

formances, while upholding the historical ambience. In the late 1980s, a new storage and a pavilion were added, designed by Exners Tegnestue, Aarhus. The same architectural firm also drew up a master plan in 1997, which was implemented over the course of a decade, thanks to the generosity of private foundations.

As a result Rønne Theatre now comprises 4 buildings around a courtyard with a historic auditorium and a corner room, modern facilities and workshops that can be used for small performances.

Theatre association, amateur theatre, revue and regional theatre

Rønne Theatre became an independent institution in 1972. Turbulent years of unrest among the various user groups ensued. Things gradually calmed down, and, from 1975, an annual summer revue tradition was established which is now appreciated both locally and nation-wide. The two key amateur groups, BA and KLAK, have regular recurring performance periods. The winter is reserved, by Teaterforeningen Bornholm, for a broad variation of guest performances – including the Royal Theatre and the Jyske Opera, children's theatre and avantgarde dance groups.

A drama school came into being in 2002, and in 2005 the island finally got its own regional theatre: Bornholms Teater. Today, all of these institutions are housed in the four-winged building where Bornholms Teater is the professional guarantor to ensure that Rønne Theatre will survive for another century at least.



Exners Tegnestue



Suste Bornnén

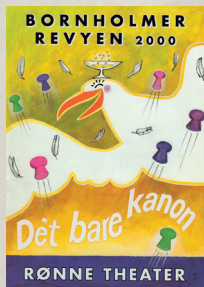
Perspective

Today, Rønne Theatre is considered the oldest continuously functioning theatre in Denmark. The Court Theatre at Christiansborg Palace (from 1767) is no longer active, but houses a Theatre Museum with exhibitions and events. Its auditorium was completely revamped in

1842 and all furnishing and technical features were sold in 1882. Helsingør Theatre, originally built in Elsinore in 1817, was in part relocated to the open-air museum „Den Gamle By“ in Aarhus. Today, it is only open to the public for certain events. In fact, it turns out that the building is remade of newer stone, and only the furnishes are originally from Elsinore. A number of small private theatres were built at several manors around 1800, but none exist today.

In a danish context, therefore, Rønne Theatre is unique – and it is the oldest continuously functioning theatre in Denmark.

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Nina Schjættz: Rønne Theater

RØNNE THEATER RØNNE THEATER RØNNE THEATER

Michael Tarp

THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY FUNCTIONING THEATRE IN DENMARK

Rønne Theatre

Since 1823, Rønne Theatre has been Bornholm's center for theatre activities housing local amateurs and travelling theatre companies. Since the beginning of the 1900s comedies written in the local dialect, summer revues, a drama school and the new professional producing organisation Bornholm's Theatre has ensured the existence of the theatre.

The building

The theatre is a well-kept yellow-washed, half-timbered building situated on the corner of Teaterstræde and Østergade in Rønne. It has a red roof, yellow walls and green doors. The building is harmoniously



Michael Tarp

adapted to the local neighbourhood of narrow cobbled streets, so it must be difficult for visitors to realize that this is Rønne Theatre.

The construction of Rønne Theatre was completed in 1823, financed by the initiative of a group of local citizens who formed a public limited company. 215 shares were purchased by the citizens, but the shares never paid a dividend. There was too little money from the beginning and the costs had to be covered with a credit.

„Learn wisdom from the scene of life“ was written above the stage, you can still see the motto today.

The auditorium was not as large as it is today, it had a seating capacity of about 400. Each play was only performed once; heating and stage light were expensive.

Active amateurs

The project was supported by theatre enthusiasts who had high ambitions and performed as if they were professionals. Their prime source of inspiration was the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen,



Edvard Lehmann / Fritz Westphal, Teatermuseet i Hofteatret



Paul Fischer, 1885. Teatermuseet i Hofteatret

that could be rolled on and off stage and a flat backdrop. The floor of both stage and auditorium was sloped to enhance perspective and the audience's view. Rows of benches were set up in the lower house and the balcony. There was never hoisting gear – and it has not been added since.

Originally theatres had only three different sets of scenery: a street scene, a forest and a sitting room. Today there are still sets from the 19. century, but these are not in use anymore.

Repertoire

Many plays were vaudevilles with equal proportions of text and music. To begin with, Rønne Theatre staged works by the German dramatist Kotzebue, later also by the French Eugène Scribe and, of course, by the renowned danish dramatists Ludvig Holberg, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, Johanne Luise Heiberg. Then came works by Hertz, Hostrup and the lesser known Overskou and Bøgh, as well as many others forever lost to posterity.

The amateurs were not interested in Shakespeare or Ibsen. These plays were either too difficult or required too much empathy.

Developments

Rønne Theatre was also visited by professional theatre companies, and once the ferry company started to provide a regular service to the island in 1866, their visits became shorter and more frequent. Interest in amateur theatre changed over the years and was constrained by the religious revival movements that swept across Bornholm in the 1860s and the 1920s.

although many of the amateurs had never visited the capital. Only comedies and vaudevilles were produced. Each programme usually comprised two plays. As a result, Rønne Theatre was soon presenting 20 different pieces a year. Some were repeated every few years, but the amateurs aimed for variety. Around 1900, the theatre library contained more than 800 scripts.

Technical features

The theatre was designed according to baroque theatre principles, i.e. flat wings



Bornholms Museum

Søren Kabell

Dr Søren Kabell was a force who reigned supreme at Rønne Theatre from 1872 and for the next 50 years. He was a medical doctor who loved theatre, and he played countless roles. But his greatest accomplishment was the transcription of the Theatre's history into a voluminous, handwritten and beautifully decorated 1,200-page document, now displayed at Bornholms Museum.

Local dialect comedies

By 1920, Rønne Theatre had become run down and the historic building evoked widespread disdain. Fortunately the theatre was renovated to celebrate its centenary in 1923, thus launching a new era. Local residents now started to write comedies in the Bornholm dialect. Young theology student Laurits Wessel pioneered with „I Piblamarken“ (Courting) which he wrote in Copenhagen in 1909, his fellow students performing it on Bornholm in 1910. In 1920 Sofie Madsen took the initiative to renovate the theatre, and then gave a boost to the dialect comedy genre as well. This was Rønne Theatre's salvation. The amateurs loved performing in their own dialect and audiences thronged to the theatre to watch their own lives and tongue performed on stage. A total of 38 plays were written in dialect, all by local, non-professionals.

Many of the plays are in the genre of Danish novelist Morten Korch's comedies and are still performed by the local amateur group Bornholmsk Amateurscene (BA) to full houses. BA now performs these plays every other year, alternating with another local amateur group, Klemensker Aktørerne (KLAK), which performs in standard danish. Hans Hjorth – prominent citizen of Rønne and director of Hjorth's Pottery Factory – was a huge asset to the theatre for 30 years (from the late 1920s to the 1950s), as a playwright, director, conductor etc.



Bornholms Ø-arkiv

Listing, refurbishment and enlargement

Originally, the theatre comprised only one building along Teaterstræde. Later neighbouring plots and some houses on Østergade were purchased. The theatre building was listed in 1939. Around 1960, it was analysed by a preservation architect, resulting in structural improvements to ensure the continuation of future per-