

Benefit Performances in the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg as an Example of Cultural Transfer in Musical Theatre in the Late Nineteenth Century

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Abstract: This study deals with benefit performances in the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg in the late nineteenth century, with their income meant for the municipal poor relief fund. The city commissioned Magistrate Councillor and municipal Officer for Care for the Poor Theodor Kumlik, the son of the conductor and founder of the Church Music Association of Saint Martin's Cathedral, composer Josef Kumlik, with organizing these performances. By staging a musical-dramatic repertoire that symbolized the culturedness of Pressburg in the eyes of its German-speaking citizens, Kumlik's son Theodor drew on the long-standing musical tradition cultivated in the city thanks to the activities of the Church Music Association. Along with the theatre director Emanuel Raul, Theodor Kumlik selected German operas which were highly popular in Pressburg, such as *Zar und Zimmermann* (by Albert Lortzing) or *Hans Heiling* (by Heinrich Marschner), for the benefit performances. Moreover, they provided an opportunity for the guest soloists from the Hofoper singing the same roles in Vienna to give stunning performances. In this way, the director secured a solid income which was, after all, one of the main goals of the benefit performances. In addition, he gained the favour of the audience and the support of the municipal representatives. Thanks to these, he led the Municipal Theatre successfully for nine seasons at a time when a battle was being fought to promote Hungarian theatre in the city.

Keywords: Municipal Theatre in Pressburg, benefit performances, municipal poor relief fund, Theodor Kumlik, musical-dramatic repertoire

“The place a good person enters is sacred. After a hundred years, it will echo his words and deeds to his grandchildren.”¹

In the late nineteenth century, the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg was the central cultural institution of the city, staging dramatic and musical-dramat-

1 „Die Stätte, die ein guter Mensch betrat, Ist eingeweiht; nach hundert Jahren klingt Sein Wort und seine Tat dem Enkel wieder.“ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Torquato Tasso*, Act 1.

ic repertoire. It was a new theatre building, known at the time of launching its operations in the autumn of 1886 as Stadttheater or Városi Színház (today, it is known as the Historical Building of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava), built by the city according to the designs of the Viennese architects Ferdinand Fellner Jr. and Hermann Helmer. For Pressburg, this Viennese atelier was a guarantee of prestige and of a promising future based on a wealthy past, since the proximity of Vienna had had a major impact on the social and cultural life of the people of Pressburg for centuries.² Despite the socio-political changes which culminated after 1848, the people of Pressburg rejected the attitude of Budapest and Vienna, which both viewed Pressburg as a provincial town on the western border of Upper Hungary. Therefore, they tried to cultivate intensive relations with the cultural and artistic milieu of the nearby metropolis and promoted shared initiatives.

With growing Hungarianization after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the tone changed and Pressburg was increasingly often mentioned as the western bastion of the Hungarians. In this respect, it is not surprising that the new theatre building fulfilled a non-dramatic mission, too. According to Ministerial President and Minister of the Interior Kálmán Tisza, Pressburg had to become a place for cultivating national, i.e. Hungarian, theatre.³ However, German-speaking citizens prevailed in the city and ignoring them would have led to the end of theatre in Pressburg. Therefore, the city, as the owner of the Municipal Theatre, decided to keep the German shows and divided the season into a German and a Hungarian part, with their respective directors and ensembles.

The years between 1886 and 1899 were crucial for the further orientation of the theatre, since extensive discussions came up between the director providing German performances and the representatives of the city whenever the three-year lease agreement of the theatre was to be renewed. Ultimately, a change occurred in 1899 under the pressure of the Hungarian Government and the theatre was leased to a single (Hungarian) director with a bilingual (German and Hungarian) ensemble. This decision was to stabilize Hungarian theatre in the city and spread the Hungarian language by increasing the

2 On this topic, see TANCER, J. *Im Schatten Wiens. Zur deutschsprachigen Presse und Literatur im Pressburg des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Bremen : Lumiere, 2008.

3 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879 – 1887. Zusammengestellt von Oberingenieur Anton Sendlein. Archiv mesta Bratislavy (AMB) [Bratislava City Archives], Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box No. 2940, inv. No. 15879, p. 35.

number of Hungarian performances despite the constantly low attendance and the fluctuating standard of the performances.

The difference was felt all the more since, during the German seasons in the Municipal Theatre before 1899, operas had been played on a level well above that of a provincial theatre. This was thanks to theatre directors Max Kmentt (who rented the Municipal Theatre from 1886 to 1890, the dates of his birth and death are unknown) and, mainly, to Emanuel Raul (Emanuel Friedmann by his real name, 1843 – 1916, who worked in Pressburg from 1890 to 1899).⁴ Both drew inspiration from the repertoire of Viennese theatres and invited guest soloists from the Hofoper Vienna. In this way, they drew on the tradition of cultural transfer between “the metropolis and the province”, “the centre and the periphery”,⁵ while benefit performances formed an integral part of theatre operations and, just like in the past, they were an important intermediary in



Municipal Theatre in Pressburg. Photo Monuments Board Archives of the Slovak Republic. Inv. No. 2382.

4 On recent research on the activities of directors Max Kmentt and Emanuel Raul in Pressburg, see LASLAVÍKOVÁ, J. *Mestské divadlo v Prešporoku na sklonku 19. storočia. Medzi provinciou a metropolou*. [The Municipal Theatre in Pressburg at the Close of the Nineteenth Century. Between Province and Metropolis.] Bratislava : Hudobné centrum – Historický ústav SAV, 2020.

5 For more on this, see HARS, E. – MÜLLER-FUNK, W. – REBER, U. – RUTHER, C. (eds.). *Zentren, Peripherien und kollektive Identitäten in Österreich-Ungarn*. Tübingen; Basel : A Francke Verlag, 2006.

the appropriation process of the Viennese cultural tradition.⁶ Thanks to the local patriotism of the leading figures of cultural developments in Pressburg, for whom the excellent execution of the shows mattered a lot, the performances became a “showcase” of the Municipal Theatre.

Charity and the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg Over the Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century, the charity of the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie had several characteristics, and the relationship between the donor and the beneficiary was an act of convergence (and dependence at the same time), but was also characterised by distancing (and obligatory gratitude at the same time).⁷ A significant element in practising charity was to emphasize the donors’ social status and promote their rise in elite circles. As a means to gain resources for funding public charitable projects promoting the organization of social care in Pressburg, benefit performances provided an ideal opportunity to demonstrate social prestige.

One of the intentions of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy was to eliminate poverty in order to suppress begging in public and increase the safety of public spaces in the city.⁸ Over the nineteenth century, besides traditional church charity, the charitable activities of societies and various individuals, in collaboration with municipal bodies, came to the forefront. As a result of modernization, the system of communal social care in Pressburg became more specialized in the late nineteenth century compared to the previous decades and, in addition, it provided social aid to a wider circle of socially deprived individuals.⁹ A special Department for Care for the Poor/Poverty

6 For more on this, see ZVARA, V. Hudba a hudobné divadlo v Bratislave pred prvou svetovou vojnou a po nej. Aspekty a súvislosti [Music and Musical Theatre in Bratislava Before and After World War I. Aspects and Connections]. In CHALUPKA, Ľ. (ed.): *Príspevky k vývoju hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku* [Contributions to the Development of Musical Culture in Slovakia]. Bratislava : Stimul, 2009, pp. 69 – 86.

7 PIELHOFF, S. Stifter und Anstifter. Vermittler zwischen “Zivilgesellschaft”, Kommune und Staat im Kaiserreich. In *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2007, Vol. 33, No. 1, p. 10.

8 For more on this, see KUŠNIRÁKOVÁ, I. Vplyv elit na podobu sociálnej starostlivosti v Uhorsku v období od polovice 18. do polovice 19. storočia. [The Influence of the Elite on Shaping Social Care in Hungary from the Mid-Eighteenth Century to the Mid-Nineteenth Century.] In *Forum historiae*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 9 – 30.

9 DUDEKOVÁ, G. Systém sociálnej starostlivosti v Bratislave v 19. storočí a jeho modernizácia na prelome 19. a 20. storočia. [The Social Care System in Bratislava in the Nine-

was established as part of the municipal bodies in charge of social care, and it managed a so-called poor relief fund.¹⁰ Besides subsidies from the municipal budget, the income of the poor relief fund included donations and estates of individuals and patrons of Pressburg¹¹ or of those from outside the city¹² (e.g. it received a part of the endowment of Samuel Royko),¹³ and its regular income consisted of fines for offences,¹⁴ and levies on some of the cultural events held in the city.¹⁵ These included concerts organized in public halls and theatrical performances for charitable purposes.¹⁶

Charity events organized in the theatre, aimed at supporting the poor, had a long tradition in Pressburg. Such events were held already in the old Municipal Theatre built in 1776, and the theatre directors, as lessees of the building owned by the city, were required to organize two shows of this type per season.¹⁷ The playbills always stated that the performance was for the poor relief fund (Armenfond) or for the Institute for Care of the Poor (Armen-Institut). Several directors organized fundraising shows above their liabilities stated in their contracts to win the favour of the city and its inhabitants. Franz Pokorny, who was granted honorary citizenship of Pressburg for his merits, stands out in this regard.¹⁸ Besides theatrical performances in the Redoute, which formed

teenth Century and Its Modernization at the Turn of the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries.] In *Historický časopis*, 2014, Vol. 62, No. 2, p. 237.

10 Ibid.

11 [Anonymous]. Das Linzboth'sche Testament. In *Preßburger Zeitung [PZ]*, 1888, Vol. 125, Issue 260, p. 2, 20 September 1888.

12 In 1893, the *Preßburger Zeitung* daily reported on an unknown donor, an official from Vienna called Johann Nepomuk van Crasbeck, who left a donation for the municipal poor relief fund in his testament. [Anonym]. Ein überraschendes Legat für den städt. Armenfond. In *PZ*, 1893, Vol. 130, Issue 352, p. 2, 21 December 1893.

13 [Anonymous]. Der Roykófond. In *PZ*, 1893, Vol. 130, Issue 169, p. 2, 21 June 1893.

14 [Anonymous]. Unsere braven Landleute und die neue Fahrordnung. In *PZ*, 1888, Vol. 125, Issue 246, p. 3, 05 September 1888.

15 [Anonymous]. Sollen die Taxen für Benützung des Repräsentanten-Saales und des Apponyi-Saales erhöht werden? (Schluß). In *PZ*, 1888, Vol. 125, Issue 45, p. 2, 14 February 1888.

16 On latest research, see the studies on the history of music in Bratislava in the nineteenth century in the multi-authored monograph KALINAYOVÁ-BARTOVÁ, J. (ed.). *Hudobné dejiny Bratislavy. Od stredoveku po rok 1918* [The Musical History of Bratislava. From the Middle Ages to 1918]. Bratislava : Ars musica, 2019.

17 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box No. 2937, inv. No. 15879, draft lease agreement of the theatre.

18 CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, M. *Premeny divadla. Inonárodné divadlá na Slovensku do roku 1918* [Transformations of the Theatre. Theatres of Other Ethnicities in Slovakia before 1918]. Bratislava : Veda, 1981, p. 47.

part of the old Municipal Theatre, fundraising balls were also held in support of municipal social facilities (e.g. the local hospital, the military field hospital etc.). It was mandatory for the theatre directors to make the Redoute hall available for this purpose free of charge.¹⁹

As for the benefit performances in the new Municipal Theatre built in 1886, the director was bound by the lease agreement of the theatre to organize three performances of this type per season.²⁰ The income from two of the performances went to facilities managed by associations run by Pressburg's citizens in collaboration with the municipal council. The first such association was the Catholic Civil Caregiving Association (Katholischer Bürger-versorgungs-Verein in German, Pozsonyi Katholikus Polgári Ápoló Egyesület in Hungarian) and the other such association ran the Evangelical Nursing Home of Pressburg under the aegis of the Lutheran community. The third performance was meant for the municipal poor relief fund, without further specification of a particular institute of social care run by the city. According to the lease agreements between the city and the theatre directors, the total income, except for the regular daily expenses whose amount was not allowed to exceed a hundred guilders, was reserved for one of the above-mentioned three purposes.²¹ Benefit performances were organized in December, often close to Christmas, or in January. At that time, the local ensemble was already coherent and the members of the Hofburgtheater and the Hofoper could get permission to give guest performances outside Vienna. Moreover, the Christmas season was a perfect opportunity to challenge the audience to demonstrate their generosity. At times, attendance dropped due to pre-holiday rush or due to the balls held in January, as these had a long-standing tradition in the city and often served charitable purposes, too.

Since the theatre premises were a specific place for self-representation, benefit performances in the theatre had a strongly representative character. They were accompanied by massive advertising campaigns in the newspapers, often started weeks ahead of the show. In the theatre play bill, the purpose of the show and the ticket price, which was higher than at other times, were written in large font and highlighted. The main organizer of the

19 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box No. 2937, inv. No. 15879, draft lease agreement of the theatre.

20 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Bratislava City Archives, box No. 2836, inv. No. 15800, file No. 24, lease agreement of the theatre from 1886 and box No. 2839, inv. No. 15803, file No. 32, lease agreement of the theatre from 1889.

21 Ibid.

performances for the municipal poor relief fund was evidently the municipal council since, in some years, these lacked the publicity that accompanied the two other, above-mentioned benefit performances. A change occurred only when prestigious guests gave performances, arousing the interest of the theatre directors too, who viewed these shows as an opportunity to become more visible for the magistrate of Pressburg.

The fact that benefit performances were extraordinary events worth supporting regardless of one's mother tongue or political or religious affiliation can also be seen from the reactions of the Pressburg press. While the conservative German daily *Preßburger Zeitung* promoted the cultural memory of the city by supporting classical repertoire, the liberal *Westungarischer Grenzboten* acted as a progressive reporter of novel ideas (also) in the field of theatre. Therefore, the contents of the critiques often varied. At the time of benefit performances, however, both dailies published reports and critiques in a very similar spirit. The Hungarian newspapers *Pozsonyvidéki Lapok* and *Nyugatmagyarországi Híradó* favoured Hungarian theatre but, since organizing benefit performances was an obligation of the German directors, they truthfully informed about their progress regardless of their different ethnicity.

The choice of the repertoire and of the guest performers reflected the preferences of the associations for whom the income was meant. Classical plays and tragedies from the repertoire of the Viennese Hofburgtheater, symbolizing German-speaking culture and education, were usually staged at shows in support of the Catholic Civil Caregiving Association or the Evangelical Nursing Home. In the late nineteenth century, a guest artist giving benefit performances for the Evangelical Nursing Home almost every year was Bernhard Baumeister (Bernhard Baumüller by his real name, 1827 – 1917), a close friend of Georg Theodor Murmann (1832 – 1896) and Johann Nepomuk Batka (hereinafter referred to as Johann Batka, 1845 – 1917). Thanks to his guest performances in Pressburg, the works of Spanish classics, like Pedro Calderón de la Barca or Lope de Vega, which were Baumeister's profile roles, were regularly staged in Pressburg.²²

In the 1890s, organizing benefit performances to support the municipal poor relief fund was the duty of Magistrate Councillor and Municipal Officer for Care for the Poor Theodor Kumlik, the son of the conductor and founder

22 GÓMEZ-PABLOS, B. El teatro de Calderón de la Barca y sus traducciones. In *Actas del XXI Encuentro de profesores de Español en Eslovaquia*. Bratislava : Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2018, p. 22.

of the Church Music Association (Pressburger Kirchenmusikverein zu St. Martin in German, Szt. Mártonról címzett Pozsonyi Egyházi Zeneegyesület, in Hungarian, 1833 – 1950/1953), composer Josef Kumlik (1801 – 1869). This was the most significant and longest-functioning music society in the city, whose repertoire consisted not only of church music but also of secular compositions, including the works of opera composers. Therefore, it is no surprise that musical-dramatic repertoire that symbolized the culturedness of Pressburg regularly figured at the benefit performances that were organized under the aegis of Kumlik's son Theodor on behalf of the city.²³

Benefit Performances in Support of the Municipal Poor Relief Fund in 1886 – 1899

At the time of the directorship of Max Kmentt, who rented the newly-built Municipal Theatre for four seasons, three benefit performances were held to support the municipal poor relief fund. Two of these had musical contents. On 18 January 1887, Kmentt organized a charity concert as an “emergency solution” to meet his contractual terms and conditions. He engaged the soloists Helene von Rodriguez (singing), Helene Siebenlist (piano), and Georges Schütte-Harmsen (singing), and the programme consisted of opera arias and piano pieces. After their performance, Kmentt's ensemble played the farce *Ein ungeschliffener Diamant* (Alexander Bergen, Marie Gordon by her real name), and the ballet divertissement *Wiener-Walzer* (Louis Frappart, Franz Gaul, Josef Bayer).²⁴ According to the *Preßburger Zeitung*, the audience was impressed by the performance of the solo singers and they all gave an encore, but attendance was not above average since the performers did not consist of any famous guests.²⁵ The critic did not reflect on the dramatic or the dance part of the performance. In the *Westungarischer Grenzbote*, an unknown author summed up the evening, touching on the entire programme.²⁶ In the background of the appreciation of the soloists' performances, the support

23 On the function of operas in German-speaking towns, see KOPECKÝ, J. – KŘUPKOVÁ, L. *Das Olmützer Stadttheater und seine Oper. „Wer in Olmütz gefällt, gefällt der ganzen Welt.“* Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017.

24 [Notice]. Wohlthätigkeitsvorstellung. In *PZ*, 1887, Vol. 124, Issue 17, p. 2, 18 January 1887; [Notice]. Wohlthätigkeitsvorstellung. In *Westungarischer Grenzbote* [WG], 1887, Vol. 16, Issue 4830, p. 4, 18 January 1887.

25 E. Wohlthätigkeits-Vorstellung. In *PZ*, 1887, Vol. 124, Issue 18, p. 4, 19 January 1887.

26 [Anonymous]. Theater. In *WG*, 1887, Vol. 16, Issue 4831, p. 5, 19 January 1887.

that the newspaper openly expressed to director Kmentt was very evident. As for the poorer attendance, the daily explained it by the first major ball of the season having taken place at the same time as the charity evening.

A benefit performance in the Municipal Theatre in the 1888/1889 season, with the ceremonial performance of the operetta *Die Fledermaus*, had a different character. It did not take place by chance, as Kmentt was trying hard to extend the lease agreement of the theatre and wanted to highlight his own efforts in that season (also) in favour of the poor. Johann Strauss, already world-famous at that time, agreed to perform at a concert organized in support of the municipal poor relief fund and conducted his most famous operetta in the Municipal Theatre on 23 November 1888. Since he was a prominent figure, the Pressburg press took special interest in the preparations, the execution, and the subsequent assessment of the evening. On the day of the event, the *Westungarischer Grenzbote* reported that the tickets to the boxes as well as to the other seats in the theatre had been sold out, promising high income for the noble cause.²⁷ The *Preßburger Zeitung* dedicated a lengthy introductory article to the precious guest, penned by Strauss's close friend, municipal archivist and member of the Theatre Committee, Johann Batka, who took an active part in organizing Strauss's visit.²⁸

The performance itself was described by Batka as an immense success.²⁹ The full house applauded the maestro with great enthusiasm and crowned him with a laurel wreath. The *Westungarischer Grenzbote* published an article written by its editor-in-chief, Iván von Simonyi, who pointed out the human aspect of Strauss's personality based on his personal memories of him and "reminded" the readers that his collaboration with the Hungarian playwright Lajos Dóczy was a sign of his openness and progressiveness.³⁰ In his highly positive assessment of the evening, the critic Otto von Fabricius praised the performances of almost all the performers.³¹

Batka's words also reveal that Strauss's presence in Pressburg on 22 to 24 November 1888 was a major event for the German-speaking elite of the city. The day when Strauss arrived in Pressburg, a social evening was

27 [Notice]. Zur heutigen Vorstellung. In *WG*, 1887, Vol. 17, Issue 5486, p. 4, 23 November 1887.

28 J. B. [J. Batka]. Johann Strauß in Preßburg für Preßburg. In *PZ*, 1888, Vol. 125, Issue 324, pp. 1 – 2, 23 November 1888.

29 J. B. [J. Batka]. Die Fledermaus mit Johann Strauß. In *PZ*, 1888, Vol. 125, Issue 325, p. 5, 24 November 1888.

30 S. Theater, Kunst und Literatur. In *WG*, 1888, Vol. 17, Issue 5487, p. 4, 24 November 1888.

31 F. Wohlthätigkeits-Vorstellung. In *WG*, 1888, Vol. 17, Issue 5487, p. 4, 24 November 1888.

organized for a few people in the house of the municipal representative and wholesaler Johann Ludwig, where Fanny Kováts, a solo soprano of the Church Music Association, gave a performance.³² The next day, after the benefit performance ended, there was a sumptuous dinner, with Palugyay wine, given by a well-known entrepreneur to honour the composer accompanied not only by his wife but also by a few other guests from Vienna. From among the locals, the dinner guests included Teodor Ernest Mihályi, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, Theodor Kumlik and Pál Taller, members of the municipal Department for Care for the Poor, Dr. Georg Kováts, a physician in Pressburg, with his wife – the above-mentioned singer – Fanny Kováts, the above-mentioned Johann Ludwig, Johann Batka with his wife, Georg Theodor Murmann, an accountant in Ludwig's company and operetta critic for the *Preßburger Zeitung*, and others. The atmosphere of the evening was very friendly and Strauss said he would be happy to come and visit again to support the poverty fund or other charitable activities. The magistrate councillor Theodor Kumlik, commissioned with organizing this benefit performance, thanked all the participants publicly in the Pressburg dailies and stated that the income from the show amounted to 646.19 guilders.³³

From 1890, the Municipal Theatre of Pressburg was rented by director Emanuel Raul. During his nine seasons, he organized nine benefit performances to support the municipal poor relief fund (one was suddenly cancelled due to some unforeseen circumstances), six out of which had musical contents. The first one took place in Raul's third season, at a time when negotiations were being held about extending the lease agreement of the theatre. The main protagonist of the evening was the mezzosoprano Irma de Spanyoli (Spagni, von Spanyoli, de Spagni, de Spagny; Irma Spányik-Tomaszyk by her married name, 1861 – 1932), a native of Pressburg, who debuted at the Municipal Theatre as Amneris in Verdi's *Aida* on 15 December 1892.³⁴ Spányi recalled this first performance of hers in her hometown in her memoir.³⁵

32 J. B. [Johann Batka]. Johann Strauß in Preßburg und seine „Fledermaus“. In *PZ*, 1888, Vol. 125, Issue 326, p. 5, 25 November 1888.

33 Theodor Kumlik. Oeffentlicher Dank. In *PZ*, 1888, Vol. 125, Issue 326, p. 3, 25 November 1888; Theodor Kumlik. Wohlthätigkeits-Vorstellung. In *WG*, 1888, Vol. 17, Issue 5488, p. 4, 25 November 1888.

34 LENGOVÁ, J. Zur Frage der Genderforschung: Frauen im Opernbetrieb des Pressburger Stadttheaters (1886 – 1920). In ZVARA, V. (ed.) *Musiktheater in Raum und Zeit. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Theaterpraxis in Mitteleuropa in 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Bratislava: Asociácia Corpus in collaboration with NM Code, 2015, pp. 124 – 125.

35 SPÁNYI, I. de. *Bühnen-Erinnerungen*. Pressburg: Im Selbstverlage, 1926.



Photo of Johann Strauss Jr. with dedication to Johann Batka. Collection Photos. Inv. No. Fo-01099. Photo Bratislava City Museum.

According to her, an elegant audience, headed by Archduchess Isabella, had gathered for the performance, and Irma received a lot of attention. She had performed in her native Pressburg at private and public events already in the previous years. Thanks to her mother, Kornélia von Spányik (1832 – 1913) who taught the piano for the family of Archduke Friedrich, she regularly performed at family concerts in the archduke's family accompanied by Ernst von Dohnányi (1877 – 1960) on the piano.³⁶ The evening dedicated to the poor thus gained a strong local patriotic tone, highlighted also by extensive notices in the press.³⁷

36 On latest research on Ernst von Dohnányi, see KUSZ, V. *A Wayfaring Stranger. Ernst von Dohnányi's American Years 1949 – 1960*. Oakland, California : University of California Press, 2020.

37 [Notice]. Ein interessantes Gastspiel. In *WG*, 1892, Vol. 21, Issue 6910, p. 4, 14 December 1892; FrI. Irma v. Spányik (Spagni) als „Amneris“ in „Aida“. In *PZ*, 1892, Vol. 129, Issue 346, p. 4, 15 December 1892.

The debut of Irma the Spányi, for which Johann Batka had put in a word, had thus several sides to it. One aspect were the expectations of the locals, another was the charitable purpose of the evening and, lastly, the presentation of Raul as a promoter of opera in Pressburg. Raul staged *Aida* several times during the season, but Spányi performed only in this single show. The *Preßburger Zeitung* published a relatively long critique, which began with a reminder that this native of Pressburg had performed for a charitable cause. The author then praised the extraordinary vocal performance of Spányi, as well as the good attendance, especially in the box seats.³⁸ He called the performance the best one from among the stagings of the opera during that season. The music critic Gustav Mauthner (1869 – 1928) opened his review published in the *Westungarischer Grenzboten* with welcoming the guest performance of this native of Pressburg who had already achieved success in Italy where she had debuted in 1888 as Brängen in the Italian première of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.³⁹ He calmly noted that she had met the expectations. Further on he mentioned her family background, including the achievements of her brother, the painter Kornel von Spányik (1858 – 1843), and their pianist mother, standing witness to the rich cultural tradition and stature of the city. He appreciated the acting talents of Spányi, as her performance had been highly expressive, though not lacking moderateness and prudence either, as these were characteristics preferred by the people of Pressburg in their behaviour in every situation.⁴⁰

Raul was going to organize one more show in support of the municipal poor relief fund that season, planned for 19 January 1893. The guest performer in Otto Nicolai's opera *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was going to be the bass Karl Grengg (1853 – 1914) from the Viennese Hofoper, labelled thanks to his achievements in Vienna and his performances in Wagner's dramas in Bayreuth as the successor of the genius Emil Scaria. The popular repertoire and the prominent guest were to attract audience and secure a high profit for the charitable cause. A notice in the *Westungarischer Grenzboten* reveals that the main organizer of the evening was again the president of the Com-

38 E. Theater- und Kunst-Nachrichten. Gastspiel des Frl. Irma v. Spányi. In *PZ*, 1892, Vol. 129, Issue 347, p. 4, 16 December 1892.

39 M. G. [G. Mauthner]. Theater und Kunst. *Aida*. In *WG*, 1892, Vol. 21, Issue 6912, p. 4, 16 December 1892.

40 HERZFELD, M. Der Pozsonyer. Versuch einer Charakteristik. In *PZ*, 1913, Vol. 150, Issue 352, p. 3, 25 December 1913.

mittee for Care for the Poor, Magistrate Councillor Theodor Kumlik.⁴¹ The newspaper praised his sense for art by which he organized these benefit performances, drawing on the musical tradition cultivated in his parents' house. Unfortunately, the guest did not perform in the end. The evening issue of *Preßburger Zeitung* informed its readers that the guest had been unable to leave Vienna due to heavy snow and the performance took place without him.⁴² The newspapers did not bring any further information about the performance or the income collected for the poor.

In the subsequent year, Josef Forster's *Die Rose von Pontevedra*, a novelty of that year, was performed as part of a charity evening to support the municipal poor relief fund. The opera premièred in Pressburg on 24 January 1894 in the presence of the composer and other prominent guests, including members of the management of Hofoper.⁴³ The reason was that this was its first staging in the monarchy and its first performance after its première in Coburg. The composer remained in the city for a few more days and attended also the benefit performance that took place on 27 January 1894. Besides the opera, the parody *Die Pojazzern* (Paul Althof – Richard Haller, Richard Lewy by his real name) was premièred and the comedy *Unter vier Augen* (Ludwig Fulda) concluded the evening. Johann Batka informed in detail about Theodor Kumlik's efforts which resulted in sold-out tickets and, consequently, in high income (according to Batka, almost the highest out of the three benefit performances), in addition to an extraordinary artistic experience and a highly satisfied audience.⁴⁴ Besides the new opera, Batka praised also the new work *Die Pojazzern*, which excellently parodied Leoncavallo's opera *Pagliacci*.

A year later, Raul tried to invite the bass Karl Grengg from the Hofoper in Vienna again to perform at a benefit performance in support of the municipal poor relief fund. The guest performance took place shortly before Christmas, on 18 December 1894. Grengg was to sing in the opera *Zar und Zimmermann* (by Albert Lortzing) and the show had been advertised in the *Preßburger*

41 Hofopernsänger Karl Grengg, der Nachfolger Scaria's, in Preßburg. In *WG*, 1893, Vol. 22, Issue 6944, p. 4, 19 January 1893.

42 [Notice]. Hofopernsänger Karl Grengg. In *PZ*, *Abendblatt*, 1893, Vol. 130, Issue 19, p. 2, 19 January 1893.

43 J. B. [J. Batka]. Theater- und Kunst-Nachrichten. Die Rose von Pontevedra. In *PZ*, 1894, Vol. 131, Issue 23, pp. 3 – 4, 25 January 1894.

44 J. B. [J. Batka]. Theater- und Kunst-Nachrichten. Die Armenvorstellung. In *PZ*, 1894, Vol. 131, Issue 26, p. 4, 28 January 1894.

Zeitung, promising an extraordinary artistic experience.⁴⁵ After the show, Batka wrote a critique which, although short, was full of superlatives about the performance of the guest.⁴⁶ In conclusion, he praised Kumlik's efforts and congratulated him for his wonderful choice. Gustav Mauthner's critique in *Westungarischer Grenzbote* had a similar tone.⁴⁷

In the 1895/1896 season, Batka suggested to director Raul to engage in his ensemble the prominent baritone Joseph Beck (1849 – 1903), son of the former soloist and chamber singer of the Hofoper, Johann Nepomuk Beck (1827 – 1904). By that time, Joseph Beck had built a successful career in European theatres (Frankfurt, Cologne, Salzburg, Graz, Berlin, Prague) and even in the Metropolitan Opera in New York. He arrived in Pressburg to spend time with his ill father and was considering giving up his artistic activities but, on Batka's advice, he accepted Raul's offer. After a six-year break, he returned to the stage in the role of Hans Heiling in Marschner's opera of the same name. This was a symbolic gesture since, in 1873, the young Beck debuted in the old Municipal Theatre in Pressburg in Ignatz Czernitz's ensemble in the première of Marschner's opera. The composer had also close ties to Pressburg since he taught music there from 1817 for Count Johann Nepomuk Zichy's family. Beck's performance on 23 October 1895 in support of the municipal poor relief fund was, at the same time, a celebration of the centenary of Marschner's birth, lending the evening a deeply symbolic and festive character.⁴⁸

Batka and Mauthner both called attention to this fact in their critiques, generously praising Beck's remarkable performance.⁴⁹ Regarding the charitable cause, Batka cited for Pressburg Goethe's words of praise: "*The place*

45 [Notice]. Grengg als „Van Bett“ in der morgigen städt. Armenfond-Vorstellung. In *PZ*, 1894, Vol. 131, Issue 344, p. 2, 17 December 1894.

46 J. B. [J. Batka]. Grengg als „Van Bett“. In *PZ*, 1894, Vol. 131, Issue 346, p. 4, 19 December 1894.

47 M-r. [G. Mauthner]. Theater und Musik. Gastspiel Grengg. In *WG*, 1894, Vol. 23, Issue 7618, p. 4, 19 December 1894.

48 [Notice]. Die Marschnerfeier mit Beck als „Heiling“ heute zu Gunsten des städtischen Armenfondes. In *WG*, 1895, Vol. 24, Issue 7915, p. 4, 23 October 1895; [Notice]. Beck's Heiling heute als Marschnerfeier und Armenvorstellung. In *PZ*, 1895, Vol. 132, Issue 291, p. 2, 23 October 1895.

49 Mauthner. Theater, Kunst und Literatur. Josef Beck jun. als Hans Heiling. In *WG*, 1895, Vol. 24, Issue 7916, pp. 4 – 5, 24 October 1895; J. B. [J. Batka]. Theater- und Kunst-Nachrichten. Hans Heiling mit Joseph Beck zu Gunsten der Armen. In *PZ*, 1895, Vol. 132, Issue 292, p. 4, 24 October 1895.

a good person enters is sacred and, after a hundred years, it will echo his words and deeds to his grandchildren.”⁵⁰ Thus, after several years, the full house, with Archduchess Isabella also present, had the opportunity to experience the mysterious power of Marschner’s music again.

Joseph Beck remained in Raul’s ensemble as a guest also in the subsequent season and sang at a benefit performance organized in support of the municipal poverty fund. Along with a female soloist of the Viennese Hofoper, Sophie Sedlmair (1857 – 1939), regarded as one of the best contemporaneous performers of Wagner’s dramas, he sang in Wagner’s *Flying Dutchman* on 18 January 1897. The *Preßburger Zeitung* published an extensive notice on the coming show, emphasizing that, thanks to Mayor Gustav Dröxler and Officer for the Poor Theodor Kumlik, Joseph Beck decided to perform at the event without any remuneration.⁵¹ The daily also informed its readers about a donation (of which no further details are known) given by Beck to the poor of Pressburg shortly before. The character of the Dutchman was one of Beck’s profile roles and the almost sold-out theatre had the opportunity to hear beautiful vocal performances again.⁵² The poor relief fund probably gained a significant sum, too. Its amount, however, is unknown. In his critique, Mauthner was sure to mention the presence of the archduke and his wife, along with their daughters Christina and Marianne.⁵³

The last benefit performance with a musical-dramatic programme organized by director Raul in Pressburg in support of the municipal poor relief fund took place on 17 November 1897. The highlight of the programme was Franz von Suppé’s operetta *Das Modell* and, this time, the guest was the soubrette Betty Stojan (1873 – after 1921) from the Viennese Carltheater, a former member and popular soloist of Raul’s ensemble. Her return to Pressburg confirmed the qualities of the Municipal Theatre, which had been a starting point for some future stars of Viennese theatre. Moreover, the critiques revealed the favourable welcome of “locals” by which the audience greeted the

50 J. B. [J. Batka]. Theater- und Kunst-Nachrichten. Hans Heiling mit Joseph Beck zu Gunsten der Armen. In *PZ*, 1895, Vol. 132, Issue 292, p. 4, 24 October 1895.

51 [Notice]. Sensationelle Opern-Vorstellung zu Gunsten des städt. Armenfondes mit der neuen ersten, dramatischen Sängerin des Wiener Hofopertheaters, Frl. Sophie Sedlmair und Joseph Beck. In *PZ*, 1897, Vol. 135, Issue 16, p. 2, 16 January 1897.

52 J. B. [J. Batka]. Theater. „Der fliegende Holländer“ mit Frl. Sedlmair und Joseph Beck. (Armenabend). In *PZ*, 1897, Vol. 134, Issue 19, p. 5, 19 January 1897.

53 M-r. [G. Mauthner]. Theater, Kunst und Literatur. Der fliegende Holländer. In *WG*, 1897, Vol. 26, Issue 8352, p. 4, 19 January 1897.

arrival of German-speaking members of theatre companies. According to the *Westungarischer Grenzboten*, Betty Stojan deserved the beautiful laurel wreath with a ribbon in white and red, the colours of the city, that she received.⁵⁴ Besides praising her vocal performance, the *Preßburger Zeitung* appreciated the soloist's generosity as she performed without remuneration.⁵⁵

Conclusion

In the analysis of the presentation of the urban elite of Pressburg, civic charity and patronage come to the forefront. As one of the central topics of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, this phenomenon manifested itself in connection with the Municipal Theatre in three benefit performances that the director of the German part of the season had to organize every year according to the lease agreement of the theatre. The above-mentioned presence of Theodor Kumlik, who was a leading officer in the city in the field of care for the poor and, at the same time, a connoisseur of arts and organizer of events, left a stamp on the selection of the musical-dramatic repertoire for the performances organized in support of the municipal poverty fund.

In 1886 – 1899, six operas and two operettas were given at fundraising evenings. The director Max Kmentt, who rented the building of the Municipal Theatre in the first years of its operations, had no opera soloists in the 1886/1887 season. Therefore, he opted for a charity concert where famous opera arias were sung by guest soloists. In the 1888/1889 season, he made use of his friendship with Johann Strauss and Johann Batka, and staged Strauss's most well-known operetta, *Die Fledermaus*, in the presence of the composer.

Kmentt was succeeded by Emanuel Raul, who had been the director of the theatre in Karlovy Vary for many years and whose activities in Pressburg were characterized by a serious approach to developing a daily programme plan that included regular opera performances. During the years 1891 to 1898, Raul offered sixteen opera novelties to the Pressburg audience, one of which was performed during the second repeat at a charity evening organized for the poor relief fund. These were *Cavalleria rusticana* (by Pietro Mascagni, 1891), *Jadwiga* (by August Norgauer, 1893), *Mala vita* (by Umberto

54 [Anonymus]. Theater und Kunst. Das Modell. In *WG*, 1897, Vol. 26, Issue 8644, p. 4, 18 November 1897.

55 -rr-. Theater. „Das Modell.“ In *PZ*, 1897, Vol. 134, Issue 319, p. 4, 18 November 1897.

Giordano, 1893), *Pagliacci* (by Ruggero Leoncavallo, 1893), *Rose von Pontevedra* (by Josef Forster, 1894), *Der Weise von Cordova* (by Oscar Straus, 1894), *Hansel and Gretel* (by Engelbert Humperdinck, 1894), *Enoch Arden* (by Viktor Hansmann, 1895), *The Bartered Bride* (by Bedřich Smetana, 1895), *Mignon* (by Ambroise Thomas, 1896), *Heimchen am Herd* (by Carl Goldmark, 1896), *The Evangelist* (by Wilhelm Kienzl, 1897), *Djamileh* (by Georges Bizet, 1897), *La bohème* (by Ruggero Leoncavallo, 1898), *Der Streik der Schmiede* (by Max Josef Beer, 1898), and *Griselda* (by Giulio Cottrau, 1898).



Kornel Spanyolik: Portrait of Irma de Spányi. Inv. No. A 3041. Photo Bratislava City Gallery.

Raul was supported by the *Preßburger Zeitung* daily, where the long-standing music and opera critic, Johann Batka, also contributed regularly. A look at the extent of operas by which Raul gained the reputation of an excellent director raises the question to what extent he would have been able to achieve this had he not enjoyed Batka's support. The correspondence of Batka and Raul also reveals that the director regularly consulted the critic regarding the operas he was planning to stage during the season. Moreover, he invited guest soloists based on Batka's recommendations. They included the baritone Joseph Beck and the mezzosoprano Irma de Spányi. These two soloists guest performed at the benefit performances organized by Raul in support of the municipal poor relief fund, which helped him gain the favour of the audience and the support of the city's leadership.

For the benefit performances in support of the municipal poor relief fund, Raul selected operas which were popular with the audience and, at the same time, gave scope for the guest performers to give stunning performances. In this way, he secured a solid income which was, after all, one of the main goals of these benefit performances. He invited guests from the Hofoper who were rendering the same characters there, which further increased the attractiveness of the shows and led to high attendance.

Except for Verdi's *Aida*, Raul staged operas composed by German composers, conforming to the preferences of the German-speaking elite of Press-

burg. The contents of the selected operas had no connection with social issues, nor did they reflect the charity of the citizens in any way. They were simply frequently staged works that the Pressburg audience was happy to hear in every season. Raul's ensemble (full of young Viennese artists) managed to capitalize on the inspirations brought by the guests from Vienna. Moreover, it should be noted that the process of cultural transfer intensified at the time when Budapest was sending clear signals for the pro-Hungarian orientation of the Municipal Theatre.

In the late nineteenth century, in selecting the repertoire, the benefit performances organized in support of the municipal poor relief fund were characterized by a certain degree of autonomy which may seem surprising at first glance, since organizing these performances was the task of a member of a municipal council. The artistic possibilities and the contacts of the German-speaking directors probably prevailed. The choice of a popular and prestigious repertoire and artists secured solid income and enabled the directors to gain the favour of the audience and the support of the municipal representatives. This resulted in promoting German-speaking artists and continuing the long-standing charitable tradition of the Municipal Theatre.

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