

A short history of puppet plays

So-called marionette theatre performed by nomadic puppeteers became the most popular type of theater in central Europe from about 16th century. In Bohemia, in about the mid-18th century, they were replaced by wandering Czech puppeteers, who brought Czech theatre to smaller towns and villages as well. In addition to this, they also performed important plays from both the Czech and international repertoire to local audiences. One of the legendary representatives of these puppets was Matěj Kopecký (1775-1847), also called the patriarch of Czech puppet theatre. A wooden acting ensemble was created by wood-carvers for wandering puppeteers.

In the late 19th century, puppet theatre started to appeal to young theatre-goers, but parents often found lots of ambiguities, especially during times of political oppression. One of the best examples of characters displaying such ambiguities was the Czech hero **Kašpárek**. He was famous in Pilsen before the famous puppets **Spejbl and Hurvínek** came into being. Kašpárek was a real star in his time. The one from Pilsen was, on top of that, also courageous: from the beginning of the First World War in 1914 up to its end in 1918, he provocatively wore the Czechoslovak colors and was also one of the first to abolish the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Later, he even became *a national cultural monument*. In the beginning, when the puppet **Spejbl** was created, it was **Kašpárek** who helped him get started, and who was also his important “acting” partner.

Thanks to innovation in mass production of puppets, set and stage construction, home puppet theatres also became popular. In 1912, the first models of so-called **Aleš puppets** made by Ant. Münzberg appeared in Prague markets. They were made mostly by **professor Karel Koblíček** according to designs by Aleš.

Even today, puppet drama hasn't lost its beauty and significance. And Pilsen just happens to be one of the cities where you have the opportunity to learn about the roots of the most famous Czech puppet creators – Jiří Trnka and Josef Skupa.