

**Inheritance of the Brandt family** or a quick look into the history of theater technology  
by Prof. Dr. Bernhard Paysan (translation by Dr. Stefan Gräbener)

The theater technical inheritance of the Brandt family consists of about 600 sheets. These include, among others, plans of the festival theater for Wagner in Munich from Semper, technical effect devices like the mobile moon/sun, sketches for a Fafnerwurm for the Bayreuth Festival in 1876, reconstruction sketches for the Ring in Bayreuth, a portfolio construction drawings for electrical lighting console, plans for the renovation of the Royal Court Opera Berlin, today's State Opera.

The Brandt inheritance was acquired through donation of the descendants of Friedrich Brandt in August 1988 by the Institute for Cultural Buildings in the GDR. The accompanying letter from Catherine Brandt says, "From the estate of the Brandt family, I hand over to you according to an accompanying list of originals and blueprints on theater technology, architecture and scenography for unrestricted use and exploitation. With the donation, I assume that this historic documents are of scientific interest for your institute and will be carefully preserved". Whose general manager and shareholder Gerhard "After the Reunion of Germany the Institute for Cultural Buildings was privatised and transferred to the successor company" AIK Planungsbüro Cultural GmbH „, owned by Gerhard Döring (now treasurer of the initiative Theatre Museum Berlin eV) who became now the owner of the Brandt legacy.

Even the first, admiring views of some members of the Initiative raised the question: Who were the Brandts, and what was there significance?

The history of theater technology starts with the beginnings of the theater. Already in the ancient Greek tragedy only a God could avert the impending fate at the end. The deus ex machina (the God of the Machine literally) came down with a kind of crane or rolled on stage in a carriage (Ekkylema).

Until the Renaissance elaborate technical tools were rarely used in the theater. Theater architects were also engineers and scenographers.

Significant technical changes came with the Baroque era. The normally static sets have been replaced by exchangeable sets, mainly painted to visualise different locations. The key requirement of rapid and "magical" transformation of the set was only be solved by technical means. Rotating, sliding and folding visual elements were developed that were usually moved over elaborate, hand-operated rope drives. Other technical tools were needed to imitate effects such as rain, thunder and lightning. During this period, the Italian theater architects, scene painters and theater technicians were in a leading position in Europe. As mentioned before usually most of this scenic aspects laid in the hands of a single artist. The members of the Galli-Bibiena family worked all of Europe as theaters engineers, architects and scenographers. For example also at Bayreuth and Berlin.

About 100 years later, in mid-19th century, a separation of responsibilities in theater-architecture, set-design and theater technology started. The rapidly progressive industrial development, especially in England and in Germany, initiated a complete change of technical possibilities in the theater. Electric and / or hydraulic drives replaced human driving force. The wooden structures of the stage structures gave way to steel structures. At the same time the predominantly two-dimensional stage set was supplemented by plastic parts. The new demands of the stage were not achieved with the Baroque scenery. New stage systems were required, such as lifts and elevating stages, turning and sliding platform with side and back stage. Having these technical possibilities not only recognized but also implemented, is to the credit of theater technicians of that time and in particular the extent of the Brandt family.

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The family's ancestor **Elias Friedrich Brandt (1800-1878)** was a machinist in Darmstadt and later worked there as decoration inspector. His four sons Karl, Ludwig, Georg and Fritz were all theater technicians.

**Karl Brandt (1828-1881)** started as a machinist at the Munich Court Theater, then went as mechanical and theater master at the King City Theater in Berlin. In 1849 he was appointed Head of Mechanical Engineering at the Court Theatre Darmstadt. Its technical facilities in many European cities are legendary, such as of Wagner's "Tannhäuser" at London's St. James Theatre. His technical stage work could fill pages. Between 1857 and 1881 he equipped 24 theaters with new technology. In a special way Karl Brandt was connected to Richard Wagner. Under his technical direction the entire "Ring des Nibelungen" was staged at Bayreuth Festival House for the first time (1876), conducted by the composer.

**Ludwig Brandt (1835-1885)** was machinery inspector in Dresden and Hanover. Apart from a sensational technical facility of Walpurgisnacht in "Faust" in Hannover is of little known him. Since his name is occasionally French, so to read Louis Brandt, it may be presumed that he has been active in France.

**Georg Brandt (1846-1923)** worked for years of wandering in Stuttgart, Prague, Dresden, Munich and Altenburg than 30 years as machines inspector at the Court Theatre in Kassel.

**Fritz Brandt (1846-1927)** began his career with his 18-year-older brother Karl. At the age of 18 he was technically responsible for Wallner Theater at Berlin and a year later the Theater am Gärtnerplatz in Munich. For three years he was technical-artistic director of the Munich Court Opera. Through his achievements King Ludwig II. gets attentive and entrusted him with the management of all his private performances. After disagreements with the Bavarian monarch, he joined the Royal Court Theatre Berlin in 1876. His plans for the technical transformation of the Court Opera were only realized partially because all the increase in the stage area were denied. They only took place during the conversion of the State Opera in the years 1926-27, which based on the Brandt's plans. He also drew up the plans for the stage of the Royal Opera Covent Garden in London and the Imperial Opera in Tokyo. He developed new stage technology investments such as hydraulic platforms with parallel guidance, double purchase counterweight system and the system of lateral sliding platform. Likewise, he was successful in the field of stage lighting: In the Berlin Opera, the first lighting console was opened (in a theater at all!) on June 07th 1882.

The next generation, namely **Fritz Brandt (1854-1895)** and **Georg Brandt (1889 -?)** worked, like their fathers, for the theater. Fritz, son of Karl Brandt, worked on various German stages in the technical field and from 1891 mainly as a director in Weimar. Georg, son of Fritz Brandt, 1923 technical director at the Schauspielhaus in Dresden. But neither of them succeeded or stepped out of the shadows of their fathers.