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## **Press release**

### **275 Years Margravial Opera House - a UNESCO World Heritage site**

Bayreuth's Margravial Opera House, opened 275 years ago, is considered one of the greatest examples of Baroque theatre design and therefore UNESCO adopted this 18<sup>th</sup> century jewel on the list of World Heritage Sites. From the moment they walk into this Opera House built between 1744 and 1748, visitors are stunned by the beauty of the colourful interior.

There are performances of baroque operas and concerts from May to October including important festivals such as Musica Bayreuth or Bayreuth Baroque Opera Festival. Furthermore the opera house is almost daily open to visitors. Since April 24<sup>th</sup> the new information centre & museum is highlighting the opera houses history in a modern and interactive way. Visitors' information, opening hours and guided tours: [www.bayreuth-wilhelmine.de](http://www.bayreuth-wilhelmine.de).

Europe's best preserved Baroque theatre was built by Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena and his son Carlo, two of the most famous theatre designers of their era. The father and son duo were members of the well-known Galli da Bibiena family of artists from Tuscany who were closely involved with many projects in Italy and across Europe. In 1744, the King of Prussia Fredrick the Great's

sister, Margravine Wilhelmine of Bayreuth hired Giuseppe Galli Bibiena to design the interior of her brand-new opera house. Whilst Giuseppe designed the interior, his son Carlo was charged with the supervision of the building and with the management of the entire project. Even today the Margravian Opera House in Bayreuth is considered the pinnacle of their career and an unsurpassed masterpiece of late Italian Baroque.

The Bayreuth Opera House was considered something truly special even back then in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Rather than being constructed of stone and marble, the interior was entirely built of wood. To ensure the very best acoustics even the columns were carved from wood, covered in paper and then painted to resemble marble. The quote from the great philosopher Voltaire about the city of Bayreuth during the era of the Margravine is often still cited today to characterize the period known as the "Golden Era": "Once poets and artists went on pilgrimages to Naples, Florence or Ferrara. Today they come to Bayreuth!"

However, this role as an earthly Arcadia for the enlightened, absolutist monarchs and their guests from across Europe was to last but a few short decades. In this era of emerging Romanticism there was little tolerance for the pageantry of absolutism: in 1793 the author Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder on his famous Whitsun travels together with Ludwig Tieck wrote: "An Opera House that is so rich and sumptuous inside yet so old-fashioned and so tastelessly adorned with gold, that is almost as large as the Berlin Opera House is destined to be one of the largest and most magnificent Opera Houses in the world"

The Opera House entered a Sleeping Beauty phase, which actually turned out to be its salvation as it is al-

most certainly due to this that the building was able to remain intact: almost every other Baroque opera house suffered the fate of being burnt to the ground at one time or another.

Today, the fact that the Margravian Opera House has been honoured with the accolade of UNESCO World Heritage is just tribute to the creativity of Margravine Wilhelmine. Yet it is thanks to the work of the Italian architect duo Giuseppe und Carlo Galli Bibiena that the Opera House is now an 18<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece worthy of being honoured by UNESCO and being taken under their wing providing it with the organisation's own special protection. This World Heritage Margravian Opera House captivates the imagination of its visitors today just as much as 275 years ago.

**Further information:**

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