

## Magician – Jester – Business Man

A first question we should ask ourselves: Could one even say that Joseph Fröhlich was a magician? During my research, while presenting our idea of doing a magic festival honouring Fröhlich to **Sieglinde Köberl**, director of Kammerhofmuseum in Bad Aussee, she blatantly told me that in her opinion Fröhlich was a highly political figure – but not a magician.

To fully understand the role that Fröhlich played, we have to emphasise on the tradition of court jesters, which goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when jesters were installed as an antithesis to the king's regular advisors. In doing so, people found a way to personalise the christian idea of good and evil at the court. By listening to – and trusting – the jester instead his other advisors and vice versa the king could choose between good and evil.

Eventually, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the position of a court jester was officially installed at European courts. Around the same time, a strict dress code for the so-called “Narrent-racht” was established.

From there on, the jester played a crucial part in the court ceremonial. Historians can substantiate the popularity of the jester until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, which would increasingly decline in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

With one exception: In the year 1727, electoral prince **Friedrich August 1<sup>st</sup>**, also known as **August the Strong**, employed Joseph Fröhlich at his Dresden court. Not as a jester in the well-known motley dress, but rather as an official “court conjurer” dressed in an alpine fantasy garb.

### Short overview of Joseph Fröhlich's live

As mentioned before, the life of Fröhlich is well documented, as you can see in the attached list of sources.

As it was in the very nature of a jester to entertain people with stories and tricks, one should not wonder, that transmission about such figures are a mixture of facts and fiction.

Joseph Fröhlich was born on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1694 as the illegitimate child of Wolfgang Fröhlich, a travelling sales clerk and Ursula Gatterer. With 13 he began his apprenticeship at the Gatterer-Mill, belonging to his grandparents, where he was trained to become a miller and baker. In the last year of his apprenticeship, he stayed with the farmer and miller Adami – also called “Mühlenarzt” which one would roughly translate as “mill-doctor”. Besides working as a miller, his responsibilities also included building new mills as well as mending broken cogwheels.



He followed the conventions of the time, spending 6 years after finishing his apprenticeship travelling, following his profession around the country.

It was then that he met the travelling showman Benvenuto Venturolo. Fascinated by his kind of work, he eventually took employment with him. In Venturolo's employment, he had to learn “magic” tricks, in order to attract people to the medical procedures of his master. Following that, he grooved his abilities and magic tricks under the jester Reitzenstein at Castle Seblitz.

After a short stay in his hometown, in 1725, he found employment at the court of electoral prince **Georg Wilhelm of Brandenburg-Bayreuth**, whose sister **Christiana Eberhardina** married August the Strong in 1693.

After his first performance there, he was immediately installed as the official court conjurer.

Following the death of the prince, which led to losing his position at court, he found employment with the prince's sister and her husband, electoral prince of Saxony and King of Poland, Friedrich August 1<sup>st</sup> at their court. There he held the position of “kurweiliger Rath”, which wasn't much a position as magician, but more that of a jester.

He also knew how to use his status of being somehow “exotic” to his advantage, which lead to even more popularity at the Dresden Court. As August the strong was a true lover of the performing arts, the only thing that mattered to him was an artist's ability to entertain, no matter what social status he had. Which was also the case with Fröhlich who – as a catholic Austrian, born into a lower class – soon was responsible for tasks that exceeded his position by far.