

Slovak Theatre Before Professionalization 1830 – 1919



Record-Keeping Book of the Slovak Theatre in Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš from 10 July 1830
The Record-Keeping Book includes all important information about the activities of the amateur theatre – opening nights, actors, venues, as well as financial details associated with the dramatic performances.

The development of amateur theatre on the territory of today's Slovakia was primarily influenced by the German and Hungarian theatre. The dramatic efforts of amateurs were concentrated in multiple cultural centres – in Brezno, Sobotište, Levoča, Martin, Tisovec, Banská Štiavnica or in Banská Bystrica. The official birthday of the Slovak amateur theatre is 22 August 1830, when in Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš, over the summer holidays, Gašpar Fejérpataky-Belopotocký with his students staged Ján Chalupka's comedy *Kocúrkovo*. The most prominent playwrights of this time included Ján Chalupka, Ján Palárik, and later Ferko Urbánek. Their comedies became the basis for the repertoires of the Slovak amateur theatres.

The beginnings of the Slovak dramatic activities were significant particularly for their national revival efforts. With the help of Samuel Jurkovič, teacher and later also notary public in Sobotište, the Bratislava students founded the Slovak National Theatre in Nitra on 5 August 1841. In addition to the Bratislava youth, the theatre company included the local enthusiasts from the Sobotište community.



Samuel Jurkovič Cooperative Museum in Sobotište with a commemorative plaque
The Slovak National Theatre in Nitra played in this building, which is marked with a commemorative plaque placed on the building.



Anička Jurkovičová in a theatrical costume
One of the first Slovak actresses was Anička Jurkovičová, later the wife of Jozef Miloslav Hurban.

The second half of the 19th century was most favourable for the Slovak nation and culture. Matica slovenská was founded in Turčiansky Sv. Martin (1863), and three Slovak high schools opened in Revúca, Turčiansky Sv. Martin and Kláštor pod Znievom. The energetic theatre activities gradually spread to other Slovak cities – Trnava, Prešov, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Trenčín, Žilina. In addition to Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš, Turčiansky Sv. Martin became a significant centre of amateur theatre. Amateurs from Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš focused their work in Slovenská beseda, amateurs from Martin developed a more active dramatic portfolio after the foundation of Slovenský spevokol (1872).



1891 Curtain of Slovenský spevokol, gift from Umelecká beseda in Prague
The curtain of Slovenský spevokol in Martin from 1891 was a gift from Umelecká beseda in Prague. It was designed by Karel Vítězslav Mašek.



Title page of the printed version of Ferko Urbánek's Penalty for Sin (1919, originally published under his pen name Miloš in 1890)
In the early years of the 20th century, amateur theatres were dominated particularly by the plays of Ferko Urbánek. Through his plays, based on the principles of Christian humanism and lingering sentimentalism, theatre spread to the village residents.



Members of Slovenský spevokol in Martin during the August festivities in 1913



Signs (posters with the cast) of Slovenský spevokol in Martin



Posters from the performances of Slovak amateurs abroad (America, Lower Hungary, Austria)
The popularity of amateur theatre at the turn of the 20th century can be seen from the fact that Slovaks practiced it everywhere where they travelled for work and better life.