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## Joy and respect at the Friedrichstadt-Palast

**The Friedrichstadt-Palast in Berlin is a theatre and an ensemble that stages spectacular Las Vegas style productions on a two-year cycle.**

Commemorating its centenary in 2019, the shows combine extravagant costumes, state-of-the-art stage settings with grand musical and dance numbers interspersed with 'heart-stopping' feats.

The current production is *Vivid Grand Show*.

All this is performed on the world's largest stage to a wildly enthusiastic evening audience of nearly 2,000 and six days a week

The Friedrichstadt-Palast embraces the fact that its 300 plus ensemble of musicians, singers and dancers and acrobats; production engineers and back of house support comprise 28 different nationalities (at the last count).

And mutual respect and understanding is a fundamental driving force for Berndt Schmidt, the Friedrichstadt-Palast's director since 2007.

Perhaps not surprising given his personal appreciation of the way the theatre was utilised by different political forces in a Germany that has seen so much turmoil in the last 100 years.

Today the theatre's philosophy is clear – respect each other.

[www.palast.berlin/en/show/vivid-grand-show](http://www.palast.berlin/en/show/vivid-grand-show)

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## Standing ovations for this show and its stance

By Ashley Gibbins

**A spontaneous and wildly enthusiastic standing ovation erupted at the end of *Vivid Grand Show* at the *Friedrichstadt-Palast*.**

But then this is the natural reaction at each evening and matinee performance of a spectacular show that melds Las Vegas glitz with the artistry of Cirque du Soleil and gives it a twist of German Burlesque.

### A love for life

*Vivid Grand Show*, the current show, has the simple premise – the declaration of love for life.

Irish haute couture hat–designer, Philip Treacy is the production's design director, and he created the spectacular headdresses that are a highlight.

As a stand alone theatrical experience it is truly memorable and one can understand how each *Friedrichstadt-Palast* production plays to sell-out audiences during its extended run.

That's nearly 600,000 satisfied theatregoers.

But delve a little deeper and the historic significance of this theatre and its predecessor gives added poignancy to what we have seen.

Over the last 100 years the theatre has endured in a Germany that has been a cauldron of political upheaval and social and economic turmoil.

A skim through the history of what is now the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* adds much to a visit.







## The Großes Schauspielhaus

The first theatre, called the *Großes Schauspielhaus*, was opened by Austrian theatre and film impresario Max Reinhardt, in 1919.

This was a time when Germany was emerging economically and morally devastated from defeat in the Great War'.

Reinhardt ran 11 stages in Berlin and also established the Salzburg Festival with Richard Strauss, but at the Großes Schauspielhaus he focused on Busby Berkley style productions with flamboyant and elaborate musical numbers.

Germany's 'Golden Twenties' was short lived and the emergence, in 1933, of National Socialism and Hitler's Nazi Party had inevitable consequences for Reinhardt, who was a Jew.

He refused to accept the Nazi's offer to be deemed *Aryan by Honour* and fled to Britain and then the USA where he died in poverty in 1943.

## Theater des Volkes

During the Third Reich the *Großes Schauspielhaus* was renamed *Theater des Volkes* and staged Nazi sanctioned propaganda productions with bourgeois operettas popular.

With the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945 there was hope of brighter times, but it was a case of 'out of the frying pan into the fire'.

The theatre was located in what had become East Germany and in the Russian designated sector of East Berlin.

The American, British, and French controlled West Berlin.

This had no real consequences at first but, on the 13 August 1961, the Berlin Wall' split East and West Berlin.

The Communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) ruled East Germany and East Berlin until the Wall fell on 9 November 1989.

## Friedrichstadt Palast

The now named *Friedrichstadt-Palast* served up entertainment geared to the thinking of its new political masters.

And the communist authorities were aware of the importance of the theatre as a voice for propaganda.

In 1980, when the old theatre building had to closed after being deemed unsafe, it was quickly agreed to construct a new and grand theatre.

This opened near to the original in 1984.

Ironically, it was one of the last prestige constructions projects undertaken during the GDR regime, which fell four years later.

With German reunification the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* was, at last, able to adopt a theatrical approach based on freedom of expression and respect for all.

This has been driven by Berndt Schmidt, who has created a musical experience that is modern, vibrant and awe-inspiring while also embracing multi-nationalism and tolerance.

Max Reinhardt would have been proud to see how his theatre has finally thrown off the shackles of oppression to become a beacon of joy and mutual understanding.







## Glitz and glamour on the grandest of scales

If ever the term large-scale deserved to be used in theatrical parlance it is for *Vivid*.

Over 100 artists are performing a series of huge and visually stunning musical production numbers and acrobatic stunts on the world's biggest stage – and employing each and every bit of it.

It took a 12 million Euro's to get *Vivid Grand Show* to the stage and every Euro has been used to spectacular effect.

And my goodness is it money well spent with audiences wallowing in a glorious evening of theatrical extravaganza.

As for the plot, it is deliberately lightweight.

A young girl is separated from her father, becomes an android and longs to be returned to her life of love and freedom.

But then *Vivid Grand Show* is a musical review not a musical and, with little dialogue and then in German repeated in English, it is ideal for international audiences.

And for those of eight years and older, despite some risqué and burlesque elements to the show.

Reviewing *Vivid Grand Show* is a relatively easy task.

One starts by including as many of the stunning production images as possible before searching the meaning of *vivid*.

It is *bright and bright-coloured; brilliant, glowing, radiant and vibrant; intense, rich and warm; flamboyant and eye-catching*.

Yes - that's *Vivid*.

And being staged in a theatre with such an historic back story, in a city that is one of Europe's finest, really did make my visit to *Friedrichstadt-Palast* one of the most memorable and enjoyable of experiences in a very long time.

[www.palast.berlin/en/show/vivid-grand-show](http://www.palast.berlin/en/show/vivid-grand-show)

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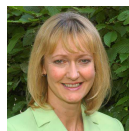
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