

Foundation of the Slovak National Theatre

– the First Professional Stage



Members of the Slovak National Theatre Cooperative

The establishment of the Slovak National Theatre Cooperative was initiated by the participants of the August festivities in Martin and spearheaded by the minister for the administration of Slovakia, Vavro Šrobár. The Cooperative was supposed to secure the economic affairs and financial resources for the theatre. It generated funds primarily by issuing individual and collective shares and from the contributions to the Jirásek Fund (1921). This model of financing in the early years caused an almost permanent financial crisis for the theatre, and therefore the funding of the theatre soon transformed to a private business model (1923).

The first step on the road to a national theatre was the establishment of the Slovak National Theatre Cooperative as a shareholding company, since this cultural theatre venue could not count on any significant subsidy from the newly formed state – Czechoslovakia.

The Eastern Czech Touring Theatre Society became the foundation of the national theatre, led by an experienced theatre enthusiast Bedřich Jeřábek. Its touring around the Slovak cities in 1919 helped with the establishment of the theatre society in Slovakia.

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City Theatre, the future seat of the Slovak National Theatre

City Theatre. Stadttheater. Városi Színház. The City Theatre was built by developers Ignác and Alexander Feigler in 1884 – 1886 based on the design of Viennese architects Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer. The theatre had a grand opening on 22 September 1886 with the performance of a Hungarian opera Bánk bán. As late as in the early 1920s the theatre bore its name in all three languages spoken in Bratislava, Slovak, Hungarian and German. The Slovak National Theatre still operates in this historical building.



Members of the Jeřábek Theatre Society on a trip to Košice in August 1919



Václav Jiříkovský with the drama company of the Slovak National Theatre on a trip to Prague in 1926

In the 1920s, theatre was led by a private entrepreneur Oskar Nedbal, composer and conductor. He emphasized particularly the presentation of international theatre forms – opera and ballet. To head the dramatic stage he hired Václav Jiříkovský who pushed for the Slovakization of the theatre. He employed Tido J. Gašpar as the literary director for the Slovak repertoire and also initiated translations of important dramatic works into Slovak.

The expansion of Slovak actors community was greatly influenced by the traveling company Marška, even though it only existed for a single season 1921/1922. One third of their repertoire was staged in Slovak.

Another step toward Slovakization and emancipation of the Slovak dramatic theatre was the division of the dramatic theatre in 1932 into independent Czech and Slovak dramatic stages. This was initiated by the theatre director Antonín Drašar for operational and economic reasons.

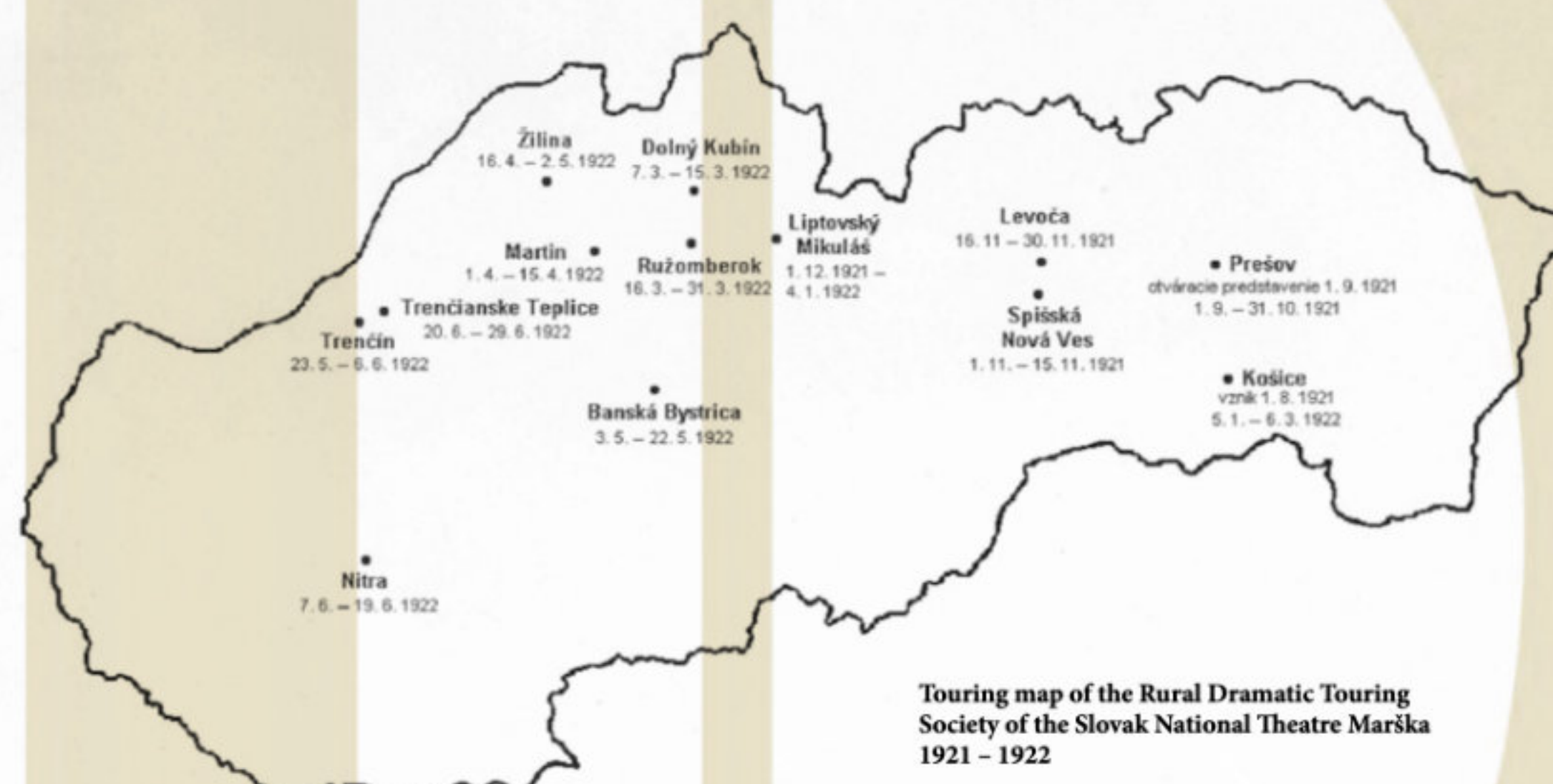
The year 1938 marked a new era for the Slovak National Theatre. The Czech dramatic theatre was disbanded and some of their members were able to join the Slovak company (Jozef Budský, Ján Sýkora, Mária Sýkorová, Mária Želenská, Karel Rint and Míla Beran). Others had to leave Slovakia. However, the new political orientation of the state triggered the departure of not only Czech, but also some Slovak artists (Andrej Bagar, Martin Gregor, Hana Meličková, Ružena Porubská).



Rural Dramatic Touring Society Marška 1921 – 1922

The first premiere of the Rural Dramatic Society of the Slovak National Theatre Marška was the play of Ján Palárik *Incognito* on 1 October 1921 in Prešov.

(standing from left) Adolf Divíšek, Gašpar Arbét, Ján Sýkora, Janko Borodáč, Olga Országhová, Karel Balák, Anna Kovaříková, Andrej Bagar, Jaroslav Tumlíř, Jozef Kello (sitting from left) Marta Divišková, Marie Pochmannová, Otto Vrba, Vladimír Jelenský, Hana Lauterbachová-Jelenská, Vilém Táborský, Ella Petzová, (front from left) Marie Slámová, Julie Horská



Touring map of the Rural Dramatic Touring Society of the Slovak National Theatre Marška 1921 – 1922

Another important step toward the professionalization of the Slovak theatre was the activity of director Janko Borodáč in the area of training theatre professionals. From his initiative, the private Music Academy for Slovakia opened the drama division for acting studies in 1925. In 1928 the school achieved a public status, the right to administer exams and issue diplomas valid in the entire country, and was renamed the Music and Drama Academy for Slovakia. Its graduates helped establish the Slovak Dramatic Theatre company within the national theatre in 1932 and became full-fledged members of the opera company. The school became the basic pillar of the future theatre art education.



Czech company of the Slovak National Theatre with director Viktor Šulc, photo from the 1930s



Trip of the Slovak National Theatre opera to Vienna in 1931

The first opera performance was Bedřich Smetana's opera *The Kiss*, 1 March 1920

The first dramatic performance was the Mrstík brothers play *Maryša*, 2 March 1920

The first ballet performance was Léo Delibes' ballet *Coppélia*, 19 May 1920

The first premiere of a Slovak play were two one-act plays of Jozef Gregor Tajovský *The Sin* and *The Servant*, 21 May 1920

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