 1946-1947 (*Hungerwinter*), she offered the *Palast* to the city as a public warming place (*Wärmehalle*) during the day, providing a slice of bread or some soup to its guests.¹²⁰ While several other theaters (*Neue Scala*, *Kabarett der Komiker*, etc.) had to close due to the lack of coal,¹²¹ this move secured the continuous operation of her venue. The jubilee show of the *Palast* on 18 August 1946 was under the patronage of the mayor of Berlin, and its income was offered for charity.¹²² By that time, Marion Spadoni became an acknowledged member of the local cultural life. She was invited to the discussions of the *Magistrat*¹²³ and the mayor's wife baked a cake for her birthday.¹²⁴ She was planning long-term: before her contract for the building expired, a second one was arranged from December 1946 to November 1957¹²⁵ and started lobbying through the *Artisten-Loge* to extend her license for performances as well until then.¹²⁶

The expropriation of the *Palast*

On 31 July 1947, major newspapers published that “as has now become known”, Marion Spadoni had been connected to the *Kraft durch Freude* organization, and the

117 The first conferencier of the *Palast* was Curt Ackermann (voice actor, the regular German voice of Cary Grant) in February 1946. His text was written by Robert T. Odeman – a gay actor and writer prosecuted by the Nazis.

118 Akrobat – nicht schön! *Telegraf* 12 October 1946, no. 158; Oktobersturm im “Palast” – Varieté, *Spandauer Volksblatt* 5 October 1946, no. 102.

119 See the bills in SMB Fotoarchiv Marion Spadoni.

120 Marion Spadoni to the mayor of Berlin-Mitte, 16 January 1947. In photocopy: MS2, 86.

121 Die Kohlennot, *Das Programm* March 1947, no. 1733, 8.

122 The mayor's letter of thanks: Quittung, 21 August 1946 SMB Fotoarchiv Marion Spadoni.

123 Dr. Werner's invitations for the *Künstlerischen Beirat*, 21 October 1946; 1 March 1947, MS “Originale für beide Bücher”

124 MS2, 187.

125 2. Pacht – Vertrag zwischen Marion Spadoni und die Deutsches Nationaltheater AG, 12 December 1946, SMB Spadoni – Nachlass.

126 Alfred Puchs's (president of the *Internationale Artisten-Loge*) letter to Major Ausländer, 17 July 1947, LAB C Rep. 120 Nr. 1675.

Soviet *Kommandantura* withdrew her license from 1 September. (In papers based in the Soviet sector, the articles were almost word for word the same.)¹²⁷ Both Spadoni and Walter May, leader of the Cultural Office of the *Magistrat* learned this news from the papers. May was shocked because he had just extended her license two days earlier.¹²⁸ The *Magistrat*, being merely an administrative office, soon announced that her license was invalidated. She claimed that the basis of allegations against her was cleared already in 1945, before she took over the *Palast*.

“Worried about the newspaper article, I went to see the Russian political officer Major Ausländer to explain to him that these allegations were by no means based on truth. The Wehrmacht tours—yes, I did them. But this had been in every questionnaire I filled out. On top of that, I asked before I took the great responsibility for the bombed house and for all those who wanted to help me with the reconstruction whether this could interfere in any way with my work. Two years ago, Major Mossjakoff replied to me: This is by no means an obstacle. The Major’s reply suddenly came in impeccable laconic German: Well, then the accusations are just not true—and the Wehrmacht tours are interfering now.”¹²⁹

From 10 August, the Spadonis were not allowed to enter the *Palast* anymore. Her belongings (sets, costumes, office supplies, typewriters, music instruments, etc.) stayed in the *Palast*, and so did her father’s office. The question of these objects and her investments in the house remained open for months. The decision was made by the *Kommandantura*, but the German offices were to deal with the consequences. The *Magistrat* claimed it was unclear what belonged to the Spadonis and what to the house itself.¹³⁰ The same problem occurred regarding her non-tangible properties: the branding elements of the house (the name, logo, etc.) or the shows, which were in the making. The *Magistrat*—trying to distance itself from this affair—gave a rather cynical answer: they could not say anything due to their “ignorance of legal practices”.¹³¹ Marion Spadoni sued the owner of the building (*Deutsches National – Theater AG*), which was already taken over by the *Treuhandverwaltung*, the

127 “Palast-Varieté” wird Lizenz entzogen, *Berliner Zeitung* 1 August 1947, 6; Lizenzentzug im “Palast,” *Neue Zeit* 1 August 1947, 3; Die Lizenz von Marion Spadoni entzogen, *Neues Deutschland* 1 August 1947, 4. Marion Spadoni Lizenz entzogen, *Tagespost Potsdam* 2 Aug 1947, etc.

128 DEFA und Palast, *Der Tagesspiegel* 23 September 1947, no. 222.

129 MS2, 217.

130 Eine Ergänzung, *Der Tagesspiegel* 7 September 1947, no. 209.

131 Unklares Recht – Klare Tendenz, *Der Tagesspiegel* 4 September 1947, no. 206. The key articles published by *Der Tagesspiegel* were reprinted in the journal of the Hamburg-based Variety, Theater, Cabaret and Circus Manager’s Organisation. See *Variété*, October 1947, no. 10, 3.

organization responsible for expropriations.¹³² As for the accusations, they were soon proved false.¹³³ She was to be the subject of a denazification purge but “[that] trial never happened because there was nothing to be cleared.”¹³⁴

In February 1948, the parties settled.¹³⁵ They agreed that as long as Spadoni did not have a license, the contract between them was suspended and the *Deutsches National – Theater AG* had the right to lease the theater to someone else. She would be returned all the objects which she had brought in; all the objects which she had bought or paid for during her managing time; and all of the objects which belonged to her parents, and the rest stayed in the house. The new management of the house expressed a wish to rent a couple of items from Spadoni’s belongings. She had to agree not to claim her investments in the house. This unbalanced settlement depended on one condition: Marion Spadoni had to publish a statement in *Der Tagesspiegel* and in the *Telegraf* (based in the American and British sectors) about the settlement, highlighting that it was written “according to German legal principles.”¹³⁶ This settlement clearly favored the venue and the communist interest behind it; still, the return of at least some of the assets allowed her to continue the show.

Parallel to revoking Spadoni’s license, a new license was issued to her Russian translator, Nicola Lupo and Adolf Fischer from the newly established state film studio.¹³⁷ Lupo was an artist himself, who was touring with his quick-change act all over the continent, appearing three times in the *Wintergarten* (and booked at least

132 German Trusteeship of Sequestered and Confiscated Property in the Soviet Occupation Sector of the City of Berlin (*Deutsche Treuhandverwaltung des sequestrierten und beschlagnahmten Vermögens im Sowjetischen Besatzungssektor der Stadt Berlin*).

133 “We have a letter in which an unsolicited Berlin artist explains that the tense relationship between the Propaganda Ministry and Ms. Spadoni had finally led to the Ministry advising to every artist not to work with her. The letter also confirms that the Wehrmacht-commission of the *Kraft durch Freude* was maintained with a low level of cooperation in the framework of »work obligations« [*Arbeitsverpflichtungen*]”. Kreislauf der Erklärungen, *Der Tagesspiegel* 20 September 1947, no. 220. Another letter of proof denied her alleged activity in Riga: Eidesstattliche Erklärung von Karlis Peterson, 19 August 1947, MS2, 237.

134 MS2, 219. Paul Spadoni was also accused of being a member of the NSDAP in 1945, by another impresario Alexander Schenk, but the Chamber of Artists unanimously defended him. After the expropriation of the *Palast*, Schenk accused Marion Spadoni too but his claims were never taken seriously. It is mentioned about Schenk that he was engaged to Marion Spadoni a few years earlier. See Paul Spadoni’s denazification folder, LAB C Rep. 031-01-02, Nr. 1215a.

135 Vergleich, 4 February 1948, MS “Originale für beide Bücher.”

136 “Damit ist zwischen den Vertragspartnern eine deutsche Rechtsgrundsätzen entsprechende, abschliessende Vereinbarung getroffen worden.” Vergleich, 4 February 1948, SMB Spadoni – Nachlass.

137 He was the production leader of the DEFA; appointed only to oversee the transition from Spadoni to Lupo.

once by Spadoni in the 1930s).¹³⁸ After taking over the venue, he removed Marion Spadoni's name from the *Palast* logo, replacing it first with a stripe, later by his own name. Spadoni sued for the unauthorized use of her intangible property and won. As a result, the house was renamed and rebranded as the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* from November 1947.¹³⁹ Lupo was managing the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* until 1954;¹⁴⁰ credited as co-founder (*Mitbegründer*) on the fifth jubilee of the house in 1952.¹⁴¹

Marion Spadoni tried to get another theater in Berlin, but the Western powers did not want to involve themselves in this matter and thereby to further deepen the gap between them and the Soviets. After the expropriation, the American Theater and Music Department offered her to stage "The Shoe Gala", a charity show in the *Titania-Palast* (in the American sector).¹⁴² She received a supporting statement from the British authorities to move to Cologne and a provisional permit for her shows in the *Williamsbau* theater.¹⁴³ She kept using her trademark, *Palast-Berlin*, as if they were having only a guest performance in Cologne from April 1948.¹⁴⁴ During her stay, she attempted several times to obtain a managing position in a Berlin venue, but did not succeed.¹⁴⁵ Just like many other entertainment enterprises, she lost all her money in the currency reform in September.¹⁴⁶ In 1949, the Spadoni family moved to Rome. In 1994, Only Marion Spadoni returned to Berlin at the age of 89, and a year later she was given the title "Honorary member of the *Friedrichstadt-Palast*."

138 Stadtpark – Varieté Kassel, *Die Deutsche Artistik* 6 November 1938, no. 45, 34.

139 Neuer Name für den Palast, *Der Kurier* 18 October 1947. The defendants were referring to the Soviet authority, as they kept it according to the "instruction and command" of the *Kommandantura*. Abschrift der Sw. Zentralkommandantur an die Lizenzträger des Friedrichstadt – Palast, 20 December 1947, MS "Originale für beide Bücher". The press of the Soviet sector diplomatically gave business differences ("*geschäftliche Differenzen*") as a reason for renaming.

140 Since he did not have an agency behind him, he had to advertise for acts: "expecting offers from agencies and first-class artists," *Das Programm*, 8 September 1947, no. 1746, 2.

141 5 Jahre Friedrichstadt – Palast, *Das Programm*, 10 August 1952, no. 8, 17.

142 The event was organised by the American Women's Club of Berlin in order to buy 1300 pairs of shoes for elementary school students. Germans were only allowed as personal guests of the participants. Artists appeared only in the second half of the show. Program of The Shoe Gala, 27 November 1947, SMB Spadoni – Nachlass.

143 Provisional Permit for Marion Spadoni, 30 March 1948, SMB Spadoni – Nachlass.

144 Wilhelmsbau/Köln unter Gastspielführung, *Das Programm* February 1948, no. 1755, 7.

145 Wasserthal Hauptreferent an das Finanzamt für Liegenschaften, 14 January 1948, MS "Originale für beide Bücher." Der Oberbürgermeister von Gross – Berlin an Marion Spadoni, 21 April 1949, MS "Originale für beide Bücher." Letter from John Bitter (Office of Military Government, Berlin Sector, Theater and Music Section) 14 June 1948, SMB Spadoni – Nachlass.

146 Steuer und Lizenz im Lichte der Währungsreform, *Das Organ der Varieté – Welt* 18 June 1948, no. 6, 3. Nach dem Tage X, *Varieté* July 1948, 3.

Aftermath

There are several reasons for Marion Spadoni's removal, which had nothing to do with her shows, as critics on both sides always praised her productions.¹⁴⁷ However, the *Palast-Variété* was the only private theater in Berlin's Soviet zone. By the middle of 1947, the group of the future system's preferred ("trusted") persons had already crystallized: when Walter Felsentein moved into the former *Metropol-Theater*, his license was handed over in a ceremonial manner in front of the press.¹⁴⁸ According to Spadoni's memoirs, two months before the affair she was approached by the Soviets to cooperate with their secret service, but she refused.¹⁴⁹

Another issue was the change of priorities of the Soviet *Kommandantura* compared to two years earlier: by 1947, establishing their ideological control over dramatic and representative venues was important as they started moving towards separation.¹⁵⁰ The *Palast* building was involved in the plan to rearrange Berlin's theater scene (in the Soviet Occupation Zone). The *Volksbühne* theater organization was re-established in January 1947,¹⁵¹ and the newly licensed managers, Alfred Lindemann and Heinz W. Litte, were in need of a venue. The *Colosseum* cinema was chosen as a temporary home, since their theater on *Karl-Liebknecht-Platz* (today *Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz*) was expected to be completed only in 1949. The company of the *Metropol-Theater* resided in that cinema from 1945, but because the Soviet military administration prioritized the *Volksbühne*, the *Metropol* had to leave.¹⁵² By August 1947, this question evolved into a major exchange between companies and buildings,¹⁵³ and from November the *Metropol* (led by Anton Maria Rabenalt) was supposed to move into the *Palast*. The Western press questioned this decision, since Rabenalt did not go through the denazification process, and had been an active film director during the *NS-Zeit*—while a seemingly similar involvement was the reason to revoke Spadoni's license.¹⁵⁴ Rabenalt announced that the opening piece in the new venue would be *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein* by Offenbach and promised to follow the traditions of Erik Charell.¹⁵⁵

147 Das ist Großstadtvarieté, *Der Sozialdemokrat* 5 Juli 1947.

148 "Komische Oper" in Berlin, *Neues Deutschland*, 7 June 1947, 5.

149 MS2, 198–202.

150 Volksbühne oder Parteitheater?, *Der Tagesspiegel* 22 August 1947.

151 See Weigert, *Vier Lizenzen zur Umerziehung*.

152 Unklares Recht – Klare Tendenz, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 4 September 1947, no. 206.

153 The company of the *Metropol* moves out of the *Colosseum* cinema, which the *Volksbühne* shall take over; and the *Prater*, where the *Volksbühne* was already playing shall be taken over by Rudolf Platte. As the reporter joked: "It is easier to solve a crossword than the convoluted situation that the Light Muse got us into." Operetten wie Sand am Meer, *Berliner Zeitung*, 13 August 1947, 3.

154 Unklares Recht – Klare Tendenz, *Der Tagesspiegel* 4 September 1947, no. 206.

155 In den Fußstapfen Charells, *Berliner Zeitung* 23 August 1947, 3.

Changing the venue's profile was quite distressing for the artists since the number of their possible workplaces was highly limited.¹⁵⁶ Also, the *Colosseum* cinema was significantly smaller than the *Palast* (in fact, every other playable venue in the city was significantly smaller) and because of its low ceiling, it was not suitable for aerial acts, which appeared in almost every production. Spadoni (still hoping to get the *Palast* back) stated that moving would reduce the significance of the house to a local level.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it was unlikely that next to the city's other five opera and operetta venues, the *Metropol* would attract 3,000 spectators each day.¹⁵⁸ To fill the gap of the *Palast*, "a new permanent house with at least two thousand places in the downtown" was under consideration.¹⁵⁹ Three days after this news, it was announced that the *Palast* did not have to move before the end of the year.¹⁶⁰ The building authorities inspected the theater, but they did not find it suitable for an operetta theater; only assemblies, variety shows and box matches were allowed. Their report noted that "under regular circumstances the reconstruction [as operetta theater] would take at least one and a half years."¹⁶¹ Only in May 1948, was it decided that the *Palast* would remain a variety,¹⁶² and a year later the house was reconstructed to serve further as a representative venue.¹⁶³

Although *Großvarietés* were very closely involved with Nazi organizations from the second half of the 1930s, neither their concept nor their shows were stigmatized after 1945.¹⁶⁴ Instead, the *Palast* as a completely new *Großvarieté* became a representative theater both professionally and politically just like its predecessors (due to the circumstances, on a local scale). Positioning the new venue as such meant continuity and commemoration of the destroyed city's former *Weltstadt* (cosmopolitan city) image, and its shows provided an escape from everyday life among the ruins. The continuity of this *Großvarieté* tradition was not guaranteed: Marion Spadoni's personal ambitions and efforts made that happen by rapidly reconstructing and operating the former *Großes Schauspielhaus*. Spadoni's establishment was not related at all, not even rhetorically, to the former defining creative talents residing in the house, neither Charell nor Reinhardt. Their managing period does not

156 Krise um "Palast" beendet, *Das Programm* 24 August 1947, Nr. 1745, 5.

157 Unklares Recht – Klare Tendenz, *Der Tagesspiegel* 4 September 1947, no. 206. The Soviets were also aware of the fact that Spadoni would have not moved the *Palast* anywhere else, unlike Lupo.

158 DEFA und *Palast*, *Der Tagesspiegel* 23 September 1947, no. 222.

159 "Palast" – Varieté zieht um, *Berliner Zeitung* 5 October 1947, 6.

160 "Palast" im Oktober, *Neue Zeit* 8 October 1947, 2.

161 "Palast" nicht Operettentheater, *Berliner Zeitung* 21 October 1947, 6.

162 Friedrichstadt – *Palast* bleibt Varieté, *Das Programm* 8 May 1948, 5.

163 Was sich Reinhardt nicht träumen ließ, *Die Welt* 25 August 1949.

164 Unlike in Budapest; See Molnár, *Vörös csillagok*.

belong to the history of the *Friedrichstadt-Palast*, but to the history of the former *Großes Schauspielhaus* building.¹⁶⁵ The *Palast's* history begins with Marion Spadoni in 1945, who possessed the necessary symbolic and financial capital (earning it also, but not exclusively during the *NS-Zeit*) to run such a house and created the *Palast-Varieté* from scratch. Her ambitions met with a cultural need and support from the Soviet Military Administration. However, this support led to the politically motivated extortion of the venue and, as political priorities changed, to the removal of the Spadonis. The *Palast's* size and condition prevented any other use than a variety and kept its representative status in the GDR as well.

Today, through many changes in style and managements, the *Palast* is a memento of Berlin's rich and distinguished *Großvarieté* culture and traditions. It is rather disappointing to see the current leadership ignoring its own history and the memory of its real founders in the name of PR considerations:¹⁶⁶ while Reinhardt and Charell, who have hardly anything to do with the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* are celebrated in front of the house as "founders", Marion Spadoni is resting in an unmarked mass grave in *Friedhof Steglitz*.

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Figure 6 Marion Spadoni's resting place in *Friedhof Steglitz*. Photo by the author.

165 The building was closed in 1980 and destroyed in 1985. The new building of the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* was opened in 1984 at *Friedrichstraße 107*.

166 Ironically, only the word *Palast* is emphasized nowadays of the brand name, as it is easier to pronounce for foreigners.

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