



One of many showcases from the museum, created in the 18th century manner, with just a small selection of one of the more than 750 dolls and toys to be offered in the January 5-7, 2007 auction by Theriault's.

Theriault's To Auction the Vienna Puppen & Spielzeug Museum

In 1991 a small article appeared in the illustrious German doll journal, *Cieslik's Puppenmagazin*. Titled simply "The Doll Fairy", the article told the background history of the Viennese ballet of that name, in which the dolls of a richly-filled toy shop come vibrantly alive. Premiering in Vienna in 1888, this Josef Bayer ballet became one of the most successful ballets in the history of dance.

Yet the inspiration for the ballet is of even greater interest for doll lovers. It traces back to 1867 when Countess Pauline Metternich, wife of an Austrian statesman in Paris, organized a charity ball. The theme of her Parisian ball was a doll shop, and each guest was instructed to come costumed as a doll, a doll customer, or a doll shop owner. The party was a grand success.

Twenty years later, the Countess repeated this party theme, this time in Vienna, and this time concluding with a pantomime enacting scenes in a doll shop. The performance was completely soundless excepting the rustling of silk gowns and the occasional "mama" call of a bebe whose pull-string was mischievously tugged. It is possible that Josef Bayer, the composer, was in attendance. At any rate he learned of the party, and in the following year the ballet, *The Doll Fairy (Die Puppenfee)*, inspired by this fete, was premiered.

The ballet was met with universal accolades. "...the whole thing is delightfully arranged, full of impish surprises and entertaining from beginning to end" wrote one top critic.



The front entrance of the Museum is shown in this poster which will be given to every auction attendee (as supply lasts).

That 1991 Cieslik *Puppenmagazin* article was based in part on the research of one Vaclav Sladky. A Czech native, he left his native land in 1969 on the eve of Russian tanks rolling into Prague. With a suitcase in hand, his only possession, he traveled to Hungary, then Italy and finally, to Vienna which he made his new home.

A few years later, wandering through a flea market, he came upon a bedraggled antique doll, her limbs hanging loosely, her costume in tatters. He brought her home with a feeling of sadness and then delight as her beauty emerged with cleaning, and then, deciding the doll must be lonely, he found another. And another. And another. So began his curiosity, fascination and, eventually, love of beautiful antique dolls. He determined to make a museum, a showcase of these dolls, and to make this his life's important work.

Who could not say that "The Doll Fairy" ballet of Josef Bayer, or at least the sound of music that imbues Vienna, figured in the dream of Vaclav Sladky? For the location that he chose for his museum was in the very courtyard where Mozart had played and lived as a young child. Dolls come alive, set to the background of music, indeed!

It was a dream well accomplished, as every visitor to the Puppen & Spielzeug Museum at #4 Schulhof Street in old Vienna

will bear witness. Entering the courtyard with its gas lights and old cobbled streets, opening the centuries-old wooden door, and climbing the narrow winding stone staircase, one emerged into room upon room filled with the sugarplum visions of all doll lovers, young and old alike. Framed by floor-to-ceiling arched windows, and with elegant crystal chandeliers and superb wooden showcases in the 18th century style as background, visitors were left gasping in delight at the childhood treasures contained within.

For over a 30-year period, with determination, sleuthing, judicious selection, and a superb eye for the unusual and rare, Vaclav Sladky assembled an unrivalled collection of the world's finest dolls. Research was important to him, and for years he was a contributor to Cieslik's *Puppenmagazin*. In his collection, he chose not only the rare and beautiful but also outstanding costumes and presentation. Dolls wearing authentic period costumes, accompanied by perfect final touches (a piece of jewelry, a parasol, a little toy) helped bring this collection alive for all the world's collectors who made this museum a must-see on their trips to Vienna. Extraordinary dolls by famous French doll firms, impish German googlies of infinite variety, German character children whose expressive features are enhanced by size

The dolls of the Vienna Puppen & Spielzeug Museum are notable, not only for rarity, but for exquisite presentation and antique costuming as shown in this small selection.

At the museum, the dolls and toys were displayed in a panorama of artfully placed 18th-century style vitrines which will also be offered at the auction.



and presentation, and many, many rare and early dolls of bisque and porcelain with sculpted hair were highlighted. Little dolls that fit so charmingly in the palm of one's hand were a special delight in the museum and dozens and dozens were included. Too, the accessories, a well-furnished very large dollhouse, rocking and riding horses, toy theatres, lavishly fitted carriages, miniature toys, holiday decorations, and doll furniture gave a vital and alive look to the settings.

Last year, Vaclav Sladky determined the time had come to part with his museum. And now it has come to America to be sold in one grand auction on January 5, 6, and 7, 2007 in Newport Beach, California. Theriault's was chosen to conduct the auction according to Mr. Sladky, "because I knew Theriault's would best honor my collection and what I had sought to achieve." He noted that George and Florence Theriault had been among his first visitors, nearly 25 years ago, and pointed proudly to a place on a wall where George Theriault had signed his name those decades before (the remainder of the wall had been painted since, but the signature was still preserved).

The complete contents of the Vienna Puppen & Spielzeug Museum will be featured in a one-owner auction at Theriault's January 5, 6 and 7 premiere weekend in California. Too, the antique style vitrines in which the collection was displayed will also be offered, and the auction preview will be a re-creation of the museum displays. The museum is featured in a commemorative hard-bound catalog with superb color photographs, many full-page, of each object and detailed descriptions by Florence Theriault. "This is a keepsake book", notes Stuart Holbrook, President of Theriault's, "a veritable

Although the collection is notable for a superb collection of tiny dolls ("because every doll should own its own doll", according to Mr. Sladky) there is a very fine inclusion of large dolls, with superb costuming.



A wooden carousel horse stands as a playful sentry in the middle of elegant display cabinets filled to the brim with fine antique dolls and toys. The extensive collection includes some 600 superb dolls as well as doll houses, doll kitchens, model trains, mechanical toys, toy theatres, teddy bears, and toy horses.



piece of doll history that every collector will want." The weekend begins with a Friday evening session, and continues with Saturday and Sunday auctions. Mr. Vaclav Sladky will be in attendance throughout the weekend, and available for meeting collectors and autographing catalogs. In addition, a catalogued auction of antique doll costumes will be presented on Sunday.

It is fitting that the reviewer's notes about the 1881 ballet, "The Doll Fairy," that helped inspire the museum, can also serve as a description of the Museum itself, and hence the auction. In 1888 the reviewer wrote "...the whole thing is delightfully arranged, full of impish surprises and entertaining from beginning to end". About the auction, Stuart Holbrook predicts that the 1881 words of the *Vienna General News*, in writing of the ballet premiere, will be particularly apt. "A thoroughly great evening! We have never seen anything like it."

Hardbound commemorative catalogs of the auction are available for \$75. Or a free-color brochure is available upon request. Collectors are encouraged to attend in order to see this superb museum in its last intact presentation, but absentee and live Internet bidding are also available. For more information call 800-638-0422. Special hotel rates are available at the Westin Hotel Newport Beach (until December 15) by asking for the Theriault block.

Editor's Note: Refer to Stuart Holbrook's article in our October 2005 issue for more information on the Vienna Doll Museum and its owner, Vaclav Sladky. Readers wishing to learn more about the wildly successful ballet, "The Doll Fairy," will find an article in the Cieslik book, *German Doll Studies* available through Dollmasters (800-966-3655).

Vaclav Sladky, the founder of the Puppen & Spielzeug Museum, shown with a small group of dolls from the museum.