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Press release

A most remarkable woman - Margravine Wilhelmine of Bayreuth

Almost 300 years ago, King Frederick of Prussia's favourite sister Margravine Wilhelmine turned Bayreuth into a centre of art and culture. The palaces and parks dating back to this era make Bayreuth the splendid baroque gem that it is today. Thanks to Margravine Wilhelmine Bayreuth has many stunning buildings of which the most magnificent is the Opera House. Appointed by the leading theatre architect of the period, Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena, the opera house is considered the most beautifully preserved baroque theatre worldwide, it has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list and it is, including the new visitor centre and museum, open daily for visitors.

Wilhelmine, is without a doubt one of the most outstanding women of the 18th century. Unlike Tsarina Elizabeth or Maria Theresia, Wilhelmine's successes were achieved not in politics but in the intellectual and artistic world. She represented an epoch of change, the Age of Enlightenment. Born on July 3rd, 1709, the daughter of the king Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia and his wife Sophie Dorothea from the House of Hanover

was the oldest of ten brothers and sisters; her brother Crown Prince Friedrich, who was three years younger, received the epithet "the Great" when he in turn became king (Frederick the Great).

Soon after Wilhelmine's birth, the queen determined that her brother's son, who was the same age as Wilhelmine, was to be her daughter's future husband, with the idea of forging a closer link between the dynasties. The House of Hanover was expected to take over the English throne in the near future, and Wilhelmine would thus become Queen of England.

But finally the marriage plans came to nothing as a result of intrigues at the English royal court and therefore they settled on the Bayreuth Crown Prince Friedrich (1711-1763). The idea behind this choice was to bind the small Franconian margraviate, which had in the past showed a tendency to drift politically towards the Austrian camp, more closely to Prussia.

As soon as she got married and moved into the Bayreuth residence, Wilhelmine had a major influence on the planning and designing of the Bayreuth palaces and gardens. The margravine also took an active interest in all the arts: she painted, composed, wrote works for the stage, occasionally acted as well and directed. She was an important international writer who corresponded with the great intellectuals of her day, including Voltaire.

18th-century Bayreuth with its attractive palaces and parks, designed for the enjoyment of life, is

largely the work of Wilhelmine and is the expression in architecture, stucco and painting of her personality, her thinking and her artistic preferences. It is astonishing what this dainty but energetic woman designed and created in the two decades between 1735 and 1758. Thanks to the achievements of Margravine Wilhelmine, Bayreuth became a milestone in the art and cultural history of Germany. Margrave Wilhelmine died at the age of 49 on October 14th, 1758.

Today, the Bayreuth palaces and gardens are widely known as "Wilhelmine's World" and visitors are welcome all year round to discover the treasures of Bayreuth's Golden Age.

Further information:

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