

3 in one: Theatre, Opera House, Cinema

JUSTYNA ZIELIŃSKA
Students' Union Volunteer

🇬🇧 In 2016 we will probably start doing guided tours of Teatro Municipal in Funchal. In last October we had an opportunity to visit the inside, including the mysterious backstage and catacombs.

We were in the great noble hall, the magnificent royal box and we even climbed to see the audience room from the perspective of the chandelier – 7 meters above. It was a spectacular experience!

Since the very beginning I had dreamed of joining "The Theatre Project". I have a degree in drama studies, a very niche field of science in my country, with a limited number of possibilities to gain professional experience in it. Frankly speaking, I didn't expect the opportunity I would get 4000 km from Poland, on a very little island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

On my first day, when I was walking through the city with the EVS coordinator from the association, I asked him if there was the possibility to see from time to time theatre performances. I was quite surprised when we passed next to the city theatre. He told me then that during the summer there are not many shows, but there are more between October and May.

The repertoire included many concerts, exhibitions, some dance and ballet performances and



from time to time guest theatre shows.

The first surprising thing that I found out about this theatre was that La Scala from Milan was a kind of prototype and inspiration for the construction of this building from 19th century.

During the visit with other EVS volunteers we found out that besides theatrical shows, the building had functioned for a long time as a cinema. Still, till present times, Teatro Municipal is the location for the Madeira Film Festival. Its golden cinema times were here in 50s and 60s. The very first movie was projected here in the 1920s. Still, in its halls and corridors we can see some old movie projectors. The other popular shows here were of course operas and ballets (and still are popular).

The audience room with great balconies and a chandelier in the middle for me is the most mag-



The audience room with great balconies and a chandelier in the middle for me is the most magnificent element of this building.

nificent element of this building. When you enter it – you can feel a little bit like in a time machine. You leave the 21st century and immediately appear somewhere in 19th century – the golden century of opera and ballet shows, with spectacular, naturalistic, but painted scenography's. We visited upper level of the backstage, where these sets were prepared and then put on the stage with a help of special tool called "Web". We found out that they stopped using painted sets in this theatre about 20-30 years ago. For me it was surprising, because the 20th century in theatre history was a time for experimenting.

But – let's get back to the audience room. We were sitting on seats in the royal, later – presidential box, just in front of the great stage. We also visited the last floor, which was dedicated to the poorer audience. It was called "chicken pot" – the balcony there is so low that usually it was

also equipped with a net, to protect against falling down from this level – it could be spectacular, dramaturgic jump, unexpected change in performance scenario, but somehow too realistic... So I hope it won't happen ...

As for multi-function theatre, inside the audience room we noticed two types of masks – Venice which stay for comedy genre and Greek ones which stay for tragedy. To make this building more local, despite it being inspired by a famous Italian opera house, we could also find inside some Madeiran motives like flowers, sugar canes, sugar loafs and wine grapes.

All in all, I was and still am impressed with the huge architecture of the theatre – let's say that as every drama and theatre lover (only sometimes critic) should do – this was love from the first sight!