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# **Cultural and Artistic Transfers in Theatre and Music Past, Present, and Perspectives**

**Michaela Mojžišová (ed.)**

Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences  
Institute of Theatre and Film Research



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## Editorial Note

The concept of cultural transfer was developed in the mid-1980s in Germany and France. Originally focused on processes of cultural exchange between these two countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it has been expanded, comprising transfers between religious denominations, social levels, regions, and cities, before 1700 and after 1900 as well.<sup>1</sup> Recently, terms like ‘cultural exchange’ and ‘cultural translation’ have surfaced, replacing the term ‘cultural transfer’.<sup>2</sup> This shift in terminology points to the fact that cultural transfer does not constitute a unidirectional process but mostly consists of the mutual influences of two or more spheres at various levels.

This journal, the work of thirteen musicologists and theatrologists from research institutes and universities, focuses on cultural and artistic transfers in art music and theatre in Central Europe. The contributions of the authors, who have already collaborated as team members in the *Poetics of Contemporary Performance Art* (VEGA 2/ 0110/19) and *Towards a Common Regional History of Our Nation Building Strategies. Traveling Directors, Musicians* (Visegrad Grants 2020 – 2021) projects, deal with the topic not only with regard to history and the present, but also in terms of future perspectives. They bring information on the role and status of music and theatre art and ponder over their possibilities in the open cultural environment of the twenty-first century. Cultural transfer/cultural exchange thus highlight the cultural conjunctions, as well as differences, in regions which used to be homogeneous.

The first thematic unit of the journal focuses on the period of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century up to 1918 when musical theatre in Austria and, later, in Austria-Hungary, fulfilled a representative role in the bourgeois society. The musicologist Péter Bozó (Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest) deals with intersections

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1 See e.g. ESPAGNE, Michel – WERNER, Michael. Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Zu einem neuen interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm des C.N.R.S. In *Francia*, 1985, Vol. 13, pp. 502 – 510; WERNER, Michael – ZIMMERMANN, Bénédicte (eds.). *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*. Paris, 2004.

2 BEIDELMAN, Thomas (ed.). *The Translation of Cultures*. London, 1971.

in the reception of the works of Richard Wagner and Jacques Offenbach in nineteenth-century Budapest. It is uncommon to juxtapose these two composers, so different in terms of genre and ideology. Nevertheless, as Bozó points out, contemporaneous Hungarian press compared them to each other and evaluated them against each other, and this stemmed from the fact that their works appeared roughly at the same time and in the same institution, the National Theatre, and both composers gave guest performances there within a short span of time.

In her study, the musicologist Jana Laslavíková (Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava) focuses on cultural transfers between imperial Vienna and Upper Hungarian Pressburg. In the late nineteenth century, memories of the bygone glory of this coronation city still lingered on, although only indirectly, and Pressburg and Vienna remained in close contact despite growing Hungarianization. On the example of benefit performances in the Municipal Theatre (built in 1886), the author discusses the characteristic features of theatrical life in the city, with an emphasis on the close connection of the repertoire of Viennese theatres, which gave regular guest performances in Pressburg, and the local Municipal Theatre.

The study of the musicologist Cristina Scuderi (Karl-Franzens-University Graz) takes the reader to the southern parts of the monarchy, to the shores of the Adriatic Sea. From the aspect of cultural transfers, this region is remarkable indeed. Situated on the crossroads of the Slavic, the Germanic, and the Latin world, it is characterised by a diverse mixture of cultures. The author focuses on cultural transfer on the example of the operations of opera houses in Istria and Dalmatia between 1861 and 1918. Although each had its own history, different funding, and varying opera seasons, the impresarios did their best to create an interconnected theatre network, partly with the aim to reduce operating costs.

The study of the musicologist Tomasz Pudłocki (Institute of History, Jagiellonian University, Krakow) transports us from the south of the monarchy to its eastern parts. The author focuses on the growing significance of music in the life of the inhabitants of Eastern Galician provincial towns in a period ranging from 1867 to 1914. He sheds light on the prominent guest performances of Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian ensembles and instrumentalists, and on the concerts of Czech and German ensembles. Local musicians (composers, instrumentalists, singers) were forced to fulfil their national obligations and they focused not only on the local implementation of the latest European musical trends but, primarily, on emphasising national ele-



ments in their ethnic musical culture. The author asks a fundamental question whether these professional musicians were local ambassadors for elite European culture, promoting the universal meaning in music, or whether they primarily utilised music for national purposes.

The subsequent case studies focus on prominent figures in art and analyse their lives and activities in the theoretical framework of cultural transfer. Tatjana Marković (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage, Vienna) discusses the fate of two Serbian musicians, the violinist Dragomir Krančević (1847 – 1929) and the soprano Karola Jovanović (1879 – 1958). Both artists built a successful career in Vienna and in other towns of the Habsburg Monarchy (Budapest, Olomouc), and the author explores how they were influenced by adapting to their new environments, i.e. to the dominant cultural politics expressed by repertoire, gender policy, guest performances etc. The study of Veronika Kusz (Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest), the curator of the legacy of Ernő (Ernst von) Dohnányi (1877 – 1960), offers an original perspective on this composer, conductor and pianist, whose fate took him from Pressburg and Budapest as far as Argentina and the USA. The author focuses on Dohnányi's performing and pedagogical activities. She conveys Dohnányi's views on teaching musical performance based on his lectures, interviews, prefaces, and memoirs.

The second thematic unit of this publication concentrates on the period that followed the birth of the Czecho-Slovak Republic (1918). In Slovakia, it brought about, *inter alia*, the establishment of the Slovak National Theatre. Last year, we commemorated the centenary of this first national stage of ours, and this gave the primary impetus to the birth of this publication. This unit opens with the study of Katarína Haberlandová and Laura Krišteková (Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava), bridging this part symbolically with the previous one through the stories of the buildings of the Slovak National Theatre. The first one, the historical building, was erected at the time of the monarchy (1886), and simultaneous theatre operations began in the second one in 2007. In their study, the authors verify the thesis that, similarly to the establishment of the Slovak National Theatre being a key event in the cultural history of Slovakia, the choice of the location for both theatre buildings represents fundamental phases of urban planning in Bratislava in these two different historical periods.

The subsequent studies shed light on the operations of the Slovak National Theatre from the beginning of its existence until the end of World War II.

Jiří Kopecký's study (Institute of Czech Literature of the CAS) traces how the repertoire was shaped in the first decade of its existence from the viewpoint of tender procedures for composing new operas. The analysis of the Czech element of its repertoire motivated the author to formulate the research question how such a massive and relatively easy transfer of works written for concrete Czech stages at least a quarter of a century earlier could take place. In his view, the opera tenders, which strictly prescribed the conditions for the character of the operas, were one of the possible keys. Jiří Kopecký's topic of the status of Czech works in the repertoire of the Slovak National Theatre in the inter-war Czechoslovak Republic is further explored by Lenka Křupková (Department of Musicology, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University in Olomouc) in her case study of the stagings of Vítězslav Novák's operas. The ambition of the composer was to assert his operas on German stages, but the dissolution of the monarchy was not conducive to this. In other foreign opera houses, his works, which had exclusively Czech themes, did not receive a warm welcome. Nevertheless, the Slovak National Theatre showed great interest in Vítězslav Novák's oeuvre and, through a tour of the Slovak National Theatre in the Viennese Stadttheater, it finally made its way to this metropolis of the former Austria-Hungary, too.

The new socio-political conditions arising from the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the birth of the Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945) brought about significant changes in the field of culture, too. The study of Branko Ladič (Department of Musicology, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Bratislava), situated in this turbulent period of European history, focuses on cultural exchange between allied countries. He traces the stagings of opera novelties in the Slovak National Theatre composed by composers from such countries, their musical and theatrical rendering, and their perception by the Bratislava audience.

The third unit of our publication focuses on cultural and artistic transfers today when, in the context of a globalised Europe, the mobility of composers and performers naturally leads to a globalisation of music and theatre art, too.

As it was between the first and the second unit, this unit also opens with a study that bridges the topic over a century, from the birth of the Slovak National Theatre to the present day. Michaela Mojžišová (Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava) focuses on the development of Slovak opera staging practice from the viewpoint of cultural transfer. She concludes that, whether directly or

indirectly, the most valuable inspirations for musical theatre came from the international artistic milieu. Her study traces the reception of key European drama poetics of the twentieth century on the stage of the Opera of the Slovak National Theatre from the inter-war period, influenced by the aesthetics of expressionism, through the aesthetics of socialist realism under the aegis of the Russian director and pedagogue Konstantin Stanislavski and the subsequent era of music-psychological realism in the spirit of the works of the director and pedagogue Walter Felsenstein, up to the new era of Slovak opera formed in direct contact with the latest European trends in theatre, partly intermediated by guest staging teams.

The study of the teatrologist Martin Hodoň from the same academic institution explores another area of music drama: contemporary dance. In his case study examining contemporary dance in the context of Slovak and European discourse, the author focuses on the dance ensemble Les SlovaKs, which was active in Brussels. In an effort to characterise the poetics of this ensemble which fuses “local” and “global”, his text concentrates on the work of its choreographer Anton Lachký, who uses extreme tools of musical expression in his creations, balancing between classical music and techno. The publication closes with the study of Martin Hodoň’s colleague from the Institute of Theatre and Film Research, teatrologist Zuzana Timčíková. She analyses the creations of the independent Slovak theatre ensemble Odivo, which fuses different genres. Since its productions are based primarily on non-verbal images enhanced with visual and musical elements, they have a growing potential to make their way to the international theatre scene, too.

A tendency to internationalise theatre is a strong phenomenon in our time. This publication aims to open a discussion on what the various European cultures can mutually offer today. One of the principles of cultural transfer is a search for understanding, which enriches not only the recipient of the art, but culture as a whole, too. It is this quest for understanding that forms the central motto of our publication.

**Michaela Mojžišová**

# The Butterfly and the Lion. Intersections between the Reception of Wagner and Offenbach in Nineteenth-Century Budapest

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**Abstract:** It is strange to find Wagner and Offenbach mentioned together in the reception of their music in nineteenth-century Budapest and measured against one another in the Hungarian press. This study seeks to interpret the before-mentioned juxtaposition in terms of the system of theatrical institutions in Budapest on the basis of contemporary reviews of theatrical performances. The identified factors that directly concern the way the (Austro-)Hungarian public received these two stage composers are: the multinational and multicultural character of the theatre life, the need to distinguish between genres, and the ongoing changes in the institutional theatre system. I point out that Offenbach and Wagner could be compared and measured against each other in contemporary Hungarian press partly because the works of both composers appeared around the same time, partly because they were played in the same institution, the National Theatre, and also because both musicians gave guest performances there within a short span of time.

**Keywords:** Richard Wagner, Jacques Offenbach, reception history, theatrical landscape, Budapest

Why mention Richard Wagner and Jacques Offenbach together – one an author of music dramas of vast dimensions and the other a composer of delicate music for witty operettas? Well, the idea is not mine, inasmuch as the German scholar Peter Ackermann, in the mid-1980s, dedicated a whole study to the relationship of the two composers.<sup>1</sup> His title quotes that of a Wagner play written in 1870, at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, in

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1 ACKERMANN, P. Eine Kapitulation: zum Verhältnis Offenbach–Wagner. In *Jacques Offenbach: Komponist und Weltbürger*. (Eds. W. Kirsch – R. Dietrich). Mainz : Schott's Söhne, 1985, pp. 135 – 148.

which Offenbach himself appears on the scene.<sup>2</sup> It is characteristic that the study in question was written by a German musicologist and it is understandable that, since World War II, the two composers have been seen as antagonistic and antithetical. It is obviously difficult to disregard the fact that Offenbach's music was stigmatized under the Third Reich between 1933 and 1945 and could not be played publicly,<sup>3</sup> while the performances of Wagner's works were employed as vehicles for propaganda.<sup>4</sup> It should be added that Offenbach's works underwent a similar fate in Hungary: between 1939 and 1945, their public performances were prohibited; later, at the beginning of the 1950s, they were drastically rewritten and used as propaganda vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

However, the antithesis between Wagner and Offenbach arose not only in twentieth-century Germany, but also in nineteenth-century Hungary, even if not in so extreme a way. Offenbach was in Pest in April 1872 to conduct his operetta *Schneeball* [*Boule-de-neige*] at the Gyapjú utca German Theatre (Deutsches Theater in der Wollgasse), as he had done earlier that year at Carltheater in Vienna.<sup>6</sup> While in Pest, he saw a performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (or a part of it) at the National Theatre (Nemzeti Színház). The event was reported by the Hungarian journal *Fővárosi Lapok*: "The

2 WAGNER, R. Eine Kapitulation. Lustspiel in antiker Manier. In id., *Sämtliche Schriften*, Vol. 9. Leipzig : Breitkopf & Härtel, 1912, pp. 3 – 41.

3 STOMPOR, S. Die Offenbach-Renaissance um 1930 und die geschlossenen Vorstellungen für Juden nach 1933. In *Offenbach und die Schauplätze seines Musiktheaters*. (Ed. Rainer Franke). Laaber : Laaber, 1999, pp. 257 – 258.

4 HAMANN, B. *Winifred Wagner oder Hitler's Bayreuth*. München : Piper, 2005.

5 Both extremes of the reception of Offenbach in Budapest will be described in detail in my book entitled *Orpheus on the Danube: Offenbach Reception in Budapest, 1920 – 1956* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, [to be published in 2021]).

6 On Offenbach's reception in Vienna, see OBERMAIER, W. Offenbach in Wien: Seine Werke auf den Vorstadtbühnen und ihr Einfluß auf das Volkstheater. In *Offenbach und die Schauplätze seines Musiktheaters*. (Ed. R. Franke). Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1999, pp. 11 – 30; SPOHR, M. Inwieweit haben Offenbachs Operetten die Wiener Operette aus der Taufe gehoben? In *Offenbach und die Schauplätze seines Musiktheaters*. (Ed. R. Franke). Laaber : Laaber-Verlag, 1999, pp. 31 – 68; LINHARDT, M. Offenbach und die französische Operette im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Wiener Presse. *Offenbach und die Schauplätze seines Musiktheaters*. (Ed. R. Franke). Laaber : Laaber-Verlag, 1999, pp. 69 – 84; FRANKE, R. Chronologie der Aufführungen der Bühnenwerke Offenbachs in Wien, 1858 – 1900. Programme, Statistiken, Rezensionen. In *Offenbach und die Schauplätze seines Musiktheaters*. (Ed. R. Franke). Laaber : Laaber-Verlag, 1999, pp. 119 – 182. On Offenbach reception in general, see SENELICK, L. *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2017.

*Tannhäuser* performance last Saturday was in many ways more superb than any so far. ... This time we saw the Pest *haute crème* in the boxes. Offenbach, the prolific operetta composer, sat in one of the ground-floor boxes. The butterfly visited the lion but could not stand the lion's great voice for long: he heard only one and a half acts of Wagner's music, which marks the diametric opposite of his in the music world."<sup>7</sup>

The animal metaphor used here by the anonymous author – for whom Offenbach was evidently a diametric opposite of Wagner – is suspiciously similar to the one used by Robert Schumann when talking of Rossini's encounter with Beethoven: "Der Schmetterling flog dem Adler in den Weg, dieser wich aber aus, um ihn nicht zu zerdrücken mit dem Flügelschlag."<sup>8</sup> (The butterfly crossed the path of the eagle, but the latter turned aside in order not to crush it with its wingbeats.)<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the reviewer of *Fővárosi Lapok* mentions the two composers together and compares them because Offenbach was present at the Wagner performance. It is all the more interesting, however, that the Wagner–Offenbach antithesis also occurs without any "meeting" of this kind. For example, in December 1866, two weeks after the premiere of Wagner's *Lohengrin* at the Pest National Theatre, the Hungarian music magazine *Zenészeti Lapok* published a review of it, whose author, in all likelihood the journal's editor, Kornél Ábrányi, compared Wagner's piece to Italian opera in general and, more surprisingly, to Offenbach's operettas. He wrote, among others, the following: "A frequently heard objection to Wagner's music is that there are very few melodies in it, [so] it is incomprehensible, except for musicologists and that too only for the cream of them. Those who talk that way are seeking a reason without finding it. For, if people hear out this opera attentively and are musical connoisseurs, even if only to some degree, or if they merely have some affinity for music, they must recognize the contrary, namely that there are too many melodies in Wagner, even if not in the same sense as the word may be used for Italian operas or Offenbach's operettas."<sup>10</sup>

7 ANONYMOUS. *Fővárosi hírek*. In *Fővárosi Lapok*, 1872, Vol. 9, Issue 92, p. 399, 23 April 1872.

8 SCHUMANN, R. *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*. Leipzig : Wigand, 1854, p. 210.

9 SCHUMANN, R. *On Music and Musicians*. (Ed. K. Wolff, transl. P. Rosenfeld). Berkeley, CA : University of California Press, 1983, p. 235.

10 "ák" [ÁBRÁNYI, K.]. *Lohengrin*. Regényes dalmű 3 felvonásban[,] szövegét s zenéjét írta: Wagner Richárd. In *Zenészeti Lapok*, 1866, Vol. 7, Issue 11, p. 164, 16 December 1866.

It is worth noting that Ábrányi was a propagandist for Wagner and his few statements make it clear that he sought to render Wagner's music understandable and acceptable to the Pest audiences of the time.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the paragraph reveals something not only about Ábrányi's relation to Wagner, but also about the place Offenbach held in the system of values at the time. To Ábrányi, Offenbach's music marks the diametric opposite of Wagner's, but stands on the same level as Italian opera.

Ábrányi's equation of Offenbach's operettas with Italian operas surprises today's musicologists, as post-Offenbach operetta in twentieth-century Habsburg and post-Habsburg Hungary moved in a commercially popular direction. Thus, the term "operetta" today no longer means a sub-genre of the opera, but a separate genre distinct from it, although, in the mid-nineteenth century and, particularly, before the European dissemination of Offenbach's works, operetta was seen as such a sub-genre: a musical stage work in which spoken dialogues replaced recitatives. However, the very term betrays this meaning, as documented in detail by Sabine Ehrmann-Herforth in her "Operetta" entry in *Handwörterbuch der musikalischen Terminologie*, quoting widely from music dictionaries of the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.<sup>12</sup>

An objection may be raised that the two press reports quoted above are just two examples taken out of context, but, in fact, there are further cases of the names of Wagner and Offenbach being juxtaposed in music reviews in nineteenth-century Budapest. To take another example: a quarter-century after the *Lohengrin* premiere, in 1890, a review appeared in the music magazine *Zenelap* of the first performance of Offenbach's one-act operetta *Le Mariage aux lanternes* at the Budapest Royal Opera House. The author, who may have been István Kereszty, heavily criticised the Royal Opera House, particularly the programming of Gustav Mahler, who was its music director at the time: "It is nice of him [i. e. of Mahler] to introduce every sub-genre

11 For Ábrányi's role in the Hungarian reception of Wagner, see HARASZTI, E. *Wagner Richard és Magyarország*. Budapest : MTA, 1916, pp. 230 – 232. See also VARGA, I. *Richard Wagner, Hungary, and the Nineteenth Century. Aspects of the Reception of Wagner's Operas and Music-Dramas*. PhD Diss. Graz : Universität für Musik und Dramatische Kunst, 2014. See also BOZÓ, P. Der Fall Wagner: Hans Richter and the Composer's Reception in the Hungarian Satirical Magazine *Borsszem Jankó*. In *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities*, 2019, [without Vol. No.], Issue 2, pp. 31 – 44.

12 EHRMANN-HERFORT, S. Operette. In *Handwörterbuch der musikalischen Terminologie*. (Ed. A. Riethmüller). Vol. 4. Stuttgart : Steiner, 1972, pp. 1 – 20.



of opera into our Opera House – we have only one Opera House, so the different operatic genres cannot be separated. But he should not go so far as to introduce Offenbach's operettas into the home of this serious Muse, as it is rumoured. We salute Wagner's music with holy horror and listen to it, although not too much, and we would also like to hear Kreutzer's poetic and heart-breaking songs, the witty and fresh music of a Frenchman, and the Hungarian character of our Royal Opera House should be conserved through the cultivation of the works of Hungarian composers."<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to Ábrányi's review, Offenbach and Wagner are mentioned here as two composers falling into the same category, neither being too desirable on the stage of the Opera House. Wagner's music is graded somewhat better and may be allowed, even if not too often, and saluted "with holy horror," but performing Offenbach there is condemned out of hand. Yet, the strongest remark in the quotation is the last sentence, and the national bias becomes even more emphatic in the light of the opening sentence of the review, "One and a half years went by and no Hungarian opera was played at the Royal Hungarian Opera House."<sup>14</sup> That, by the way, is untrue: to quote only one example, Erkel's opera *György Brankovics* was revived there in February 1890. Under the given circumstances, it is clear that the Zenelap review was biased against Mahler and, in that context, it is unsurprising that the two foreign composers programmed by Mahler, Wagner and Offenbach, should be condemned equally. More surprising is that Conradin Kreutzer, a minor German composer whose romantic opera *Das Nachtlager in Granada* was premiered in Budapest under Mahler's directorship, was noted positively. (Even so the reviewer may have confused him with the French Rodolphe Kreutzer, which would explain his remark about the "witty and fresh music of a Frenchman".)

So why do I quote these music reviews? How do they concern the connection between Offenbach's reception and the theatrical landscape? In my view, the aesthetic conclusions of critics and audience members are not unconnected with the kind of institutions in which a composer's works are performed. So, let me try to sketch the theatrical landscape of Budapest and interpret the quoted reviews in the light of the changes in that landscape, pointing out why Wagner and Offenbach would be mentioned together and measured against each other.

13 ANONYMOUS. A m[agyar] kir[ályi] operaház, a magyar opera és még egyéb. In *Zenelap*, 1890, Vol. 5, Issue 3, p. 2, 30 January 1890.

14 Ibid., p. 1.



Even the author of the Zenelap review felt that his aesthetic judgments were not uninfluenced by the institutional background, as he himself noted: “We have only one Opera House, so the different operatic genres cannot be separated.” This was a tender spot in nineteenth-century Budapest music and theatre. At the time of the *Lohengrin* premiere in 1866, the theatrical landscape of Buda and Pest was organized by the language of performance, not by genre. Both cities were multi-ethnic and both had more native German speakers than Hungarian ones. Unsurprisingly, there were more German theatres than Hungarian ones in the middle of the century. Around 1860, German performances took place in three venues: the Pest Municipal Theatre (Pester Stadttheater), the Buda Castle Theatre (called Ofner Stadttheater at the time), and the Buda Summer Theatre – designated as Arena in der Christinenstadt in the German-language press.<sup>15</sup> Their number rose to four in 1860 when the Viennese entrepreneur Karl Alsdorf opened the Thalia Theatre in Pest City Park, which played until 1864. By contrast, there was only one theatre for Hungarian performances up to 1861: the Pest National Theatre (Nemzeti Színház), which differed from the German theatres in being subsidized by the state.<sup>16</sup> For a short while, the number of Hungarian theatres rose by one when György Molnár, director of an itinerant troupe active in the Hungarian provinces, opened the Buda Folk Theatre (Budai Népszínház), where the repertoire focused on lighter entertainment and many operettas by Offenbach and others were performed. This, however, was short-lived, as it went into bankruptcy in 1864 and again, definitively, in 1870.<sup>17</sup> Neither Buda nor Pest had a court opera at the time. The National Theatre and the German theatres were of the multi-purpose type known as *Mehrspartentheater*, offering opera, prose drama, and light entertainment.

Those were the conditions under which the first Offenbach and Wagner performances in Hungarian took place at the same institution, the National Theatre. The cultivation of both had begun somewhat earlier in the German theatres: Offenbach’s one-acters first appeared in the summer of 1859, when

15 For the history of German-speaking theatre in Budapest, see BINAL, W. *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Budapest*. Wien–Köln–Graz : Böhlau Nachfolger, 1972.

16 For the history of the Pest National Theatre, see PUKÁNSZKYNÉ KÁDÁR, J. A *Nemzeti Színház százéves története*. Budapest : Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1940.

17 For the history and repertoire of the Buda Folk Theatre, see PUKÁNSZKYNÉ KÁDÁR, J. A *Budai Népszínház története*. Budapest : Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1979, and MÁLYUSZ-NÉ CSÁSZÁR, E. A *Budai Népszínház műsora. Adattár*. Budapest : Színháztudományi és Filmtudományi Intézet, 1957.

Carl Treumann, an actor and stage director at the Vienna Carltheater, gave guest performances at the Buda Summer Theatre.<sup>18</sup> The first Budapest Wagner premiere was *Tannhäuser* at the Pest Municipal Theatre on 6 March 1862. However, the first Offenbach and Wagner performances in Hungarian took place at the National Theatre and, interestingly, some singers took leading roles in both. For example, the soprano Ilka Markovits (1839–1915) sang Elisabeth in the first Hungarian *Tannhäuser*, conducted by Hans Richter, and also rendered Catherine in Offenbach's *Le Mariage aux lanternes*, Susanne in *Un Mari à la porte*, Antoine in *Le Violoneux*, Manuelita in *Pépito*, and Valentin in *La Chanson de Fortunio*. Likewise, the bass Károly Kőszeghy (1820–1891) sang Heinrich der Vogler in *Lohengrin*, Daland in *The Flying Dutchman*, and Cecco in *Rienzi*, while performing Martel in Offenbach's *Un Mari à la porte*, Vertigo in *Pépito* and Dig-dig in *La Chatte métamorphosée en femme* (Table 1).

What is more, both Offenbach's company and Wagner appeared at the National Theatre within a short period of time: the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens came to Pest in summer 1861 for a six-day visit (playing mostly operettas by Offenbach, see Table 2 and Plate 1), while Wagner conducted a selection of his operas in July 1863 (see Table 3 and Plate 2). So, it is no surprise to hear Offenbach described some years later in Ábrányi's review of the *Lohengrin* premiere as Wagner's antithesis.

By the mid-1880s, however, marked changes in the Budapest theatrical landscape had made an impact on the reception of both composers. In 1870, the Pest German Theatre closed down and German performances in Buda were prohibited by the authorities: the Buda Summer Theatre and the Castle Theatre became Hungarian theatres.<sup>19</sup> Yet, for a long time, it remained a problem for Hungarian theatres to attract a mostly German-speaking theatre-going public. Although a new German theatre opened in 1869 in Pest's Gyapjú utca, this Deutsches Theater in der Wollgasse was to be the last German theatre in the capital and it burnt down in 1889. It should be noted that the first Budapest performance of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* took place in this

18 The first pieces by Offenbach played in the Buda Summer Theatre were *Hochzeit bei Later-nenschein* (*Le Mariage aux lanternes*, first perf. on 24 May 1859), *Das Mädchen von Elisonzo* (*Pépito*, first perf. on 31 May 1859) and *Die Zaubergeige* (*Le Violoneux*, first perf. on 8 June 1859). See *Pester Lloyd*, 1859, Vol. 6, Issue 125, morning edition, p. [3], 28 May 1859; *Pester Lloyd*, 1859, Vol. 6, Issue 130, morning edition, p. [3], 1 June 1859; *Pester Lloyd*, 1859, Vol. 10, Issue 130, morning edition, p. [5], 8 June 1859.

19 For the repertoire of the Buda Summer Theatre, see KOCH, L. *A budai Nyári Színkör* (*Adat-tár*). Budapest : Színháztudományi Intézet/Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum, 1966.

**Table 1** The Offenbach and Wagner roles of Ilka Markovits and Károly Kőszeghy in the premieres at the Pest National Theatre

Premiere	Piece	Ilka Markovits	Károly Kőszeghy
21 Nov 1860	Offenbach: <i>Eljegyzés lámpafénynél</i> [ <i>Le Mariage aux lanternes</i> ]	Katalin [Catherine]	
12 Feb 1861	Offenbach: <i>Férj az ajtó előtt</i> [ <i>Un Mari à la porte</i> ]	Zsuzsanna [Suzanne]	Trompeur Márton [Martel]
14 March 1861	Offenbach: <i>A varázshagedű</i> [ <i>Le Violoneux</i> ]	Antal [Antoine]	
30 Sept 1861	Offenbach: <i>Az elizondói leány</i> [ <i>Pépito</i> ]	Manuelita	Vertigo
25 Jan 1862	Offenbach: <i>Fortunio dala</i> [ <i>La Chanson de Fortunio</i> ]	Bálint [Valentin]	
31 Jul 1862	Offenbach: <i>Denis úr és neje</i> [ <i>M. et Mme Denis</i> ]	Nanette	
12 Oct 1863	Offenbach: <i>Az átváltozott macska</i> [ <i>La Chatte métamorphosée en femme</i> ]		Dig-Dig
1 Nov 1866	Wagner: <i>Lohengrin</i>		Madarász Henrik [Heinrich der Vogler]
11 March 1871	Wagner: <i>Tannhäuser</i>	Erzsébet [Elisabeth]	
10 May 1873	Wagner: <i>A bolygó hollandi</i> [ <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> ]		Daland
24 Nov 1874	Wagner: <i>Rienzi</i>		Cecco

theatre on 23–26 May 1883 when Angelo Neumann’s travelling company gave a guest performance there. As for the Hungarian venues, there were attempts to fill in for the defunct Buda Folk Theatre: a short-lived popular house called István-téri Theatre, built by Gyula Miklósy on Pest’s István tér, which functioned from 1872 to 1874, and a summer theatre called Miklósy Színkör.<sup>20</sup> In 1875, the genres of theatrical entertainment – folk plays and operettas – moved from the National Theatre to the newly opened Folk Theatre (Népszínház) in Pest.<sup>21</sup> In 1884, the Royal Opera House opened so that

20 For the history and repertoire of Miklósy’s theatre, see ALPÁR, Á. *Az István-téri Színház, 1872–1874*. Budapest : Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1986.

21 For the repertoire of the institution, see BERCZELI ANZELM, K. *A Népszínház műsora. (Adattár)*. Budapest : Színháztudományi és Filmtudományi Intézet/Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum, 1957.

opera no longer needed to be played in the National Theatre.<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, the Opera House was built on the site of an earlier German institution, the Fürst-Theater.

Hence, Budapest saw a big change between Ábrányi's *Lohengrin* review of 1866 and the 1890 Mahler attack in *Zenelap*. The institutional system seems none too favourable to Offenbach, as Budapest had no venue to match Offenbach's Paris operetta theatre.<sup>23</sup> Operetta-styled pieces shared the venue with a more rustic genre, the *népszínmű*, or folk play, a local counterpart of the Viennese Volksstück. I suppose that is why the 1890 critique said Mahler "should not go so far as to introduce Offenbach's operettas into the home of this serious Muse." This may have been a common view and explains why his posthumous *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* was first performed in Budapest as an operetta and not an opera. I say "first," although Offenbach's opera had at least three first performances in Budapest. The very first one was on 14 April 1882 at the Folk Theatre, with spoken dialogues and no Giulietta act. Early in the following year, a more complete, five-act version was staged there.<sup>24</sup> Yet, despite Mahler's plans to mount it at the Royal Opera House in 1890,<sup>25</sup> the full opera version with recitatives had to wait until 15 December 1900.

22 For the history of the Royal Opera House, see STAUD, G. (ed.). *A budapesti Operaház 100 éve*. Budapest : Zeneműkiadó, 1984.

23 On the beginnings of Offenbach's theatrical venue, see YON, J.-C. La Création du Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens (1855–1862), ou la difficile naissance de l'opérette. In *Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 1992, Vol. 39, Issue 4, pp. 575 – 600, later forming a chapter in his book-length monograph: YON, J.-C. *Jacques Offenbach*. Paris : Gallimard, 2/2010 [1/2000], pp. 128 – 165. See also BRZOSKA, M. Jacques Offenbach und die Operngattungen seiner Zeit. In *Jacques Offenbach und seine Zeit*. (Ed. Elisabeth Schmierer). Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2009, pp. 27 – 36, and EVERIST, M. Jacques Offenbach: The Music of the Past and the Image of the Present. In *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*. (Eds. M. Everist and A. Fauser). Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 72 – 98.

24 On 12 January 1883.

25 As the Opera House intendant, Ferenc Beniczky, stated in the press after his dismissal, Offenbach's opera was ready for performance when the leading soprano Bianca Bianchi (Bertha Schwartz) fell ill, and the premiere was postponed. See BENICZKY, F. [untitled]. In *Budapesti Hírlap*, 1891, Vol. 11, Issue 25, p. 9, 25 January 1891. In the end, the premiere was cancelled when Mahler resigned from his post in March 1891.

**Table 2** Guest performances of the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens at the Pest National Theatre, 1861

Date	Piece
12 July 1861	Offenbach: <i>La Chatte métamorphosée en femme</i> Offenbach: <i>Mesdames de la Halle</i>
13 July 1861	Offenbach: <i>La Chanson de Fortunio</i> Offenbach: <i>Une Demoiselle en lôterie</i>
14 July 1861	Varney: <i>La Polka des sabots</i> Offenbach: <i>Un Mari à la porte</i>
16 July 1861	Offenbach: <i>Orphée aux enfers</i>
17 July 1861	Offenbach: <i>La Chanson de Fortunio</i> Gastinel, <i>Titus et Bérénice</i>
18 July 1861	Offenbach: <i>Le Pont des soupirs</i>

**Table 3** Wagner's appearances at the Pest National Theatre, 1863

Date	Piece
23 July 1863 (conducted by Wagner)	<i>Tannhäuser</i> overture Elza's Song to the Breezes and Ortrud's Admonition from <i>Lohengrin</i> Prelude and Wedding March from <i>Lohengrin</i> Prelude and Isolde's Love Death from <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> Entrance of the Guilds and Pogner's Speech from <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i> Siegmund's Love Song and the Ride of the Valkyries from <i>Die Walküre</i> Siegfried's Forging Songs from <i>Siegfried</i>
28 July 1863 (conducted by Wagner)	Prelude of <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i> Elza's Song to the Breezes and Ortrud's Admonition from <i>Lohengrin</i> <i>Faust</i> overture Wedding March from <i>Lohengrin</i> Prelude and Isolde's Love Death from <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> Entrance of the Guilds and Pogner's Speech from <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i> Siegmund's Love Song and the Ride of the Valkyries from <i>Die Walküre</i> Siegfried's Forging Songs from <i>Siegfried</i>

To sum up, there were peculiarities in the Budapest theatrical landscape and some changes had an impact on Wagner's and Offenbach's reception in the city. In my view, the reviews quoted above should be viewed in the context of the nineteenth-century conditions and the changes that occurred to them.





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# 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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

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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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4</sup> 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”,<sup>5</sup> 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 Prešporku 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.<sup>6</sup> 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).<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> Besides subsidies from the municipal budget, the income of the poor relief fund included donations and estates of individuals and patrons of Pressburg<sup>11</sup> or of those from outside the city<sup>12</sup> (e.g. it received a part of the endowment of Samuel Royko),<sup>13</sup> and its regular income consisted of fines for offences,<sup>14</sup> and levies on some of the cultural events held in the city.<sup>15</sup> These included concerts organized in public halls and theatrical performances for charitable purposes.<sup>16</sup>

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 organized two shows of this type per season.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> Besides theatrical performances in the Redoute, which formed

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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-MICALCOVÁ, M. *Premený 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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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

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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 *Nyugat-magyarországi 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.<sup>22</sup>

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

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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.<sup>23</sup>

### **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).<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

The performance itself was described by Batka as an immense success.<sup>29</sup> 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 Dóczi was a sign of his openness and progressiveness.<sup>30</sup> In his highly positive assessment of the evening, the critic Otto von Fabricius praised the performances of almost all the performers.<sup>31</sup>

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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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 Spanyi (Spagni, von Spanyi, 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.<sup>34</sup> Spányi recalled this first performance of hers in her hometown in her memoir.<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup> The evening dedicated to the poor thus gained a strong local patriotic tone, highlighted also by extensive notices in the press.<sup>37</sup>

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; Fr. 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.<sup>38</sup> 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*.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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 Pojazzlerln* (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.<sup>44</sup> Besides the new opera, Batka praised also the new work *Die Pojazzlerln*, 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.<sup>45</sup> After the show, Batka wrote a critique which, although short, was full of superlatives about the performance of the guest.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup>

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.<sup>48</sup>

Batka and Mauthner both called attention to this fact in their critiques, generously praising Beck's remarkable performance.<sup>49</sup> 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.”<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup>

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 sourette 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 Hofoperentheaters, 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.<sup>54</sup> Besides praising her vocal performance, the *Preßburger Zeitung* appreciated the soloist's generosity as she performed without remuneration.<sup>55</sup>

## 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 [Anonymous]. 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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### **Archival material**

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Archív mesta Bratislavy [Bratislava City Archives], Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Bratislava City Archives, box No. 2839, inv. No. 15803, file No. 32, lease agreement of the theatre from 1889.

Archív mesta Bratislavy [Bratislava City Archives], Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box No. 2937, inv. No. 15879, draft lease agreement of the theatre. Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879 – 1887. Zusammengestellt von

Oberingenieur Anton Sendlein. Archív mesta Bratislavy [Bratislava City Archives], Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box No. 2940, inv. No. 15879.

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# When Singers Come from the Sea. Some Remarks on Coastal Theatres and Their Management

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**Abstract:** This article aims to shed light on opera management in coastal theatres taking as an example the case of Istrian and Dalmatian institutions at the turn of the twentieth century. Where did the impresarios come from? How did the singers and the companies reach the coast and what were the main routes on land? Was there a consolidated network between theatre directors and impresarios in hiring artistic staff? The study of the production system behind the performances reveals a dense layer of underlying relationships between theatre management, publishers, singers, and musicians in the analysed theatres.

**Keywords:** Istrian and Dalmatian theatres, opera production, opera business, impresarios, management

This article aims to shed light on opera management in coastal theatres taking as an example the case of Istria and Dalmatia at the turn of the twentieth century. The archival material collected so far from Rijeka to Dubrovnik, through Zadar, Šibenik and Split, allows us to reconstruct, at least partially, the circuits of the major opera companies and the relationships between impresarios and theatre directors, and identify the contacts that the editors and their representatives from Milan, Venice, and Rome had in the coastal areas. What do we know about these networks? Who were the impresarios active there? How did they organize the opera seasons?

Some impresarios hailed from the Istrian and Dalmatian territory and also worked there, while many others came from elsewhere. Nonlocal impresarios in fact formed the majority.<sup>1</sup> Percentagewise most of the impresarios

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1 This conclusion arises from a cross-check of the origins of hundreds of impresarios' letters addressed to the directors of coastal theatres in the period between 1861 and 1918, found in the archives between Rijeka and Split. It should be noted that, sometimes, the place of provenance of the letter did not necessarily identify the impresario's residence, but rather the place where the impresario was working, perhaps temporarily, during a given period



rios were from Milan, which should not come as a surprise given that Milan was considered the stronghold of opera in Italy in the nineteenth century. More precisely, they were based in Milan at the time they wrote their letters. Secondly, Trieste had its undisputed importance as to their provenance. The archives between Rijeka and Split include various names of impresarios and agents who were based in, and negotiated from, that city (see Giuseppe Ullmann, Giovanni Simonetti, or Enrico Gallina, among the most important ones, simultaneously active in several theatres). In smaller numbers, various other impresarios came from Rome, Venice, Bologna, Florence, or Naples. There were also impresarios who wrote and negotiated from towns such as Bari or Ancona, which may seem distant, but grew closer thanks to steamships. If orchestral musicians were needed in Dubrovnik or Split, sometimes they were engaged directly from Bari and arrived by sea. Epidemics, however, could be a deterrent advising against the transfer of singers and musicians: in Dubrovnik, for example, in the years 1910 and 1911, the arrival of artists from Bari was feared precisely on account of the cholera epidemic that had broken out there. Even earlier, in 1886, artists' baggage was subjected to disinfection procedures in Zadar and this, naturally, could discourage the artists from coming.<sup>2</sup>

Some Croatian impresarios made offers from the theatres of Osijek and Zagreb, but they were a minority and rarely staged productions of Italian opera.<sup>3</sup> In one case, the company even came from Brno, with Johann Pistek, director of the municipal theatre there, staging operas by Smetana and Tchaikovsky, but also certain Verdi titles.

A register of the impresarios who were active in the theatres of the Istrian and Dalmatian coastline, or who merely came into epistolary contact with the theatre managements of the area, is being prepared (to date, it was possible to find the names and trace the coastal movements of around two hundred and eighty impresarios). The lists of impresarios of the Italian area in our possession, provided in the 1980s by John Rosselli (*Elenco provvisorio degli impresari*

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of time. Some impresarios travelled frequently and wrote directly from the place where they were managing an opera season.

2 See the letter of the mayor of Zadar to the theatre management, Zadar, 31/08/1886, Državni arhiv u Zadru, HR-DAZD-252: Kazalište "Verdi" u Zadru 1863–1936, envelope 25.

3 See the correspondence in Državni arhiv u Šibeniku, HR-DAŠI-103, Kazalište i kino "Mazzoleni" – Šibenik (1863–1945), envelope 1, and the contract between Teatro Mazzoleni and Leon Dragutinović, manager of the Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku, HR-DAŠI-103, envelopes 4 and 10.



*e agenti teatrali italiani dal 1770 al 1890*, kept in the library of the Department of Arts of the University of Bologna)<sup>4</sup> and the bio-bibliographical dictionary compiled by Livia Cavaglieri in *Tra arte e mercato. Agenti e agenzie teatrali nel XIX secolo*<sup>5</sup> contribute only to a very small extent to our knowledge about the people who worked in Istria and Dalmatia, either for chronological reasons (the impresarios surveyed worked during a historical period that stretches to the end of the First World War) or because of the different sources from which the materials were drawn. For most of them, it is currently very difficult to retrieve biographical information. There is no literature on these individuals and, if something has remained, it should be identified mainly in primary sources. Their names are therefore largely unknown.

When writing to places in Istria and Dalmatia, agents and impresarios took pains to book a series of venues, or at least more than one, in the area. Given the long journey, attempts were made to organize a complete tour of the coastal towns, not just one date. The present state of research suggests that the companies tended to move from north to south along the coast, rather than in the opposite direction. Those who got dates at the Politeama Ciscutti of Pula or the Municipal Theatre of Rijeka also wished to move down to Zadar or Šibenik for further performances.

These trips cost impresarios on average more than running Italian companies within the Italian peninsula and, given that the ticket price could not be increased much, they certainly represented a risk. The benefits were not proportionate to the high risk of financial loss. The companies wanted to be guaranteed or paid for a considerable number of representations. At the end of the century, companies of a certain importance did not move to Istria or Dalmatia if they were not paid in lire, while the more modest ones and the music hall artists accepted contracts which paid half or two thirds of the sum in lire and the remainder in Kronen. For engagements, the companies needed advances in lire that some theatre managements could only make by changing their Krone into Italian lire.<sup>6</sup>

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4 ROSSELLI, J. *Elenco provvisorio degli impresari e agenti teatrali italiani dal 1770 al 1890*, printout, Università di Bologna, Dipartimento delle Arti, 1982.

5 CAVAGLIERI, L. *Tra arte e mercato. Agenti e agenzie teatrali nel XIX secolo*. Rome : Bulzoni, 2006.

6 See the report of the theatre management of Šibenik, with their headquarters at the Šibenik Presidium, Šibenik, 05/09/1919, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 4. On the currencies of the time in relation to the operatic environment, see WALTER, M. "Geld und Münzen" in *Oper. Geschichte einer Institution*. Heidelberg : Springer, 2016, pp. 13 – 36.

As one might imagine, most of the trips from Italy were made by sea on steamships, for obvious geographical reasons. The fact that most of the singers and most of the scenery arrived by sea entailed major organizational problems if the weather conditions were bad. When the bora was blowing, steamships from Trieste did not depart and the arrival of the artists at the venue could be delayed considerably. This was the case also when leaving from Rijeka. We come across a number of telegrams in which delayed arrivals were announced, and there was little or nothing that could be done in such circumstances. The baritone Silvetti telegraphed the theatre management in Šibenik: "Unable to continue journey because terrible sea, will be delayed."<sup>7</sup> Or the agent Gallina telegraphed from Trieste: "Chorus leaves tomorrow because of horrible sea. On Thursday spotlight accessories leave".<sup>8</sup>

The delivery of materials could also experience delays. The scenery, which usually came from Milan, and various other items, such as stage costumes or scores, travelled directly by train as far as Trieste or were transported by the Gondrand transport company (still operating today, for a hundred and fifty years).<sup>9</sup> From Trieste, they reached the coastal cities by sea on steamships such as the Lloyd Thetis. Complications and shipping errors could happen, as when certain materials, instead of being embarked with Lloyd for Šibenik, were loaded on the *Montenegro*, a steamship of Navigazione Generale Italiana, that was not going to Dalmatia at all. As a result, the chests – in the words of the director of the theatre of Šibenik, Giovanni Mazzoleni – made "a long pleasure trip" as far as Turkey and Greece instead of arriving at their proper destination in time.<sup>10</sup> The decision to order the materials potentially

7 »Impossibilitato proseguire viaggio causa mare pessimo ritarderò«, telegram from the baritone Silvetti to the theatre management of Šibenik, n.d, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 8.

8 »Coristi partono domani causa tempo oribile [sic] giovedì partono riflettori accessori«, telegram from the agent Gallina to the theatre management of Šibenik, n.d, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 8.

9 The Milanese firm Gondrand, offering a »general service of transportation«, was founded in 1866 and still functions today. It has branches in nineteen Italian cities.

10 For the failed delivery of a scena parapettata – for that was the item in question – damages were claimed from Casa Parisi of Milan, which had made a mistake in the shipment: »I enclose a copy of the letter that my brother is sending today to Casa Parisi of Milan in which he asks for compensation for the damages arising from the mishap of the parapet that Signor Parisi instead of sending directly from Venice to Austria sent to make a long pleasure trip to Turkey and Greece and delivered to Šibenik by the long route of southern Dalmatia.« (»Le inchiudo una copia della lettera che mio fratello oggi imposta alla casa Parisi di Milano colla quale richiede il risarcimento dei danni per il disguido della parapettata che il Signor Parisi invece di mandare direttamente da Venezia in Austria ha

from several different locations could also be a response to a specific need to reduce the risk. It should be noted that the materials (or “effetti teatrali” as they were called) also had to be returned to the company that had hired them out, therefore the return journey had to be included in the cost estimates.

Over the years, expenses kept increasing and were compounded by a decrease in subsidies. Some of the expenses could have been reduced if there had been a close network between the theatre managements. The fact that this was a type of cooperation which was sorely needed already in 1870 is attested by the following lines sent to Mazzoleni from an as yet unidentified colleague: “[...] and we will always go from bad to worse, for as long as unity is lacking between the various presidencies of the theatres, never ever will any good come out of it and, by always leaving things to the last minute, we shall have to pay for spoilt merchandise instead of good, and cast more and more discredit on poor Dalmatia. “Unity gives strength” and we are disunited. All the worse for us.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1884, an attempt was made by Pietro Ciscutti, impresario founder of the Politeama of Pula (later named after him), to make the theatres of Pula, Rijeka and Zadar enter into an agreement for hiring productions. “The proposals that would be made to us,” wrote Ciscutti to the theatre management of Zadar, “would be made to you, too, so that, by the same token, Pula could be combined with Zadar, and the immense costs of travel and transport would decrease.”<sup>12</sup> The idea was largely accepted by the theatre management in Zadar, and even Šibenik and Dubrovnik later agreed to the idea of creating a network. The theatre of Split was not included in this network because it burnt down in 1881.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the conditions for consolidating the system were not present (and Ciscutti died already in 1890). As for the

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mandato a fare un lungo viaggio di piacere in Turchia, Grecia e fatto inoltrare a Šibenik per la lunga via della Dalmazia meridionale»), letter from Giovanni Mazzoleni to Paolo Rocca, [Šibenik], 06/02 [1909], HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 9.

11 »[...] e sempre andremo di male in peggio, mentre mancando l'unione fra i vari corpi Presidenziali dei Teatri, mai e poi mai avremo alcunchè di buono e sempre riducendoci agli ultimi momenti dovremo pagare per buona, mercanzia avariata, e screditare sempre più la povera Dalmazia. 'L'unione forma la forza' e noi siamo disuniti. Dunque peggio per noi.«, letter from Antonio Feoli to Paolo Mazzoleni. Split, 06/10/1870, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 1.

12 “Le proposte che verrebbero fatte a noi, noi le faremmo anche a loro, così a viceversa loro nel carteggio potrebbero dire, dopo Zara, potreste combinare Pola che allora le immense spese di viaggio e trasporti sarebbero diminuite,” letter from Pietro Ciscutti to the theatre management of Zadar, Pula, 03/05/1884, HR-DAZD-252, envelope 5.

13 Per Antonio Bajamonti. In *Il Piccolo*, 1900, Issue 6590, 19 January 1900.

impresarios, they were perfectly aware of the risks and of the unfavourable situation. Even if it was true that “to be an opera impresario was becoming less of a profession and more of a disease” – to quote John Rosselli,<sup>14</sup> many impresarios continued to get involved and repeatedly offered their services to the theatre managements.

If we examine the archival documents of the theatres of the coastal regions, what immediately strikes us is that, for the most part, they are written in Italian. In fact, right in the beginning of the Napoleonic era, Italian became the official language of the area. And if, for example, we leaf through the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* of 1862, we note that these theatres were still viewed as “theatres of Italy”,<sup>15</sup> whereas in the years to come, all news concerning them in the Italian press would be found in the sections marked “Estero” (International). If we examine the language of the performances, we should note that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was mandatory for an impresario in Rijeka to guarantee that the performances were given only in Italian (this was a special article in the tender specifications of that theatre: the only language permitted was Italian).<sup>16</sup> This was the rule for all the coastal theatres, with the exception of Šibenik and Split from 1893. After a change in Split’s government (from Italian to Croatian), the impresario was under a contractual obligation to ensure that the performances were given in Croatian and not in Italian. An example of this can be seen in the contract written in German between the theatre direction of Split and impresario Johann Pistek, stating that: “die Oper Dalibor, Prodana Nevjesta, Traviata, Maskarni Ples und Marthe in croathischer Sprache singen zu lassen”.<sup>17</sup> The Croatian mayor of Split was also the director of the theatre: as the mayor changed, the language and the repertoire changed, too.

The same started to happen in Šibenik at the beginning of the twentieth century, although there was no obligation regarding the language in Šibenik.

14 ROSSELLI, J. *L'impresario d'opera*, Turin : EDT, 1985, p. 36.

15 Prospetto del movimento musicale nei teatri d'Italia. In *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, 1862, Vol. 20, Issue 21, p. 84 – 85, 25 May 1862.

16 See for example art. 1 of the tender documents for the operation of the Teatro Comunale in the three-year period from 1 January 1909 to 31 December 1911, and art. 1 of the tender documents for the operation of the Teatro Comunale in the three-year period from 1 January 1912 to 31 December 1914, Državni arhiv u Rijeci HR-DARI, Općinsko kazalište “G. Verdi,” DS 60.

17 Contract between the theatre direction of Split and Johann Pišteck, letter “m” of art. 1, Split, January 1896, Muzej Grada Splita, HR-MGS: Kazalište 1/ kut. I-XII.

Therefore, impresarios who wanted to perform in Croatia had better possibilities of acceptance in theatres such as those of Šibenik or Split than in Rijeka or Zadar.

Over the years, the importance of Italian (the Italian “element” as well as the Italian “language”) declined in accordance with the “de-Italianization” policy of Istria and Dalmatia promoted by Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria from 1866 onwards. Franz Joseph ordered the Crown Council to resist the influence of the Italian element in a resolute manner (“mit aller Energie und ohne alle Rücksicht”).<sup>18</sup> This change can also be seen in the musical chronicles of the newspapers. In *Il nazionale*, for example, the musical chronicles had been written in Italian until 1872, after which they appeared in Croatian (and the newspaper changed its name to *Narodni List*).<sup>19</sup> This progressive Germanization and Slavicisation of the area did not stop the impresarios from hiring Italian opera companies for one or more seasons. The companies came from the hinterland, and only a part of the musicians (and choristers) were local. Resident orchestras were sometimes semi-professional. Consequently, concerns about the quality of the performances were raised.

According to some tender specifications, sixty orchestral musicians and sixty choristers were needed after 1909 in Rijeka,<sup>20</sup> and forty and thirty-six, respectively, in Zadar.<sup>21</sup> But these theatres did not have such a high number of permanently available musicians. Just an example: at the dawn of the twentieth century, there were no choir members and there were only twelve

18 “Se. Majestät sprach den bestimmten Befehl aus, dass auf die entschiedenste Art dem Einfluss des in einigen Kronländern noch vorhandenen italienischen Elements entgegengetreten durch geeignete Besetzung der Stellen von politischen Gerichtsbeamten, Lehrern sowie durch den Einfluss der Presse in Südtirol, Dalmatien, dem Küstenland auf die Germanisierung oder Slawisierung der betreffenden Landesteile je nach Umständen mit aller Energie und ohne alle Rücksicht hingearbeitet werde. Se. Majestät legt es allen Zentralstellen als strenge Pflicht auf, in diesem Sinn planmäßig vorzugehen.”, cfr. *Die Protokolle des Österreichischen Ministerrates 1848/1867. V Abteilung: Die Ministerien Rainer und Mensdorff. VI Abteilung: Das Ministerium Belcredi*, Wien : Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst 1971, p. 297.

19 There are also other periodicals for reference, such as *Il Dalmata*, or *La Bilancia di Fiume*, *la Gazzetta di Fiume*, *la Gazzetta di Zara*, but not specifically musical periodicals printed in the territory, simply because they did not exist yet.

20 Cfr. art. 15, “Capitolato d'appalto per l'esercizio del Teatro Comunale nel triennio 1 gennaio 1909-31 dicembre 1911”, Fiume, [1908], HR-DARI, RO-24, envelope 6.

21 Tender specification of the Teatro Giuseppe Verdi of Zadar, Zara, [post 1901], HR-DAZD, envelope 29.

orchestral musicians (but no »prime parti«) in Split.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, if an impresario wanted to guarantee a season of opera seria, he would have needed to bring at least thirty choir members and eighteen musicians. This implied bigger expenses.

Along the Istrian and the Dalmatian coast, we have examples of theatres without public funding as well as theatres subsidized by the municipality and the government. An impresario could receive more or less money as an endowment on the basis of this subsidy. The endowment, however, was always voluntary and at the discretion of the institution granting it, which was clearly pointed out in the correspondence of the theatre managements. Hence, for example, the government of Dalmatia wrote as follows to the theatre of Zadar in reply to a request for funding: "this subsidy is to be considered completely voluntary and may be reduced or even completely suspended".<sup>23</sup> It was clear that the theatre management did not have any assurance to obtain money.

For theatres without public funding, the foremost source of money were their shareholders – this was the case of Šibenik. "It is very tiresome to be the director of these poor provincial theatres without endowment, without audience, and with very few people who understand what a theatre is":<sup>24</sup> with these words – this was in 1913 – the manager (and impresario) of the Teatro Mazzoleni of Šibenik expressed in a private letter all his discomfort about being the head of a theatre that clearly produced continual worries: zero public funding, hence reduced productions, fewer performances, and scant attendance. However, at certain meetings of the shareholders of Šibenik, the fact that the Teatro Mazzoleni received no subsidies from the government or the city became almost a source of pride, given that they succeeded in organizing their opera seasons *in spite of* the lack of public aid. At such meetings, a parallel would be drawn between the resources of the theatre of Zadar<sup>25</sup> – a theatre that

22 Cfr. Letter of Antonio Lana to the theatre presidency of Split, Milan, 02/02/1895, HR-MGS: Kazalište 3/ kut. I-XII.

23 "[...] del tutto volontaria e tale da potersi anche eventualmente restringere ed anche del tutto sospendere". Letter of the district captain to the theatre direction of Zadar, Zadar, 22/02/1897, HR-DAZD, envelope 25.

24 "È una gran noia fare il direttore di questi meschini teatri di provincia senza dote, senza pubblico e con pochissime persone che comprendono cosa sia un teatro", Letter of Giovanni Mazzoleni to Enrico Gallina, Šibenik, 19/09/1913, HR-DAŠI-103, busta 6.

25 During the 1865-1882 period, two opera theatres were active in Zadar: the Teatro Nobile and Teatro Nuovo (in 1901 renamed after Verdi). Here, mention is made exclusively to the Teatro Nuovo.

had subsidies from both the municipality and the government and had a sizeable audience, but which over a period of thirty months amassed a large deficit – and that of Šibenik, which received no public funding at all. This prompted Giovanni Mazzoleni to say: “we are not running at a loss and this in itself is a cause for satisfaction”.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the glowing publicity given in the newspapers (“Teatro Mazzoleni Šibenik – The cherished refuge of the most distinguished artistocracy / Theatre of great elegance – Luxurious electric lighting / Large waiting room – Reading room – Buffet – Large smoking room / Always hosting big stars and attractions”),<sup>27</sup> the underlying organizational realities showed a world that was less dazzling and did not lack difficulties.

Nevertheless, Mazzoleni suffered less from the lack of funding than from the political changes: in 1922, the theatre passed to the Croats and this was the real reason of his discouragement. He and his brother Paolo (the previous director of the theatre) were threatened and attacked. With the Second World War, even the theatres that had not already done so changed their name and owner. From the twenties onward, other forms of entertainment, such as variety shows and cinema, competed fiercely with the opera seasons. The impresarios who dealt only with opera had to change their orientation to survive.

## Conclusion

Tracing and reconstructing the activities of impresarios on the eastern Adriatic coast at the turn of the twentieth century allows us to better understand the production and organisation processes of opera in this region. Most of the impresarios were from Milan, but their names are largely unknown (to date at least two hundred and eighty are known). When writing to places in Istria and Dalmatia, agents and impresarios took pains to book a series of venues in the area. The trips, made by sea on steamships, cost impresarios on average more than running Italian companies on the Italian peninsula. Some of the expenses could have been reduced if there had been a close network between the theatre managements, but the efforts of Pietro Ciscutti in this

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26 »Noi non siamo in perdita, e già questo ci soddisfa«, letter from Giovanni Mazzoleni to Enrico Gallina, Šibenik, 01/12/1911, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 1.

27 “Teatro Mazzoleni Sebenico / Il ritrovo preferito della più eletta artistocrazia / Teatro elegantissimo / Sfarzosa illuminazione elettrica / Grande salone d’aspetto / Sala di lettura / Buffet / Gran fumoir / Sempre posto a grandi vedettes ed attrazioni”, Advertisement Teatro Mazzoleni, [s.l.], [s.d.], HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 4.



direction could not take shape. Along the Istrian and the Dalmatian coast, we have examples of theatres without public funding as well as theatres subsidized by the municipality and the government. The impresarios could receive more or less money as an endowment on the basis of this subsidy. With the twenties, and the competition with other forms of entertainment, such as variety shows and the cinema, the impresarios who dealt only with opera had to change their orientation to survive.

### Archival material

- Advertisement Teatro Mazzoleni, [s.l.], [s.d.], Državni arhiv u Šibeniku, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 4.
- Contract between Teatro Mazzoleni and Leon Dragutinović, HR-DAŠI-103, envelopes 4 and 10.
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- Letter of Antonio Feoli to Paolo Mazzoleni. Split, 06/10/1870, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 1.
- Letter of Antonio Lana to the theatre presidency of Split, Milan, 02/02/1895, HR-MGS: Kazalište 3/ kut. I-XII.
- Letter of Giovanni Mazzoleni to Enrico Gallina, Šibenik, 01/12/1911, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 1.
- Letter of Giovanni Mazzoleni to Enrico Gallina, Šibenik, 19/09/1913, HR-DAŠI-103, busta 6.
- Letter of Giovanni Mazzoleni to Paolo Rocca, [Šibenik], 06/02 [1909], HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 9.
- Letter of Pietro Ciscutti to the theatre management of Zadar, Pula, 03/05/1884, Državni arhiv u Zadru, HR-DAZD-252, envelope 5.
- Letter of the district capitan to the theatre direction of Zadar, Zadar, 22/02/1897, HR-DAZD-252, envelope 25.
- Letter of the mayor of Zadar to the theatre management, Zadar, 31/08/1886, HR-DAZD-252, envelope 25.
- Report of the theatre management of Šibenik at the Headquarters of the Šibenik Presidium, Šibenik, 05/09/1919, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 4.
- Telegram from the baritone Silvetti to the theatre management of Šibenik, n.d, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 8.
- Telegram from the agent Gallina to the theatre management of Šibenik, n.d, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 8.
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Tender documents for the operation of the Teatro Comunale of Rijeka, 1 January 1912 to 31 December 1914. HR-DARI, Opcinsko kazalište "G. Verdi," DS 60.

Tender specification of the Teatro Giuseppe Verdi of Zadar, Zara, [post 1901], HR-DAZD, envelope 29.

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## Entertainment or National Duty? The Role of Music in the Life of Eastern Galician Provincial Towns 1867 – 1914

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**Abstract:** The author cites a number of examples of musical life in provincial towns of Eastern Galicia in the autonomy period (1867 – 1914). The centres promoting musical culture were music societies (mostly for Poles) and “Bojan” singing societies (organized by local Ruthenians/Ukrainians, promoting mostly their national music). In every town, there were a few, or even over a dozen, private music schools, and musical education – very popular before the First World War – followed the educational models for middle and upper classes, popular at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Although music was largely perceived as entertainment, musical life in Galician provinces showed clear gender divisions and some artistic initiatives were perceived as manifestations of national rivalry.

**Keywords:** Eastern Galicia, provincial towns, music societies, private music schools, entertainment, national rivalry

On 4 January 1900, a correspondent for the “Kurier Stanisławowski” newspaper reported with embarrassment how members of the Stanisław Moniuszko Music Society from Stryi were received when giving a guest concert in Kalush: “Last time I already wrote about our symbolic school, the Kalush Music Society, and Ruthenian theatre. I have not written yet about our exemplary hospitality, the evidence of which may be the evening performance the Moniuszko Music Society from Stryi organized in our town the other day. Over twenty people came to us, sparing no expense or effort, so that we could listen to some new songs unknown to us, and some exciting poems and skilfully rehearsed choral pieces, but we are not interested in such delicacies. Perhaps, if a circus had arrived... but some kind of a music society, and non-professionals as well! Yes, this is our gratitude, this is our hospitality. Over twenty people arrived to sing for us, and the number

of audience members also amounted to twenty. The members of the Stryi Music Society were not even able to cover their travel expenses; and leaving our town, they promised they would forbid even their grandchildren to ever go and perform in Kalush. The same evening the Ruthenian theatre was packed fully, even though nothing special was on. It was “Baby” (Women), a comedy by [Zygmunt] Przybylski, poorly translated and even more poorly enacted.”<sup>1</sup>

The quoted excerpt by no means applied to the people of Kalush only. Other correspondents from the provincial towns of Galicia also frequently complained about the audiences, who preferred light-hearted and unsophisticated comedies to a more serious and ambitious repertoire. In the report from Kalush, one more motif stands out: a Polish music society from the nearby Stryi is trying to develop their activities and promote Polish composers, and the people of Kalush – apparently regardless of their nationality and social groups – prefer a comedy, poorly translated from Polish to Ukrainian. Later in the article, the author stressed that, although the director of the theatre of the Ukrainian Ruska Beskida Society, Tytus Gembicki<sup>2</sup>, had performed in Kalush for six weeks with success, the concert by the people of Stryi was a novelty and, as such, should have met with more interest from the public. Obviously, even poorer performances by the Lviv actors’ troupe must have been of much better quality, especially when directed by a famous professional like Gembicki, than the singing of the amateur artists from Stryi. Yet, this is not the main message of the article; rather, it implies Polish-Ukrainian rivalry in the fields of art and culture.

This seemingly immaterial report of a concert in a small town, in Kalush, seems to be a perfect introduction to the discussion about the extent to which music was subject to national rivalry between Poles and Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia at the time of its autonomy. Although the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria was not officially divided into eastern and western parts, 1850 saw a separation of court jurisdiction (of the appellate court of second instance) into two districts with their seats in Lviv and Kraków. Other institutions, including law societies, notaries’ offices, medical asso-

1 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 746, p. 2, 7 January 1900.

2 GEMBICKI, T. In *Słownik Biograficzny Teatru Polskiego 1765 – 1965*. (Ed. Z. Rzaszewski). Warszawa : Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1973, p. 186. About the Ukrainian theatre in Galicia see more in ЧАРНЕЦЬКИЙ, С. *Історія Українського театру в Галичині. Нариси, статті, Матеріали Світлини*, Львів : Літопис 2014.

ciations, pharmaceutical associations, chambers of commerce, and chambers of industry, also adjusted to this situation and this became the basis for the later division into Western and Eastern Galicia as well. The court of appeal in Lviv had ten subordinate court districts in larger cities of the region, in Kolomyia, Ternopil, Stanyslaviv, Berezhany, Zolochiv, Stryi, Sambir, Przemyśl, Sanok, and the capital – Lviv. In this article, I would like to take a look at selected examples of music in the life of Eastern Galicians, in particular such issues as musical education (both in public secondary schools and in private music schools), the promotion of musical culture by specially appointed societies, the role of musical performances in national celebrations, and music as a form of entertainment. The key question I would like to provide an answer to is whether music in the last decades of the Habsburg Monarchy was a neutral area for shaping aesthetic impressions and increasing sensitivity to art, thus propagating musical trends from large cities in the provinces, or – using examples from Eastern Galicia – whether it was also a tool of power, indicating the cultural “superiority” of some nations over others. It is not my intention to discuss the content promoted by particular composers as part of the national schools popular at the time, as Galician provinces were not usually the place of their musical activities or the place where new models of musical expression came into being. I am more interested in the reception of their work and the manner of writing about artists at a time summed up by Richard Wagner as a period in which it was impossible to separate poetizing from politicizing.

### **Musical Education**

According to the convention of the time, all members of the upper and middle classes, and pretenders thereto, were expected to be familiar with music at least to some extent. Musical education was obligatory in the case of children from so-called “good families”. No wonder that, in all towns and cities, the children of the urban middle class and intelligentsia were sent to private music schools, of which there were plenty. Whether the students were talented at all was of minor importance; mastering the rudiments of playing an instrument was mandatory if one belonged to a specific social class. Town residents had a lot to do with music, though it is not always sure on what level. This is how Tadeusz Porembalski recalled growing up in Przemyśl before the First World War: “In my time, Przemyśl was the Polish Napoli qui canta – Naples, the Singing City. Apart from the

Ruthenian (Ukrainian) choir, there were choirs of the Music Society, of cathedrals, of the Salesians, school choirs. Singing in a choir was the done thing.”<sup>3</sup>

Residents of Galicia would come in contact with music almost everywhere. In Roman Catholic churches, singing to the accompaniment of the organ was one of the basic settings for the liturgy; in Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches, the people responsible for the music were the deacons and the choirs and, in synagogues, cantors. Obviously, the quality of music depended on a lot of factors, including the generosity of the higher – or lower – rank spiritual leaders (bishops, parish priests, rabbis) and their understanding of the role of music in shaping religious attitudes. On the eve of the First World War, there were plenty of gifted leaders of cathedral choirs and composer priests in Przemyśl, the third largest city in Galicia and the seat of two dioceses, a Latin and a Uniate one.<sup>4</sup>

Up until the early twentieth century, singing was an optional subject in public *gimnazjums* (grammar schools) in Galicia; students could choose between music, calligraphy, or extra lessons of a foreign language (usually French, rarely English, as these were not obligatory subjects). Despite the small number of lessons devoted to musical education (two hours a week, usually in junior forms), some schools boasted student choirs, largely thanks to the involvement of catechists and headmasters.<sup>5</sup> That was the case e.g. in the *gimnazjum* in Sanok. The rich choir traditions of this school were recalled years later by Bronisław Filipczak: “I enrolled at the *gimnazjum* in the 1888/89 school year [...] At that time, only Ukrainian youths had a mixed vocal ensemble, with boy sopranos and altos, for the sake of the Greek Catholic church rite. There was always a student among them who knew how to lead a choir, which the catechist of that rite, Rev. Moskalik, was aware of. Some Polish students also belonged to that group and took part in the services at the Orthodox church on holidays according to the Greek Catholic rite. And likewise, the group (Ukrainians as well as Poles) would perform in church masses in the Latin rite, singing Polish hymns.”<sup>6</sup>

3 Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu, manuscript 15394/II: POREMBALSKI, T. *Wspomnienia z lat 1896 – 1960*, p. 111.

4 See more in PUDEŁOCKI, T. *Iskra światła czy kopczyca pochodnia? Inteligencja w Przemyślu w latach 1867 – 1939*. Kraków : Historia Iagellonica, 2009.

5 See more in WĄSACZ-KRZTOŃ, J. *Edukacja muzyczna młodzieży gimnazjalnej w Galicji Zachodniej w dobie autonomii*. Rzeszów : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2019.

6 FILIPCZAK, B. Chór i orkiestra gimnazjalna w najwcześniejszych latach. In *Księga Pamięt-*

When, in 1890, Tomasz Tokarski became the head of the Sanok *gimnazjum*, a secular instructor was employed to teach singing to the students; he set up a separate choir composed of Polish students. Secular songs were included in the repertoire and, at events requiring a larger number of choristers, the group was joined by students from the Ukrainian choir, who, as a rule, used to perform mainly during services in the Orthodox church. Both choirs were the school's showpieces until the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>7</sup>

However, the situation in the Sanok *gimnazjum* was not typical. Galician schools would rarely have their own choirs. Even if a teacher happened to set up and conduct an ensemble, when he was moved to another school, which happened quite often, the work was discontinued for the lack of a suitable successor. It was only the liberalization of the education law at the beginning of the twentieth century, allowing for a lot of new initiatives in schools, that provided a broader scope for developing interests and talents also in the field of music. In some schools, not only choirs but school orchestras were also established. To a large extent, this depended on the school staff with suitable musical education. This was the case e.g. in *Gimnazjum No. 3* in Przemyśl, where the professors Jan Barącz, Tadeusz Gawryś, and Witold Nowak decided to establish a school orchestra after a successful Mickiewicz poetry evening.<sup>8</sup>

Its first performance before a larger audience from outside the school was the idea of the headmaster, Stanisław Goliński. He had decided to establish a dormitory for the students and the idea required a lot of funds. That is why, in May 1908, a fundraising concert was organized with the participation of the orchestra, the school choir, and the female soloists Maria Pillerówna from Przemyśl and Maria Glazerówna from Lviv. The highlight of the concert was the overture to the opera *Tancredi* by Gioachino Rossini.<sup>9</sup> In subsequent years, the orchestra enjoyed great success and performed in the town at various events.<sup>10</sup> This is how Tadeusz Porembalski described those times: "Our

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kowa *Gimnazjum Męskiego w Sanok 1888 – 1958*. (Ed. Józef Stachowicz). Kraków : Państwowe Instytut Wydawniczy 1958, p. 157.

7 Ibid., pp. 157 – 159.

8 *Słowo Polskie*, 1907, Vol. 12, Issue 573, p. 7, 9 December 1907; *Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji c.k. Gimnazjum z wykładowym językiem polskim w Przemyślu na Zasaniu za rok szkolny 1908*, Przemyśl 1908, p. 14.

9 *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1908, Vol. 2, Issue 36, p. 3, 5 May 1908; Issue 37, p. 3, 8 May 1908.

10 Cf. *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1909, Vol. 3, Issue 24, p. 2, 23 March 1909; Issue 36, p. 1, 4 May

orchestra was invited to various shows, fairs, festivities etc. I loved music and participating in the orchestra. [...] Our music skills were pretty high, which we owed to the organizational abilities of our conductor, professor Witold Nowak, and his persistent and hard work. He was assisted by professors Jan Barącz, who introduced a number of Wagner's pieces, and Leon Pilecki, who was a very good French horn player, and also professor Gawryś, a violinist. [...] Our repertoire was quite extensive, as the conductor's file included a lot of marches, waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, cracoviennes, and polonaises. We played various potpourris, numerous other pieces (usually German), a lot of classical music, like overtures to operas and concertos, oratorios, and violin and piano concertos with the accompaniment of the orchestra. The scores and the instruments were brought from Weinhold in Dresden."<sup>11</sup>

In Porembalski's memories, the school orchestra appears as an ensemble of a professional music school, not of a mere *gimnazjum* where learning music was optional. The very number of instrumentalists and the multitude of music initiatives were impressive for the school's conditions. Porembalski mentioned that the bandmaster of the orchestra of the 77th Infantry Regiment, Jan Pešta, was also of great support to the adolescents by sending some soldiers to the school as additional teachers of particular instruments. Pešta also composed a special *Studenten Overture* for the student orchestra. Porembalski adds that he himself used to conduct rehearsals with the sixteen-member school choir twice a week. "I taught them myself, ran rehearsals, egged on the reluctant ones, and was the life and soul of the events."<sup>12</sup>

Among the schools which rose above mediocrity as regards the quality of their choirs and instrumental ensembles, we should mention the Ukrainian *gimnazjum* in Kolomyia. On 3 March 1913, the students of the school organized an evening in memory of the composer Mykola Lysenko, who had died a few months before, and performed a number of his pieces.<sup>13</sup> The *gimnazjum* in Jasło, with its large school orchestra, also distinguished itself in Galicia.

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1909; Issue 37, p. 2, 7 May 1909; Issue 92, p. 2, 16 November 1909; *Echo Przemyskie*, 1910, Vol. 15, Issue 23, p. 2, 20 March 1910; *Słowo Polskie*, 1909, Vol. 14, Issue 139, p. 5, 24 March 1909. See more in PUDŁOCKI, T. Zanim doszło do odnowienia Towarzystwa Muzycznego w Przemyślu... – karta z działalności muzycznej profesorów i uczniów gimnazjum zasańskiego. In *Wczoraj i dziś Towarzystwa Muzycznego w Przemyślu. 150 lat działalności 1862 – 2012*. (Ed. M. Betleja). Przemyśl : Towarzystwo Muzyczne w Przemyślu, 2012, pp. 51 – 71.

11 POREMBALSKI, T. *Wspomnienia z lat 1896 – 1960*, pp. 84 – 85.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

13 *Kurier Kołomyjski*, 1913, Vol. 5, Issue 199, p. 3, 2 March 1913.



The credit for that went mostly to a local teacher, Dr Roman Molenda. The achievements of the Jasło orchestra at a concert in Gorlice on 28 April 1912 were even reported by the Lviv newspaper “Słowo Polskie”: “A concert of classical music: Haydn, Mozart... we had had our doubts, but the result convinced us that it had not been mere bragging. The violin solo to the piano accompaniment, Mozart’s Concerto in D major, fared generally well, the soloist, a seventh grader, deserves genuine praise, and the 44-strong orchestra played Haydn’s *Symphony in E flat major* (especially the Andante) excellently. The Jasło *gimnazjum* orchestra leaders should perhaps think twice before selecting a typical Austrian military march to end a classical music programme; however, the positive results are definitely to their credit.”<sup>14</sup>

As soon as a few days later, on 2 May, the students performed in the Jasło “Sokół” Society. Here, also, the audience was delighted with the performance of the soloist, the seventh grader Wiktor Fabian. Apart from the already mentioned symphony by Haydn, the orchestra played the composer’s *Serenade*, as well as *Elegiac Polonaise* by Zygmunt Noskowski. The concert, which met with great appreciation by the audience, was repeated in late June in Rymanów and Iwonicz for spa visitors.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, it was rare for public or private *gimnazjums* in the provinces to have such first-rate orchestras. Usually, young students would learn music in private music schools. For instance, before WW1, there were more than ten school owners in Przemyśl, who ran their institutions for over a decade.<sup>16</sup> In provincial Eastern Galicia, the person who distinguished himself above all was Kazimierz Lepianka.<sup>17</sup> Initially, Lepianka was active in Sambir. After moving to Przemyśl, he was a teacher and art director of the school of the Music Society; he also taught at Grzywieński’s school. From 1 September 1901, he ran his own violin school (which survived until the outbreak of the

14 *Słowo Polskie*, 1912, Vol. 17, Issue 206, p. 8, 3 May 1912.

15 Центральний державний історичний архів України у Львові, fond 178 Rada Szkolna Krakowa, opis 3, case 21, pp. 16 – 17.

16 See more in GLINIAK, S. *Szkoły Muzyczne w Przemyślu (1878 – 1939)*. In *Musica Galliciana*, 2000, Vol. 5, pp. 129 – 144; *Nowy Głos Przemyński*, 1911, Vol. 10, Issue 5, p. 3, 29 January 1911; 1913, Vol. 12, Issue 25, p. 3, 22 June 1913; 1928, Vol. 25, Issue 42, p. 2, 14 October 1928; *Gazeta Przemyńska*, 1911, Vol. 5, Issue 41, p. 3, 15 September 1911; Issue 47, p. 2, 27 October 1911; *Echo Przemyńskie*, 1905, Vol. 10, Issue 11, p. 3, 4 February 1905.

17 See more in BOBOWSKA-HRYNIEWICZ, A. Lepianka Kazimierz. In *Przemyski słownik biograficzny*. (Eds. E. Grin-Piszczek, T. Pudłocki, A. Siciak), Vol. 3. Przemyśl : Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu, 2016, pp. 105 – 108.

Second World War) and taught in public schools.<sup>18</sup> Lepianka was one of the best virtuosos, who not only repeatedly performed at many events in and outside Przemyśl but was also a popular composer of smaller musical forms. For example, on 8 June 1900, he performed at a concert in the Moniuszko Music Society in Stanyslaviv.<sup>19</sup> However, despite his success in the provinces, Lepianka never had a chance to make a name for himself by giving concerts in large cities. His fate is a good example of an artist whose talent was absorbed by the provinces and who had to earn extra money in public schools to make ends meet.

Many reports on annual student shows in particular schools, as well as their ambitious repertoire, point to considerable competition among the music teachers in Przemyśl, but also to a demand for their services. In every town or city in provincial Galicia, there were between one and over a dozen private music schools. As a rule, they taught one instrument plus music theory, but there were also quite a lot of schools with a wider offer.

More extensive musical education was mostly offered by schools run by music societies. These would often monopolize the musical education offer in the town. On the other hand, talented teachers would sometimes argue with the society's board, not agreeing to work for low wages, leaving and setting up their own private schools – thus the music society's schools often collapsed due to their private school competitors. Advertisements referred to tradition and eminent teaching figures ensuring high-quality education.<sup>20</sup>

### **Music Societies – from Music Lovers to Professionals**

Music societies existed in almost all provincial Galician cities, though only two of them – in Stanyslaviv and Przemyśl – rose above mediocrity.

In Stanyslaviv, a music society was established in 1871, which later took the name of Stanisław Moniuszko, the most popular Polish composer of songs and operas. Its founder and long-time president was a talented amateur pianist, Baron Franciszek Romaszkan. The first professional art director of the society from 1 September 1880 was a student of the Warsaw Conser-

18 See Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu, fond 357: I Państwowe Seminarium Nauczycielskie Żeńskie w Przemyślu, sign. 24; *Echo Przemyśskie*, 1901, Vol. 6, Issue 55, p. 3, 11 July 1901; Issue 86, p. 3, 27 October 1901. See also GLINIĄK, S. *Szkoły Muzyczne w Przemyślu* (1878 – 1939), p. 137 – 138.

19 In *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 767, p. 3, 3 June 1900.

20 In *Gazeta Samborska*, 1907, Vol. 7, Issue 42, p. 2, 18 October 1907.

vatoire, violinist Michał Biernacki; his brother conducted the violin class in the society's music school. Besides Polish and European repertoire, the choir and the orchestra performed also pieces composed by its art director.<sup>21</sup>

The elections for the society's board on 30 March 1900 were quite typical in terms of gender structure and authority in the organizational life of Galicia. Despite its extensive structure and as many as thirty positions in the particular bodies of the society, among so many men (and some of them holding two posts) there was not a single post held by a local woman. Whereas, paradoxically, out of the four teachers in the society's music school, as many as three were women who often gave concerts in Stanisławów: Adelman-Majewska (piano), Maria Gembarzewska (solo singing), Karola Pająkowa (recitation, elocution).<sup>22</sup> It turns out, therefore, that in the late nineteenth century, even in music societies where women had long occupied an important place, gender division in the authorities was very clear. It is all the more surprising given that the press did not attempt to conceal the musical talents of women. "Ms Adelman-Majewska is a one-time world-famous artist who, having withdrawn to the privacy of her home, became a pillar of the Music Society, always ready to contribute to its welfare with good advice or a good deed. It is to her that we owe the Society's revival [...]. And Ms Gembarzewska's singing? Why, it is the voice that speaks strongest to the human heart – this voice is so skilled, there is so much passion, wistfulness and force in it [...]."<sup>23</sup>

The reforms undertaken in the institution were so successful that, in 1904, under director Wiktor Miller, a new section was set up – a permanent opera department. Under Miller's baton, the first operetta performances began to appear in Stanisławów. Their success and approval by the local press allowed them to reach for a more ambitious repertoire. On 2 June 1906, *Faust*, Charles Gounod's opera in five acts, was staged and it opened a golden era in the history of the Music Society. This is how Eustachy Bukowski, an amateur singer who became a local music star thanks to *Faust*, remembered it: "The decorations were painted by amateurs, the costumes were borrowed with difficulty from the Lviv theatre (I had to give my word

21 See more in CIWKACZ, O. Z dziejów opery amatorskiej Towarzystwa muzycznego im. St. Moniuszki w Stanisławowie (1871 – 1914). [online]. [cit. 7. 11. 2020]. Available at: <http://stanislawow.net/historia/opera.htm>.

22 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 759, p. 3, 8 April 1900; Issue 784, p. 2, 30 September 1900.

23 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 795, p. 2, 16 December 1900.

that they would be returned the same night, right after the performance). All tickets had been sold out, people would leave the box office with nothing, yet we could not repeat the opera, as we could not get the costumes for a second performance. Our rehearsals took place from 8 p.m. until midnight and our three-month work resulted in a single performance. Feeling bitter, I decided I would never stage an opera again without our own decorations, costumes, props, and scores.”<sup>24</sup>

When it transpired that the audience demanded a Polish opera, on 4 January 1907 the society staged *Janek* by Władysław Żeleński. The final rehearsals were conducted by the composer himself, who had come down from Kraków specifically for this occasion.<sup>25</sup> The premiere and the author were fêted but, despite the enthusiasm, the undertaking was a failure from the financial aspect. Eventually, however, after paying off its debts in 1909, the Society established its own permanent orchestra. A few years later, they decided to give a concert outside Stanyslaviv for the first time, and the slightly larger Przemyśl was chosen for a guest performance of this amateur orchestra. Here, on 4 June, it performed *Halka* by Stanisław Moniuszko and, on the next day, *La bohème* by Giacomo Puccini.<sup>26</sup> As Bukowski recalled: “In 1911, we already had a few operas in our repertoire. As our amateurs were busy with their regular work, preparing one opera would take some three months. In our little town, an opera could be repeated six times at the most, even though every time some variety was added to the performances by inviting some stars. The satisfaction was actually disproportionate to the efforts. That is why we wanted to expand our activities by organizing trips to other towns.”<sup>27</sup>

Unluckily, on the first night, the Stanyslaviv ensemble had to compete with Henry’s Circus from Ternopil, widely advertised in Przemyśl by processions of the circus artists with exotic animals through the streets. Bukowski came up with the idea to do a similar thing for their performance. In the afternoon, the musicians walked around the whole town. The director headed the procession, followed by the ladies, the singers, and the whole orchestra

24 Quoted after CIWKACZ, O. Z dziejów opery amatorskiej Towarzystwa muzycznego im. St. Moniuszki w Stanisławowie (1871 – 1914).

25 In *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1907, Vol. 22, Issue 1111, p. 3, 6 January 1907; *Kurier Lwowski*, 1907, Vol. 25, Issue 10, p. 2, 6 January 1907.

26 In *Echo Przemyśkie*, 1911, Vol. 16, Issue 46, p. 3, 8 June 1911.

27 CIWKACZ, O. Z dziejów opery amatorskiej Towarzystwa muzycznego im. St. Moniuszki w Stanisławowie (1871 – 1914).

behind, with instruments in their hands. It turned out that the Stanyslaviv artists had intrigued the people of Przemyśl enough to get all their tickets sold out in two hours, and *Halka* became a great success.<sup>28</sup> Also, the local press appraised the ensemble very highly. What is more, their subsequent performances met with a very positive response from the audience and the local critics to such an extent that, in the autumn of 1911, the Stanyslaviv opera came to Przemyśl again. The performances also provided an opportunity to reflect upon the organization of life in the town: "We left the hall with our spirits lifted and with a certain regret that, in our third-rate town, we cannot even dream of creating such an artistic ensemble, even though we have the oldest music society in Galicia. How we wish there were a radical change in this respect to fulfil the hopes of our Stanyslaviv guests that 'the results of the Society's efforts will encourage local musicians to take up similar work'."<sup>29</sup>

The reporter for the *Echo Przemyskie* newspaper was right: the Music Society in Przemyśl was older than the one in Stanyslaviv, as it had been established back in 1865.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to its art director, Ludwik d'Arma Dietz, the institution used to organize music evenings for many years, promoting not only the work of famous foreign composers but also of Polish artists, including Przemyśl ones.<sup>31</sup> Dietz, a graduate of the Music Conservatoire in Warsaw, who took up his post in April 1873, set up a music school at the society and, in October 1878, a women's choir.<sup>32</sup> When organizing concerts, private connections would often come in useful. Thanks to the fact that the local music teacher Władysław Cyrbes was friends with the well-known Lviv composer Jan Gall (from 7 Nov 1888 when they played their first concert together in Przemyśl at the Music Society), Gall often gave concerts in Przemyśl.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1890, Vol. 4, Issue 38, p. 3, 11 May 1890.

<sup>31</sup> See, among others, *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1887, Vol. 1, Issue 20, p. 2, 9 October 1887; Issue 22, p. 3, 23 October. Ludwik d'Arma Dietz was one of the most talented Przemyśl composers, most frequently awarded at Galician competitions, e.g. on 12 May 1889, at the ceremonial concert "The Lute" in Lviv, his work *Pieśniarz na chór mieszany, kwintet i fortepian* was played and received the first prize at the annual composition competition announced by the music society in Lviv (see *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1889, Vol. 3, Issue 30, p. 2, 16 May 1889).

<sup>32</sup> *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1890, Vol. 4, p. 3, 11 May 1890.

<sup>33</sup> *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1888, Vol. 2, Issue 45, p. 4, 4 November 1888. Cyrbes, a renowned artist of his time, also tried his hand at composing. In October 1907, he received the second and

Sometimes, the Music Society tried to present a more serious offer to the local music lovers. For instance, it performed fragments of the oratorios *St. Paul* by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and *The Creation* by Joseph Haydn on 22 January 1879, fragments of *Christus* by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *The Seasons* by Joseph Haydn, and *Piano concerto in F minor* by Frédéric Chopin on 6 March 1879, *Athalie* by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in May 1882, and *The Coronation Mass* by Luigi Cherubini on 3 May 1891.<sup>34</sup> From the early twentieth century onward, the society also organized thematic concerts to promote compositions by famous masters. The most successful initiatives included the Moniuszko concert on 10 March 1907, with *Bajka* (A Fable), *Widma* (Appearitions), and a polonaise from *Halka*.<sup>35</sup> However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the society saw a crisis. This can be seen from the fact that, on 2 October 1909, its general meeting was attended by merely sixteen members, giving an incentive to the following reflection in the “Gazeta Przemyśla” newspaper: “When Przemyśl was a tiny town without any music schools licensed by the governor, the conductor of the cathedral choir, the late Lorenz, and Ratyński, together with over a dozen music lovers, first in St Cecilia Society and then in the Music Society, cultivated divine music with reverence, instilled the cult of music in this place, organized music evenings and concerts with select repertoire, and staged masses by classical masters at the cathedral and at the Franciscan Church.”<sup>36</sup>

## National Celebrations

The various patriotic celebrations, very popular in the autonomy period, always provided a perfect opportunity to display drama and music skills.<sup>37</sup>

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the third prize at the Lviv “Echo” competition for his polonaise *Hej gromadą waszmoścówą* and for a mazurka; in 1909, he published these and his other pieces in Kraków (see *Gazeta Przemyśla*, 1907, Vol. 1, Issue 43, p. 23, 4 October 1907; 1909, Vol. 3, Issue 44, p. 3, 1 June 1909).

34 *San*, 1879, Vol 1, Issue 4, p. 3, 26 January 1879; Issue 10, p. 3, 9 March; *Reforma*, 1882, Vol. 1, Issue 113, p. 3, 18 May 1882; *Gazeta Przemyśla*, 1891, Vol. 5, Issue 35, p. 2, 30 June 1891.

35 *Gazeta Przemyśla*, 1908, Vol. 2, Issue 18, p. 3, 3 March 1908.

36 *Gazeta Przemyśla*, 1909, Vol. 3, Issue 80, p. 1, 5 October 1909.

37 SIERŻĘGA, P. Obchody rocznic narodowych w Galicji autonomicznej. Stan i perspektywy badań. In *Galicja 1772 – 1918. Problemy metodologiczne, stan i potrzeby badań*. (Eds. A. Kawalec, W. Wierzebień, L. Zaskilniak), Vol. 2. Rzeszów : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2011, pp. 420 – 433.



Both dominant nationalities, the Poles and the Ukrainians, organized annual celebrations in honour of their artists, particularly of national poets, on the occasions of the numerous anniversaries of fights for independence, in honour of major politicians (monarchs), or key events like unions, battles, and constitutions. The Poles would celebrate the anniversary of Adam Mickiewicz's death at the turn of November and December, and the Ukrainians the anniversary of the birth and death of Taras Shevchenko in March. There were plenty of other occasions, too, and the struggle to remain visible in the urban space and emphasize a community's cultural superiority was by no means region-specific.

The line-up during such evenings was pretty schematic. Reciting fragments of poems was combined with staging parts or whole theatrical plays, and occasional lectures or speeches. Of course, music was also present. In the early twentieth century, the Women's Circle in Kolomyia was famous for organizing Adam Mickiewicz poetry evenings and the musical setting was usually provided by the local Moniuszko Music Society.<sup>38</sup> A report on a Shevchenko poetry evening which took place on 4 April in Stanyslaviv was symptomatic for such celebrations: "[...] what was most enjoyed was a soprano solo by Miss Proskurnicka, sung with great ease; the sincere and prolonged applause made her add one more song and then repeat it; then there came a violin solo by Miss Jasienicka, a mixed Bojan choir, a baritone solo by Dr Biliński [...] and, finally, Bojan's male choir. Everything fared very well, almost all items had to be repeated; the hall was packed full with local people, a lot of them country folk. The atmosphere was very solemn throughout the evening. After the performance, there was a party at the town club."<sup>39</sup>

One needs to remember that a serious programme and the nature of such celebrations did not always cater to general taste. When half a year later, on 1 December 1900, the seventieth anniversary of the November Uprising was celebrated in Stanyslaviv, besides the lecture by the local *gimnazjum* teacher Paweł Bryła for this occasion and a drama production, the main task of organizing the programme was taken up by the Moniuszko Music Society. Solo and choir songs were sung. The interest from the public was scarce.<sup>40</sup>

38 *Gazeta Kołomyjska*, 1905, Vol. 17, Issue 47, p. 3, 25 November 1905; Issue 50, p. 3, 16 December 1905; 1906, Vol. 18, Issue 50, p. 5, 14 December 1906; Issue 51, p. 2, 29 December 1906.

39 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 760, p. 3, 15 April 1900.

40 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 794, p. 2, 9 December 1900.



Also, in all secondary schools, the educational authorities allowed to hold annual celebrations in honour of national poets, but only twice a year; Poles commemorated Adam Mickiewicz and Ukrainians – Taras Shevchenko. The programme of these meetings, open to everyone and often organized outside school buildings, was quite similar to the other celebrations in the town. A teacher would deliver a lecture for the occasion and this was followed by recitations and music performances. The latter could be more or less extensive, depending on the programme. For example, on 26 November 1905, at *Gimnazjum No. 1* in Kolomyia during a Mickiewicz poetry evening, *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve) was staged, directed by the teacher Kazimierz Missona, with music by Jan Głowacki.<sup>41</sup>

Normally, such events did not exceed the standard of typical school celebrations; however, there were exceptions. On 4 May 1912, the orchestra and choir of *Gimnazjum No. 3* in Przemyśl organized an open poetry evening to commemorate the centenary of the birth of the poet Zygmunt Krasiński in a large hall at the "Sokół" Society. The music programme was quite extensive and included pieces by Górczycki, Beethoven, Wagner, Niemczycki, Moniuszki, and a local composer, Rev. Józef Polit. The school report said: "The evening drew crowds, fared pretty well and met with appreciation by the local press."<sup>42</sup> Many other similar evenings were organized by this group till the outbreak of World War I.<sup>43</sup>

Not only national and patriotic attitudes were emphasized at these events. An interesting initiative was a concert organized in Stanyslaviv on 10 March 1911 in a local theatre to promote ideas of the social democratic party. As the press reported, the evening was full of solo and choir singing as well as recitations of appropriate poems, praising the working class. "The attractions are: Maria Paszkowska-Daszyńska, an MP's wife, former artist of the Kraków theatres, Mr Adam Ludwig, our old friend, currently a singer at the Lviv opera, and... fabulously low ticket prices."<sup>44</sup>

41 *Gazeta Kołomyjska*, 1905, Vol. 17, Issue 47, p. 3, 25 November 1905; Issue 49, p. 2, 9 December 1905.

42 *Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji CK Gimnazjum z wykładowym językiem polskim w Przemyślu na Zasaniu za rok szkolny 1912*. Przemyśl, 1912, pp. 6, 14.

43 *Echo Przemyśkie*, 1912, Vol. 17, Issue 39, pp. 2 – 3, 16 May 1912; Issue 97, p. 3, 5 December 1912; *Słowo Polskie*, 1912, Vol. 17, Issue 575, p. 3, 4 December 1912.

44 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1901, Vol. 16, Issue 808, p. 3, 17 March 1901.

## A Culture of Leisure

Although musical performances were also used to add variety to the programmes of official celebrations, music in the provincial towns of Galicia at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was treated above all as a form of entertainment and pastime. It is worth quoting Jadwiga Hoff, who said that the leisure time of the residents of towns and cities in the region had a largely seasonal character.

“Autumn and the period of Advent, as well as the time of Lent were – as it was written – a time of “sad autumn weeks”, “boring long evenings” or “times of prayer and calming down”. What followed was a period of carnival follies, spring picnics, open-air festivities and, finally, summertime, a special season regarded by many (including women) to be the only time when one could feel genuinely free.”<sup>45</sup>

During the carnival period, there were balls, banquets, dances, parties – some more sumptuous, some less so, some more successful, some less so. The residents of provincial towns modelled their entertainment after Lviv, Kraków, and Vienna, and usually organized the dances themselves. The biggest problem was getting a good orchestra. Military bands were the most popular ensembles; to secure the participation of instrumentalists (for a fee or even free of charge), the best way was to find influential patrons in church or military circles. This stratagem was often successful and, additionally, it ensured the appearance of a considerable number of unmarried military officers at the parties. This was the case also on 3 February 1894 in Stanyslaviv, when a charity ball for the Kraszewski Hall of Residence was organized in the theatre hall of the Moniuszko Society. The event was held under the patronage of the commander of the local garrison, and the Greek Catholic bishop Julian Kuilovsky. The evening was very successful and the credit for that went largely to the excellent military band.<sup>46</sup>

By the early twentieth century, balls had been events where the intelligentsia and the urban middle class mingled regardless of their nationality and religion. When, in September 1888, the Ukrainian intelligentsia organized a charity ball for St Nicolas Boys’ Hall of Residence, not only Ukrain-

45 HOFF, J. Czas wolny mieszkanców miasta galicyjskiego w XIX w. In *Kobieta i kultura czasu wolnego*. (Eds. A. Żarnowska, A. Szwarz). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2001, pp. 88 – 89.

46 *Gazeta Stanisławowska*, 1894, Vol. 4, Issue 49, p. 3, 17 February 1894.

ians but also a lot of Poles had fun, with music played by the 77th Infantry Regiment.<sup>47</sup>

The common carnival balls for the intelligentsia and members of the middle class, irrespective of their nationality or religion, ceased at the beginning of the twentieth century with the further development of national ideology. While in larger cities, the organization of balls only for “their folk” could be pulled off, in many smaller towns it was impossible due to the small number of guests, limited only to the national circle.<sup>48</sup>

Military bands, often composed of very good instrumentalists, enjoyed a great success among the residents of provincial towns. They would not only be invited to grace military events, but they also co-organized the musical life of the town. This concerned, most of all, public holidays (birthdays of the emperor’s family members etc.). They often played from May to September on Sundays and holidays in public places (like town squares, main routes) or popular picnic places, providing entertainment to strollers and holidaymakers.<sup>49</sup> They would often support just causes. For instance, on 9 May 1900, the orchestra of the 95th Infantry Regiment gave a concert in the theatre hall in Stanyslaviv for the purpose of renovating the graves of the people killed in action in Bohemia during the 1866 war. The local reporter praised both the diversified repertoire and the high-quality performance.<sup>50</sup> In Przemyśl, the bandmaster from the 10th Infantry Regiment, Červenko, collaborated mainly with the Ukrainian intelligentsia (especially with the choir conductor, Rev. Teodor Pasiczyński) in organizing musical events. He conducted the orchestra at the Narodnyj Dim, among others, at a recital of Salomea Kruszelnicka on 14 November 1911 and at a Verdi evening on 16 December 1913.<sup>51</sup>

In spite of appearance, there were quite a lot of opportunities to come across world celebrities. First of all, such opportunities were provided by many travelling drama and music groups, Polish, Ukrainian and German ones. These were often ensembles from Lviv or Kraków, but some used to

47 *Gazeta Stanisławowska*, 1888, Vol. 2, Issue. 40, p. 4, 30 September 1888.

48 See more in PUDŁOCKI, T. „Lolu, gdzie mój frak?” Prowincjonalne bale Galicji Wschodniej w latach 1867 – 1914 jako przykład synkretyzmu estetyki życia codziennego. In *Powinowactwa sztuk w kulturze oświecenia i romantyzmu*. (Eds. A. Seweryn, M. Kulesza-Gierat). Lublin : Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012, pp. 79 – 102.

49 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 766, p. 2, 27 May 1900.

50 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 764, p. 3, 13 May 1900.

51 *Nowy Głos Przemyśli*, 1911, Vol. 10, Issue 49, p. 3, 12 November; 1913, Vol. 12, Issue 50, p. 2, 14 December 1913. See more in ЗАБРОВАРНИЙ, С. *З хроніки Народного Дому в Перемишлі (1901 – 1945)*, Львів – Перемишль : Растр-7, 2019.

come from more remote regions, often presenting an interesting and ambitious repertoire. The competition for audiences was big, although, on the eve of the First World War, people were oftentimes satiated with some forms of music, and not even famous Vienna or Lviv names could guarantee the financial success of a project. Such was the case also with a concert on 10 April 1906 in Przemyśl, which was a failure despite the renowned names and the ambitious repertoire. As a commentary went, “[...] the too large a number of concerts during the past music season brought about an understandable satiety and weariness”<sup>52</sup>. No wonder the audience felt sometimes satiated. In November 1909 alone, there were four European-quality concerts in Przemyśl: of the famous Bohemian Quartet of Otokar Ševčík, a disciple of the Bohemian master Jan Kubelik, who played Tchaikovsky’s violin concertos and a concerto by Henri Vieuxtemps, the world-famous French violinist Jacques Thibaud, and a famous Wagnerian tenor from Bayreuth, Anton Julius Schmedes.<sup>53</sup>

However, the travelling troupes usually performed light and easy pieces, addressed not at refined listeners but a wide audience, including the military, who were the major consumers of services in towns such as Przemyśl or Jarosław.<sup>54</sup> The advertisement of Julian Myszkowski’s operetta group from Lviv, which after four years’ absence arrived in Stanyslaviv in June 1900, shows perfectly well who was the recipient of this art form: “[...] our audience will rush to the theatre to listen to lively operetta arias and see beautiful ballet productions never seen here before.” It was emphasized that the group was made up of sixty people, including choristers and ballet masters.<sup>55</sup>

The best way to advertise the various undertakings in the provinces was to quote the opinions of the so-called “rich and famous”. If the press in Vienna, Kraków, Lviv, or another city even slightly larger than the one where a given newspaper was published praised this or that artist or a cultural institution (a travelling theatre, an operetta, an ensemble etc.), it was quoted as a poten-

<sup>52</sup> *Kurier Przemyski*, 1906, Vol. 1, Issue 10, p. 3, 15 April 1906.

<sup>53</sup> *Gazeta Przemyska*, 1909, Vol. 3, Issue 83, p. 2, 15 October 1909; Issue 85, p. 2, 22 October 1909; Issue 91, p. 2, 12 November 1909; Issue 92, p. 3, 16 November 1909; *Echo Przemyskie*, 1909, Vol. 14, Issue 84, p. 2, 24 October 1909; Issue 92, p. 3, 18 November 1909.

<sup>54</sup> See BACZKOWSKI, M. *Austriacka załoga wojskowa Przemyśla*, In *Rocznik Przemyski. Historia*, 2018, Vol. 54, Issue 1 (21), p. 3 – 16; idem. *Wojsko austriackie (austro-węgierskie) a miasta Galicji (1772 – 1918)*. In *Galicja. Studia z dziejów społeczno-gospodarczych*. (Ed. by M. Baczkowski, T. Kargol), Kraków : Historia Jagellonica, 2017, pp. 13 – 28.

<sup>55</sup> *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 768, p. 2, 10 June 1900.

tial magnet to attract the local public. In July 1894, the “Głos Jarosławski” informed its readers that a renowned cellist and professor of the Agramer Musikverein music school in Zagreb, Heinrich Geiger, had been staying in Jarosław for a few days. The local elite begged him to give concerts in the town to the accompaniment of the symphonic orchestra of the 89th Infantry Regiment.<sup>56</sup> On 7 December 1907, a concert of the renowned Warsaw composer Henryk Malcer, and a young professor of the Warsaw Conservatoire, Paweł Kochański – an outstanding violinist and later world-famous teacher, took place in Przemyśl.<sup>57</sup> Malcer gave several concerts in Przemyśl; in 1912, his concert for the local branch of Saint Vincent de Paul Ladies’ Society featured local female artists: singer Helena Międzyńska and her accompanying pianist Wanda Cyrbes.<sup>58</sup> For both of these young and little-known artists, it was a perfect opportunity to show their connections and advertise their own private music schools, which they ran in Przemyśl.

Sometimes, reports of music events used to include content unrelated to music, resulting from ethnic friction and tensions. This happened e.g. after the two concerts of the Nadina Slavianska Russian choir on 15 and 16 January 1900. Although the correspondent could not find any fault with the music, he tried to challenge the quality of the choir’s performance, saying: “[...] its performances lack genuine artistry and intelligence, without which it is hard to imagine high art, whereas what is only too obvious is drilling. [...] After all, where from could those people get the conditions for creating art! One look at them explains everything. Except for the lady director and the accompanist, who look more or less European, there are a number of figures with barbarian, purely Mongolian physiognomies, coarse features, pouting lips, protruding cheeks, and messy hair. However can one expect high inspiration and understanding of art from such people whose very appearance is enough to put one off?!”<sup>59</sup>

When the choir from Stanyslaviv set off to perform in Lviv, the correspondent did not try to conceal his contentment when the reaction of the Lviv audience confirmed his own reflections. During the concert, rotten eggs were thrown at the Russians.<sup>60</sup> A few days later in Sambir, the audience was

56 *Głos Jarosławski*, 1894, Vol. 2, Issue 13, p. 2, 1 July 1894.

57 *Słowo Polskie*, 1907, Vol. 12, Issue 569, p. 7, 6 December 1907.

58 *Słowo Polskie*, 1912, Vol. 17, Issue 460, p. 8, 2 October 1912.

59 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 748, p. 3, 21 January 1900.

60 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 749, p. 2, 28 January 1900.

divided – some were delighted with the performance and others, opponents of the Russian ensemble, broke a window in the concert hall during the concert at the city club, and beat up some of the performers after the concert.<sup>61</sup> At a time of increased nationalism, discourses on the superiority of some nations and peoples over others, including different racial theories, met with a favourable response and were ubiquitous. There were also tensions in the relations between Poles and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) and what united them was their dislike for the Russians. And, although the Russophile movement was quite popular among the Ruthenians, the supporters of the national movement (Ukrainians) could not forgive the Russophiles for their liking for Russia – both factions used to fight tooth and nail, and artists from the Russian Empire giving concerts in Galicia sometimes fell victim to these fights.

Café and restaurant owners also tried to outdo one another in coming up with ideas to attract audiences and it was by no means typical of larger cities only. For example, one of the largest establishments in Przemyśl, Café Habsburg, played host to chamber musicians from Vienna. In Café Edison, from 1 August 1910, an orchestra performed daily and is said to have enjoyed a great success.<sup>62</sup> Obviously, owners of less refined establishments also used to hire instrumentalists and singers occasionally to entertain their clients, but usually the number of performers was limited to one or two, and the repertoire was not elaborate, either.

## Conclusion

A multitude of various musical activities, from purely functional ones, through music-making in schools, to the performances of great artists at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries show that the residents of provincial Galician towns had high ambitions. Although they did not have professional theatres or opera houses, they had halls large and fine enough to stage larger music productions like operettas, oratorios, or even operas. It seems that the middle class, trying to emulate the *modus vivendi* of the upper class, incorporated musical education and frequenting musical and theatrical salons into their leisure schedules to such an extent that they would prompt modifications in the cultural offer not only in larger centres

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61 *Kurier Stanisławowski*, 1900, Vol. 15, Issue 752, p. 3, 18 February 1900.

62 *Gazeta Przemyślska*, 1910, Vol. 4, Issue 57, p. 3, 29 July 1910; Issue 59, p. 3, 12 October 1910.

but also in smaller towns. The examples of Przemyśl and Stanyslaviv (the two largest towns of Galicia after Lviv and Kraków) show that artists from the whole Habsburg Monarchy and the neighbouring countries did not ignore the region, knowing they would find there audiences large enough for their performances to be cost-effective.

At the same time, one should not forget that, at a time of increased national movements, music did not mean only entertainment. This tendency was particularly visible in the early twentieth century. Poles and Ukrainians mostly promoted the works of their own composers. Nevertheless, even though socio-political life abounded in problems and clashes, the musical culture of the two competing nations remained a relatively neutral sphere; talents who came from a different nation were appreciated. What is more, great composers like Ludwig van Beethoven, Robert Schuman, Richard Wagner, were celebrated regardless of their nationality. However, ensembles from the Russian Empire, whose politics were clearly anti-Polish and anti-Ukrainian, sometimes formed an exception. Contemporary politics, however, would rarely be reflected in the musical tastes of the residents of provincial towns in Galicia, who remained open also to other artistic trends than the ones they were used to.

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# Networks of Cultural Zones between Imperial Theatre Houses. Migrations of Two Serbian Musicians

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**Abstract:** In order to shed light on cultural exchange in a meta-national context, Michel Espagne coined the term 'cultural transfer' with respect to exchange between 'cultural zones'. The migration of cultural objects and individuals, signified by their appropriation and transformation in new contexts, is a process of continuous reinterpretation of travelling ideas and concepts. Such transnational approach provided by cultural transfers assumes transdifference, cultural hybridization, and interpenetration of cultural zones beyond the traditional dichotomy of centre-periphery: the nodes of the formed networks are proliferated (in some cases, temporary) centres, including also certain mediatory points.

Two case studies of Serbian, i.e., Yugoslav musicians – the violin player Dragomir Krančević (1847 – 1929) and especially the soprano Karola Jovanović (1879 – 1958) – will be explicated in this theoretical framework in relation to their positions at music theatres. Both were well-known artists and had successful careers in Vienna and other cities in the Habsburg Monarchy (Budapest, Olomouc, Graz) and its successor states, Krančević mainly as a soloist and Jovanović as an opera and concert singer. These two musicians are understood here as agents of cultural transfer and this paper will show how they were transformed by adjustment to their new environments, i.e., to the dominant cultural policy expressed through repertoire, gender policy, guest performances, and other aspects. By doing so, they contributed to building networks all over Europe, beyond territorial or national borders.

**Keywords:** cultural transfer, music theatre, Central Europe, Dragomir Krančević (Krančevics), Karola Jovanović (Carola Jovanovics), Graz Opera, Court Opera Vienna, Vienna State Opera, Budapest Opera

Transfer in music theatre has been a signifier of theatre life in different historical, geo-political, social, and cultural contexts. Among others, it assumes migration of the repertoire, as well as of the musicians, actors and actresses, directors, scenery, and costume designers. There were innumerable transfers of musicians in the nineteenth century, both within and out-

side the great empires. The temporary visits, migrations, or settlements were caused mainly by economic, educational, or political reasons, and they can be forced, self-initiated, or in response to an invitation. Although the terms of forced and voluntary migration are coined as opposites, “numerous scholars have, however, argued that the underlying assumption (...) is an illusion. Rather, ‘forced’ and ‘voluntarily’ are conceived as poles of a continuum, with economic, political, environmental, and social factors shaping peoples’ decisions to migrate being interdependent.”<sup>1</sup> The managements of music theatres made great efforts to engage the most renowned artists of the period either by employing them for a certain time or by inviting them to guest perform. Central/Southeast European practices show that especially Bohemian musicians extensively migrated within and outside the Habsburg Monarchy and they were often the first professionals in musical life in the places where they have settled. Contrary to them, numerous musicians from the margins of the empire, or from other lands, left their birthplace and toured the mesoregions. The musicians under scrutiny migrated from Olomouc to Graz and further on to Vienna, and from Pančevo to Vienna and Budapest, respectively. In this paper, I will explicate the theoretical thoughts on cultural transfer and migration through two case studies: a Serbian violin prodigy, Dragomir Krančević (Kranjčević, Krancsevics, 1847 – 1929), from the town of Pančevo located at the former military border in the Banat, and the soprano Karola Jovanović (Karola Jovanovic, Carola Jovanovic, Jovanovics, Jovanovič, Ivanovics, 1879 – 1958), continuously mentioned as a Yugoslav singer. I chose these two musicians of different generations in order to show the way their careers developed by considering their positions at the music theatres and the reception of their performances. In this respect, I will shed light on them as agents of cultural transfer through their biographical, i.e., professional traits in different cities and towns. By mapping Krančević’s and Jovanović’s settlements and visits, I would like to exemplify the contribution of Serbian/Yugoslav musicians to mainstream musical life in Vienna, Budapest, Graz, and other cultural centres in Central Europe.

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1 SCHEEL S. and SQUIRE, V. Forced Migrants and ‘Illegal’ Migrants. In *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee & Forced Migration Studies*. (Ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al). Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 190.

## Music Transfers as Biography

The terms settlement and visit are understood in accordance with Colin Timm's ideas about biography in relation to the migration or displacement of musicians with his case study on Agostino Stefani.<sup>2</sup> Timm makes a difference between permanent settlements and extended visits as results of migration, concluding that "the dividing line between compulsory and voluntary or permanent and temporary migration is not always clear".<sup>3</sup> The (substantial) visits, according to Timm, could last months or years, were conducted with "no intention of settling",<sup>4</sup> and were mainly restrained to the period of studies outside one's native land. In this sense, Krančević and Jovanović were both settlers and visitors. Like many other musicians, these two artists made also numerous journeys to give concerts. The main difference between Krančević and Jovanović is the fact that Krančević was sent to Vienna as a child to study the violin with the well-known professor and the then director of the Conservatory of the Society of Friends of Music (Konservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musik), Josef Hellmesberger Senior, and he had a continuous connection with his birthplace as well as with some other places inhabited by Serbs. Contrary to him, Jovanović was engaged in several Central European opera houses, starting with the Provincial Theatre (Stadttheater) in Olomouc at the age of twenty-five. Her career led her to several other cities in the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states, and in Germany. Both musicians lived in Vienna after their active years in musical life and both died there.

Dragomir Krančević was a renowned violinist who became famous as a prodigious student in Vienna and, later, as a member of leading chamber ensembles, and symphony and pit orchestras in the Habsburg Monarchy. He also visited places outside his homeland and the imperial borders, in Serbia (Belgrade) and Prussia.

2 TIMMS, C. Migration and Biography. The case of Agostino Stefani. In *Musicians' Mobilities and Music Migrations in Early Modern Europe. Biographical Patterns and Cultural Exchanges*. (Eds. G. zur Nieden, B. Ove). Bielefeld : Transcript (Mainz Historical Cultural Sciences), 2016, pp. 35 – 49.

3 Ibid., p. 36.

4 Ibid., p. 41.

Migrations – settlements	Visits
	1859 – 1867 Vienna
1867 – 1873 Pančevo	
1873 – 1901 Budapest	
1901 – 1929 Vienna	

Dragomir Krančević was born in Pančevo, a smaller town at the former military border of the Habsburg Monarchy, which was nevertheless a micro-regional cultural centre. He started his education in his birthplace and continued it in Vienna.

Education	Work
k.k. Hauptschule zu Pancsova (Pančevo)	
Serbian Orthodox Uspenska Church in Pančevo, Johann Heissler	
Conservatory of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna, Joseph Hellmesberger* Senior	
	Hellmesberger String Quartet
	Court/State Opera in Vienna
	Krancsevics String Quartet
	National Theatre/State Opera in Budapest

\* Krančević was invited in 1877 to take Joseph Hellmesberger's position of violin professor at the Conservatory in Vienna as his successor, but he did not accept it.

In 1859, as a twelve-year-old boy, he was sent to Vienna by his father to study the violin with Joseph Hellmesberger at the Conservatory. Since his teacher, with whose family he stayed, was surrounded by numerous well-known musicians and composers, Krančević had a chance to meet Hans von Bülow, Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Joseph Joachim, Anton Rubinstein, and work with composers like Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, Gustav Mahler, or Karl Goldmark.<sup>5</sup> Krančević's first position in a music theatre was

<sup>5</sup> The young Serbian violin player performed Brahms's *Piano Quartet op. 60* with other musicians for the first time, and their cooperation continued afterwards. Their incomplete



that of a concertmaster of the opera orchestra of the Court Opera (Hofoper) in Vienna, that is, the Vienna Philharmonic (Wiener Philharmoniker). As my research proved, he was the only Southeast European member of the ensemble.<sup>6</sup> However, he did not occupy this position for a long time due to his numerous other engagements as a soloist, although he gave guest performances with this orchestra, conducted by Otto Desoff and Hans Richter.

After this period in Vienna, which can be viewed as an extended visit, Krančević went back to Pančevo (1867 – 1873) and, from there, he travelled to various places inhabited by Serbs, as well as to other European centres, and made a concert tour throughout Germany. Besides, he gave concerts as a member of the Hellmesberger Quartet in 1867 – 1868.

In 1873, Hans Richter, the Kapellmeister of the National Theatre (Nemzeti Színház), i.e. the Opera House, in Budapest (1871 – 1875) invited Krančević to join the orchestra and he became its first concertmaster.<sup>7</sup> This was the highest post in Krančević's career. Besides this activity and his solo concerts, he established his Krancsevics Quartet in Budapest (1873 – 1893) and achieved great success with it, as it became one of the leading chamber ensembles in Hungary.<sup>8</sup> In 1901, he went back to Vienna, where he spent his almost thirty-year-long retirement.

As mentioned above, Karola Jovanović started her career outside her homeland, in the Provincial Theatre in the Czech city of Olomouc (1904 – 1905). Before she went on to sing in the Opera House in Graz, she was engaged by the Frankfurt Opera (1905 – 1906). Her main settlements were in Olomouc, Graz, and Vienna, while she gave numerous guest performances at the Court Opera in Munich (1906 – 1907), the Court Opera in Berlin (1908 – 1911), as well as in Klagenfurt, Maribor, Graz, Vienna, and other places. I shall shed some light on her settlements in Olomouc, Graz, and Vienna.

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correspondence – the five letters Brahms wrote to Krančević – is available in the Archive of the Musicological Institute, Serbian Academy of Sciences in Belgrade.

6 Contrary to the members of the orchestra, numerous vocal soloists from the mesoregion were engaged at the Court/State Opera in Vienna, see MARKOVIĆ, T. Staatsoper und das südöstliche Europa: Politische, soziale und kulturelle Vernetzungen. In *Geschichte der Oper in Wien, Vol. 2: Von 1869 bis zur Gegenwart*. (Eds. B. Boisits, Ch. Glanz, C. Hellsberg, P. Ther, S. Zapke). Vienna : Molden Verlag 2019, pp. 154 – 181.

7 For more details, see FIEFIELD, Ch. *Hans Richter, New Edition*. Woodbridge : The Boydell Press, 2016.

8 For more details on his biography, see TOMANDL, M. *Spomenica pančevačkog Srpskog crkvenog pevačkog društva, 1838 – 1938*. Pančevo : Napredak, 1938; TOMANDL, M. *Dragomir Krančević*. Pančevo : Istorijski arhiv u Pančevu, 2012.

Migrations – settlements	Visits
1904 – 1905 Olomouc, Provincial Theatre	1905 – 1906 Frankfurt Opera
1906 – 1911 Graz Opera	
1911 – 1932 (– 1958) Vienna, Court Opera, State Opera	1906 – 1907 Munich, Court Opera (guest performances)
	1909, 1911 Vienna, Court Opera (guest performances)
	1908 – 1911 Berlin, Court Opera (guest performances)
	1922, 1926, 1929 – 1932 Salzburger Festspiele

Jovanović's transfers are considered here based on her professional engagements in opera houses, bearing in mind that her biography, including her education, is still unknown. During my research of primary sources related to Karola Jovanović, I found out very few facts about her private life. She was married twice. Her first husband was Heinrich Higin, one of the directors of the Graz Opera. Her second husband was Viktor Lang, whom she married in 1922. There are no further details about her marriages. Additionally, I discovered some details about her death. It was known that Jovanović died in Vienna in 1958, but it was not clear when and where. She was buried in Vienna at the Central Cemetery (Zentralfriedhof) on 28 January 1958. This discovery was significant for other reasons, too. Her birth date (19 August 1879) was also stated there, and it turned out that Karola/Carola Jovanović – in some cases after 1922, Jovanović-Lang – was actually a stage name she used instead of Caroline Lang. The fact that this successful soprano could be identified through her marriages and her death is very telling from the gender point of view. Nineteenth-century female musicians, painters, and authors were often referred to after their husbands, fathers, brothers, or professors.

### Music Transfers as Performance History

From his first notable appearance in the famous Rittersaal of the Viennese Hofburg when he was only sixteen years old, Dragomir Krančević played in various European cities like Vienna, Salzburg, Linz, Pressburg, in various

German cities, and in several places in the Principality, i.e., the Kingdom of Serbia with great success. In addition to leading cultural events, he also played at charity concerts, mainly to support Serbs, e.g. to raise funds to build a Serbian Orthodox Church. As already mentioned, Krančević was a well-known concertmaster in Budapest and became famous not only through his playing in the orchestra, but also due to his brilliant solo performances. He played compositions for solo violin or viola and orchestra with the Vienna Philharmonic at their subscription concerts conducted by Otto Dessoff in 1872 and Hans Richter in 1876, as well as at a concert held at the First Salzburger Music Festival in 1877. These were violin concertos by Louis Spohr, Giovanni Battista Viotti, and a symphony by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Third Subscription Concert, 1872

Ludwig van Beethoven: *Namensfeier*, overture

Louis Spohr: Violin Concerto in D major

Richard Wagner: *Faust*, overture

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: "Italian" Symphony No. 4 in A major

Conductor: Otto Dessoff

Fifth Subscription Concert, 1876

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*, concert overture op. 27

Giovanni Battista Viotti: Violin Concerto in A minor

Carl Maria von Weber: *Aufforderung zum Tanz* (orchestration by Berlioz)

Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 6

Conductor: Hans Richter

Concert at the First Salzburg Music Festival, 1877

Luigi Cherubini: *Anakreon*, overture

Johann Sebastian Bach: Passacaglia in C minor (instrumentation by Heinrich Esser)

Georg Friedrich Händel: Aria from *Semele*

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart: *Sinfonia concertante for violin and viola in E-flat major*, K. 364

Louis Spohr: Aria from *Faust*

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: *Scherzo from A Midsummer Night's Dream*, op. 61

Ludwig van Beethoven: *Symphony No. 5*

Conductor: Otto Dessoff

These concerts and, especially, his solo violin performances were highly praised. After the concert held in 1876, it was written that Krančević (Krančevics), the concertmaster of the Pest National Theatre, played Viotti's Concerto "in an enchantingly beautiful manner. Free of all cloying and mannered playing, he made an impression with his fine, rich, and beautiful tone, his impeccable skills, and his warm and striking performance."<sup>9</sup>

It is not surprising that Krančević's farewell from the orchestra of the Budapest Opera inspired numerous expressions of high respect and sorrow, like in the following extended text in the *Pester Lloyd*, dedicated not to some of his solo performances, as was almost always the case, but to him as an orchestra member and first concertmaster: "One of the most prominent and distinguished artistic figures is leaving the Royal Opera House at the end of this season. The first concertmaster of the opera orchestra, Mr. Dragomir Krancsevics, will appear at his stand for the last time tomorrow, Tuesday, and will retire after twenty-eight years of service. He is leaving this important position at such a sprightly age that one would be happy to keep him back (...) He is accompanied by the warmest sympathies of the orchestra members, for whom he was an ideal colleague, and of the countless music lovers who appreciated his art. Krancsevics is a noble master of the violin and a finely trained musician, with a profound musical nature. What a silver, singing tone he drew from his Guarneri, how his performance flowed in clear, noble lines when he occasionally appeared as a soloist in earlier years! As a concertmaster, he was fully absorbed in his profession; he had a conscientiousness, a deep devotion to duty, and a musical accuracy that was hard to match. This could certainly be appreciated only by his closer colleagues and, especially, by the conductors, who were so much more relaxed when they knew that Krancsevics was at the first stand on their left. He was an excellent leader of the violinists of the opera theatre, with unconditional reliability even in the most delicate assignments, and with an astonishing rhythmic sensitivity, which spread to the whole group in a flash. His musical talent was revealed at an early age. (...) On Hans Richter's urgent recommendation, he came to the National Theatre as a concertmaster barely twenty-six years old. When he debuted soon afterwards in a philharmonic concert with Spohr's *Gesangsszene*, the audience was instantly enchanted. He soon became a highly respected person in the musical life of Budapest, first forming a trio with

9 [Anonymus]. *Österreichische Musiker-Zeitung*, 1876, Vol. 8, Issue. 16, p. 5, 16 January 1876. The passages quoted from German sources have been translated by T. Marković.

the pianist Willy Deutsch and the cello virtuoso Ruhoff, and then becoming the leader of the quartet named after him. For almost two decades, he was a unique and enthusiastic interpreter of chamber music literature, presenting masterpieces to the Budapest audience in perfectly formed, stylish renditions. Even in the Opera House, one occasionally had the opportunity to enjoy his exquisite art as, for example, in the Elegy of Hubay's 'Geigenmacher von Cremona' or when he played the obligato part of the viola d'amore in Erkel's 'Bánk bán' or in the 'Huguenots' so poetically. Now, as concertmaster Krancsevsics retires to private life, we also bid him a heartfelt farewell, meant for the noble artist as well as for the loveable human being."<sup>10</sup>

All the qualities of Dragomir Krančević mentioned in this unusually long text reflecting on the musician's end of engagement in Budapest made him not only a favourite violinist, orchestra concertmaster, and first violinist of his string quartet among his colleagues, but also a beloved musician by the audience in all places he visited or lived in.<sup>11</sup> He was highly respected in Vienna too, as his obituary mentioned his "brilliant musicality and virtuoso mastery" and described him as "one of the most remarkable human beings who ever lived among us, an artist, a philosopher, a misanthrope at the same time, seemingly an unusual person, in reality wise and intelligent, a man who was hit hard by fate, but who never wanted to admit it. (...) Dragomir Krancsevsics (...) spent the last three decades of his life in Vienna, where he now passed away at the age of eighty-two".<sup>12</sup>

Karola Jovanović was an opera singer, a coloratura soprano, but performed also outside the opera houses as a concert singer on various occasions. These included anniversaries of institutions, individuals, or various festivals. As numerous reviews show, she was often praised for her singing, especially in Graz during and after her engagement there, and was even called the favourite singer of the Graz audience. Therefore, she was repeatedly invited to perform either in the Opera House or at various concerts in the Styrian capital.

The repertoire performed by Karola Jovanović was rather wide, including both main and minor opera roles. Already during the year she spent in Olomouc (1904 – 1905), her performances were noticed and highly appreciated.

10 [Anonymous]. In *Pester Lloyd*, 1901, Issue 145, p. 7, 18 June 1901.

11 See e.g. LEGÁNY, D. "Die jüngere musikalische Vergangenheit von Budapest". In *Život i delo Petra Konjovića* (Ed. D. Stefanović). Belgrade : SANU, 1989, p. 29.

12 In *Neues Wiener Journal*, 1929, 1929, Vol. 37, Issue 12.750, p. 6, 22 May 1929.

As it was explicated in a monograph on German music theatre in Olomouc, the artistic manager and the administrator of the Provincial Theatre in the Czech city in 1904 – 1908, Carl Rübsam and Leopold Schmid, respectively, engaged numerous guest singers and started staging Wagner's operas.<sup>13</sup> "The future outstanding singer",<sup>14</sup> Karola Jovanović was successful as a shepherd (Hirte) in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. It was during this opera ensemble's guest performances at the German Theatre in the Moravian city of Ostrava that Jovanović achieved her greatest success. According to a note in *Mährisches Tagblatt* in April 1905, the Olomouc ensemble performed operas, operettas, theatre plays, and comedies (Lustspiele); the five operas included *Il trovatore* by Verdi, *Les dragons de Villars* by Maillart, *La fille du régiment* by Donizetti, and *Tzar und Zimmermann* and *Der Waffenschmied* by Lortzing.<sup>15</sup> Similarly to several other vocal soloists from the music theatre in Olomouc, she was later engaged by the Court, i.e., the State Opera in Vienna, which was considered to be the highest point in one's career: "In the following decades in the history of the German opera stage in Olomouc, another professional milestone was reached – several singers who started their professional careers in Olomouc were engaged by the Vienna Court Opera."<sup>16</sup>

After a season at the Frankfurt Opera, Karola Jovanović joined the ensemble of the Graz Opera (1906 – 1911). It was in Graz, during the directorship of Heinrich Higin, which almost precisely coincided with Jovanović's engagement in the city, that she reached the highest peak of her career and popularity in the German-speaking areas. Although it was announced in the *Arbeiterwille* in May 1908 that Miss Karola Jovanović sang *Undine* for the last time and that there would be no other possibility for her to perform a main role,<sup>17</sup> after three months she got the main role which made her successful in the entire region.

13 They came to lead the theatre house after their predecessors had renovated it. "The critics apparently cherished the budding baritone Schreiner in the role of Eolfram, and the young Carola Jovanovics." See KOPECKÝ, J. – KŘUPKOVÁ, L. *Provincial Theater and Its Opera: German Opera Scene in Olomouc (1770–1920)*. Transl. E. Černinová and V. Heumann. Olomouc: Palacký University, 2015, p. 189.

14 Ibid. In this monograph, she was mentioned as Carola Jovanovic and Jovanovics.

15 The opera titles were quoted in German as performed. See *Mährisches Tagblatt*, 13 April 1905, p. 5.

16 KOPECKÝ, J. – KŘUPKOVÁ, L. *Provincial Theater and Its Opera: German Opera Scene in Olomouc, 1770–1920*, p. 310.

17 See ANONYM. In *Arbeiterwille*, 1908, Vol. 19. Issue 121, p. 8, 22 May 1908.

Higin's period was marked by productions of Puccini's *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*, as well as by the Graz premieres of Strauss's *Elektra*, d'Albert's *Tief-land*, Dèlibe's *Lakmé*, and Wolf-Ferrari's *Susannens Geheimnis*.<sup>18</sup> In 1908, he entrusted Karola Jovanović with the leading role in Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*, which she rendered with great success.<sup>19</sup> This, as well as the performances of the above-mentioned operas, were at the same time the most appreciated achievements of Higin's directorship.<sup>20</sup> As a result, Karola Jovanović sang the role of Cio-Cio-San for hundreds of times during the subsequent decades (in 1910, 1912, and 1922) in different music theatres, and as a guest in Graz and at the Volksoper in Vienna.<sup>21</sup> A review from December 1912 claimed that she was in her most brilliant (*glanzvollsten*) role and that there was a great interest in this performance, as was always the case with her guest performances in Graz.<sup>22</sup>

The soubrette sang the great aria "Un bel dì, vedremo" of Cio-Cio-San as a concert singer in Graz at a celebration in support of the German School Association (Deutscher Schulverein) under the protectorate of Countess Roja Attems and the city's mayor Franz Graf, with the opera orchestra led by Georg Markowitz. Jovanović successfully performed the above-mentioned aria, as well as Urbain's aria from Meyerbeer's *Hugenotten* (*Les Huguenots*). On demand of the audience, she added "Faustwalzer" from Gounod's *Margarethe* and received an ovation: "The audience gave its unforgotten former favourite a long-lasting ovation, which was ended forcibly only by the iron curtain".<sup>23</sup>

18 See FLOTZINGER, R. *Musik in der Steiermark*. Graz : Kulturreferat d. Steiermark, Landesregierung, 1980, p. 289.

19 Ibid.

20 Higin's period was, however, characterized also in a partially negative way due to his lack of wide contacts. There were "wide gaps of artistic insignificance" („breite Lücken künstlerischer Unbedeutendheit"), quoted after SUPPAN, W. *Musiktheater in Graz*. In *Blätter für Heimatkunde*, 1980, vol. 54, Heft 1, p. 41.

21 See S-P, C. Theater und Musik. In *Arbeiterwille*, 1910, Vol. 21. Issue 6, p. 8, 7 January 1910. According to an announcement from August 1922, Puccini's opera was set in the Volksoper in Vienna with two guest singers, Karola Jovanovic from the Vienna State Opera and Josef Gabor from the Royal Opera House in Budapest, in the main roles, and it was conducted by Leo Kraus. See [Anonymous]. In *Reichspost*, 1922, Vol. 29, Issue 219, p. 7, 11 August 1922.

22 [Anonymous]. Vom Theater. In *Arbeiterwille*, 1912, Vol. 23, Issue 350, p. 7, 20. December 1912.

23 V. D, E. R. Festakademie zu Gunsten des Deutschen Schulvereins. In *Grazer Tagblatt*, 1912, Vol. 22, Issue 63, p. 1, 4 March 1912.



Karola Jovanović sang in Graz regularly during her engagement in Vienna, too. The soprano was invited many times to make guest performances in the city as its favourite singer: she was called the “Liebling der Grazer” in numerous reviews, as on the occasion of her guest performance in the main role of the Singspiel *Susannes Geheimnis* by Wolf-Ferrari in 1913.<sup>24</sup> Only a month later, in May 1913, Jovanović was seen on the stage of the opera house in Graz again, this time as Eva Pogner in Wagner’s *Meistersinger*.

In addition to the standard repertoire, in 1917 Jovanović also performed the main role in the contemporary opera *Die Schneider von Schönau* by a Dutch composer living in Salzburg, Jan Willem Frans Brandts-Buys, only a year after its premiere at the Dresden Opera (Semperoper). This performance raised a great interest in Graz.<sup>25</sup> As it was reported, Karola Jovanović from the Court Opera in Vienna sang the main role and “her success in her last guest appearance in the same role was very great”.<sup>26</sup>

Let me also mention one of Jovanović’s later guest performances at the Graz Opera, which marked a newly established festival (Festspiele) in Graz. The Styrian capital organized a music and theatre festival after the model of Salzburg.<sup>27</sup> This event in June 1930 was opened by the performance of Richard Strauss’s *Rosenkavalier* with great publicity.<sup>28</sup> Due to the cultural, and political, importance given to the festival, the programme of the opening evening was described in detail: “This evening the Graz Festival will solemnly open with the performance of “Rosenkavalier” in the presence of President Miklas, the Minister of the Army, Vice-Chancellor Vaugoin, and various envoys of foreign countries, guests of honour, and heads of Graz authorities. The festive performance will be conducted by the director of the State Opera, Clemens Krauß. The participating soloists from the Vienna Opera, Lotte Lehmann, Margit Angerer, Adele Kern, Karola Jovanovic (...) have already arrived. Of the local artists, Felix Follfuß and Heinrich Werk have taken soloist roles. For the ceremonial opening, the police band under the direction of

24 [Anonymous]. Vorstellung zugunsten des Chorporsonals im Opernhaus. In *Arbeiterwille*, 1913, Vol. 24, Issue 109, p. 3, 22 April 1913.

25 [Anonymous]. Grazer Bühnen. In *Grazer Tagblatt*, 1917, Vol. 27, Issue 115, p. 3, 28 April 1917.

26 [Anonymous]. Grazer Bühnen. In *Grazer Tagblatt*, 1917, Vol. 27, Issue 124, p. 6, 7 May 1917.

27 See [Anonymous]. Festspiele in Graz. In *Freiheit!*, 1930, Vol. 4, Issue 849, p. 6, 23 May 1930.

28 As a matter of fact, the Graz Festival took this performance from the Salzburger Festspiele, where it was held a year earlier, in 1929. See [Anonymous]. Die Salzburger Festspiele. In *Illustriertes Familienblatt. Häuslicher Ratgeber für Österreichs Frauen*, 1929, Vol. 35, Heft 12, p. 2.

Kapellmeister Hermann will give a promenade concert from 5.30 to 7.30 in the evening on the terrace of the Municipal Theatre. In the foyer, the honorary members of the festival community, led by the Governor of the Province, will gather to receive the Federal President in a celebratory manner. The Federal President will be welcomed with the federal anthem as he enters the box. Due to the solemnity of the occasion, the audience is requested to appear in ceremonial evening dress, the gentlemen in dark suits. During the first intermission, the military torchlight procession of the Graz garrison will march past the opera house, where Federal President Miklas will watch the march from the terrace.”<sup>29</sup>

Karola Jovanović performed both main and minor roles at the Court Opera, the later State Opera, in Vienna. As the list of her roles in this opera house from 1909 to 1930 (see appendix) shows, her minor roles included Marzelline in *Fidelio* by Ludwig van Beethoven and Echo (Nymphenecho) at the premiere of Richard Strauss’s opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*. She sang the main role in Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, as well as in Humperdinck’s *Hänsel und Gretel* in Vienna. Sometimes, she performed different roles in the same opera in different periods of time: for instance, she played Woglinde and Wellgunde in Wagner’s opera *Das Rheingold*, the former twice between 1914 and 1916, and the latter seven times in 1925–1928. It is no surprise that her successful rendering of Cio-Cio-San maintained her fame.

As mentioned above, Karola Jovanović was not only a renowned opera singer, but also a concert singer. Her concerts took place in different cities where she settled or which she visited. For instance, she sang at a concert together with the Männergesangsverein and Damensingverein conducted by Wladimir Labler. Out of the six numbers, she performed two solo Lieder.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Jovanović performed in Klagenfurt in 1909 at the celebration of the centennial commemoration of Haydn’s death. As it was announced, the Carinthia Music Society (Musikverein für Kärnten) and the Klagenfurt Male Choir (Klagenfurter Männergesangsverein) were to perform Haydn’s oratorio *Die vier Jahreszeiten* on 18 April 1909. The concert was characterized as the “cultural event of the season”: “The preparatory committee succeeded in winning the young dramatic singer Karola Jovanović, who has already

29 [Anonymous]. Heute beginnen die Grazer Festspiele. *Grazer Tagblatt*, evening edition, 1930, Vol. 40, Issue 270, p. 15, 14 June 1930.

30 [Anonymous]. Konzert des Männergesangsvereines. In *Deutsches Nordmährerblatt*, 1905, Vol. 7, Issue 12, p. 5, 19 March 1905.

been engaged by the Berlin Court Opera for the next year, for the role of Hannchen.”<sup>31</sup> Jovanović’s performance was reviewed in a very positive way: “Miss Jovanović has also repeatedly triumphed as a concert singer. Her light and appealing soprano, her well-developed coloratura, and her smooth and warm performance pleased the audience immensely and prompted them to applaud her most enthusiastically.”<sup>32</sup>

On the occasion of the sixty-sixth anniversary of the reign of Franz Joseph I, there was a celebration dedicated to the Styrian Day of Soldiers (Soldatentag) on 1 and 2 December 1914. Karola Jovanović took part in the celebration on the first day and sang arias and Lieder, as well as duets with another singer from the Vienna Court Opera, Hermine Kitt(e)l, along with the orchestra of the Styrian Music Society led by Roderich v. Mojsilovics.<sup>33</sup> Announced as “a young beautiful singer of the Hofoper”, Karola Jovanović had a notable performance in 1915 on the third evening of the German-Austrian Writers’ Society (Deutschösterreichische Schriftstellergenosenschaft) with the “Haydn” Music Society conducted by Kamillo Horn. She also sang the Lieder *Die Quelle* by Goldmark, *Was die kleinen Kinder beten* by Max Reger, *Deutsche Mädchen-Wünsche* by Ludwig Daucha and, additionally, the waltz *Il bacio* by Luigi Arditi, with extraordinary success. Her duets with Kittl, *Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär* and *Schön Blümlein* by Schumann, as well as the famous extensive duet from Nikolai’s opera *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, were “an exquisite, unforgettable, noble pleasure”.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Karola Jovanović sang at various other celebrations, like at the fortieth anniversary of the author Edmund Skurawys,<sup>35</sup> or the fiftieth artistic anniversary of the singer and actor Anton Amon in Vienna.<sup>36</sup> Like many other opera singers and musicians, the soubrette held concerts in well-known Austrian spa centres visited by numerous prominent figures, including high-

31 [Anonymous]. Jahrhundertfeier des Todestages Josef Haydns. In *Freie Stimmen*, 1909, Vol. 29, Issue 20, p. 5, 15. February 1909.

32 H. Zur Haydn-Feier am letzten Sonntag. In *Kärntner Zeitung*, 1909, Vol. 16, Issue 89, p. 2, 21. April 1909.

33 [Anonymous]. Steirischer Soldatentag. In *Grazer Tagblatt*, 1914, Vol. 24, Issue 310, p. 2, 26. November 1914.

34 [Anonymous]. Dritter großer Vortragsabend der Deutschösterreichischen Schriftstellergenosenschaft. In *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 1915, Vol. 27, Issue 9385, p. 5, 18 February 1915.

35 [Anonymous]. Edmund Skurawys 40jähriges Schriftsteller-Jubiläum. In *Die Stunde*, 27 November 1926, p. 7.

36 [Anonymous]. Fünfzigjähriges Künstlerjubiläum Anton Amons. In *Reichspost*, 26 March 1928, p. 5.

ranked politicians and members of noble families, during the summer holidays between the opera seasons. One of such events took place in Wildbad Einöd, where the former League of Nations General Commissioner for Austria, Georg Zimmermann, spent several days and met Vice Chancellor Karl Hartleb, the former Minister of Education Anton Rintelen, and the General Director of RAVAG (Radio-Verkehrs-AG), Oskar Czeija, which bears witness to the importance of political meetings at health resorts (Kurort).<sup>37</sup>

Both musicians contributed to the musical life not only of the cities where they were settled, but also of the places they visited to perform. Through their personal migrations, and transfers of the repertoire in many cases, Karola Jovanović and, especially, the violinist Dragomir Krančević, left a deep impression on Central/Southeast European musical life. Their engagements in the mesoregional music theatres were praised in numerous reviews, and they were invited to several theatre/opera houses. Krančević's virtuosity inspired some of the most renowned composers of his time to dedicate compositions to him already at his young age, and his performances, always highly appreciated, contributed also to violin literature. Due to his unbroken relation to Serbian culture, Krančević was an agent of cultural transfer not only from the margins to the European cultural centres like Vienna or Budapest, but also vice versa – from the musical centres to the margins. Subsequently, the reception of his art was marked also by national pride and patriotism, since he was mentioned as the first Serbian violin virtuoso with European standing. In this sense, and in their own ways, Dragomir Krančević and Karola Jovanović not only took an active part in the metanational network of different cultural zones, but also constructed this cultural hybridization by their performances and migrations through Central/Southeast Europe.

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<sup>37</sup> Besides Karola Jovanovic-Lang, the singers Hermine Hendrych and Emma Löwy, the cello player Senta Benesch, and the pianists Anna Murko and Fritz Stepsky were also there. [Anonymous]. Welt und Stadt. In *Wiener Salonblatt*, 1927, Vol. 58, Issue 17, pp. 4 – 5, 21 August 1927.

## APPENDIX

## Roles of Karola Jovanović (Carola Jovanovic) at the Vienna Court/State Opera

Composer	Opera	Role	Number of performances	Year
Ludwig van Beethoven	<i>Fidelio</i>	Marzelline	9	1909 – 1926
Richard Strauss	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	Drei adelige Weisen	16	1911
		Sophie	43	1912 – 1921
		Jungfer Marianne Leitmetzerin	102	1922 – 1939
Albert Lorzing	<i>Der Wildschütz</i>	Gretchen	2	1911 – 1914
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	Papagena	24	1911 – 1923
		Drei Knaben	19	1918 – 1925
		Zweite Dame	27	1924 – 1929
Siegfried Wagner	<i>Banadietrich</i>	Eine Elfe	1	1912
Carl Maria von Weber	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	Erste Brautjungfer	2	1912 – 1913
		Ännchen	14	1913 – 1924
Georges Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>	Micaëla	6	1912 – 1916
		Frasquita	43	1913 – 1927
Johann Strauss	<i>Die Fledermaus</i>	Adele	8	1912 – 1918
		Ida	6	1913 – 1925
Max von Oberleithner	<i>Aphrodite</i>	Myrtokleia	21	1912 – 1918
Bedřich Smetana	<i>Die verkaufte Braut</i>	Esmeralda	23	1912 – 1922
		Marie	3	1916 – 1922
Richard Strauss	<i>Elektra</i>	Fünf Mägde	33	1912 – 1924
		Die Aufseherin	16	1925 – 1932
Giuseppe Verdi	<i>Falstaff</i>	Nannetta	4	1913 – 1914
Carl Goldmark	<i>Das Heimchen am Herd</i>	Das Heimchen	17	1913 – 1920
Louis Henri Jean Caspers	<i>Die Tante schläft</i>	Gabriele	1	1914
Richard Wagner	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	Woglinde	2	1914 – 1916
		Wellgunde	7	1925 – 1928

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Zerlina	6	1914 – 1918
Otto Nicolai	<i>Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor</i>	Jungfer Anna Reich	22	1915 – 1922
Heinrich Marschner	<i>Hans Heiling</i>	Anna	2	1916
Hans Heiling	<i>Der Ring des Polykrates</i>	Lieschen	20	1916 – 1917
Richard Strauss	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	Echo Najade	56 7	1916 – 1929 1917 – 1927
Albert Lortzing	<i>Der Waffenschmied</i>	Marie	2	1917 – 1918
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	<i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i>	Blondchen	3	1917 – 1924
Wilhelm Kienzl	<i>Der Evangelimann</i>	Martha	2	1919 – 1920
Felix Weingartner	<i>Die Dorfschule</i>	Chomà	4	1920
Franz Schreker	<i>Die Gezeichneten</i>	Ein Mädchen	6	1920
Richard Strauss	<i>Die Frau ohne Schatten</i>	Die Stimme des Falken	9	1920 – 1927
Giacomo Puccini	<i>Il tabarro</i>	Ein Liebespaar	2	1921
Erich Wolfgang Korngold	<i>Die tote Stadt</i>	Lucienne Juliette	6 31	1921 – 1922 1921 – 1929
Franz Schreker	<i>Der Schatzgräber</i>	Erste alte Jungfer	1	1922
Richard Strauss	<i>Feuersnot</i>	Elsbeth	4	1922 – 1924
Engelbert Humperdinck	<i>Hänsel und Gretel</i>	Gertrud Die Knusperhexe	21 14	1922 – 1924 1925 – 1932
Ludwig van Beethoven	<i>Die Ruinen von Athen</i>	Die Frau des Griechen	6	1924 – 1927
Julius Bittner	<i>Das höllisch Gold</i>	Das alte Weib	12	1925 – 1930
Giacomo Puccini	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	La Ciesca	14	1925 – 1933
Ede Poldini	<i>Die Hochzeit im Fasching</i>	Stanzi	4	1926
Umberto Giordano	<i>Andrea Chénier</i>	Madelon	3	1926
Max von Oberleitner	<i>Der eiserne Heiland</i>	Frau Kümmerlich	4	1930

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# “He Never Said that it Had to be Played a Certain Way.”

## Ernst von Dohnányi on Teaching Music and Musical Interpretation

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**Abstract:** Although, unlike many of his contemporaries, the world-known musician and native of Pressburg Ernő (Ernst von) Dohnányi (1877 – 1960) did not leave an extensive legacy of prose writings, a surprisingly large number of documents surfaced during the preparation of the edited collection of his writings and interviews (published in 2020 by Rózsavölgyi, Budapest). During his long life filled with wide-ranging professional activities, he seems to have authored numerous writings pertinent to the history of music and musical life: memoirs, articles and lectures on pedagogy, proposals for organizations, statements on public affairs, etc. Equally informative are the interviews he gave in his various capacities as composer, performer, teacher, and director of an institution. Based on his various lectures, interviews, prefaces, and recollections, this study aims to present Dohnányi’s views on teaching musical interpretation, including the authenticity of interpretation, the importance of familiarity with the style, the damaging influence of sound recordings, the technical background of a musical production, and the teachable elements of musical performance.

**Keywords:** Ernő (Ernst von) Dohnányi, Pressburg, music pedagogy, interpretation, piano technique, sight-reading

“One who needs more details should rather not play the piano” – this is what Ernst von Dohnányi<sup>1</sup> (1877 – 1960) wrote in a seemingly unfriendly note in his preface to his edition of Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Short Preludes for the Beginners*<sup>2</sup> and one cannot help thinking how very different this idea is from

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1 Outside Hungary, Dohnányi used “Ernst”, the international form of his unusual-looking Hungarian first name (Ernő) from early on in his career. The prefix “von” refers to a rank of nobility in the family and originates from the seventeenth century, but the title was more of a decoration for later generations: Dohnányi’s grandparents and parents were typical bourgeois/middle-class in their standard of living and lifestyle.

2 The complete quotation is: “My goal was to inspire the student to think and work inde-

the concept of his Hungarian composer/music pedagogue contemporaries, especially of Zoltán Kodály whose motto was "music belongs to everyone". Yet, before accusing Dohnányi of elitism, it is worth taking a closer look at the context, by which I do not only mean the preface to this Bach edition but all of Dohnányi's writings and statements. I started collecting and preparing them for publication five years ago, funded by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The collection, published in Hungarian in 2020 by Rózsavölgyi és Társa, Budapest, contains autobiographical notes, recollections, articles on pedagogy, reform proposals for the Academy of Music, directorial statements related to the musical life, interviews, and even some political writings – most of them unknown or forgotten before this modern edition.<sup>3</sup> The collection is being compiled in English in parallel with the Hungarian publication in co-operation with James A. Grymes, American musicologist. The English-language collection, which will be adapted to foreign readers' interests, will possibly be published in some years. To make the texts available for non-Hungarian readers till that time, this study not only aims to discuss Dohnányi's ideas on musical interpretation based on these documents, but also to present longer excerpts of the texts which could possibly bring the usually reluctant Dohnányi's ideas and beliefs closer to the reader.

Regarding our very first, amusingly straightforward quote ("One who needs more details..."), it is true that similar thoughts do sometimes appear in Dohnányi's other writings and statements, too. In his article "Freedom in Music Teaching Methods" published in the American journal *Etude*, which might as well be interpreted as a proclamation, Dohnányi praised the concepts of the young music educator Sándor Kovács (1886 – 1918), who had died some years before Dohnányi's publication.<sup>4</sup> According to Kovács, music should be taught exclusively by ear in the first few years: children should

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pendently if possible, so I kept away from superabundant instructions, and I did not even mark the tempo in those pieces where the natural musical sense would not be mistaken. I still believe that the given instructions and explanations are enough for the student to find his way in these pieces – the one who needs more details should rather not play the piano." DOHNÁNYI, E. (ed.). Johann Sebastian Bach: *Short Preludes for the Beginners*. Budapest – Berlin – Leipzig – London – New York : Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 1922, p. 3.

3 KUSZ, V. (ed.). *Dohnányi Ernő: válogatott írások és nyilatkozatok* [Ernő Dohnányi: Selected Writings and Interviews] Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 2020. Hereafter referred to as Dohnányi's Writings.

4 DOHNÁNYI, E. Freedom in Music Teaching Methods. In *The Etude*, 1921, Vol. 39, Issue 7, 431 – 432. Edition (in Hungarian): Dohnányi's Writings, pp. 198 – 203.

learn to practise scales, play melodies and chords, and improvise without scores, only by ear.<sup>5</sup> Dohnányi was amazed by the pupils taught with Kovács's method. "The report that comes to me is that, at that time [two years after the start of the studies], the note reading advances far more rapidly than by other methods. That is, of course, contrary to all our previous practices. We were always taught that to 'play by ear' was one of the first evils against which the musical Decalogue was aimed. When the teacher heard of a pupil playing by ear, he raised his hands in holy horror. Yet, I have personally examined many pupils trained according to the philosophy of Kovács, and I have been amazed with the character of their work."<sup>6</sup>

In Dohnányi's conclusion, the most important advantage of the method of teaching a child to play by ear before he is given the "complicated mathematical problem of studying notation"<sup>7</sup> is that the teacher can soon discover the musical talent of the pupil. "If he is really musical, he is worthy of studying music seriously. If he is not, let us spare him the punishment,"<sup>8</sup> he says. This is clearly similar to the quotation in his Bach edition, even though *Short Preludes* is not for complete beginner pianists.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the principal aim of the editor

5 Sándor Kovács (Kováts) (1886 – 1918), piano teacher and music aesthetician. After his graduation from the Academy of Music, he worked in Fodor Music School (today Aladár Tóth Music School in Budapest, District 6) and he was a music teacher with a unique personality. For more on his methodology, see KOVÁCS, S. *Hogyan kellene a gyerekeket a zenébe bevezetni?* [How to Introduce Children into Music?]. Budapest : Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 1917. Other works: MOLNÁR, A. – GOMBOSI, O. (eds). *Kovács Sándor hátrahagyott zenei írásai* [Writings on Music by Sándor Kovács]. Budapest : Rózsavölgyi és Társa, [1926].

6 DOHNÁNYI, E. *Freedom in Music Teaching Methods*, p. 432.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Although it is not closely connected to the subject of this paper, it is important to note that, while Dohnányi certainly did not believe that music was meant exclusively for enjoyment for a small minority, he did seem to believe that playing music was not absolutely necessary for enjoying it. As he put it in an interview: "In my opinion, everyone can be taught to enjoy even the most serious classical music. The simplest and most efficient way to do so is to playfully guide them from the world of music they like, say from a Strauss waltz or a Hungarian folk song, to Symphony No. 9. This is an important task for the radio, too." [Translated from Hungarian.] EGYED, Z. Dohnányi Ernő a zene örök hatásáról, a jó és a rossz zenéről, a mester és tanítvány kapcsolatáról és a nő igaz hivatásáról [Ernst von Dohnányi on the Eternal Effects of Music, on Good and Bad Music, on the Relationship between Master and Pupil, and on the True Vocation of Women]. In *Film, Színház, Irodalom*, 1943, Vol. 6, Issue 8, p. 9, 19 – 25 February 1943. Edition: Dohnányi's Writings, pp. 428 – 433. He noted another experience of a similar kind in an encyclopaedia entry: "Here is an interesting incident which brings out the role of the community in radio and music culture and their important task: it happened some time ago that, stepping onto

by providing only minimal explanation was "to encourage the pupils to think and work independently"<sup>10</sup>. (I would like to point out, however, that Dohnányi apparently did not expect the pupils to know how to "play ornaments with elegance" by themselves, so he explained these in detail in the preface.)

All these ideas are clearly related to Dohnányi's own childhood experiences. "What you experience as a child does not only impact your entire life – it governs it," Dohnányi wrote in his memoirs. Indeed, there are various traits in Dohnányi the child that would manifest themselves in his social and artistic personality for the rest of his life. Growing up in Pressburg (called Pozsony at the time), Dohnányi benefited from a remarkably privileged musical education. His father, Frigyes Dohnányi,<sup>11</sup> was a schoolmaster, director of the Catholic Grammar School, and an amateur cellist and composer who inspired his son by domestic music-making. This stable and disciplined yet harmonious family life within the vibrant and colourful musical culture of Pressburg had clear effects on Dohnányi's personality and musical bearing. In one of his lengthiest writings, a memorial radio speech from 1944, he discussed these childhood experiences – he had a long list, starting from his organ services at school masses through the musical festivities at the Catholic Grammar School to a high-standard concert life. As the crowning of his musical environment, he nostalgically recalled the opera performances in the municipal theatre. As he recalls: "I came to know a major part of the opera literature in Pozsony. A standing-room ticket cost 32 *kreutzers*,<sup>12</sup> and

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the stage at a dress rehearsal of a philharmonic concert at the Academy of Music, I saw a peasant couple sitting in the first row. A friend of mine approached them during the interval and asked them if they had ended up at the concert by mistake. They answered, as I had presumed, that they had heard several philharmonic concerts on the radio and they wanted to see one, too." [Translated from Hungarian.] DOHNÁNYI, E. Rádió és zenekultúra [Radio and Music Culture]. In *Rádióhallgatók lexikona* [The Encyclopedia of Radio Listeners]. (Eds. Andor Tiszay, Géza Falk.) Budapest : Vajda-Wichmann Kiadás, 1944. Volume 2, p. 243. Edition : Dohnányi's Writings, p. 265.

10 DOHNÁNYI, E. (ed.). Johann Sebastian Bach: *Short Preludes*, p. 3.

11 Frigyes Dohnányi (1843 – 1909), secondary-school teacher of mathematics and physics at the Királyi Katolikus Főgimnázium [Royal Catholic Grammar School] in Pressburg (from 1873). He was a versatile man: beside his professional work and musical activities, he invented a method for stenography ("panstenography," 1887), made a plan for a universal ("Panroman") language, and established the first X-ray laboratory in Hungary with Károly Polikeit.

12 Its present value is about 3 euros. Magyar pénzürték index [Value Index of Hungarian Currencies]. [online]. [cit. 28 March 2020]. Available at: ><https://artortenet.hu/magyar-penzertekindex-arak-es-devizak-alapjan-1754-tol/><.

if I arrived at the theatre early enough, I could stand in the first row, leaning against an iron bar, which made standing much more comfortable. The company consisted of young singers, some of whom became famous later on. I heard operas by Verdi and Meyerbeer, including *L'africane*, which is rarely performed today, as well as operas by Wagner, although, of course, only *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin* could be given. Gounod's *Faust* was also on the programme, as was Beethoven's *Fidelio*. They did not play any Mozart operas – those are, it seems, the most difficult of all. The Hungarian company, directed by Krecsányi,<sup>13</sup> played no operas except for *László Hunyadi*, but gave many classical and modern dramas that I also assiduously attended.”<sup>14</sup>

It was in Pressburg that Dohnányi had his first music lessons, too. From an early age, he displayed a natural gift for music even if, by his own admission, he lacked discipline at times. Music “was like a game,” he admitted, and, as a result, he often eschewed practicing and relied on his prodigious gifts as a sight-reader. A wonderful teacher encouraged him to do so, as he remembers: “My father realized that he could no longer teach me to play the piano and entrusted Ágost Forstner,<sup>15</sup> organist of the Pozsony Cathedral, with the task. I was very fond of good, calm Uncle Forstner<sup>16</sup> because he did not torture me with hand positions and other things that discourage children from playing. Instead, he let me play and develop as my nature required. Of course, some scales could not be dispensed with. I also had to play some études, but not too many. Beyond determining a progressive course of study, his teaching method was passive in the sense that he pointed out mistakes but never said or indicated that it *had* to be played in a certain way. Even today, I think this is the right approach.”<sup>17</sup>

13 Ignác Krecsányi (1844 – 1923), Hungarian actor and theatre director.

14 Translation from Hungarian. DOHNÁNYI, E. *Emlékeimből* [From my Memories]. Radio lecture, Hungarian Radio, 30 January 1944. Edition: Dohnányi's Writings, p. 74.

15 Elsewhere, Dohnányi refers to his first teacher, organist at St. Martin's Cathedral in Pozsony, as Károly Forstner.

16 In Hungarian: “Forstner bácsi,” a rather informal way of addressing him.

17 Translation from Hungarian. DOHNÁNYI, E. *Emlékeimből*, pp. 67 – 68. He followed this method as a teacher, too, as it turns out from the recollections of his pupils. See, for example, SMITH, C. A. Dohnányi as a Teacher. In *Clavier*, 1977, Vol. 16, Issue 2, pp. 16 – 22; DEVICH, M. Pódium és katedra. Beszélgetés Váczi Károllyal [Stage and Lectern: A Talk with Károly Váczi]. In *Muzsika*, 2002, Vol. 45, Issue 4, pp. 10 – 14; FERENCZY, Gy. *Piano-forte*. Budapest : Héttorony Könyvkiadó, 1989, pp. 45 – 47.

The ideal of thinking and working independently in learning music and, in a broader sense, in musical interpretation was fundamental to Dohnányi's whole pedagogical concept. One might even say he was obsessed with it. The concept included the pupil's independence, the teacher's independence in terms of choosing a method independently for each pupil and, eventually, the adult artist's technical and intellectual independence. "Art and school are fundamentally so different and incompatible concepts that it is impossible to resolve the issue"<sup>18</sup> – this is how Dohnányi formulated his motto in his 1917 reform proposal (concerning the educational system and the curriculum) for the Budapest Academy of Music, which is one of the most important texts Dohnányi ever wrote.<sup>19</sup> When he drew up the proposal, he had gained a decade-long teaching experience at the Berlin Academy of Music (1905 – 1915). Afterwards, in Budapest (1915 – 1943), he also preferred working with pupils who, as he put it, were almost "ripe for concertizing".<sup>20</sup> However, when Dohnányi and his prospective employer were discussing in 1949 the conditions of his future job at an American university, including the presumably lower standard of the students in Florida, he did not ask for an assistant teacher "even in the case of a longer absence".<sup>21</sup> As he wrote to the dean Karl Kuersteiner in Florida: "After all, the aim of any education should be to make the pupil independent. Of course, this is only possible with very much advanced pupils. On the 'Hochschule für Musik' in Berlin, where I taught 10 years, I generally had 6 pupils, who were almost ripe for concertising, but had besides a few – not too many – also advanced listeners [...] In Budapest I had even less pupils. [...] Now I presume that the student material on the University is inferior to what I had in Berlin and Budapest, and very likely an assistant teacher would be useful. But I should like to wait with the settlement of this until I am there."<sup>22</sup>

18 The source of the manuscript with Moravcsik's comments noted down by Dohnányi is: Hungarian National Széchényi Library, Dohnányi Collection (Fond 2/VI.3.).

19 Interestingly, Géza Moravcsik, the Secretary of the Academy, who commented on the points of the proposal either with appalled or sarcastic notes, commented on the above-quoted sentence in the following way: "this is definitely true."

20 Dohnányi's letter to Karl Kuersteiner, 3 August 1949. (Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Archives for 20th–21st-Century Hungarian Music, MZA-DE-Ta-Script 82.187).

21 Ibid. Dohnányi's quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

22 Ibid. Dohnányi's quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.



In Dohnányi's view, independence is an equally important requirement for teachers. The most important reason why he wrote his reform proposal in 1917 was the fact that he felt immensely appalled by having to teach with mandatorily prescribed publications and methodology. This is how he complained about the failure of the proposal afterwards in his above-mentioned article for the journal *Etude*: "Let us take the case of Hungary, for instance, the Academy of Budapest, an institution of the very highest standing: the student, however, in order to pass his government examinations, is required to take certain materials, non-proprietary of course, but of certain prescribed editions with certain fingerings, phrasings, expression marks, etc., and as arbitrary as the police regulations for crossing the streets. However, the law is laid down so that the teacher whose artistic judgment inclines him to use a certain edition cannot do so but must use one prescribed by the state. He cannot use certain pieces or studies which he in his own experience knows to be good, until he has employed others the state has listed. This lack of artistic freedom may have the advantage of compelling inadequate teachers to keep up a certain standard; but it is deadening to the progress of the art, insulting to the judgement of really progressive step in these modern times."<sup>23</sup>

Regarding independence, it is worth discussing Dohnányi's views on the connection between sound recordings and musical interpretation, as it is also related to the ideals of independence. As he pointed out in a lecture-recital for American students of music in 1949, "the records have beside the danger, that (...) you get accustomed to the interpretation of *one* artist, who may be not always the best."<sup>24</sup> His opinion did not change even after recordings became more widespread. As he said in one of his last radio interviews, "the radio and records made many-many people love music which was not the case before. But what I don't like if students who study music go after a record (...) The student should try to get from by himself there just [by] the interpretation of the piece. It very often it happened that I had to ask a pupil now what record did you listen to (...)

23 DOHNÁNYI, E. *Freedom in Music Teaching Methods*, p. 431. Dohnányi's quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

24 DOHNÁNYI, E. Sight-reading [lecture-recital]. In DOHNÁNYI, I. von. *Ernst von Dohnányi. A Song of Life*. (Ed. GRAYMES, James A.) Bloomington & Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 2002, p. 215. The quoted version is based on a manuscript source (British Library, Add. Ms 50807A). Dohnányi's quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

I think if they study just a piece they shouldn't listen to anybody and to any record of it."<sup>25</sup>

There is a funny story he told to prove his views, namely that recordings were harmful for adult artists' freedom of interpretation just as much as they were harmful for the students: "I had a funny experience once in a city here, I won't name the city, and I won't name the conductor. It was 10 years ago, I played, I think, my Nursery Variations [op. 25], and the conductor made my F sharp-minor Suite [op. 19] with orchestra, and up to the rehearsal I told him some little things, and I told him he should take this a little slower, a little faster, or something like that. The answer was: 'I can't do that.' I was like 'why can't you do that?' 'Because people will think I don't know the music.' 'How is that?' 'Yeah, because it's in the records so.' [Interviewer is laughing.] Now then I asked him what record he has heard, and he told me, and then I listened to that recording – of course all wrong tempi. Now, you see that to regard a record like to Bible, you know, it's certainly a mistake. And that what's the students do, and as this example shows also [does] a conductor. Of course, he was not one of the famous conductors."<sup>26</sup>

This episode also reveals the circumstances under which Dohnányi worked after his emigration: such a thing was less likely to occur in Vienna or Berlin or even Pressburg in the 1880s and 1890s – with or without recordings – than in an American small town with a much less burgeoning musical life, to say the least.<sup>27</sup> Dohnányi made a truly interesting remark during an earlier interview in Hungary which also concerned the relationship between sound recordings and the independence of interpretation: "Radio music is not mechanical because, today, the circumstances of playing in the radio are absolutely identical with those of playing at home or in a concert hall. (...) Playing for recording, on the other hand, is completely different. It must be simplified. It must be made artificially uninteresting so that it will not turn

25 Radio interview on Dohnányi's 82nd birthday, 24 July 1959 (Roy Flynn, WFSU Radio, Tallahassee, USA) (Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Archives for 20th–21st-Century Hungarian Music, MZA-DE-Ta-AV 2.041:1). Edition [in Hungarian]: Dohnányi's Writings, pp. 451 – 459. Dohnányi's quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

26 Radio interview on Dohnányi's 82nd birthday, 24 July 1959. Dohnányi's quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

27 Our sources indicate that this may have been a concert of the Tri-City Symphony Orchestra on 23 January 1949 in Davenport, Iowa, conducted by Oscar Anderson. About Dohnányi's years in emigration, see KUSZ, V. *A Wayfaring Stranger. Ernst von Dohnányi's American Years, 1949–1960*. Oakland, CA : University of California Press, 2020.

boring. This paradox means that the more *rubato* and arbitrary fantasizing there is on the record, the earlier the owner of the record will get bored with it after playing it several times. In other words, what you need is serene objectivity to protect the performers from the listeners becoming bored with them too early.”<sup>28</sup>

Dohnányi thus regards radio performances, i.e. those broadcast from a radio studio, as spontaneous, unique, and inimitable ones, similar to concerts. (His regular radio performances were broadcast live.) Consequently, his first monographer, Bálint Vázsonyi, concluded that recordings were not to the credit of Dohnányi’s spontaneous piano playing, which Vázsonyi believed could have also contributed to the unfortunate events in his posthumous reception, and could have resulted from a conscious strategy on his part.<sup>29</sup> All this may also be illustrated by the following extract from an interview-like text published in Kálmán Konkoly’s collection in 1944, in which Dohnányi talks about two types of performers: those who are “completely absorbed in the piece and record this feeling in themselves. All their interpretations are more or less equivalent to their previous ones (...). The opposite of these are the artists who play the work differently every single time they perform it.”<sup>30</sup> There is no doubt which category Dohnányi believed himself to belong to: his words indicate it, too, but, more importantly, if we compare his concert recordings of the same work played at different times, we will clearly experience “many different lights”. The available recordings of his American concerts – even if fragmentary – illustrate the plasticity of Dohnányi’s concert performances.<sup>31</sup> His contemporaries said that “his audience felt as if his masterpieces were *born there* on the stage.”<sup>32</sup>

28 Translated from Hungarian. SZÁNTHÓ, D. Beszélgetés Dohnányi Ernővel [A Discussion with Ernst von Dohnányi]. In *Magyar Nemzet*, 1942, Vol. 5, Issue 55, p. 10, 8 March 1942. Edition: Dohnányi’s Writings, p. 424.

29 VÁZSONYI, B. *Dohnányi Ernő*. Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2002, p. 89. On Dohnányi’s recordings, see e.g. VÁZSONYI, B. *Dohnányi a zongoránál / Dohnányi at the Piano 1955, 1956, 1959* (CD-booklet). Budapest : Hungaroton Classic, 1993. HCD 12085.

30 KONKOLY, K. *Magyar alkotók* [Hungarian Creators]. Budapest : Singer és Wolfner, 1944, p. 165. Edition: Dohnányi’s Writings, pp. 467 – 477.

31 The private (and non-professional) recordings of Dohnányi’s American concerts are available at the Archives for 20th–21st-Century Hungarian Music of the Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungary. Publication of a selection: *The Last Romantic. Dohnányi’s American Concert Recordings / Az utolsó romantikus. Dohnányi amerikai koncertfelvételei*. CD. (Ed. Kusz, Veronika.) Budapest: Rózsavölgyi, 2017. RÉTCD 089.

32 Translated from Hungarian. VÁZSONYI, B. *Dohnányi Ernő*, p. 83. Dohnányi’s quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

One thing was stable and permanent though, as Dohnányi always put it: style. He was truly obsessed with the sense of style and its prerequisite, a knowledge of the broadest possible repertoire. As he explained in one of his lecture-recitals in America: "To play *one* Beethoven sonata *well* you have to be familiar with the style of Beethoven; this is impossible by knowing only that *one* sonata. You benefit to know the others too. This refers naturally to other composers too. The style is a thing which can hardly be taught because it is a matter of feeling, obtainable only by the knowledge of a great part of the works of a composer. This alone makes the necessity of sight-reading obvious."<sup>33</sup>

He had formulated the above idea at least three decades before, in his reform proposal for the Academy of Music: "The biggest mistake of the teaching material is that there is too large emphasis on the mechanical part, which results in the fact that pupils, apart from doing a lot of unnecessary work, focus on less important things and regard etudes as autotelic pieces. This is why most students at the Piano Teacher Training Department know only ten percent of the major piano works. (...) So, we need fewer etudes and more, much more pieces for performance! There is no need to break down the pieces into the tiniest details when teaching them; pupils should become familiar with the composer's style instead, and this is possible only by playing a large number of pieces. Then, when they need to refine a piece for performance in more detail, it will be easier for them to do so."<sup>34</sup>

"It will be harder for them," commented Géza Moravcsik, whose sarcastic and, at certain instances, even hostile remarks on the reform proposal were recorded by Dohnányi, "because they will get used to sloppiness." Dohnányi, naturally, did not agree with this and not only because, as he said, he himself had learnt to play the piano by sight-reading and, in his case, this resulted in a technique that not even Moravcsik could question. Nevertheless, Dohnányi's words in his above-mentioned lecture-recital sound as if he had written them as a late message from Ohio in 1948 to Moravcsik back in 1917: "But here many of you, L[adies] & G[entlemen] will reply that this might lead to a "sloppy" playing. Yes, it *might*. But it *need not*. Just as well as the occasional rhythmical unevennesses need not lead to sloppiness. The some-

33 DOHNÁNYI, E. Sight-reading [based on his manuscript].

34 Translated from Hungarian. Dohnányi's reform proposal. Edition: Dohnányi's Writings, pp. 171 – 185. Dohnányi's quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

times unavoidable ‘sloppiness’ can be thoroughly balanced by the demand of absolut[e] correctness in practicing the pieces and executing of the pieces which are the objects of our regular studies. And besides if our the practise of sight-reading is done *reasonably* this danger is almost null.”<sup>35</sup>

So, it is definitely not about understating technical skills, and this is clear from some of his writings. What is more, he thinks that high-quality musical interpretation requires technical skills which may be acquired by playing scales (because, as he put it, “there is nothing to take the place of scales to gain a certain kind of liquid ability at the keyboard”)<sup>36</sup>, finger exercises and etudes (he liked to separate these two and regarded etudes as musical compositions, often saying that one can turn more complex technical problems into finger exercises himself)<sup>37</sup>, free Bach studies, as well as classical education by which he means a large number of pieces by Mozart, Haydn, Clementi and other masters. According to Dohnányi, many pupils tend to avoid the latter step and start learning Liszt’s, Chopin’s, and Schumann’s works too early. While he admits that it is also possible to gain marvellous technique in this way, a true musician and, after a while, even the audience will be able to judge whether the artist has truly gained a real “qualification.” “How will the real musician know whether he has done this or not? By a certain finish, a certain subtlety, a certain flavor that is indescribable,” says Dohnányi.<sup>38</sup>

We have come to a point where it is difficult to put anything into words. Being reluctant to give interviews in general, Dohnányi said very little about this “certain finish, certain subtlety, certain flavour.” Although some remarks appear in his interviews from time to time, it remains unclear whether these are really Dohnányi’s words or the journalist’s ones. A conclusion may be drawn from a seemingly different aspect in an interview made with Dohnányi in 1943: “Neither the conductor nor the performer can completely disguise their own personalities when they serve the composer. However of-

35 DOHNÁNYI, E. Sight-reading [based on his manuscript]. Dohnányi’s quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

36 DOHNÁNYI, E. Freedom in Music Teaching Methods, p. 431.

37 See, for example: “One of the best ways to keep up one’s technique as well as one’s repertoire is, I have found, to select the difficult portions of compositions, and make technical studies of them. The literature of the piano provides such rich material of all kinds that the student or artist need never be at a loss.” BROWER, H. Technical Material Discussed [By Dohnányi]. In *Modern Masters of the Keyboard*. Freeport, NY : Books for Libraries Press, 1926, pp. 104 – 112. Dohnányi’s quotes originally written in English are presented in their original, unedited form.

38 DOHNÁNYI, E. Freedom in Music Teaching Methods, p. 431.

ten the expression 'playing music objectively' is used, there is no such thing in reality. However, on the other hand, the closer the performer's personality is to that of the composer's, the more perfect the reproduction will be. If the performer does not understand the composer, they cannot present the composition, either."<sup>39</sup>

And when a journalist asked him to clarify the meaning of the word "understand", Dohnányi's answer revealed his reservations: "Understanding something is mainly a matter of instinct. It is the instincts that play the largest role in art, but also in life. Education improves people but it does not create anything in them. You cannot instil talent or character in anyone, just discipline and a certain level of culturedness."<sup>40</sup>

With this remark, we have arrived back from where we started. All things considered, it is clear that Dohnányi's interviews and statements related to the pedagogical aspect of interpretation are more concrete. His remarks quoted in the second part of the article, which will hopefully give us some insight into his ideas on the deeper layers of performing arts, are mostly commonplaces. This is true of Dohnányi in general: he seems to have avoided talking about his musical memories, the models of his compositional style, the consciousness or unconsciousness in his breaking away from the late nineteenth-century musical mainstream, or, like here, the authenticity of interpretation. Truly important questions and answers seldom arise, and the most intriguing topics are cut short. Yet, the random remarks made by him from time to time are really exciting puzzle pieces for us to solve. Notwithstanding, we will never be able to find out the "secret" by analysing Dohnányi's non-musical statements; most probably, he himself was unable and unwilling to put it into words. Because, as he always said, "music is only music"<sup>41</sup>. One can hardly deny the correlation between this life-long attitude and the early experiences of this gifted music pupil whose Pressburg teacher gave him so much independence in interpretation and "never said or indicated that it *had* to be played in a certain way."

39 Translated from Hungarian. EGYED, Z. Dohnányi Ernő a zene örök hatásáról, p. 428.

40 Ibid.

41 TAKSONYI, P. A mai népi magyar zene nem hozott újat a magyar zeneszerzés szempontjából [Folk Music Did Not Bring Anything New for Today's Hungarian Composition]. In *Összetartás* [Solidarity], 1943, Vol. 1, No. 45, 12 November 1943, p. 5.



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# Theatre Architecture in Bratislava in the Context of Cultural-Social Changes, Urban-Planning Concepts and Architectural Innovations over Three Centuries

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**Abstract:** Architecture of theatres in Bratislava is interesting topic of research from various perspectives – urban, cultural, social, and architectural. Both buildings of the Slovak National Theatre – the first one called historical building situating in the centre of the city on Hviezdoslav Square and also the second, new one located on a former industrial periphery on Pribinova Street – are remarkable architectural works. Besides that, planning and thinking about appropriate location of the theatre buildings took place in important phases of urban planning in Bratislava, in different historical periods. While the original historical theatre was decided to be built relatively quickly – on the orders of the Queen Maria Theresa of Hungary and Bohemia in the 18th Century on grounds acquired by demolishing the city walls, the location of the new theatre was the result of architectural discourse lasting several decades, from inter-war period to late seventieth of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It illustrates, what an important social theme was the search for the location of theatre in urban structure of Bratislava in any political arrangement across three centuries.

**Key words:** Theatre architecture, Bratislava, town planning, social context

The buildings occupied by the Slovak National Theatre (Slovenské národné divadlo, abbr. SND) in Bratislava, one of the nation's foremost cultural institutions, consist of the historic theatre on Hviezdoslavovo námestie – originally the City Theatre (Ferdinand Fellner, Hermann Gottlieb Helmer, 1884 – 1886) and the new theatre in Pribinova ulica (Martin Kusý, Pavol Paňák, Peter Bauer, 1980 – 2007). Not only are these buildings noteworthy architectural achievements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in their formal aspects, but also in their technical and conceptual innovations.

As much as the actual founding of the SND formed a key moment in the cultural life of Bratislava and Slovakia, the decisions regarding the location

of the theatre buildings in the city crystalized, in both cases, during points of far-reaching change in the planning of Bratislava, yet also in greatly differing historical periods separated by an entire century. Moreover, the siting of the present-day historic building of the SND was determined by its predecessor – the first permanent city theatre, dating from the reign of Queen Maria Theresa. And indeed, the construction of the historic SND building was completed far in advance of the founding of the Slovak National Theatre itself, which occurred only in 1920. As for the new SND building, its realisation spanned a long 27 years, being completed in a radically different political regime and social atmosphere than the one prevailing at the time when its designs were created. With this in mind, it is necessary to analyse the theatre buildings in a wider historical framework and greater spatial context in the development of the city, as described, which extends beyond both buildings' immediate situations.

### **The Theatre as a City-Forming Element**

The coronation of Maria Theresa in June of 1741 formed one of the most significant moments in the history of Bratislava – or as it was then known, Pressburg (Prešporok/Pozsony) – after it assumed the status of the Hungarian capital in 1541 in connection with the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the queen supported cultural life in her cities. With her husband Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor, she tried to create the best possible conditions in her seat in Vienna primarily for the theatre.<sup>1</sup> On 14 March 1741, the Burgtheater was opened in Vienna, located close by the Hofburg Imperial Palace on Michaelerplatz in the Innere Stadt. The theatre, though, did not then have its own building, but used for its performances the adapted imperial ball-games court.<sup>2</sup>

For Maria Theresa, the city of Pressburg (now Bratislava) naturally had a special significance after Vienna as the site of her coronation. During her reign, she regularly visited it and took an interest in its architectural and urban transformation. Already in the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Pressburg/Prešporok played host to a lively theatre scene in the form of itinerant

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1 For more see KNOPFLER, M. J. *Das Theresianische Wien*. Wien : Hermann Böhlau, 1979, pp. 69 – 71.

2 SCHWARZ, O. *Hinter den Fassaden der Ringstrasse*. Wien : Amalthea Signum Verlag, 2014, p. 204.

theatre companies and small theatres in burghers' houses or aristocratic palaces. Performances were also held in marketplaces, inns, or the gardens of noble residences. Yet a fitting building for a city stage was still lacking.

The situation changed precisely during the period of preparation for Maria Theresa's coronation. At the urging of the future queen of Hungary and Bohemia, a temporary theatre was built – reflecting both the pressures of time and financing. This three-storey wooden structure occupied the site of the present school, cloister, and Church of Notre Dame in Palackého ulica.<sup>3</sup> This theatre was intended to serve its purpose only during the assembly and coronation. Its realisation formed part of a wider context of construction work initiated by these two events, which were scheduled to last for several weeks. During this period, noble families commissioned palaces allowing them to live in the city to match their demands and ambitions. After the assembly meetings, their time was occupied by feasts, concerts, balls and theatre productions. Even the coronation was a court ritual with many theatrical elements, including the participation of the military, while the broader public ate, drank wine and danced in celebration of the new sovereign's ascent to the throne.<sup>4</sup>

The plot that the city set out for the construction of the theatre was situated outside the inner core. Additionally, the wooden theatre was situated far from the Castle, enclosed with its own ramparts, where Maria Theresa had resided for five days before her coronation procession emerged on 25 June 1741. At the same time, though, the theatre was situated on 'Coronation Hill', where the procession traditionally ended with the ceremonial oath of the new reigning monarch. This site had, thanks to its historic significance reinforced ever since the first coronation of Maximilian II in 1563, a notable city-forming potential, bearing in mind that it then lay outside the city gates, subjected not only to the possibility of military attack but also the threat of the frequently-flooding Danube. After the assembly and the coronation of Maria Theresa, the theatre was disassembled.

A permanent theatre was constructed in 1776 through the efforts of Count György (Juraj) Csáky, who invested the funds for its construction un-

3 HORVÁTH, V. *Bratislavský topografický lexikon* [Topographic Lexicon of Bratislava]. Bratislava : TATRAN, 1990, p. 126.

4 LAJCHA, L. *Divadlo v korunovačnom meste* [Theatre in a Coronation Town]. In MAŤAŠÍK, A. (ed.). *Slovenské divadlo/The Slovak Theatre. Historická divadelná architektúra* [Historical Theatre Architecture in Slovakia]. Bratislava : Národné divadelné centrum, 1996 (appendix, not paginated).

der the condition that the city provide the land for free. The building was designed by the city master builder Matthäus Walch, once a pupil of Franz Anton Hillebrandt, as a late Baroque structure of lengthwise outline, symmetrically divided into two nearly identical sections for the theatre and dance hall.<sup>5</sup> Initially, only the theatre section was completed, starting operations on 9 November 1776 with the play *The Medicis* by Johann Christian Brandes. Maria Theresa again displayed her interest in improving the cultural life of Pressburg in November 1775, when she came to view the still-incomplete theatre in person. Only later was the rear section of the building completed with the aid of Csáky's descendants, with the dance hall opening in 1793.<sup>6</sup>

The location chosen for the theatre was the open area facing the Fish Gate (Rybárska brána), only a few metres north from the site of the earlier wooden temporary theatre. Its situation within the urban structure was most significantly influenced by the directive of Maria Theresa from 1774 calling for the demolition of the inner fortifications and filling of the city moat, occurring in the period 1775 – 1778. This process, undertaken in parallel with many other European fortified cities, allowed for the unification of the space of the central core with its suburbs, as well as the routing of new streets on the site of the ramparts, giving the first impulse for the creation of an urban ring-boulevard. Shortly before the start of demolition, the queen assigned the Viennese architect Franz Anton Hillebrandt the task of preparing the first regulatory plan for Bratislava.<sup>7</sup> Hillebrandt ranked alongside Giovanni Battista Martinelli in the circle of architects who played a significant role in the personal building chamber that Maria Theresa established for state construction activities in the kingdom of Hungary.<sup>8</sup> Hillebrandt in his regulatory plan addressed most ambitiously the treatment of the southern section of the fortifications. In the eastern section of the moat, he planned

5 For more see DULLA, M. – STACHOVÁ, M. – POHANIČOVÁ, J. – KRIVOŠOVÁ, J. – VODRÁŽKA, P. – MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – LUKÁČOVÁ, E. *Majstri architektúry* [Masters of Architecture]. Bratislava : Perfekt, 2005, p. 8 – 9.

6 LUKÁČOVÁ, E. – POHANIČOVÁ, J. *Rozmanité 19. storočie. Architektúra na Slovensku od Hefeľeho po Jurkoviča* [Omnigenous 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Architecture in Slovakia from Hefeľe to Jurkovič]. Bratislava : Perfekt, 2008, p.14.

7 For more see MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. Earliest Conceptual Interventions into the Urban Form. In MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – SZALAY, P. – HABERLANDOVÁ, K. – KRIŠTEKOVÁ, L. – BOČKOVÁ, M. *(Un)Planned Bratislava*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2019, p. 10.

8 WAGNER, V. *Franz Anton Hillebrandt a jeho staviteľská činnosť na Slovensku* [Franz Anton Hillebrandt and His Building Activities in Slovakia]. Turčiansky Svätý Martin : n.s., 1934, p. 2 – 3.

two new streets (today's Gorkého and Jesenského), while in the western section, in front of the newly rising masonry theatre, he defined a new square.<sup>9</sup> The one city gate saved from the demolition of the fortifications was the Michael Gate (Michalská brána) close to the edge between the present-day squares Hurbanovo námestie and Námestie SNP. All the others – Vydrická, Laurinská, and even Rybárska – were torn down, the last on the site where the new theatre would arise. Among the built works realised by Hillebrandt in connection with the demolition of the fortifications and the acquiring of new construction spaces, we should mention the city granary, with its main façade turned north to face the cloister of Notre Dame and hence also the already planned theatre.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, the urban space containing the theatre, which belonged to the area historically known as Grössling, then Franz Josef-Stadt, could gradually be modified after the removal of the fortifications into the promenade by the Fish Gate (Fischerthor – Promenade, 1785), also known as the Spatzier-Platz or Spazier Allee. For the shaping of today's Hviezdoslavovo námestí (in the 1840 – 1852 period still called Theaterplatz) in its current appearance and area, the positioning of the theatre at its front and the orientation of the main façade to the west formed one of the determining city-shaping factors. The promenade, built under the tenure of burgermeister Josef Stettner and running from the theatre as far as Rybné námestie (Fischplatz), consisted of four walkways lined with five rows of trees,<sup>11</sup> representing a typology of urban landscaping for recreational purposes arising along former fortifications and typical for many European cities at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, since Hillebrandt's designs succeeded in being realised to a considerable extent, they created for Pressburg at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century particularly good spatial conditions for the creation of the previously mentioned urban ring, or circular urban boulevard, later supplemented with a horse-drawn rail line (1840) and then an electric tram (1895), with the final stop right by the theatre.

9 For more see MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – BOČKOVÁ, M. The Ambiguous Ring/Inner City Ring. In MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – SZALAY, P. – HABERLANDOVÁ, K. – KRIŠTEKOVÁ, L. – BOČKOVÁ, M. (Un)Planned Bratislava, p. 264.

10 WAGNER, V. *Franz Anton Hillebrandt a jeho staviteľská činnosť na Slovensku* [Franz Anton Hillebrandt and His Building Activities in Slovakia], p. 16.

11 SZEKCSŐ, T. Pressburg und dessen Umgebung in topographischer und statistischer Hinsicht. In *Pressburg und seine Umgebung*. Pressburg, 1865, p. 114 – 115.

12 ČIČO, M. Oddychové a výletné miesta Prešporka koncom 18. a v prvej polovici 19. storočia v kontexte rozvoja krajinárstva [Leisure in Pressburg in the Turn of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century in a Mirror of Landscape Painting]. In *Forum Historiae*, 2016, Vol. 10, Issue 2, p. 116.

Maria Theresa influenced the change in the city's image no less through initiating other projects in the spaces linked to the frontage of the theatre on today's Hviezdoslavovo námestie, most notably on Námestie Ľ. Štúra, which contains the previously mentioned coronation hill (originally 'Kráľovský kopiec' / Königsberg gegen Neustadt, 1709). On this square, which reaches up to the Danube bank with a view toward the opposite bank in Petržalka, as part of the construction of the first public urban park, the Sternallee (now Sad Janka Kráľa), she launched in the 1770s the first efforts at river regulation. This plan illustrates how the queen was aware of the importance of the embankment space in the city, not only for economic reasons but also for relaxation, cultural or social events, or even political and public representation. Through Hillebrandt's efforts, a new coronation hill was created on Námestie Ľ. Štúra in 1776, since the previous hill now occupied the site reserved for the planned city granary. Hillebrandt moved the hill closer to the square's centre, on the visual axis from Petržalka and the river, as well as the axis from the city – from the space in front of the theatre.

When in 1870 this coronation hill was removed, at the bequest of the mayor Heinrich Justi, for additional regulation of the river, plans were made that Námestie Ľ. Štúra would eventually be supplemented with a monument, though its precise purpose remained unspecified. A suitable occasion arose only much later, in the year of the Hungarian millennial celebration (1897): the square received an equestrian statue of Maria Theresa from the sculptor Ján (János) Fadrusz, an homage to the monarch who in the 18<sup>th</sup> century had given the decisive impulse to the urban development of Pressburg, while at precisely this moment the definitive placement of the city theatre was also being made.

The spaces of the river embankment, along with the ring of open territory along the perimeter of the demolished fortifications, offered the chance for the successive construction of imposing public buildings or the development of economic activity. Tivadar Ortway wrote with respect to the construction on the promenade in front of the theatre in 1905 that " (...) the buildings will give the square a metropolitan stamp – here, where in medieval times there stood right beside the city moat various cattle-barns, tool sheds, latrines, the mouths of sewage gutters, after the demolition of the walls and filling-in of the moat there rose buildings, each more beautiful than the next (...)." <sup>13</sup>

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13 ORTVAY, T. *Ulice a námestia Bratislavy – Mesto Františka Jozefa. Franz Josefstadt. Ferencz-József-Város.* [Streets and Squares of Bratislava. Franz Joseph Town]. Bratislava : Marenčin PT, 2005, p. 26.



Moreover, the newly created urban space near the theatre became, right at the moment of its creation, a significant traffic intersection of the city. This area was defined no less by the pedestrian flows between the historic core, the river embankment, and the suspension bridge.

### **Establishing the Placement of the Theatre in the Urban Structures in the Later 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Starting in the 1860s, Vienna began to demolish its own city walls, which had by then definitively lost any defensive function. Because of their massive thickness, as well as the extensive counterscarp (*Glacis*), the space was available for creating the essential urbanistic units of the 19<sup>th</sup> century city along both sides of the emerging ring. The creation of this outer boulevard, the famed Ringstrasse, atop the former defensive system was preceded by a regulatory competition initiated at the end of 1857 by Emperor Franz Josef I, in which the winning design was that of the Viennese architect and planner Ludwig Christian Friedrich von Förster.

Even the new court theatre (Burgtheater) was erected along the Ring (Gottfried Semper, Karl Freiherr von Hasenauer, 1888), at the axis of the City Hall, completed a few years previously (*Wiener Rathaus*, Friedrich von Schmidt, 1872 – 1883). Finished still earlier, in 1872, was the city theatre (Stadttheater), designed by the Viennese architects Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Gottlieb Helmer.

In Pressburg, a decision was made at the start of the 1880s to revitalise the increasingly decrepit building of the city theatre. Yet the original plan, involving the renovation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century structure and its possible expansion with new spaces offering more modern technical equipment, was altered. The evaluation of the building's structural condition, entrusted to Ferdinand Fellner, found that it was on the verge of collapse.<sup>14</sup> And in the wake of the fire that destroyed Vienna's original Ringtheater in 1881, claiming several hundred lives, the authorities of Pressburg then shifted to a more radical solution: to demolish the extant theatre and build a new one.<sup>15</sup> Fur-

14 In January 1879, a part of ceiling fell down in the dance hall (Reduta) added in 1793 to the Theatre building. For more see POHANIČOVÁ, J. – BUDAJ, P. *Storočie Feiglerovcov. Príbeh bratislavských architektov, staviteľov a stavebných podnikateľov* [The Century of the Feigler family. The Story of the Bratislava Architects, Builders and Property Entrepreneurs]. Bratislava : TRIO PUBLISHING, 2015, p. 138.

15 For more see SCHWARZ, O. *Hinter den Fassaden der Ringstrasse*, p. 181 and subsequent.

ther support for this step was offered by the statement of the chief city engineer, Anton Sendlein that in the case of a fire in the old theatre, out of a full house of eight hundred spectators less than a quarter would be expected to survive.<sup>16</sup> At first, the Pressburg City Council addressed this problem through the creation of temporary exterior emergency staircases, though the city's newspaper *Pressburger Zeitung* was strongly critical. Hence, in 1884, the old theatre building closed its doors for the last time, and in the same year its demolition began.

Ferdinand Fellner and his partner Hermann Gottlieb Helmer were the authors of the design for the new structure, a project approved in 1885 by the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Public Works and Transport. The selection of these architects, whose cooperation had started with the founding of their joint Vienna atelier in 1873, was no accident. The design of the previously mentioned Vienna Stadttheater was only the start of the successful creative career of these two architects, whose relations arose across a wide section of Europe: e.g. in Brno (*Mahenovo divadlo*, 1882), Rijeka (1883 – 1885), or Prague (the New German Theatre, now the State Opera, 1887).<sup>17</sup> Additionally, both the theatres in Prague and Brno similarly were placed on the edge of demolished city fortifications, each in their own urban rings. The theatres of Fellner and Helmer are marked by strong formal similarities, yet the architects managed to integrate as well successive technical innovations, primarily improvements to the safety of interior functions (initiated after the tragedy of the Ringtheater, particularly in the design of the staircases) and original artistic touches reflecting the local context of each individual theatre building.

The imposing eclectic palace of the Pressburg theatre, bearing all the characteristic signs of its authors' work, was ceremonially opened on 22 September 1886. Its construction lasted just over a year, which can be ascribed to the skills of the building contractors, Ignatz Feigler Jr. and Alexander Feigler. Their company could well be the greatest example of the family construction firms of Bratislava, with a history of operation spanning nearly 150 years.<sup>18</sup>

16 GAŽO, M. – HOLČÍK, Š. – ZINSER, O. *Bratislava pred sto rokmi a dnes* [Bratislava a Hundred Years Ago and Today]. Bratislava : Marenčin PT, 2003, p. 63.

17 For more see LIPSKY, T. Nationaltheatre Bratislava. In *Fellner & Helmer. Die Architekten der Illusion Theaterbau in Europa*. Graz : Stadtmuseum Graz, 1999, p. 139 – 141.

18 POHANIČOVÁ, J. – BUDAJ, P. *Storočie Feiglerovcov. Príbeh bratislavských architektov, stavitelov a stavebných podnikateľov* [The Century of the Feigler family. The Story of the Bratislava Architects, Builders and Property Entrepreneurs], pp. 6 – 11.

The productions of this firm are equally a testament to the regular implementation of innovative construction elements and procedures throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, allowing for the rapid realisation of extensive and spatially complex building commissions. Proof of this success is given by the rapid pace of construction of the Bratislava theatre; after all, theatre buildings were not realised as an everyday assignment. Indeed, a theatre formed an exceptional challenge for architect and builder, a major event followed by professional experts, the cultural sphere, journalists, and indeed the wider public. Special emphasis was placed on the tempo of construction, while the success of the result lay not only in the quality of the design but equally in the targeted selection of local assistants and contractors.<sup>19</sup>

Along with the completion of the new, stylistically more imposing theatre with technical facilities fully matching the era's demands and possibilities, the urban space in front of the theatre continued to be shaped, with the addition of the Ganymede' fountain (Viktor Tilgner, 1887) and park landscaping.

### **The Theatre and the Beginnings of Modern Urban Planning**

Though mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Pressburg never saw the realisation of a complex urban project linked to extensive new construction, as embodied by Vienna's Ringstrasse –, particularly if we recall that the city's fortifications had been demolished almost a century previously – other modernisation efforts in the city's fabric, made possible equally through various innovations in the construction industry, were no less vital.

In 1849 and 1850, following a commission from the city council, the Budapest engineer Miklós Halácsy prepared a regulatory plan for the city. It was not a "regulation" in the fullest sense of the word, since Halácsy's plan affected primarily the extant urban structure, yet it sketched out a future street network and the structure of city blocks, prefiguring the eventual growth of the city in the eastward direction. In parallel, an essential condition for organising Bratislava's urban development at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early in the 20<sup>th</sup> was the City Construction Statute from 1872.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. Premeny obrazu mesta. Storočie plánovania a výstavby Bratislavy [Changing the Image of the City. Century of Planning and Building of Bratislava]. In DUDEKOVÁ, G. (ed.): *Medzi provinciou a metropolou* [Between the Province and the Capital City]. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2012, p. 131.

A further formulation of a ring in its rudimentary stages, itself influenced by treatment of the urban structures in the vicinity of the theatre, was confirmed by the city regulatory plans prepared right at the turn of the century (Viktor Bernárdt's plan from 1905, the plan of the Technical Department from 1906).<sup>21</sup> In connection with these activities of the city, changes also began to occur in the shaping of the block behind the theatre, outlined by today's streets Gorkého (after 1786 St. Andreae Gasse, after 1823 Theatergasse, after 1836 Rosengasse, after 1839 Andrassy Gyula-Gasse) and Jenesského (after 1786 Neustift, after 1804 Rosengasse). Gradually, modernisation also affected the buildings along the northern edge of Gorkého ulica. Since the new theatre building was shorter than its predecessor, without the additional dance hall, or 'Reduta', an open space emerged, that of today's Komenského námestie, containing a public park (after 1836 Redouten Platz, after 1879 Csákyplatz). Toward the east, in the direction of Štúrova ulica, once the site of the medieval fortress known as the 'Old Camp' (Starý tábor), the building of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce was built to the plans of architect Jozef Hubert in 1903, with its main façade facing the square. The block between Komenského námestie and Štúrova ulica was later filled by the headquarters of the Assicurazioni Generali and Moldavia Generali Insurance Companies (Alexander Skutecký, 1935) and completed with the construction of the Slovak National Bank (Emil Belluš, 1936 – 1938). With its asymmetrical four-wing layout to match the curve of Štúrova ulica and its main façade facing the same street, it forms a significant portion of the ring-section linking the river embankment with the modern city centre – Námestie SNP (in the inter-war years Námestie republiky).

### **The Theatre in the Young Metropolis**

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Habsburg monarchy) and the formation of the Czecho-Slovak Republic in 1918 were decisive historic events bringing sweeping changes to the political and social life of Bratislava. In turn, they were reflected in a revival of construction activity in the city. The mosaic of the interwar cultural changes in Bratislava (officially bearing this name only after 6 March 1919) included, just under two years after the

21 For more see MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – LOVRA, É. – PASTOREKOVÁ, L. Červený alebo modrý? Začiatky moderného plánovania Bratislavy [Red or Blue? The Start of Modern Planning in Bratislava]. In *Architektúra & urbanizmus*, 2017, Vol. 51, Issue 1 – 2, pp. 30 – 44.

founding of Czechoslovakia on 1 March 1920, the founding of the Slovak National Theatre – the first professional theatre company in Slovakia.

The first mention of the need to create a new building for this cultural institution was an article by the poet and translator Bohumil Mathesius, which appeared on 17 June 1920 in the newspaper *Slovenský denník*. The aim of building a new theatre formed a natural part of the wider context of the emancipatory efforts of Slovakia's cultural scene after the formation of the new Czechoslovak state.<sup>22</sup> Yet even with the finding of a way to provide financing for the construction – organising a lottery of donated items – in the end all the money collected was invested into the existing, now somewhat outdated building.<sup>23</sup>

While the discussions on the construction of a new theatre building waned, already by the start of the 1920s one major theme of architectonic debate coming to the forefront became that of urban planning. In the light of the social changes of 1918, the work on the inter-war regulatory plans for Bratislava was long assumed to be a thoroughly new step, rejecting all previous efforts in the field. Research in later years, though, has shown that it continued to rely on several fruitful ideas in the regulatory plan by Antal Palóczi, completed in 1917. The two Czech architects who worked most intensively on the question of Bratislava's regulatory planning in the early 1920s were Alois Balán and Jiří Grossmann. Their prime target of critique was initially Palóczi's solution of the rail network assuming the movement of the main station to the east, yet in time they came to agree with him and further developed this idea in their own regulatory studies. Connected to the moving of the rail station were other ideas with significant impact on the entire city, primarily the proposed construction of an urban boulevard from the new station that would have curved around toward the south to the industrial zone of Mlynské Nivy and the river port. This boulevard would have run through the former outer suburb of Blumentál, giving it the strong potential for construction of a new urban centre. In part for this reason, Alois Balán and Jiří Grossmann in their study for Greater Bratislava situ-

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22 For more see LASLAVÍKOVÁ, J. *Mestské divadlo v Prešporku na sklonku 19. storočia. Medzi provinciou a metropolou* [The City Theatre in Pressburg at the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Between the Province and the Capital City]. Bratislava : Hudobné centrum – Historický ústav SAV, 2020, p. 28 and following.

23 MARTIŠOVÁ-BLAHOVÁ, E. *Slovenské národné divadlo 1920 – 1995* [The Slovak National Theatre 1920 – 1995]. Bratislava : Národné divadelné centrum, 1996, p. 3.

ated the new theatre building precisely here.<sup>24</sup> The work that these architects put into their urban regulatory studies paid off in the international competition for a general regulatory plan held in 1929. Though they only won third prize in this competition, and even the highest-ranked design by architects Juraj Tvarožek, Alois Dryák and Karel Chlumecký was never realised, the discussion about the new theatre and its location managed to remain uninterrupted.

The main impulse for construction in Bratislava after 1918 was primarily the lack of administrative buildings and apartment blocks, yet even buildings for cultural purposes eventually came onto the agenda. In 1925, the headquarters of the Slovak Art Association (Umelecká beseda Slovenska) were completed and opened on today's Šafárikovo námestie, another major work of Alois Balán – Jiří Grossmann, regarded not only as the first modernist work in their oeuvre, but as a breakthrough in the development of modern architecture in Slovakia. Perhaps most influential in the later 1920s was the discussion around the competition for the building of the Slovak National Museum, eventually realised in 1928 from the plans of Milan Michal Harminc on Vajanského nábrežie. In the very same year, a competition was also announced for the new theatre building, ending without success even though the theatre was intended as one of the important landmarks in the previously mentioned new urban centre in Blumentál. This district was planned in the form of modern urban blocks constructed in the 'national style', including a city hall as well as a new public space of a large square with the theatre.

A few years later, in 1935, work began on reconstruction of the theatre on Hviezdoslavovo námestie. It, however, only concerned the modernisation of the stage and set technology, which was realised by the firm Českomoravská-Kolben-Daněk. A partial solution to the insufficient space came with the completion of the new drama stage for the SND, named 'Divadlo P. O. Hviezdoslava'. This theatre was opened in 1955 in the building of the Slovak National Bank in Štúrova ulica (now the General Prosecutors' Office of the Slovak Republic), following the realisation of the project by Eugen Kramár and Štefan Lukačovič from 1942. The result was a unique concept integrating in a single structure the bank premises, a shopping arcade and an entire theatre, with the building itself situated once again on

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24 BALÁN, A. – GROSSMANN, J. Regulační studie Velké Bratislavy [Regulation study for Greater Bratislava]. In *Časopis ČSL architektů SIA*, 1902 – 1926, Vol. 25, Issue 1, p. 50.

the city ring, which in the interwar years had already acquired its metropolitan appearance.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Theatre as an Axiom of Bratislava's Post-war Urban Planning**

Without question, the year 1945 is another enormous milestone of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Bratislava's development with the arrival of a new political regime and the associated changes to urban planning grounded in the assumptions for its post-war growth. A central role in reflections on the city's further growth was played by heritage protection, considering the need to deal with the poor condition of historic buildings in urban centres. Emerging as a national priority was the explicit protection of heritage zones in the form of urban heritage reservations, yet at the same time the large-scale demolition of historic urban fabric and its replacement with entirely new construction became a far more realistic possibility than ever before, even though the subject had been broached already by Antal Palóczy and further expanded by the inter-war Modernists. Assistance to this effort was further given by the nationalisation of the housing stock. Discussions on the demolition of historic urban formations and their replacement with modern structures concentrated primarily on the oldest section of Bratislava, i.e. the Castle and the southern section of the Lower Town below the Castle (Podhradie) with the former subject villages of Vydrica, Zuckermandel and Osada sv. Mikuláša. These formed the very earliest core of the city settlement in its historic course, and thus bore an indisputable historic value, yet had long been neglected and left damaged by fires or military action.<sup>26</sup>

At the start of the 1960s, the square Rybné námestie, as the main transport nexus at the western end of Hviezdoslavovo námestie opposite to the historic theatre building, linking it to the settlements below the Castle, was chosen as one of the development localities outlining what was now termed the 'Central Urban Area'. Besides this locality, the other focal points of this conception, published in 1961 in the journal *Projekt*, were today's Hodžovo

25 For more see SZALAY, P. Mesto v zázemí [The City in the Background]. In SZALAY, P. – BOGÁR, M. – HABERLANDOVÁ, K. – BARTOŠOVÁ, N. – KRIŠTEKOVÁ, L. In *Vojnová Bratislava 1939 – 1945* [War and Bratislava 1939 – 1945]. Bratislava : Marenčin PT, 2019, p. 106.

26 For more see MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. Post-war Renewal of the City]. In MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – SZALAY, P. – HABERLANDOVÁ, K. – KRIŠTEKOVÁ, L. – BOČKOVÁ, M. *(Un)Planned City*, pp. 46 – 54.



námestie (then Mierové námestie), Americké námestie in the former suburb of Blumentál, the Central Market in Miletičova ulica and Martanovičova ulica. Inside the Central Urban Area, a siting competition was held for the location of the new building for the Slovak National Theatre. In total, 16 proposals were submitted for the theatre's potential situation: in 13, the theatre was situated in the inner centre, while 3 others had it on the embankment (two of them directly within Podhradie on Rybné námeste and one in Martanovičova ulica, close to the river port).

Placing the theatre on Rybné námestie seemed most promising with respect to harmonisation with the city masterplan, as well as matching a long-established trend favouring the transformation of the Danube embankment into a representative space containing the buildings of the nation's most important cultural institutions (the Slovak National Museum, the Slovak National Gallery and the Slovak Philharmonic). However, the initial designs were insufficiently supported with analysis of the urban clearance required, and failed to address the wider urban relationships.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, the siting competition was intended to test the idea of the 'lengthwise axis' with respect to the variant locations proposed for the theatre. The north-south connection of the central area, which was planned in the post-war years as the underlying compositional element of the entire city, was allegedly first termed the 'lengthwise axis' by urban planner Emanuel Hruška, drawing both on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century idea of Antal Palóczi for connecting the riverbank with the forested hillsides of the Lesser Carpathians and on the plan for an urban boulevard running from the rail station to the river port published by Alois Balán and Jiří Grossmann in the 1920s, which resonated with the planned situation of the new theatre building close to Americké námestie. Ján Šteller, one of the post-war planners assisting in the creation of directive urban plans, prepared a document defining the axis as a transverse greenbelt sided with rows of public buildings.<sup>28</sup> However, the competition held at the same time made it all too clear that the transverse axis lacked the requirements for creating a cultural-social centre along its length; similarly, it failed to produce a complex solution for the area below

<sup>27</sup> *Projekt*, 1961, Vol. 3, Issue 12, p. 235.

<sup>28</sup> For more see SZALAY, P. – KRIŠTEKOVÁ, L. *Fragmenty konceptov/Vládna štvrt' a priečna os* [Fragments of Concepts/Government District and the Transverse Axis. In MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – SZALAY, P. – HABERLANDOVÁ, K. – KRIŠTEKOVÁ, L. – BOČKOVÁ, M. *(Un)Planned Bratislava*, p. 206.

the castle and the embankment. After the siting competition, a theoretical architectural competition was held for a proposed theatre building on Rybné námestie and the wider urban context, in which the architects were required to pay attention to the future design of the bridgehead of the planned Danube bridge. The results, though, were never brought into realisation. In 1972, though, the new bridge across the river Danube – the Bridge of the Slovak National Uprising (Most SNP) – was completed, the construction of which led to extensive demolition of the historic built fabric on Rybné námestie, as well as the old settlements under the Castle. Yet a question still unresolved was the form of Podhradie, along with the plan for the location of the new theatre.

The construction of the theatre in the immediate timeframe was unrealistic, yet at the same time the historic building was threatened with closure after a hygienic investigation that revealed severe structural deficiencies. As a result, in 1965 steps were taken toward preparing project documentation for the enlargement and modernisation of the theatre on Hviezdoslavovo námestie (general contractor Stavoprojekt, chief designer Rajmund Hirth, assistance Vladimír Hazucha, 1965 – 1972).<sup>29</sup> Next to the rebuilding of Bratislava Castle, the theatre restoration formed the most significant heritage project on such a large scale in this period. Moreover, it made use of several technical innovations. Since the theatre is located on land originally occupied by the Danube riverbed, and hence originally the cellar was regularly flooded with groundwater, it was necessary to surround the building with an insulation wall anchored in an impenetrable layer of soil. Similarly, the new addition was grounded on a “diaphragm” system, i.e. a Milan wall sunk into impermeable soil, creating several below-ground floors used for ballet halls and set storage.<sup>30</sup> In terms of the urban planning of the theatre environs, the enlargement of the building meant that the public space of Komenského námestie with its park was reduced and served as a car park.

In 1979, a competition for the new theatre building was once again held. Possible construction sites included the original locations in the Central Urban Area, though other sites considered included three variations of positioning the theatre on the opposite bank of the Danube – in the suburb

29 MORAVČÍKOVÁ, H. – DLHÁŇOVÁ, V. *Divadelná architektúra na Slovensku* [Theatre Architecture in Slovakia]. Bratislava : 2001, Divadelný ústav, p. 81.

30 MAXA, M. – RAJMUND, H. SND/Bratislava. Rekonštrukcia a prístavba budovy opery SND v Bratislave [SND/Bratislava. Reconstruction and Extension of the Opera Building in Bratislava]. In *Projekt*, 1972, Vol. 14, Issue 10, p. 42 – 47.

of Petržalka, making this rapidly growing area into a full-scale modern district of Bratislava and changing it from a city “beside the Danube” to one “on the Danube.” However, eventually the focus of attention turned, on the recommendation of the Office of the Chief Architect, to the locality of Martanovičova ulica (now Pribinova ulica), where extensive demolition of historic urban structures would not be a requirement. The final choice for the situation of the new national theatre thus illustrates a shift in the relationship of planners to historic urban cores starting in the early 1970s and the contemporary ideas on the conception of Bratislava’s growth. Additionally, this industrial district was also witnessing a gradual decline in manufacturing, while the river port itself never achieved its earlier figures for frequency and capacity of shipping under post-war economic conditions. While these industrial complexes had been provided with a detailed mapping starting in the mid-1970s by the Bratislava City Board of the Care of Historical Monuments and Preservation of Nature, it must be said that practically no vision then existed for their preservation in the sense of architectural heritage. Hence it could be stated unequivocally that “the space of the central urban zone, bordered by the left bank of the Danube, Dostojevského rad and the route of the new bridge leading into Košická ulica [now Most Apollo – authors’ note], creates the preconditions for the situation of the Slovak National Theatre.”<sup>31</sup>

The 1979 architectural competition for the new theatre was won, from among 53 project submissions, by a group of then-youthful architects, Peter Bauer, Martin Kusý and Pavol Paňák from the State Research and Project Standardization Institute. They positioned the theatre, as did most of the other participants, in the ‘first horizon’, i.e. on the north side of Martanovičova (now Pribinova) ulica. The main urbanistic advantage of this placement is the contact with the river and the city centre at the same time, visually underscored by the landmark of the Castle visible at the central axis of the street Martanovičova (Pribinova). The winning authors connected these attributes to two volumes, turned toward each other from the main axis at a 45-degree angle, a move allowing the visitor to perceive from the inside not only the unique visual link between the Castle and the Danube but equally the theatre building itself. The wider urban plan for the zone was proposed following the principle of a street with a high cornice line and an

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31 FAŠANG, V. Novostavba Slovenského národného divadla. Výsledky súťaže. [The New Building of Slovak National Theatre. Competition Results]. In *Projekt*, 1980, Vol. 21, Issue 10, p. 5.

atmosphere evoking the spaces of the historic core.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the other participants, who by contrast largely proposed compositions of freestanding, isolated volumes, the Bauer – Kusý – Paňák team created a natural continuation and complement to the urban context of the specific locality. The building of the new SND, in essence, was conceived not merely as an autonomous volume, but as an integral part of Bratislava as a whole, and equally the cultural focus of the new urban district. Just like the construction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century of the first masonry theatre on Hviezdoslavovo námestie, the realisation of the new theatre was to be closely tied to the transformation of its wider surroundings, in this case the ‘Zone Martanovičova’ – on either side of the square in front of the theatre, the winning design assumed the construction of the buildings of the ‘Museum of the Workers’ Revolutionary Movement and Communist Movement’ and a large hotel. Likewise, from the very outset the plan included the pedestrian connection of this new cultural-relaxation urban space to the central core with a riverbank promenade.

The architecture of the new theatre bears the traits of the postmodernist architecture of the 1980s. Among the technical innovations applied in its construction, it is worth noting the unique ceiling construction realised by the company Hutní montáže Ostrava. In its urban setting, the theatre building created a spatial axiom for the basis of the development of this urban locality even after the changing political regime in 1989, but not in the original extent. A major role in how this space was later treated was occupied by the emergence of private investors, in other words a category of participants who were naturally never imagined at the time of the creation of the theatre’s first designs. As such, the embankment line was filled in with the commercial-social centre Eurovea and Námestie M.R. Štefánika to the east, shaping the entrance space for the theatre from the river.

As for the actual construction of the theatre, which first began in 1986, it spanned several different governmental arrangements, not to mention ministers of culture or general directors of the SND. In 2004, the government even decided to sell the incomplete building into private hands, though after great public pressure through the initiative ‘A Voice for Culture’ the decision

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32 KUSÝ, M. Poznámky k 28-rokov trvajúcej výstavbe SND v Bratislave [Notes on 28-year Long Construction of SND in Bratislava]. In RAGAČOVÁ, J. – ŠKRINÁROVÁ, A. (eds.). *Kultúrne dedičstvo 2019 – Divadlo v umení / Umenie v divadle* [Cultural Heritage 2019 – Theatre in Art/Art in Theatre]. Banská Štiavnica : Združenie historických miest a obcí Slovenskej republiky, 2019, p. 45.

was dropped, and the final stages of work, as it happened, completed from the state budget.<sup>33</sup> In any event, the opening of the new theatre in Pribinova ulica in 2007 formed the culmination of nearly ninety years of reflection on the new theatre's most suitable insertion into the urban tissue, formed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century primarily by the principles of modernist urban design but often brought to reality in fragmentary, altered or sometimes even contradictory forms. And moreover, with the passage of time it has become clear that precisely this competition and realisation of the theatre in this particular location led to the creation of probably the only unified public space in the city centre after 1989.

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33 Ibid, p. 50.

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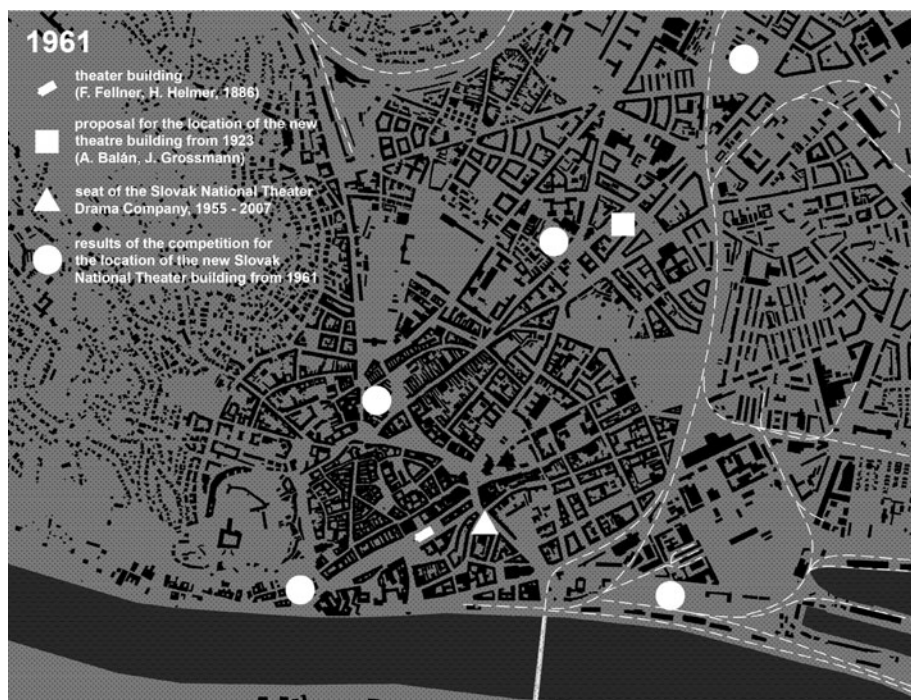




*Historical Building of the Slovak National Theatre on Hviezdoslav Square at the end of the 19th Century. Bratislava City Museum (P-01971).*



*Situation of the theatre buildings in the city structures in the 18th century and now. Picture by Laura Krišteková.*



*City structure of Bratislava in 1961 with variants of the new theater building location. Picture by Laura Krišteková.*





*Aerial view of the Slovak National Theater on Pribinova Street under construction in 1991.  
Department of Architecture, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences archives.*



*Building of the Slovak National Theatre on Pribinova Street. Photo by Martin Črep. The Slovak National Theatre archives.*

# Czech Opera Competitions and Their Effect on the Czech (and Slovak) National Theatre

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**Abstract:** Opera competitions determined opera production in the Czech lands from 1860s to 1890s. In a very complex way, these competitions influenced wide social debate on the suitable repertory for the National theatre, on the appropriate shape of representative opera (features of Wagnerian music drama and grand opera were discussed above all), and behind the surface of open debate affected notion of the independence of composer and the autonomy of music as an art which significantly constituted a confident position of the Czech nation in the frame of Habsburg monarchy. Only a few operas participated on the opera competitions, but many others originated in the contest atmosphere and observed announced conditions and thus the authors could freely manipulated with suggested artistic solutions. In regular, the awarded works became officially acclaimed operas unfortunately without a stable position in the repertory. On the contrary, the other operas formed continuously everyday repertory.

**Keywords:** opera competitions, National Theatre, Czechoslovak opera, Smetana, Dvořák, Fibich

## The Development of Czechoslovak Opera in Bratislava after World War I

The development of opera in the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava was not merely a Slovak reflection of the National Theatre in Prague; it was also a transformation of a former provincial theatre that had functioned in an international network of Austrian stages.<sup>1</sup> After 1918, the population of Bratislava still consisted of many national groups; one cannot forget that the city was close to Budapest and Vienna. However, now the repertory would be

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1 For a detailed examination of the operation of the final years of the theatre in Prešpurk (Bratislava) before World War I, see works by Jana Laslavíková, especially. LASLAVÍKOVÁ, Jana. *Mestské divadlo v Prešporku (1886–1899) v kontexte dobovej divadelnej praxe*. [The Municipal Theatre in Pressburg and Its Theatrical Practice]. Bratislava : Ars musica, 2018.

basically determined by the protectorate attitude of the Czechs toward Slovakia: “The concept for integrating the nation of Czechoslovakia was based on the idea that Slovakia as the eastern part of the Czechoslovak republic has, (that is, should have) actual administrative and political connection with the Czechs, as well as the basis of unified language and culture. At the same time, its distinct folklore type was considered as a mere living dialect. It was assumed that Slovak culture would attain a development to as high artistic level as that of Czech culture, and try to absorb its elements with the necessary delay of a half century, bearing in mind that that Czech music culture has already attained a professional basis for music scholarship and extensive national institutions, such as the Prague Conservatory (1811), National Theatre (1863 [sic!]), and the Czech Philharmonic (1896). It was necessary to establish such institutions in the area of Slovak music culture with the interest in strengthening the national-cultural awareness in the area of culture.”<sup>2</sup>

It is significant to consider the choice of Czech operas performed in Slovenské národné divadlo (Slovak National Theatre – from here, SND) in its early years in connection with the impatient expectations for national opera” that the Slovak public and critics demanded.<sup>3</sup> Interpretation of Czech operas in the SND repertory was a fundamental problem. It arose in connection with the relatively straightforward transfer of the works that were written a quarter century earlier for very different and concrete staging in the Czech theatres (Provisional Theatre and National Theatre/Prozatímní divadlo and Národní divadlo). A possible key could have been the influence of opera competitions that had very strict requirements for operas. We must also recall that critics for the arts who specified the trends that composers should adopt next, particularly when writing compositions. It has been confirmed that a music critic in Slovakia assumed that “the position of Czech aesthetics preserves the school of Otakar Hostinský”<sup>4</sup>. This statement legiti-

2 CHALUPKA, Ľ. *Cestami k tvorivej profesionalite. Sprievodca slovenskou hudbou 20. storočia I. (1901 – 1950)*. [Journey toward Creative Professionalism. A Guide to Slovak Music Durinig the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Vol. 1 (1901 – 1950)]. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, Filozofická fakulta, 2015, p. 62.

3 MOJŽIŠOVÁ, M. Súdobá operná tvorba v repertoári Slovenského národného divadla 1920 – 1938. [Contemporary Opera Production in the Repertoire of the Slovak National Theatre 1920 – 1938]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2015, Vol. 63, Issue 4, pp. 357 – 376.

4 Ibid. Jana Laslavíková has made a detailed analysis of the critical stance of Antonín Hořejš, who strove to make a sharp distinction between “Čechoslovaks” and other nationalities, particularly Hungarians and Germans. His strict criteria for this evaluation was in agreement with the teachings of Zdeněk Nejedlý, p. 359. See LASLAVÍKOVÁ, J. Reflexia



mized the notion that opinions about Czech national opera should be cultivated, and particularly supported by the debate about opera competitions, and that they would later become a model for collective understanding of the steady self-confidence of the nation.

Let us first provide a list of Czech operas that were staged at SND during its first ten seasons:<sup>5</sup>

- 1.3. 1920 Bedřich Smetana: *Hubička* [The Kiss]
- 6. 3. 1920 Bedřich Smetana: *Dalibor*
- 10. 3. 1920 Zdeněk Fibich: *Šárka*
- 19. 3. 1920 Karel Kovařovic: *Psohlavci* [The Dogheads]
- 31. 3. 1920 Bedřich Smetana: *Dvě vdovy* [Two Widows]
- 3. 4. 1920 Bedřich Smetana: *Prodaná nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride]
- 15. 4. 1920 Leoš Janáček: *Její pastorkyňa* [Her Stepdaughter/Jenůfa]
- 26. 4. 1920 Vilém Blodek: *V studni* [In the Well]
- 30. 4. 1920 Bedřich Smetana: *Libuše*
- 5. 11. 1920 Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka*
- 21. 12. 1920 Bedřich Smetana: *Tajemství* [The Secret]
- 28. 3. 1921 Josef Bohuslav Foerster: *Eva*
- 9. 4. 1921 Antonín Dvořák: *Čert a Káča* [The Devil and Kate]
- 4. 9. 1921 Vilém Blodek: *V studni*
- 8. 9. 1921 Bedřich Smetana: *Prodaná nevěsta*
- 21. 10. 1921 Karel Weis: *Lešetínský kovář* [The Lešetin Blacksmith]
- 3. 1. 1922 Bedřich Smetana: *Hubička*
- 6. 4. 1922 Antonín Dvořák: *Jakobín* [The Jacobin]
- 30. 4. 1922 Bedřich Smetana: *Dalibor*
- 24. 3. 1923 Leoš Janáček: *Káťa Kabanová*
- 26. 8. 1923 Bedřich Smetana: *Prodaná nevěsta*
- 31. 8. 1923 Bedřich Smetana: *Hubička*
- 29. 9. 1923 Bedřich Smetana: *Libuše*
- 21. 11. 1923 Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka*
- 4. 1. 1924 Stanislav Duda: *U Božích muk* [At Calvary]
- 15. 2. 1924 Zdeněk Fibich: *Šárka*

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opery v mezivojnovom období v Bratislave v referátoch Antonína Hořejša. [Reflections on Operas Produced in Bratislava by Antonín Hořejš between World War I and World War II]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2017, Vol. 65, Issue 2, pp. 142 – 157, especially pp. 144 – 146.

5 See [https://etheatre.sk/du\\_vademecum/NavigBeanDU.action?eventPager=&\\_sourcePage=iTB\\_A\\_9g7O9YEurwRgAXEqRbE\\_v4phdvvgwZlchDJUm5vjEhlukIWNUAZWir09Pw33yDSnGTP-30W8wYdoB7APbwfYdspQ54sC7&rowPg=0](https://etheatre.sk/du_vademecum/NavigBeanDU.action?eventPager=&_sourcePage=iTB_A_9g7O9YEurwRgAXEqRbE_v4phdvvgwZlchDJUm5vjEhlukIWNUAZWir09Pw33yDSnGTP-30W8wYdoB7APbwfYdspQ54sC7&rowPg=0) [cit. 13 September 2020].

22. 3. 1924 Bedřich Smetana: *Dalibor*  
10. 4. 1924 Bedřich Smetana: *Tajemství*  
14. 9. 1924 Bedřich Smetana: *Prodaná nevěsta*  
14. 10. 1924 Bedřich Smetana: *Dvě vdovy*  
28. 10. 1924 Bedřich Smetana: *Hubička*  
13. 12. 1924 Bedřich Smetana: *Čertova stěna* [The Devil's Wall]  
26. 9. 1925 Antonín Dvořák: *Čert a Káča*  
7. 3. 1926 Antonín Dvořák: *Svatá Ludmila* [St. Ludmilla]  
21. 8. 1926 Leoš Janáček: *Její pastorkyňa*  
22. 9. 1926 Josef Bohuslav Foerster: *Debora*  
13. 2. 1927 Bedřich Smetana: *Tajemství*  
4. 2. 1928 Zdeněk Fibich: *Nevěsta messinská* [The Bride of Messina]  
14. 4. 1928 Antonín Dvořák: *Jakobín*  
28. 8. 1928 Leoš Janáček: *Její pastorkyňa*  
8. 9. 1928 Karel Kovařovic: *Psohlavci*  
12. 9. 1928 Bedřich Smetana: *Dalibor*  
7. 11. 1928 Josef Bohuslav Foerster: *Eva*  
17. 11. 1928 Karel Weis: *Polský žid* [Polish Jew]  
8. 2. 1929 Vilém Blodek: *V studni*  
10. 3. 1929 Vítězslav Novák: *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Imp of Zvikov]  
14. 3. 1929 Antonín Dvořák: *Dimitrij*  
20. 4. 1929 Antonín Dvořák: *Čert a Káča*  
11. 9. 1929 Jaromír Weinberger: *Švanda dudák* [Švanda the Bagpiper]  
25. 9. 1929 Bedřich Smetana: *Dvě vdovy*  
28. 10. 1929 Bedřich Smetana: *Hubička*  
31. 10. 1929 Zdeněk Folprecht: *Lásky hra osudná* [Fateful Game of Love]  
14. 11. 1929 Karel Rudolf: *Ilsenino srdce* [Ilsen's Heart]  
12. 4. 1930 Otakar Ostrčil: *Poupě* [The Bud]  
15. 5. 1930 Bedřich Smetana: *Prodaná nevěsta*

### Opera Competitions and the Independence of the Czech Opera Stage

When they are not exclusive, opera competitions can lead to clarification of structural interaction among artists, as well as among artists and their surroundings. Even submitting a work to a competition brings publicity and prestige, and above all, a substantial financial incentive. The public expects that the prize-winning work will be successful; the press provides information about rehearsals, premieres and other performances, analytical studies

and reviews. Such humbug (if we may use the term) stimulates pretentious celebrations but also envy; acceptance but also aloofness. For a short time, a circle surrounds the composer and his actual work, giving opinions and judgements which are passed on; the composer can only escape from them with difficulty. For example, such opinions linked Bedřich Smetana and the pure national aspect of his operas; Zdeněk Fibich and Wagnerianism, Antonín Dvořák and his presumed inadequate sense of the dramaturgical requirements of opera.<sup>6</sup>

Czech theatre expanded with unprecedented intensity after the October Diploma (1860). In order to obtain new, prestigious Czech operas, four opera competitions were announced by the end of the nineteenth century: Count Harrach's competition in the 1860s (won by Bedřich Smetana's opera *Braniboři v Čechách* [The Brandenburgers in Bohemia]), the second competition in the 1870s (the first prize was awarded to Smetana's *Libuše*), the competition celebrating the reopening of the National Theatre after it had burned down, which was won by Zdeněk Fibich's *Nevěsta messinská*; and finally in the 1890s, the competition that was won by Karel Kovařovic's opera *Psohlavci*. The competition requirements had significant influence on the behaviour of artists. Critics became involved in disputes that were inevitably the result of taking a strong position in the artistic field,<sup>7</sup> and music was unable to escape from political issues.<sup>8</sup> Multitalented critics with literary backgrounds collided with the opinions of musicians. When Karel Sabina fell out of favour, his name was omitted from the posters that advertised performances of Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta*. The accomplishments of librettists Josef Wenzig (*Dalibor* and *Libuše*) were frankly described as unsatisfactory. In spite of the significant recognition that librettists Eliška Krásnohorská and

6 OTTLOVÁ, M., POSPÍŠIL, M. Hostinskýs und Fibichs Braut von Messina: Tschechischer Wagnerianismus. In *Schiller und die Musik* (hrsg. von H. Geyer, W. Osthoff, A. Stäber). Köln : Böhlau Verlag, 2007, pp. 113 – 122. OTTLOVÁ, M. Giacomo Meyerbeer v Praze v 19. století [Giacomo Meyerbeer in Prague during the Nineteenth Century]. In *Hudební divadlo jako výzva*. [Music Theatre as Challenge]. (Ed. H. Spurná). Praha : Národní divadlo, 2004, pp. 133 – 160.

7 The authors not only aspired to success with the public, but also to succeed in the field of music itself, “where creators continually sought the approval of other creators (and competitors).” BOURDIEU, P. *Pravidla umění. Vznik a struktura literárního pole* [Laws of Art. The Origin and Structure of the Field of Literature]. (Translated into Czech by P. Kyloušek and P. Dytrt). Brno : Host, 2010, pp. 165.

8 See POSPÍŠIL, M. Bedřich Smetana a Riegerova rodina. [Bedřich Smetana and the Rieger Family]. In *Hudební věda*, 2017, Vol. 54, Issue 2, pp. 179 – 200.

Marie Červinková-Riegrová received, these “librettists in skirts”<sup>9</sup> faced continual reproach from highly regarded authorities such as Otakar Hostinský and Zdeněk Nejedlý. Even a libretto subject taken from the works of highly respected authors such as William Shakespeare, Friedrich Schiller, and Torquato Tasso did not protect outstanding composers from attacks by critics (see, for example, Jaroslav Vrchlický’s libretto for Antonín Dvořák’s *Armida*, and the libretto by Jaroslav Kvapil for Josef Nešvera’s opera *Perdita*). The solution seemed to be to choose a professional, reliable artist as a partner (for example, Zdeněk Fibich and Anežka Schulzová, Karel Kovařovic and Karel Šípek), or to combine composer and librettist into a single profession, as Leoš Janáček did. The exclusive club of musically educated persons (including Otakar Hostinský, Emanuel Chvála, Bedřich Smetana and Zdeněk Fibich) was apparently opposed by adherents of opera in Romance languages and the motto “vox populi, vox dei”, used to call attention to the threat of the destructive influence of Wagnerism (including František Pivoda, Karel Knittl, and Josef Boleška). However, this polarized view did not correspond to reality; even today, it is disturbing from various perspectives.<sup>10</sup> And finally, we note that the significance and necessity of opera competitions can be most clearly shown by observing Antonín Dvořák’s attitude; he never wanted to have anything to do with opera competitions, even though he stubbornly wrote operas throughout his entire career.

### Before the Opening of the National Theatre

The first competition announced with the requirements of the stage of the National Theatre covered the years 1869 to 1880, the second one lasted only from 1882 to 1884. The deadline for the first competition was extended at the request of the composers; then, because of the slow progress of constructing the new theatre, it was extended to 1 January 1874, then to September 1879, the end of March 1880, and finally to the end of June 1880.<sup>11</sup> The main

9 PARKER, E. T. “*The Librettist Wears Skirts*”: *Female Librettists in 19th Century Bohemia*. [Dissertation]. Santa Barbara : University of California, 2016.

10 See OTTLOVÁ, M., POSPÍŠIL, M. *Bedřich Smetana a jeho doba*. [Bedřich Smetana and His Era]. Praha : NLN, 1997.

11 See HOROVÁ, I. Operní konkursy, vypsáné v souvislosti s otevřením Národního divadla v Praze [Opera Competitions Announced in Connection with the Opening of the National Theatre in Prague]. In *Hudební věda*, 1990, Vol. 27, Issue 2, pp. 152 – 159; especially pp. 152 – 154.

reason for announcing the first competition was to obtain a prestigious work for the inauguration of the new theatre: "On 16 May 1869, the Board for Construction of the National Theatre announced four prizes for the best dramatic and operatic works for the inauguration of the National Theatre: 1000 rubles donated by the Slavonic Philanthropic Committee of Moscow for the best drama, 1000 florins for the best comedy; 1000 florins for the best opera and 1000 florins for the best comic opera; also, 300 florins for each of the two most successful libretti. The deadline for submissions is 1 June 1872. The judges will be named by the committee."<sup>12</sup> The competition requirements did not provide specific information about the choice of subject or musical inspiration. Although there were frequent debates about the future of the National Theatre repertory during the 1870s, no one doubted that the work had to have a national character. As expected, the composers accepted the concise requirements that had been specified for Harrach's competition. In 1861, Count Harrach had announced prizes for two operas "[...] of which one would be based on the *history of the Bohemian Crown*, and the second, a comic opera, would be drawn from *the national Czech-Slavonic life* in Bohemia, Moravia, or Silesia. The first and most important condition for music and voice is the support of *diligent study of traditional Czech-Slavonic folk song and that its use in music* would have a truly *national* spirit. Choruses, particularly in comic operas, are not merely listeners in the background; they should provide a living echo of national tunes in vivacious, continuing participation! National dances could also be used successfully in comic operas. The history of the time-honoured chorale in opera as a theme in choruses could be alluded to; the composer himself can best determine that with respect to the subject he has chosen. The fundamental condition is that the *composer's family* belongs to one of the lands of the *Czech crown*."<sup>13</sup>

For the second competition, there was a noticeable shift from nationalist

12 The report was published in *Dalibor*, 1869, Vol. 7, Issue 15, p. 121, 20 May 1869, and elsewhere – *Česká Thalia*, *Světobzor*, etc. Cited according to HOROVÁ, I. Operní konkursy, vypsané v souvislosti s otevřením Národního divadla v Praze [Opera Competitions Announced in Connection with the Opening of the National Theatre in Prague], p. 153. On the choice of historical themes and relationship to religious motives, see TYRRELL, J. *Czech Opera*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 122, 145.

13 HARRACH, J. Vypsání cen za nejlepší dvě české opery a náležitě k nim texty. [Announcement of Prizes for Two Czech Operas and Texts for Them]. In *Dalibor*, 1861, Vol. 4, Issue 6, p. 45, 20 February 1861. The competition was won by Smetana's opera *Braniboři v Čechách* [The Brandenburgers in Bohemia]; his second opera, *Prodaná nevěsta*, was not and could not be submitted to the competition, even though it fulfilled its requirements.

political goals to genuine artistic requirements and management of theatrical matters. The competition's requirements were announced on 6 February 1882: "Works can be submitted in the Czech language, or a Slavonic language in Czech translation. The material can be taken from Czech history, or at least should be well known to the Czech community. The best work will be evaluated according to whether it satisfies definite aesthetic requirements, it has a duration of an entire evening's programme, and it can be performed on the stage of the National Theatre."<sup>14</sup> The works accepted for the first competition were Bedřich Smetana's *Libuše*, Karel Bendl's *Černohorci* [The Montenegrins], and Zdeněk Fibich's *Blaník*. The emphasis on high artistic quality that is noticeable at the beginning of the 1880s seems to be a result of this competition. Let us try to substantiate this remarkable development from historical sources, and from analytical remarks on the musical dramaturgy of these three operas.

At the end of November 1880, the opera jury met to recommend the distribution of prizes. Four judges of the five-member committee were present; František Zdeněk Skuherský, director of the organ school, was excused. The four judges were: Otakar Hostinský as presiding officer; Emanuel Chvála as scribe; Adolf Čech, conductor of the Czech theatre; Antonín Bennewitz, professor at Prague conservatory and violin virtuoso. The commission set the issue of national character aside, and concentrated on the following topics:

I. For the prize of 1000 florins for the "best serious opera," the competitors were *Libuše*, *Černohorci* [The Montenegrins], and *Blaník*: "the score of *Libuše* with its motto "For our land and nation" is worthy of the prize to the greatest measure; it displays a very solemn artistic direction and highly perfected musical techniques. Also, its entire character is particularly suitable for festival performance."

II. The only competitor for the prize of 1000 florins for "the best comic opera" was Karel Bendl's *Starý ženich* [The Old Bridegroom]. The jury compared it "with the contemporary state of Czech production in that category" and concluded: "despite all of its commendable qualities, it does not deserve this honour."

III. According to the requirements for the competition, the opera libretti were merely read to determine how the prizes should be awarded. The com-

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14 HOROVÁ, I. Operní konkursy, vypsané v souvislosti s otevřením Národního divadla v Praze [Opera Competitions Announced in Connection with the Opening of the National Theatre in Prague], p. 156.

mittee disagreed with this requirement, because “According to the text of the announcement of the prizes of florins, the libretto of *Libuše* must receive a prize, but is the weakest of all four competitors [...]” The libretto that the jury considered the best was Eliška Krásnohorská’s libretto for Zdeněk Fibich’s *Blaník*. The Board for Construction of the National Theatre ignored this advice, and a prize was awarded according to the announced conditions, to the libretto of *Libuše*. A recommendation was adopted to divide the 1000 florins for the comic opera prize in half, honouring both *Černohorci* [The Montenegrins] and *Blaník*.<sup>15</sup>

It is surprising how confidently these operas were evaluated. When we consider Hostinský’s steadfast faith in artistic progress and Emanuel Chvála’s views as a critic who welcomed well-crafted, polished development of musical ideas, we can understand why the jury ignored any doubts about whether monumental works could be performed satisfactorily, as they considered their suitability for the National Theatre repertory. Their convictions about the correct path for composition also illuminates the issue of nationalistic art, which continually interested the Czech community to the end of the nineteenth century. This unusual situation caused submission of unusual works based purely on unsustainable artistic criteria, but as was soon evident after the opening of the National Theatre such criteria could nobody hold for so long. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1880s, it was possible to think that the musical world was tending toward irrevocable changes: Richard Wagner was victoriously sweeping through Europe; Charles Gounod and Georges Bizet were replacing Giacomo Meyerbeer; Giuseppe Verdi was thought to be in decline; the “eastern” national schools were catching up with the western world.

The opera committee could have had the courage by the new works themselves, for all of the three accepted operas strove to attain magnificent concepts. The evolution of Czech opera during last ten years was influenced by this competition. It was characterized by an intensive creative process which inherently brought much reflection and uncertainty into the work of

15 The report of the jury on 30 November 1880 is deposited in an envelope with the title “Slavnému výboru Sboru pro zřízení Národního divadla v Praze, 30 November 1880.” In Archiv Divadelního oddělení Národního muzea (from here, abbreviated as ADONM), sign. A XXVIII, Issue 172. The two composers who did not win prizes, Karel Bendl and Zdeněk Fibich, participated in the second opera competition and both received first prize in 1884: Fibich for his tragic opera *Nevěsta messinská* (on a libretto by Otakar Hostinský) and Bendl for his comic opera *Karel Škréta* (on a libretto by Eliška Krásnohorská).



the opera committee as a whole, as Otakar Hostinský recalled around 1880. The National Theatre's presentation of extraordinary operas was a shining example to the Czech public, but the composer was in the shade – it was necessary to risk, experiment, to try various solutions. When the National Theatre was inaugurated, the repertory was crammed with works which, despite their evident quality, had to fight for their place in the theatre archive and on the stage. This situation seemed to be the result of an intensive search for artistic form that was, as yet, undefined. Operas written at the close of the 1870s and during the 1880s are spread out before us like a collection of monumental statues. Many of them were buried by time, others were dropped or dismissed by music critics and musicologists.<sup>16</sup> In exceptional cases, the composers made changes to increase the chances that their works would remain in the repertory. Zdeněk Fibich made changes to *Blaník*; Antonín Dvořák repeatedly returned to *Dimitrij*; as a mature composer, Leoš Janáček made alterations to his early opera *Šárka*.

In such an exhilarating atmosphere, composers chose demanding artistic solutions for the opera competition. They showed disregard neither for the public nor for themselves. They did not hesitate to reach for existing modern trends such as Wagnerism while using well-established, magnificent scenic effects from grand opera. It is well known that Bedřich Smetana conceived *Libuše* as a festive opera to be performed on extraordinary occasions in the history of the Czech nation. Its librettist, Josef Wenzig, suggested that the composer write closing arias. Bedřich Smetana did not agree, but he did accept Josef Wenzig's idea to finish *Libuše* with a grand opera sequence of living tableaux. And actually, it was thanks to this closing prophecy – not immediately, but through its reception over the years – that *Libuše* became a state opera. Bedřich Smetana approached its libretto as a mature composer, and tended to agree with the librettist, Josef Wenzig, about the integration of the form. But since Zdeněk Fibich, at the outset of his career, had agreed to the conditions by his librettist, Eliška Krásnohorská, he was not able to attain Bedřich Smetana's concept of historical opera in *Blaník*. However, his versatility and the experience of writing *Blaník* enabled him to follow

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16 With remarkable ignorance, especially of Antonín Dvořák's works, Zdeněk Nejedlý proclaimed that Zdeněk Fibich's *Blaník* closed the series of "our heartfelt historical operas. What will come afterwards? It is just fat; it does not speak to the best instincts of the wider audience." NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Česká moderní zpěvohra po Smetanovi* [Czech modern opera after Smetana]. Praha: J. Otto, 1910, p. 35.

Bedřich Smetana's method, which can be seen in the sketches for *Libuše*.<sup>17</sup> This method is visibly reflected in the formation of individual scenes that tend to emulate the form of grand opera, and are filled with music that follows Wagnerian leitmotive technique.

Smetana's *Libuše* won the opera competition for the festive reopening of the National Theatre in 1883. It should also have pleased its Austrian counterpart. But Crown Prince Rudolf's reaction to the program for the festive evening for reopening was negative. He did not attend the performance of *Libuše*, but a week later he attended Antonín Dvořák's *Dimitrij*.<sup>18</sup> Zdeněk Fibich's *Blaník* did not become stable part of the repertory, but he had gained the significant creative activity that enabled his third attempt at opera, *Nevěsta messinská*.

## The Second Opera Competition

The goal of the second competition is clearly explained by the comments about the work that received the prize. The competition was intended to expand the repertory of Czech works for the theatre. In the spring months of 1883, *Nevěsta messinská* was recognized as a performable opera.<sup>19</sup> The issue of high-quality production was taken for granted, and the submitted operas helped to enlarge the basic repertory of the National Theatre. On 20 May 1883, *Nevěsta messinská* was in rehearsal, as well as Karel Bendl's comic opera *Karel Škréta*, which had been unanimously recommended for performance, and Karel Kovařovic's *Ženichové* [The bridegrooms].<sup>20</sup> Some operas were assessed as "unsuitable for performance at the National Theatre:" *Karla IV*.

17 One of the finest sources for Bedřich Smetana's *Libuše* is OČADLÍK, M. *Vznik Smetanovy zpěvohry*. [The Origin of Smetana's Operas]. Praha : Melantrich, 1939. Stimulating ideas can also be found in OTTLOVÁ, M., POSPÍŠIL, M. *Bedřich Smetana a jeho doba* [Bedřich Smetana and His Era], pp. 80 – 95.

18 POSPÍŠIL, M. *Bedřich Smetana a Riegrova rodina*. [Bedřich Smetana and the Rieger Family], pp. 179 – 200, especially p. 194.

19 Letter from František Zdeněk Skuherský dated 16 April 1883 (after the announcement of the jury) resembles the minutes from the jury meeting held on 18 April 1883 that *Nevěsta messinská* "capable of being performed." In addition to Skuherský, the members of the jury were Emanuel Chvála, Antonín Bennewitz, Josef Foerster, and Adolf Čech. ADONM, sign. A XXVIII, box No. 12.

20 The minutes were finalized on 24 May 1883, and signed by František Zdeněk Skuherský, Emanuel Chvála, Antonín Bennewitz, Josef Foerster, and Adolf Čech (ADONM, sign. A XXVIII).

Výtvor [The Work by Charles IV], *Starosta z Mudrovan čili Prodaný nos* [The Mayor from Mudrovany or the Bartered Nose], *Vineta* [The Vignette]. No decision was made about the opera *Popelka* [Cinderella], because the score was studied very slowly by the members of the committee.<sup>21</sup> The jury for assessing operas met again with František Zdeněk Skuherský presiding on 22 May 1884. It unanimously awarded the prize of 1000 florins for a serious opera to Zdeněk Fibich's *Nevěsta messinská*, and also unanimously awarded the prize of 1000 florins for a comic opera to Karel Bendl's *Karel Škréta*. They also unanimously recommended that Karel Kovařovic's comic opera *Ženichové* [The Bridegrooms] be given honourable mention.<sup>22</sup>

The announcement of the results was delayed, in part because of the complex system of evaluation; the libretti were judged by the commission for assessing the plays. The jury for opera, according to a report dated 28 August 1883, wanted to award both prizes for libretti (for serious and comic opera) to Eliška Krásnohorská.<sup>23</sup> But the dramaturgical jury had expressed reservations about the quality of these libretti.<sup>24</sup> To resolve this difference of opinion, František Zdeněk Skuherský reminded the juries that the prizes were awarded by the opera jury, and the dramaturgical jury merely had the power to make recommendations.<sup>25</sup> The literary experts did not consider that any

21 A list of attached plays and operas announced by the competition on 6 February 1882 only shows titles and the signs under which the anonymous authors submitted their works to the competition. Under No. 25 we find *Nevěsta messinská*; under No. 38, there is *Starosta z Mudrovan* [Mayor of Mudrovany] (comic opera); under No. 40, *Karel IV.* [Charles IV] (opera in three acts); under No. 52, *Karel Škréta* (comic opera); under No. 54, *Vineta* [The Vignette]. The entire collection contains 54 items: 17 tragedies, 10 comedies, 11 libretti, 5 operas (3 serious, 2 comic), 8 stage plays and farces, 3 one-act plays. Dated 31 March 1883. On the last page of the list are two additions. The first addition, dated 1 April 1883, shows under No. 55 the comic opera *Ženichové* [The Bridegrooms]; under No. 56, *Popelka* [Cinderella] (comic opera); and under Nos. 57 and 58, other libretti (*Z mrtvých vstali* [Rising from the Dead], *Máje* [Maypoles]). The second addition shows the libretto of *Lesní muž* [Wood Man] as No. 59, and the historical drama *Dokonáno* [It is over] as No. 60. The collection is contained in unclassified boxes, ADONM, sign. A XXVIII.

22 Document dated 24 May 1884, ADONM.

23 Eliška Krásnohorská wrote two libretti for Karel Bendl: for the serious opera *Dítě Tábora* [The Child of Tábor], and the comic opera *Karel Škréta*. Document dated 28 August 1883, presiding officer, František Zdeněk Skuherský; scribe, Emanuel Chvála. ADONM.

24 See letters addressed to the presiding officer of the jury for drama dated 25 September 1883 and 4 January 1884. ADONM.

25 In a letter dated 4 April 1884 addressed to the Board for the Construction of the National Theatre, František Zdeněk Skuherský, as presiding officer of the jury for judging operas and libretti, announced that after the opening the envelope with the names of the libret-

of the 14 libretti were of adequate quality to win a prize. Three libretti were recommended for honourable mention: 1. *Matčina píseň* [Mother's Song], 2. *Šárka*, 3. *Dítě Tábora* [The Child of Tábor].<sup>26</sup> Like the first opera competition connected with the National Theatre, the second competition did not bring about the wished-for expansion of Czech operas – perhaps because it was evidently a public secret that Zdeněk Fibich's *Nevěsta messinská* would win the prize. That may be why Bedřich Smetana did not submit *Čertova stěna* to the debate, and why Antonín Dvořák again remained entirely aloof from the competition debate! However, the literary world had extraordinary interest in the competition, since it had turned its attention to opera libretti. Thanks to the second competition, literary standards were definitely improved for Czech libretti as the result of this change in competition requirements. The finest writers began to appear within the commercial sphere of librettists, where they could take advantage of the combination of remuneration and art.<sup>27</sup>

### Opera Competition 1895

After the success of Czech opera at the International Music and Theatre Exhibition in Vienna in 1892, Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* became part of the international opera repertory. At the peak of his career, František Adolf Šubert, director of the National Theatre, began to plan another extraordinary event: the Czech-Slavonic Ethnographic Exhibition, at which the Czechs could demonstrate their national and political attempts at emancipation from the Austro-Hungarian government. The Ethnographic Exhibition

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tists, he found that the author of both winning libretti was Eliška Krásnohorská, and that she would receive a prize of 300 florins for each libretto. The scribe was Emanuel Chvála. The minutes from the meeting of the commission, dated 9 April 1884, are titled "The matter of awarding the prizes for libretti." They confirm the decision of the opera jury. ADONM.

26 See the letter written by František Zdeněk Skuherský, dated 15 March 1884, ADONM. The view of the literary experts raises concerns that the quality of these libretti actually was not suitable for operas. Although we do not find the author's name in the libretto of *Matčina píseň* [Mother Song], it was probably written by Marie Červínková, who later was credited for the libretto of *Jakobín* [The Jacobin]. The libretto for *Šárka* was written by the prominent literary figure Julius Zeyer, who offered it to Dvořák. However, it was Antonín Janáček who eventually took an interest in it.

27 Emulating French artists, some Czech writers kept aloof from the theatre, taking a stand "against marketing art." BOURDIEU, P. *Pravidla umění. Vznik a struktura literárního pole* [Laws of Art. The Origin and Structure of the Field of Literature], p. 181.

was held in 1895. It was a triumph for František Adolf Šubert; the star of Karel Kovařovic as conductor of the exhibition orchestra shone clearly for the first time. Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák and Zdeněk Fibich were presented at the exhibition as the three most significant Czech composers.

An announcement of another opera competition was made in the exhilarating atmosphere of the Ethnographic Exhibition. At the end of November 1895, the administrative group of the National Theatre announced prizes for comedies, libretti and operas with the following condition: "The material for this work must be, without exception, connected with the life of Czechs; it should be contemporary, not historical. The deadline for submitting works will be the end of April 1897."<sup>28</sup> The requirements were repeated once more in more specific way. There was now a narrower definition of a successful work, as well as a definition of nationalism (blood relationship) that none of the participants could overlook: "competitors for this prize must submit works originally written in the Czech language or be composed by Czech opera composers [...] The prize will be awarded to the work [...] whose performance will be highly significant theatrical success."<sup>29</sup>

Three composers entered the competition: Zdeněk Fibich, Karel Kovařovic and Josef Bohuslav Foerster. Zdeněk Fibich's opera was the favourite but did not win, which offended him. The works were performed for the jury as follows: on 22 February, Zdeněk Fibich's *Šárka*; on 24 February, Karel Kovařovic's *Psohlavci*; and on 27 February 1899, Josef Bohuslav Foerster's *Eva*. Karel Kovařovic's opera won.<sup>30</sup> František Adolf Šubert was still refusing to comment on the fate of Zdeněk Fibich's *Šárka* in 1910.<sup>31</sup> It is possible to reconstruct a list of the jury members and their voting: Hanuš Trneček for *Psohlavci*, Josef Richard Rozkošný for *Psohlavci*, Adolf Čech, in absentia, requested honorable mention for Josef Bohuslav Foerster's *Eva* and agreed with Jaromír Borecký who decided to divide the prize of 1500 florins between Karel Kovařovic and Zdeněk Fibich, Antonín Bennewitz has to vote for *Psohlavci* because Zdeněk Fibich lose with a 2:3 ratio. Josef Bohuslav Foerster's *Eva* was dropped from public discussion; most of the public

28 *Dalibor*, 1895, Vol. 17, Issue 44 – 45, p. 347, 23 November 1895.

29 *Dalibor*, 1896, Vol. 18, Issue 1 – 2, p. 9, 4 January 1896.

30 See *Dalibor*, 1897, Vol. 19, Issue 43 – 44, p. 337, 25 September 1897. The jury may have met on 3 March. (see *Dalibor*, 1899, Vol. 21, Issue 12, p. 9, 14 March 1899).

31 See ŠUBERT, F. A. Několik rysů k masce Zdeňka Fibicha. [Certain Traits of the Mask of Zdeněk Fibich]. In *Dalibor*, 1910, Vol. 32, Issue 42 – 47, pp. 345 – 346; especially p. 345, 24 September 1910.

was enchanted by *Psohlavci*. Emanuel Chvála commented: “Kovařovic did not need any publicity from Trneček to obtain public favour for this opera, or to generate the passionate opinions expressed outside of the competition by music critic J. Boleška, who circulated the motto ‘vox populi, vox dei’ among powerful and lesser personages, and led the opposition against Fibich.”<sup>32</sup> Immediately after the announcement of the prize, Zdeněk Fibich presented a concert of his works on 7 March 1899 that included the successful premiere of his *Symphony No. 3* and the orchestral version of his melodrama *Štědrý den* [Christmas Eve], recited by Otilie Sklenářová-Malá. *Šárka* later received the Novotný prize of 393 florins, and *Eva* was given honourable mention; Otakar Hostinský, Emanuel Chvála and Josef Richard Rozkošný submitted this solution to the town council.<sup>33</sup> Zdeněk Fibich’s *Šárka* became an established opera in the National Theatre repertory, and was soon performed on other Prague stages.<sup>34</sup> In the course of time, Josef Bohuslav Foerster’s *Eva* demonstrated that the theme of village tragedy could be viewed as resembling French lyric opera, which is still successful; similarly, Leoš Janáček’s *Její pastorkyňa* found a connection with verismo opera. Despite the splendid success of Karel Kovařovic’s *Pohlavci* [The Dogheads], it embraced the solutions of grand opera too closely, and it had dropped out of the repertory by the second half of the twentieth century.

### Significance of the Opera Competitions

Many of the operas announced by the competitions have histories of problematic reception. Most of them had to struggle for long-term success or gradually fell out of the repertory (*Braniboři v Čechách* [The Brandenburgers in Bohemia], *Libuše*, *Blaník*, *Černohorci* [The Montenegrins], *Nevěsta messinská*, *Psohlavci* [The Dogheads], *Šárka*, *Eva*). Anyway, there are still another results of competitions! We think of works that were not submitted, although they met the competition requirements. (Why? Were they not completed

32 CHVÁLA, E. *Z mých pamětí hudebních*. [From My Musical Memories]. (Eds. F. Karlík, J. Kopecký). Olomouc : Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2019, p. 370.

33 See *Dalibor*, 1899, Vol. 20, Issue 47 – 48, p. 375, 23 December 1899.

34 František Lacina obtained Zdeněk Fibich’s *Šárka* for the Brno National Theatre and premiered it on 2 December 1898 with Leopoldina Hanusová in the title role. See *Dalibor*, 1898, Vol. 20, Issue 45, p. 352, 22 October 1898; *Dalibor*, 1898, Vol. 21, Issue 48, p. 374, 3 December 1898; *Dalibor*, 1898, Vol. 21, Issue 2 – 3, p. 22, 31 December 1898; *Dalibor*, 1899, Vol. 22, Issue 4 – 5, pp. 26 – 27, 7 January 1899.



in time? Did the composers attempt uncertain solutions, unlike those of their colleagues?) Although Bedřich Smetana based his hopes and great expectations on *Dalibor* and *Libuše*, national opera came to resemble *Prodaná nevěsta*, which Bedřich Smetana himself called a mere “plaything.” Among Antonín Dvořák’s operas, *Dimitrij* stands out as a direct competitor to *Libuše*, *Blaník*, and perhaps even *Nevěsta messinská*. Antonín Dvořák’s comic opera *Šelma sedlák* [The Cunning Peasant] established itself in the Czech repertory as a work modelled on *Prodaná nevěsta*. After returning from America and after the announcement of another opera competition, Antonín Dvořák embarked on revising *Jakobín* [The Jacobin] and composing *Čert a Káča*, finally finding a successful operatic form in *Rusalka*. Leoš Janáček, already a recognized folklorist who had influenced the events of the Ethnographic Exposition, was drafting his *Její pastorkyňa* at that time. Genres having to do with the countryside served for entertainment or followed fashionable, “hopeless” outcomes (operetta, fairy-tale opera and verismo), but in time they engendered attractive works. The operas that were submitted to opera competitions became landmarks, setting standards that composers generally did not change any more; translated versions became definitive, often quite demanding artistically. A work that endured the fires of actual performance, where thorough rehearsals were necessary and it would be exposed to relentless criticism, would prove itself to be performable for years to come.

However, the problematic relationship between the opera competitions and the public can be lost in certain circumstances. An opera can be only successfully performed when the situation is favourable. Revivals of “competing” operas are possible when it is necessary to evoke the spirit of nationalism, when they can arouse response in eras of danger and germination (as during World War I and the years between the wars). In the end, the strength of the opera competitions produced a paradox: they stimulated the emergence of other operas that were not submitted to them, and they profited from popularity of these operas.

These competitions generally had “Czechness” as one of their requirements, suggesting that operas with national character could be written for in other nations – especially the Slavic countries, but also for small or remote nations, such as Ireland and Flanders. This approach became a model for opera competitions, especially when such operas were based on entirely realistic, well-loved models. (Bedřich Smetana’s *Prodaná nevěsta* fulfilled this role at many Slavonic stages.) This process eventually entered a phase calling for other opera competitions. Slovak opera history took this path. In 1926,



the Československý umelecký klub [Czechoslovak Art Club] in New York announced a competition in which genuine representative Slovak opera were not represented yet. Nevertheless, their efforts on behalf of Slovak national opera brought forth a new intensity, achieved by strong composers such as Alexander Moyzes (*Svätopluk*, 1935) and especially Eugen Suchoň (*Krútňava* [The Whirlpool], 1949).<sup>35</sup>

We always find a great deal of tension in the background of these opera competitions. External circumstances, such as the requirements of the competitions, the motivation of relatively high financial reward, were a remarkably strong stimulus to the composers' private life and psychological state. However, they were often connected with exhaustion, personal quarrels and feelings of disappointment. Yet the boundaries that the competitions placed on the artists urged them to unprecedented concentration, to finding daring concepts and choosing resolutions that composers have adopted and developed further. The beneficial contribution of the opera competitions in creating such markedly specific situations affected the entire community, and provided public debate with the subject of opera composition.

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35 MOJŽISOVÁ, M. M. Súdobá operná tvorba v repertoári Slovenského národného divadla 1920 – 1938. [Contemporary Opera Production in the Repertoire of the Slovak National Theatre 1920 – 1938], p. 373 – 375.

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## From Prague to Vienna via Bratislava. Reflecting on Novák's Operas *The Zvíkov Imp* and *The Lantern*

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**Abstract:** The study focuses on the reflexion of Vítězslav Novák's operas *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] by music criticism in Prague, Bratislava and Vienna in between 1915 – 1929.

**Key words:** Vítězslav Novák, opera reception, *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp], *Lucerna* [The Lantern], Prague, Bratislava, Vienna

Vítězslav Novák (1870 – 1949) was considered one of the leading figures of the so-called Czech musical modernity generation and a respected Central European composer at the beginning of the twentieth century. Towards the end of 1913, however, his hitherto extremely successful career entered into a period of crisis. This came after his new cantata, *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt] Op. 48 – a composition that, like Antonín Dvořák's *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt], Op. 69, was based on the text of a ballad by Karel Jaromír Erben (1811 – 1870) – was first performed in Prague by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and the Prague Hlahol Choir. The main issue of the work, one that was noted by the critics at the time, was the incongruity of the dramatic story and a certain sense of artistic emptiness (in comparison to his prior works). As Vítězslav Novák's biographer Vladimír Lébl later expressed: "(...) his [Novák's] compositional virtuosity often had to come to the aid of the parts that had no natural initiative of their own."<sup>1</sup> Three years after the successful Brno premiere of Vítězslav Novák's cantata *Bouře* [The Storm], which was viewed as a confident demonstration of modern Czech music, Novák's position on the pedestal of Czech music became unstable.

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1 LÉBL, V. *Vítězslav Novák: Život a dílo* [Vítězslav Novák: His Life and Work]. Praha : ČSAV, 1964, p. 162.

Criticism came not only from his opponents, centred around the musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878 – 1962), but also from his supporters and friends. Vítězslav Novák accepted some of the criticism and reworked certain parts of the work, but was strongly affected by the failure, both as an artist and as a person. Nevertheless, just a few months after completing *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt], he began working on his first opera. Although he had long considered writing an opera, the cantata's failure likely hastened this decision – he wanted to write a composition in the traditionally most highly regarded field of music as a way to convince his critics that his skills as a creator were still developing rather than stagnating. Over the following nine years, (1914 – 1923) he would compose four operas: *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] (Ladislav Stroupežnický), *Karlštejn* (Otokar Fischer, based on the play by Jaroslav Vrchlický), *Lucerna* [The Lantern] (Hanus Jelínek, based on the play by Alois Jirásek) and *Dědův odkaz* [Grandfather's Legacy] (Antonín Klášterský, based on the poem by Alois Heyduk). In contrast to his chamber and orchestral work from the period before the First World War, for which he was considered a progressive composer and a continuator of the German or, to be more exact, Brahmsian approach to music, he turned out to be rather conservative when it came to his operas. The lyrics that Vítězslav Novák worked with were – with the exception of the text of Ladislav Stroupežnický's play *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp], which was lifted nearly verbatim – rather poorly adapted by their librettists for the purposes of opera. Most of his operas were historical in nature – those where Novák sought to adapt a 'modern setting' into opera, such as in *Dědův odkaz* [Grandfather's Legacy], come off as very amateurish.<sup>2</sup> His operas are almost devoid of ensembles and choirs<sup>3</sup> and even when taking into account Vítězslav Novák's reputation as an excellent orchestral composer, the orchestral elements of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] are surprisingly forced into the background. (This is not the case for *Karlštejn* and certainly not for Novák's last opera, *Dědův odkaz* [Grandfather's Legacy], in which he returned to symphonic interludes, postludes and, most no-

2 John Tyrrell suggests that this aspect becomes visible when contrasted with Leoš Janáček's musicalisation of Karel Čapek's *Věc Makropulos* [The Makropulos Affair]. See TYRRELL, J. *Czech Opera*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 97 – 98. Similar 'amateurishness' or awkwardness can be observed in Foerster's *The Invincible Ones*.

3 J. Tyrrell is also surprised at the absence of ensembles in Novák's operas, even in places where the subject matter required it (for example in his *Karlštejn*). See TYRRELL, J. *Czech Opera*, p. 92.

tably, choirs.)<sup>4</sup> Novák's goal was to promote his operas similarly to how he promoted his chamber and orchestral works, in a German-language setting. The time after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not particularly favourable, however, towards this and foreign opera houses were not all that interested in producing operas with strictly Czech subject matter. The recently-established Slovak National Theatre produced two of the composer's operas – *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] – several times during his lifetime. Both operas were also included in the Slovak National Theatre's representative tour show in May 1929, which also included performances of other operas by Czech composers at the Viennese Stadttheater (Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride], Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa/Její pastorkyňa* [Jenůfa/Her Stepdaughter], Antonín Dvořák's *Dimitrij* and Karel Boleslav Jirák's *Žena a Bůh* [The Woman and the God]). Vítězslav Novák's desire to present himself as an opera composer in the former Austro-Hungarian capital was at least fulfilled through the Czechoslovak ensemble. In this study, I will attempt to interpret the contemporary reception of Vítězslav Novák's operas *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] from their premieres to their infrequent foreign productions.<sup>5</sup>

### Premieres in Prague

#### *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp]

Vítězslav Novák began working on his first opera convinced that his compositional and orchestration technique allowed him to “compose an opera over the text of the original, without any changes or abridging,”<sup>6</sup> that is, compose it over prose. In the history of Czech music, this was the third ‘literaturoper’, after Janáček's *Jenůfa* (1903) and Otakar Ostrčil's comedic one-act opera *The Bud* [Poupě] (1911), to which *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] was often compared. For Novák's contemporaries, it was surprising that he chose the cheerful subject of Ladislav Stroupežnický's 1883 play of the same

4 Novák was criticised for not adhering to the rules of opera. K. B. Jirák, for example, notes that his operas, rather than being dramatic musical works, are – formally and structurally speaking – symphonies. See JIRÁK, K. B. Die moderne tschechische Oper. In *Der Auftakt*, 1930, Vol. 10, Issue 7 – 8, p. 183.

5 *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was performed as late as 1931, in Ljubljana.

6 NOVÁK, V. Jak jsem se stal operním skladatelem [How I Became an Opera Composer]. In *Divadlo*, 1940 – 1941, Vol. 27, p. 29.

name, as humour was nowhere to be found in his prior, predominantly serious, work. The choice of genre may have also been surprising considering his then-recent artistic failure, which, as Novák himself admitted left him deeply wounded. On the other hand, it made sense for a composer with no prior experience in large-scale musical theatre to choose a one-act comic opera. Additionally, the familial theme of the play matched Novák's life at the time, as, after his marriage to Marie Prášilová, he was awaiting the birth of his son. Ladislav Stroupežnický's intimate, conversation-based play which is devoid of any major narrative development and which, at its core, is built on the shaky premise of a conjugal jealousy plot initiated by the mischief of the couple's son, Petřík (the titular "imp"), did not provide much artistic potential to Vítězslav Novák. Novák musicalised the play's naïve (perhaps even dull) dialogue, presented in awkward pseudo-archaic Czech, verbatim. He provided musical illustration to the comic scenes and responded to the on-stage events and dialogue using various motifs, adapted to suit the current situation. The music is mostly made up of minor motifs that underline the conversation without ever playing directly over it. Although the composer uses several leitmotifs for some of the characters or situations, including a periodically recurring tone painting of pouring wine, this is not a consistent application of Wagnerian leitmotifs – instead, the leitmotifs follow Brahmsian approaches of motivic development, which Vítězslav Novák had previously mastered in his chamber or orchestral works.

*Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] was first performed on 10 October 1915 at the Czech National Theatre in Prague, in a rendition from the head of the opera, Karel Kovařovic, and with a cast that included some of the leading Czech singers of the time.<sup>7</sup> Václav Štěpán<sup>8</sup> noted the weaknesses of the original play in his paper, published in the journal *Hudební revue* after the opera's premiere.<sup>9</sup> Although watching the original play gave him the "impres-

7 The original cast of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] at the Czech National Theatre was: Kryštof of Švamberk – Emil Pollert; Eliška – Gabriela Horvátová; Petřík – Ema Miřiovská; Salomena – Věra Pivoňková; Markéta – Marie Šlechtová; Mikuláš Dačický of Heslov – Antonín Lebeda; Michálek – Marie Rysková.

8 Václav Štěpán (1889 – 1944) studied composition under Vítězslav Novák between 1904 and 1909. He is the author of a number of analytical studies, mainly of the works of Vítězslav Novák and Josef Suk, which were later published in ŠTĚPÁN, V. *Novák a Suk* [Novák and Suk]. Praha : HMUB, 1945. He also paid great attention to Novák's work as a pianist.

9 ŠTĚPÁN, V. *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp]. In *Hudební revue*, October 1915, Vol. 9, Issue 1, pp. 32 – 36.

sion of awkward naïveté,” he praised Vítězslav Novák’s music, which is “so perfect, so thrilling, that it made the characters sympathetic and the situations engaging.”<sup>10</sup> The music covered up the shortcomings of the libretto, and, according to Václav Štěpán, Vítězslav Novák achieved this by being able to musically capture the personality of each character, every minor shift in the mood and situation much better “than the generally clumsy text.”<sup>11</sup> Václav Štěpán was convinced that Vítězslav Novák did an excellent job with his first opera, both on the dramatic and the theatrical level, noting the excellent declamation and intelligibility of each word. The fact that this conversational play only enabled Vítězslav Novák to demonstrate his masterful musical development “in punctuation pauses,” that the harmony was much simpler in comparison to his symphonic works and that the polyphonic setting is almost absent, came as a result of the simple nature of the original. In spite of this, the orchestra “shines and glows” in places. Václav Štěpán remains loyal in his sympathy towards Vítězslav Novák’s work and applauds his first foray into the opera world. “Zvíkovský rarášek [The Zvíkov Imp] is the first major Czech opera to grace the stage of the National Theatre in recent times and its dramatic qualities make it a contender to be one of the best Czech operas of all time.”<sup>12</sup> Václav Štěpán (much like Vítězslav Novák) praised Karel Kovařovic’s rendition. His criticism was reserved for the direction and the set design, which was all over the place in terms of form and colour and which, according to Václav Štěpán, could not meet the high demands of the time.

*Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] (as well as Vítězslav Novák’s following operas) came under sharp criticism from the musicologist and historian Zdeněk Nejedlý,<sup>13</sup> who was convinced that Novák’s decision to write operas came as a result of his growing desire for praise. In reality, however, these operas represented a decline in Novák’s oeuvre, already foreshadowed by *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt] cantata, and they brought essentially no substantial change in Novák’s compositional style: “Novák, in his turn to op-

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10 Ibid., p. 33.

11 Ibid., p. 34.

12 Ibid., p. 35.

13 Nejedlý’s critique of the premiere of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] was published in the journal *Smetana* (NEJEDLÝ, Z. Vítězslava Nováka “Zvíkovský rarášek” [Vítězslav Novák’s “The Zvíkov Imp”]. In *Smetana*, 19 November 1915, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 1 – 5, 19 November 1915), and was later included in a collection of papers about Novák’s work (NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák: Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews]. Praha : Melantrich, 1921).



era, has not been able to say anything new that we have not yet encountered in his preceding works.”<sup>14</sup> Zdeněk Nejedlý particularly reproached Vítězslav Novák for not taking inspiration from Bedřich Smetana, who provided Czech music with a true model of what comic opera should be. While Václav Štěpán praised Vítězslav Novák’s ability to musically express the essence of the characters and dramatic situations, Zdeněk Nejedlý talks about a faulty “descriptive method” through which the composer “illustrates everything that is spoken about in the text – not the psychic content of what is said, merely the total externalities.”<sup>15</sup> In his view, Novák merely provided a basic musical illustration of Ladislav Stroupežnický’s text, to which he attaches some of his musical ideas. Zdeněk Nejedlý found *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] devoid of any musical architecture and felt “a severe lack of real music.”<sup>16</sup> Zdeněk Nejedlý also observed a decline in the compositional technique, saying that, in the score, he cannot hear the author of the symphonic works that he had praised before. He is aware that the musical expression had to be simplified by Novák to fit the genre of the comedic opera, “but that should not be a reason for this simplicity to turn in places into outright poverty.”<sup>17</sup> He thought that Novák could not distinguish between musical expression and mere tone painting. He also criticised the fragmentary character of the whole of the opera, noting the absence of dramatic polyphony. Zdeněk Nejedlý, who was also a strong critic of Antonín Dvořák’s dramatic work, argued that Novák’s compositional approach is even worse than the already unacceptable approach of Antonín Dvořák: “in his [Dvořák’s] operas, we feel that he wanted to express the dramatic situation with music, which tried to be dramatic in its mood (...). Dvořák, in short, at least had the goal of making real dramatic music, whereas Vítězslav Novák in ‘*The Zvíkov Imp*’ does not share this goal. Instead, he merely illustrates the words (...).”<sup>18</sup> Soon after its creation, Zdeněk Nejedlý already considered Vítězslav Novák’s first foray into opera to be the weakest of the composer’s longer works, noting also that Novák should not give much credence to the potentially positive responses from other critics and the public – the “modern and cheap clamour for Novák” may only serve to confuse the

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14 NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák: Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews], p. 181.

15 Ibid., p. 182.

16 Ibid., p. 184.

17 Ibid., p. 186.

18 Ibid., pp. 187 – 188.

composer.<sup>19</sup> He almost considers it a slight that it was Novák's opera, rather than any other work presented at the National Theatre that received the exceptional orchestral performance under the direction of Karel Kovařovic. Despite his previous claims about the musical simplicity of the work, he praised Kovařovic's diligent rendition of all the sound and motivic details that "the score of 'The Imp' is full of."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the shortcomings of the score were "covered up" by the "sophisticated orchestra," although the singers had to manage Vítězslav Novák's problematic declamation in the singing parts – "instead of musical melodic phrases, we often hear sharp syllables that correspond to the word's stress pattern (...)." <sup>21</sup> Zdeněk Nejedlý eventually actually degrades Vítězslav Novák's opera to being mere stage music accompanying a theatrical performance when he calls it a one-act play by Ladislav Stroupežnický accompanied by the music of Novák: "If we laugh at something, we laugh at Stroupežnický's writing, but not Novák's composition, because his jokes (...) are difficult to discern and lacking in warmth."<sup>22</sup>

Although Vladimír Lébl argues in his monograph on Vítězslav Novák that "the criticism was entirely negative and, at best, ambivalent," there were other figures of the Prague music scene (beside Václav Štěpán) who supported Novák's first opera. From today's perspective of sober and detached art criticism, the review from one of the most influential Prague-based music critics of the time, Emanuel Chvála, appears particularly interesting. In contrast to Zdeněk Nejedlý, he considered the disciples of Antonín Dvořák (especially Josef Suk) to be the future of Czech music, an opinion for which he became the target of many diatribes from the much younger Zdeněk Nejedlý.<sup>23</sup> His

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19 Ibid., p. 189.

20 Ibid., p. 190.

21 Ibid., p. 190.

22 Ibid., p. 191.

23 Emanuel Chvála (1851 – 1924) was a contributing critic to the journals *Lumír*, *Posel z Prahy* and *Dalibor* – between 1880 and 1921 (under the signature -la) he wrote for the journals *Politik*, *Národní politika* and *Union*, which began to be published in 1907 following the cancellation of the German-language *Politik* (KARLÍK, F. – KOPECKÝ, J. (eds.). *Emanuel Chvála: Z mých hudebních pamětí* [Emanuel Chvála: My Memoirs of Music]. Olomouc : VUP, 2019, p. 10). Emanuel Chvála was praised for his unbiased criticism of the Czech musical scene in his German-language articles. He impartially placed himself between the Smetana camp and the Dvořák camp, which did not win him many supporters from either side. In 1912, however, Emanuel Chvála signed the so-called Protest, in which Dvořák's disciples and other important figures of Czech music strongly came out against the growing attacks of the "Smetana camp," headed by Zdeněk Nejedlý, on the personality and oeuvre of Antonín Dvořák.

review of the premiere of *Zvukovský rarášek* [The Zvukov Imp] found no issues with the opera – Emanuel Chvála found it surprising “that an artist who was previously mainly preoccupied with the pressing issues of living, feeling and desiring, that a musician who struggles and fights inside his soul” would choose the genre of comic opera. In this sense, Emanuel Chvála considers Vítězslav Novák’s one-act opera to be a “musical comedy in its truest sense” and Novák’s musicalisation an “unwavering success” in terms of how he was able to dramatically underscore the text without getting in its way. In contrast to Zdeněk Nejedlý, he does not think that Vítězslav Novák held back his musicality. He sees Novák’s creativity even in this work, “from his artistic intelligence, (...) from the uniqueness of his musical expression, which adorns the words with beautiful-sounding frills, from his witty musical archaisms, (...) from his sweet-smelling lyrical blossoms sprouting anywhere where the soil is conducive to lyricism.” In his musical capturing of the characters and individual scenes, Emanuel Chvála considers Vítězslav Novák a “genuine dramatist”. Unlike Zdeněk Nejedlý, he appreciates the declamation of the sung word, and that, in pursuit of total clarity, Novák can suppress his natural “symphonic lavishness,” “he conducts himself with decorum, sparingly applying his bright and mixed colours (...).”<sup>24</sup> In his memoirs, which Emanuel Chvála wrote years later and into which he incorporated his older critical articles, he mentions the criticism of Vítězslav Novák’s tone painting from his opponents (“the parties opposing him”), which, he wrote, the composer did not need to feel bad about – in fact, Emanuel Chvála notes, Vítězslav Novák’s art of musical characterisation contributed to the work’s dramatic qualities.<sup>25</sup>

One month after *Zvukovský rarášek* [The Zvukov Imp]’s Prague premiere, the German magazine *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* published a review from their Prague contributor, Dr. Viktor Joss,<sup>26</sup> in which he applauded the premiere of Vítězslav Novák’s opera as a true artistic experience, if only because Novák is the most prospective composer in Czech music who masterfully employs modern techniques. He describes Vítězslav Novák in superlatives, call-

24 -la [Emanuel Chvála]. *Zvukovský rarášek* [The Zvukov Imp]. In *Národní politika*, 1915, Vol. 33, Issue 283, p. 3, 12 October 1915. Emanuel Chvála simultaneously published his review of the opera in the German-language newspaper *Union*, 12 October 1915.

25 KARLÍK, F. – KOPECKÝ, J. (eds.). *Emanuel Chvála: Z mých hudebních pamětí* [Emanuel Chvála: My Memoirs of Music], p. 487.

26 Viktor Joss, sometimes written as Joß (1869 – 1942?) was a Prague German of Jewish descent, cultural columnist and litterateur.

ing him an orchestral virtuoso, excellent colourist and genius impressionist, the most qualified representative of absolute music who is also capable of respecting the original literary text. The reviewer particularly enjoyed the fact that the orchestra emphasised what was being sung rather than playing over it, as was (according to him) sometimes the case with modern composers. Joss views *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] as a landmark in Novák's artistic development and hopes that more large-scale dramatic works would follow this highly-promising one-act opera.<sup>27</sup>

### Lucerna [The Lantern]

Vítězslav Novák's second opera, *Karlštejn*, suffered an even greater rejection from Zdeněk Nejedlý. The work, composed during the war, was conceived by Novák and its librettist Otokar Fischer, who adapted the text of Jaroslav Vrchlický's play *Noc na Karlštejně* [A Night at Karlstein Castle], as a Czech national opera. Zdeněk Nejedlý questioned the sincerity of Vítězslav Novák's artistic display of patriotism, denied his ability to create "values as generally human as is that of nationality" and labelled the opera an artistic forgery.<sup>28</sup> Nejedlý claimed that Novák took advantage of the tense period of war to present himself as a national artist. He considered Novák's choice of Vrchlický's play immoral: "Can an artist use the popularity of someone else's work for the benefit of his own art, warming himself against someone else's fire?"<sup>29</sup> He entirely panned the musical component of the work, which he considered below even that of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp], saying that "Novák has never before written music so bland."<sup>30</sup> He criticised the lack of stylistic unity, as a result of which Zdeněk Nejedlý considered *Karlštejn* "another point in the chart of Novák's decline (...)."<sup>31</sup>

In the introduction to his detailed analysis of the *Lucerna* [The Lantern], published in the journal *Listy hudební matice*,<sup>32</sup> the Dvořák scholar Otakar

27 JOSS, V. "Der Burgkogold." In *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*, 12 November 1915 (only a clipping is available).

28 NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák. Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews], p. 198.

29 Ibid., p. 212.

30 Ibid., p. 215.

31 Ibid., p. 219.

32 ŠOUREK, O. Novákova "Lucerna" (několik poznámek o povaze díla) [Novák's "The Lantern": Some Notes on the Work]. In *Listy hudební matice*, 1923, Vol. 2, Issue 8 – 9, p. 189.

Šourek emphasised that Vítězslav Novák chose Alois Jirásek's play *Lucerna* [The Lantern] towards the end of the First World War not for its popularity, but rather for its Czech theme.<sup>33</sup> This was likely done out of the desire to prevent similar accusations to the ones Nejedlý hurled at him in the context of *Karlštejn* – that he was 'leeching off' of successful theatre plays. Novák only managed to secure Alois Jirásek's permission to musicalise his 1905 play on the second attempt, in 1918. Based on Jirásek's recommendation, the composer commissioned the creation of the libretto from Jirásek's son-in-law, Hanuš Jelínek. While Vladimír Lébl considers Hanuš Jelínek's adaptation of Alois Jirásek's play a success,<sup>34</sup> John Tyrrell is more critical, stating that, in places, it comes off as "singsong rhythmic periods", which is difficult to disagree with.<sup>35</sup> In Alois Jirásek's *Lucerna* [The Lantern], Vítězslav Novák was to musicalise a fairy-tale story set in the Czech past, which features not only stock fairy-tale characters, but also the social themes of material poverty and rebellion against the aristocracy. Vítězslav Novák composed *Lucerna* [The Lantern] in an unusually short time – it was written between Christmas 1921 and 6 February 1922 and by the end of June of the same year, he had instrumented the opera. *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was described by Otakar Šourek as a work of "rapid, fresh inspiration and sunny inner cheerfulness" that shared similarities with a number of smaller works that were created in close proximity to it. "It is not a drama in the general sense, redeemed by crises and struggles, but a happy line-up of several fabulously warm and adorable images (...)." <sup>36</sup> Even in this opera, Vítězslav Novák employed the technique of motivic development, which he perfectly controlled (and never truly abandoned) to create organically-built musical spaces, occasionally broken up by individual songs. The kaleidoscopic order of the individual situations is underlined by the changing vocal forms – ariosos are followed by declamations and there is even space for melodrama.

Vítězslav Novák's compositional method, which Zdeněk Nejedlý pejoratively described in his reflections on *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] as "musical colouring," is considered by Otakar Šourek to be an excellent instru-

33 Otakar Šourek's four-volume monograph *Život a dílo Antonína Dvořáka* [The Life and Work of Antonín Dvořák] was published by Hudební matice Umělecké besedy between 1922 and 1933.

34 LÉBL, V. *Vítězslav Novák: Život a dílo* [Vítězslav Novák: His Life and Work], p. 206.

35 TYRRELL, J. *Czech Opera*, p. 91.

36 ŠOUREK, O. Novákova „*Lucerna*“ (několik poznámek o povaze díla) [Novák's "The Lantern": Some Notes on the Work], p. 189.

ment for masterful musical depiction of the moods, words and actions on stage, a “well-fitting drawing” which is developed in *Lucerna* [The Lantern] into its own creative theme.<sup>37</sup> Otakar Šourek marvels at the “varied and complex” interplay of leitmotifs, the variety and diversity of which is notably richer compared to the composer’s first opera. He praises the structural logic of the musical aspect, which is organically developed through the motifs and leitmotifs. A distinctive feature of the opera is its striking plainness, which, according to Šourek, is also “an extraordinary advantage of the work.” This simplicity is only superficial, however, as he demonstrates through his analysis of Vítězslav Novák’s daring harmony, and even observing polytonality.<sup>38</sup> Šourek truly believed in Novák’s abilities as an opera composer. He considered *Lucerna* [The Lantern] to be a boon to Czech opera and lamented the underappreciation of the composer’s earlier operas.

Similar to *Karlštejn*, Vítězslav Novák thought of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] as a national opera, which is why it often musically evokes the opera tradition of Bedřich Smetana and, more explicitly, Antonín Dvořák’s *Rusalka*. Vladimír Lébl speculates about Novák’s demonstrative turn towards the past, showing the interconnectedness of the national tradition, through which he wanted to comment on the post-war developments in Czech music.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the opera’s traditionalism was met largely with negative reactions or complete disinterest from the musical sphere (and not merely its younger members). One of the many reflections of the work was Otakar Šourek’s aforementioned analysis which shares many similarities with his review in the newspaper *Venkov*. In it, lauded *Lucerna* [The Lantern] as a “decisive upswing” not only for its creator but for Czech opera more broadly. Otakar Šourek, invoking the majority opinion of those who saw the premiere, was convinced that the musicalisation improved upon Alois Jirásek’s original. Although he is generally positive, his article is critical in parts – Šourek considered the final act to be the weakest one, not only due to the protracted and fragmentary libretto, but also because “the composer’s imagination did not take full advantage of the opportunities.”<sup>40</sup>

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37 Ibid., p. 191.

38 Ibid., pp. 198 – 199.

39 LÉBL, V. *Vítězslav Novák: Život a dílo* [Vítězslav Novák: His Life and Work], p. 207.

40 O.Š. [Otokar Šourek]. Vítězslav Novák: *Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Venkov*, 1923, Vol. 18, Issue 111, pp. 3 – 4, 15 May 1923.



Some of Vítězslav Novák's supporters claimed that he refused to be threatened by negative criticism. Although Jaroslav Borecký tried to defend Novák's approach to opera, he did admit some past deficiencies when he noted that Novák's style saw 'improvements' in the third opera: the declamation is more fluent and does not strictly adhere to stress patterns. He considered the closed numbers, which Novák abundantly employed throughout *Lucerna* [The Lantern], to be appropriate for the genre of fairy-tale opera. Jaroslav Borecký had nothing against references and "national themes" that aim to assert the "the music's Czechness". Although even in this case, the orchestra mainly plays an illustrative role, Jaroslav Borecký believed that "the composer did not get lost in the details and colours – as was sometimes the case in his two prior operas – and created unified scenes." The reviewer also saw progress in the dramaturgy of the opera, which continually escalated over the opera's performance.<sup>41</sup>

In response to Vítězslav Novák's third opera, as well as Otakar Ostrčil's *Legenda z Erinu* [The Legend of Erin] and the premiere of Leoš Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová* [Katya Kabanova], Zdeněk Nejedlý published a lengthy analytical overview in the journal *Smetana*.<sup>42</sup> He was boundlessly enthusiastic about Otakar Ostrčil's work, which was understandable considering the significant role that Ostrčil played in Nejedlý's conception of Czech music's developmental history.<sup>43</sup> Although Zdeněk Nejedlý never truly understood Leoš Janáček's oeuvre, he did describe *Káťa Kabanová* [Katya Kabanova] as an "interesting document of late Czech verismo" and graciously found some examples of development in the musical aspect of the work.<sup>44</sup> Vítězslav Novák's opera received the least praise from Zdeněk Nejedlý. He referred to *Lucerna* [The Lantern] as naïve art that resembled the minor compositions for children that Vítězslav Novák was working on at the time. Zdeněk Nejedlý considered this "desired primitivism" and fairy-tale naïveté insufficiently authentic. *Lucerna* [The Lantern] exhibited all the dramatic weaknesses of the previous operas and, moreover, was very poor on a musical level – "artistically, it is a backwards turn to the art of yes-

41 Dr. J. B. [Jaroslav Borecký]. Vítězslav Novák: *Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Národní politika*, 1923, Vol. 41, Issue 132, pp. 1 – 2, 15 May 1923.

42 NEJEDLÝ, Z. Letošní novinky Národního divadla v Praze [This Year's New Works at the Prague National Theatre]. In *Smetana*, Vol. 13, Issue 3 – 4, pp. 41 – 45 and Issue 5, pp. 70 – 72.

43 According to Zdeněk Nejedlý, this line of progress was comprised of Bedřich Smetana, Zdeněk Fibich, Josef Bohuslav Foerster and Otakar Ostrčil.

44 NEJEDLÝ, Z. Letošní novinky Národního divadla v Praze [This Year's New Works at the Prague National Theatre]. In *Smetana*, Vol. 13, Issue 5, p. 72.



teryear.” “It is as if we could not even make out Novák in this work, not only because his composition is different (...). The music of ‘*Lucerna* [The Lantern]’ is extremely thin.” Zdeněk Nejedlý, who had been viewing Vítězslav Novák as an artist in an ever-deepening creative crisis ever since his *Svatební košile* [Wedding Shirt] cantata, believed that the opera was another failed attempt at escaping this crisis – “he capitulates to his own forward-thinking art and seeks redemption through looking back.”<sup>45</sup>

Josef Bartoš, a disciple and close associate of Zdeněk Nejedlý, rejected *Lucerna* [The Lantern] in even more explicit terms in his review of the premiere, published in the Prague-based German-language newspaper *Prager Presse*. Similar to Zdeněk Nejedlý, Josef Bartoš considered Hanuš Jelínek’s adaptation of Alois Jirásek’s play (which, he also says, suffered as a result of being musicalised) as an ill-fated one. He also criticised Vítězslav Novák’s ‘illustrative’ method, in which he enveloped the words in music. Noting the apparent lack of a dramatic structure, Josef Bartoš asks: “Why does [Zdeněk Novák] musicalise plays when it goes against his abilities?” He also repeated Zdeněk Nejedlý’s earlier comparison to Antonín Dvořák, who, although he was no music dramatist, had a ‘major’ gift for the dramatic. Like Zdeněk Nejedlý, Josef Bartoš also emphasised Zdeněk Novák’s attempt to compose very simple music – creating popular melodies to fit a popular text. His music is bland and inexpressive, and he was unable to musicalise even the most favourable scenes in a way that would “move the heart.” Josef Bartoš calls *Lucerna* [The Lantern] a “stillborn child” and a “music-school work,” a description that clearly offended Zdeněk Novák, since he noted it down in his memoirs.<sup>46</sup>

Otakar Šourek was dissatisfied with the National Theatre’s performance of *Lucerna* [The Lantern], saying that they did not give it enough attention and respect, considering the significance of the work and its creator for Czech art. He mainly criticised the orchestra, the direction and performances of some of the singers.<sup>47</sup> One of the main roles – that of the Miller – had to be recast at the last minute because the original actor, Václav Novák, got into a fight with one member of the National Theatre ensemble and, despite Vítězslav Novák’s loud protest, was stripped of the role as punishment. The vocally weaker baritone

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> BARTOŠ, J. Eine neue tschechische Oper. In *Prager Presse*, 15 May 1923 (there is only a newspaper clipping available in Zdeněk Novák’s inheritance).

<sup>47</sup> O.Š. [Otakar Šourek]. Vítězslav Novák: *Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Venkov*, pp. 3 – 4.

Štěpán Chodounský, who had to quickly prepare for the role, was indisposed for three weeks, however, after the premiere. This meant that the opera could not be immediately reprised, which, according to Vítězslav Novák, led to the public perception that it flopped.<sup>48</sup> Vítězslav Novák put the blame squarely on the musical director of the National Theatre's opera, Otakar Ostrčil, who was unable to assert his authority at the theatre and ensure a smooth production. To add to this, Vítězslav Novák had been convinced for a while that Otakar Ostrčil was biased against his operas, a theory that had supposedly been confirmed to him by two 'higher-ups' from the National Theatre who gave him the option of selecting a different musical director for the opera. Vítězslav Novák rejected, however, the offer out of respect for Otakar Ostrčil, supposedly because he did not want to threaten his then-precarious position at the theatre.<sup>49</sup> This affair further deepened the conflict between Vítězslav Novák and Otakar Ostrčil, which came to a head in 1930, during celebrations of Novák's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to Otakar Šourek, Jaroslav Borecký rated Otakar Ostrčil's rendition of the opera positively. Čeněk Kvíčala's set design was in accordance with both "the necessity for progress and the unchangeable laws of true taste," and he also praised the "fortunate" direction of Vladimír Wuršer and some of the singers' performances. In Jaroslav Borecký's view, the Prague premiere was a "resounding" success.<sup>51</sup> Josef Bartoš – who, according to Novák, was a "very close acquaintance of Otakar Ostrčil"<sup>52</sup> – attributed the audience's positive re-

48 NOVÁK, V. *O sobě a o jiných* [About Myself and Others]. Praha : Supraphon, 1970, p. 24.

49 Ibid., p. 239.

50 For this occasion, the National Theatre prepared a cycle of Zdeněk Novák's dramatic works, which ended up getting moved to December to make space for a different birthday cycle – that of Zdeněk Fibich. As such, there was very little time to prepare the individual productions and Novák thought it made no sense to show all of his stage works in the span of three short weeks. He told Otakar Ostrčil and the entire National Theatre Company that he would be distancing himself from the project – he attended neither the preparations nor the performances. Using his own money, Zdeněk Novák eventually published a text called *Vítězslav Novák contra Otakar Ostrčil*, in which he detailed the entire history of his conflict with Otakar Ostrčil, from the unsuccessful production of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] to the cycle of productions of his stage works that was planned in honour of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. For more details, see KŘUPKOVÁ, L. The Consequences of Conflict in the Czech Musical World: Zdeněk Fibich as a Point of Contention in Novák's Polemics with Nejedlý. In KOPECKÝ, J. – KŘUPKOVÁ, L. (eds.). *Czech Music around 1900*. Hillsdale, NY : Boydell & Brewer, Pendragon Press, 2017, p. 283.

51 Dr. J. B. [Jaroslav Borecký]. Vítězslav Novák: *Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern], pp. 1 – 2.

52 NOVÁK, V. *O sobě a o jiných* [About Myself and Others], p. 243.

ception of the opera during its premiere to the chief musical director, under whose leadership the orchestra and the singers gave an excellent performance. Nevertheless, the reviewer provided an even simpler explanation for the loud praise: "We know our theatre-goers: they always demand to see the author on stage."<sup>53</sup>

The composer, however, had trust in the favour of the public and was convinced that Otakar Ostrčil and Zdeněk Nejedlý (and those around them) were conspiring against him. Even years later, he recounted in his memoirs that *Lucerna* [The Lantern] had six reruns in its first year, only four in the second, "after which it was deposited into my opera's mausoleum until the next decade of my life (...). No work of mine ever brought me such hopeful joy and such bitter disappointment."<sup>54</sup> Despite the composer's great expectations, *Lucerna* [The Lantern] did not become a mainstay.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Productions of Vítězslav Novák's Operas at the Slovak National Theatre**

Although Vítězslav Novák had a strong personal and artistic connection to Slovakia, it took a relatively long time before his operas were performed at the Slovak National Theatre, established in 1920. Novák's first opera was preceded in Bratislava by a production of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] in March 1928, led by Oskar Nedbal, directed by Zdeněk Ruth-Markov and with set design from Ján Ladvenica. According to Antonín Hořejš, the resident critic at *Slovenský denník*, the Bratislava premiere "was overall much more heartfelt in its mood and performances than the Prague one, which seemed cold by comparison" and the opera was received by the audience "with unprecedented enthusiasm." The composer, who enjoyed great popularity in Slovakia during his lifetime, attended the rehearsals and the premiere in person and, a day before the premiere, even gave a lecture about *Lucerna* [The Lantern] at the university.<sup>56</sup> Antonín Hořejš thought that the simpler the means Vítězslav Novák

53 BARTOŠ, J. Eine neue tschechische Oper. In *Prager Presse*, 15 May 1923 [there is only a newspaper clipping available in Zdeněk Novák's inheritance].

54 NOVÁK, V. *O sobě a o jiných* [About Myself and Others], p. 243.

55 Looking at the statistics, the state of the productions of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] during the composer's lifetime is not as dire as it may seem from Vítězslav Novák's descriptions. At the Czech National Theatre, there were productions of *The Lantern* in the years 1923 – 1924, 1930 – 1933, 1940 – 1941 and 1945 – 1951.

56 Anonymous. In *Slovenský denník*, 1928, Vol. 11, Issue 51, p. 2, 1 March 1928.

used in his opera, the more effective it was. He tried to understand why the composer, whose prior work was “often focused on metaphysical issues,” picked this simple and folksy theme. His explanation was that Novák’s deep romanticism found inspiration mainly in natural imagery, which intrinsically includes the world of fairy tales. Antonín Hořejš called Vítězslav Novák both a European who “understood several Western cultures” and a Slav “who was breathing the air between the Bohemian Forest and the Tatra Mountains.” In calling Novák a fusion of the two worlds – the Western/intellectual world and the Slavic/emotional world – he employed a common cliché. This was supposedly what differentiated him from other Czech composers. He admired Novák for his art of characterisation, musical wit, motivic work and the rich diversity of his melodies. The reviewer also left some space for criticism, however, noting that the composer focused too much on individual scenes at the expense of the whole – “some scenes do not logically fit into the overall work and are dramatically lagging behind others.” As soon as he says this, however, he walks back his critical tone and talks about “Novák’s marvellous compositional technique.” He explained that the “threads of the whole” are tearing due to the abundance of beautiful music and the work that was put into the minute details. He also admired the orchestra’s “exquisite sound.” Alongside this, he also noted the opera’s simplicity and the inspiration it took from older models, which reveals that the reviewer is not entirely consistent in his opinions.<sup>57</sup> Antonín Hořejš mostly praised the singing and acting performances, for which the composer was to be applauded, as he was the one responsible for melodically and vocally “adapting the characters for the human voice.” Although Oskar Nedbal’s rendition did not contain detailed subtleties, it was generally good, according to the critic. The only aspect he found lacking was the set design and he chastised the theatre for being overly spendthrift when it came to such an excellent piece of work.<sup>58</sup>

57 On the critical work of Antonín Hořejš (1901 – 1969) in Bratislava, the style of his opera reviews and his activities in the art industry, see the analyses of Jana Laslavíková. LA-SLAVÍKOVÁ, J. Antonín Hořejš – jeho umeleckopriemyselné aktivity na Slovensku v 20. a 30. rokoch 20. storočia a ich odraz v autorových operných kritikách [Antonín Hořejš – His Activities in the Slovak Art Industry in the 1920s and 1930s and Reflections in the Author’s Opera Criticism]. In *Opus Musicum*, 2017, Vol. 49, Issue 3, pp. 42 – 57; LA-SLAVÍKOVÁ, J. Reflexia opery v medzivojnovom období v Bratislave v referátoch Antonína Hořejša [Interwar Reflections on Operas in Bratislava in the Essays of Antonín Hořejš]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2017, Vol. 65, Issue 2, pp. 142 – 157.

58 -ah- [Antonín Hořejš]. Vítězslav Novák: Lucerna [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Slovenský denník*, 1928, Vol. 11, Issue 60, pp. 1 – 2, 11 March 1928.

In February 1929, *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] arrived on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre (14 years after its Prague premiere) in the rendition of Karel Nedbal, directed by Bohuš Vilím and with set design from Ján Ladvenica. Judging by his review, Antonín Hořejš was aware of how the opera was received in Prague, where it did not receive unanimous praise. Namely, he was familiar with the ideas of Zdeněk Nejedlý, although he was unwilling to be as negative towards Vítězslav Novák in an environment that was much more supportive of his work than that of Prague. Nevertheless, Hořejš's review is more reserved compared to that of *Lucerna* [The Lantern]. Although he mentions the positive reception of the work by local audiences, he nevertheless emphasises that the success belongs primarily to Ladislav Stroupežnický's original play: "For all the interesting features of Novák's music, it seems that the real playwright here was Stroupežnický, while Novák acted merely as a colourist and illustrator (...)." Somewhat aphoristically and without any explanation, the reviewer exclaims: "Conversational opera! Lacking ariosity!" Although there is a certain absence of operatic drama, the reviewer does admit that Vítězslav Novák is greatly aided by the sound-rich orchestral stream. And, as if the reviewer became suddenly shocked by his own negativity, he adds that the work has "great musical value, which I must show my respect for, despite the dramatic shortcomings." Hořejš ended up focusing primarily on the Slovak National Theatre's production of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp]. He lauded Karl Nedbal's rendition and only expressed some reservations towards the comedic acting performances of some of the singers.<sup>59</sup>

### Responses to Vítězslav Novák's Operas Abroad

In 1924, the young ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre received a great opportunity to present itself internationally thanks to Oskar Nedbal, under whose direction they performed Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride] and Antonín Dvořák's *Rusalka* in Barcelona and Madrid. Five years later, he made his first artistic tour to Vienna and presented himself in the Wiener Stadttheater with two drama plays (*Morálka paní Dulské* [The Morality of Mrs. Dulská] by Gabriela Zapolska and Gerhart Hauptmann's *Bobří kožich* [The Beaver Coat]), Pyotr Tchai-

59 -ah- [Antonín Hořejš]. Z bratislavskej opery. Vítězslav Novák: Zvíkovský rarášek. In *Slovenský denník*, 1929, Vol. 12, Issue 62, p. 2, 14 March 1929.

kovsky's ballet *Louskáček* [The Nutcracker] and eight opera performances. Alongside Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Zlatý kohoutek* [The Golden Cockerel], the Bratislava opera presented a number of Czech opera productions: Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa*, Antonín Dvořák's *Jakobín Jakobín* [The Jacobin] and *Dimitrij*, Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride], Karel Boleslav Jirák's *Žena a Bůh* [The Woman and the God] and the two Vítězslav Novák operas that were already part of the Slovak National Theatre's repertory – *Lucerna* [The Lantern] and *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] – which closed off the guest performances in Vienna. The Slovak National Theatre was presented to the Viennese audience as a “prominent” stage<sup>60</sup> with a “highly-disciplined” ensemble, akin to those found in the national theatres in Prague and Brno.<sup>61</sup> The main ‘draw’ was supposed to be the name of Oskar Nedbal, whose successful work as the head of the Tonkünstler-Orchester had not been forgotten even 11 years after the fall of the monarchy. Oskar Nedbal, who was talked about as a skilled and well-travelled artist perfectly aware of the requirements for good theatre, was mainly given credit for the ensemble's ability to develop and promote national art at an advanced level and its rich repertoire, which was on the level of much larger theatres. According to local critics, the Bratislava theatre brought talented singers who were able to cooperate and work out all the small nuances of their parts. The choir and the orchestra also did not lag far behind, although the strings were rather weak and, given the conditions, the direction was “making the best of it.” “The smooth and cool routine is replaced by the enthusiasm of ambitious youth,” one reviewer wrote while lamenting that the performances that feature both well-known and obscure works of Slavic composers – and which were, moreover, performed by such a prospective ensemble – had such low attendance.<sup>62</sup>

While the Viennese performance of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] went unnoticed by Viennese critics, the performance of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] received some reviews. Vítězslav Novák was not an unknown composer in Vienna – his works were performed in the Austro-Hungarian metropolis prior to the war, and in 1912, he received an offer to teach at the presti-

60 Anonymous. Das Gastspiel des slowakischen Nationaltheaters in Wien. In *Der Tag*, 1929, Vol. 8, Issue 2266, p. 6, 18 April 1929.

61 Anonymous. Gastspiel des slowakischen Nationaltheater aus Bratislava in Wien. In *Die Stunde*, 1929, Vol. 7, Issue 1831, p. 7, 18 April 1929.

62 L. Die Preßburger Slowakische Oper in Stadttheater. In *Neue Freie Presse*, 1929, Vol. 66, Issue 23219, pp. 1 – 2, 6 May 1929.



gious Vienna Academy of Music. In a review of the Viennese performance of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] by the Slovak National Theatre ensemble from 1929, Vítězslav Novák is referred to as a leading figure of modern Czech music – this was at a time, however, when not even his loyal Czech admirers would refer to him in such a way. The review also mentions his older works, in which he combined the “melodies of his people with German precision” and compositional techniques inspired either by Johannes Brahms or Max Reger.<sup>63</sup> The Viennese critic was also surprised by the apparent lightness of Vítězslav Novák’s musical expression in the first opera and the simple direction of voices and fluent parlendo – features he also found in *Lucerna* [The Lantern]. The reviewer, who appears to have been more of a conservative persuasion, praised the facts that the flexible and logically conducted sung melody was carried over the motivic structures of the orchestra and that the dramatic personae were largely characterised through their singing voice, which, according to him, is something modern opera does not value particularly highly.<sup>64</sup> The reception of the opera suffered from the fact that it was performed one day after Leoš Janáček’s *Jenůfa*, which naturally led to comparisons between the two. The author of the *Neue Freie Presse* review described Vítězslav Novák’s pre-war chamber works, song cycles and symphonic poems as “powerful art of free and passionate individuality,” while also noting that the most appealing of the composer’s works were the ones inspired by the melodies and rhythms of Slovak and Moravian folk songs. In this, the reviewer observed some similarities between Vítězslav Novák and Leoš Janáček, although he noted that, in *Lucerna* [The Lantern], Novák lacks some of Janáček’s dramatical skills. Novák’s opera is similar to Janáček’s in how the declamatory principle conflicts with the melodiousness of the orchestra, which the reviewer praises for its impressionistic colouring, subtle background nuances and occasional witty twists. Unfortunately, Vítězslav Novák stays bound within this lyrical space even in the parts of the fairy tale that demand a more powerful dramatic escalation or some sort of a theatrical effect. The reviewer described the musical aspect of the opera as the music of a well-educated composer who combined national elements with those of Richard Wagner and remained closely tied to Romanticism. Although the reviewer was not able to fully comprehend the convoluted plot of the opera

63 H.E.H. Die Laterne. Oper von Vítězslav Novák. In *Wiener Zeitung*, 1929, Vol. 226, Issue 106, p. 7, 7 May 1929.

64 Ibid.



due to it being performed in Czech, he was able to understand some of its broader strokes.<sup>65</sup>

The Viennese critic correctly described Vítězslav Novák's operatic work, which, despite its good composition and a number of musically-appealing segments, stylistically remained in the nineteenth century. This fact was also apparent to the publisher Universal Edition Wien, which had an exclusive contract for publishing Novák's works between 1910 and 1920. After this initial contract expired, the publisher expressed no interest in further renewing it. Their decision was likely largely influenced by Vítězslav Novák's opera work, which did not fit their focus. After Emil Hertzka became the director in 1907, they began to focus primarily on the works of contemporary progressive authors, with Leoš Janáček as their main Czech composer after the First World War. *Zvůkovský rarášek* [The Zvůkov Imp] was published by Universal Edition in 1915, but only in a piano reduction and with Czech lyrics. The composer wanted *Zvůkovský rarášek* [The Zvůkov Imp] to be performed in Germany, which is why he repeatedly asked director Emil Hertzka to help him promote the opera in Vienna and Germany.<sup>66</sup> A major obstacle to this was the lack of a score with German lyrics, which Universal Edition refused to put money into, despite Vítězslav Novák offering to secure the high-quality services of Max Brod. Towards the end of the 1920s, Novák asked Emil Hertzka to put out the orchestral materials for *Zvůkovský rarášek* [The Zvůkov Imp]. He explained that there was only a single manuscript, which had to be sent from Prague to Brno and Bratislava so that the opera could be performed. In the upcoming season, there were planned productions of the opera in Ostrava and Olomouc and Novák doubted that the directorate of the National Theatre would make the orchestral material available to these smaller theatres, as the damage the manuscript would very likely sustain could put their future productions at risk. He therefore believed it necessary that Universal Edition (the copyright holder) publish the orchestral material. He suggested that the existing manuscript be sent from Bratislava to Vienna, where it could be copied over the summer and subsequently brought back to Prague by Oskar Nedbal.<sup>67</sup> Vítězslav Novák, perhaps intentionally, wrote this

65 L. Die Preßburger Slowakische Oper in Stadttheater. In *Neue Freie Presse*, 1929, Vol. 66, Issue 23219, p. 2, 6 May 1929.

66 See, for example, Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 4 February 1917. See KŘUPKOVÁ, L. *Vítězslav Novák – Universal Edition Wien. Korespondence 1910 – 1935 / Die Korrespondenz 1910 – 1935*. Olomouc : VUP, 2007, p. 189.

67 Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 8 June 1929. See *ibid.*, pp. 239 – 240.

letter soon after the opera's introduction in Vienna, although it is not known whether members of the publishing house even attended the performance. In his reply to Novák, Hertzka admits that if the opera is performed this frequently, it should definitely have new orchestral material produced for it and that they will try and confirm whether the theatres do, indeed, plan on producing it. Subsequent correspondence between Vítězslav Novák and Universal Edition does not discuss this matter further. We do know, however, what the result of the negotiations was, as to this day, the score of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] has not been published in print.

Universal Edition never ended up showing any interest in *Lucerna* [The Lantern]. Emil Hertzka did not attend the Prague premiere and Vítězslav Novák's assurance that *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was a great success (which seems to not have been entirely the case, given what we have described above) was not enough to convince him to attend the repeat performances. Novák later sent Hertzka the piano reduction published in *Hudební matice Umělecké besedy* along with some clippings of reviews of the opera – although it is somewhat safe to assume that these did not include the reviews from Zdeněk Nejedlý and Josef Bartoš. He again expressed his regrets that Emil Hertzka did not attend the premiere, because he wanted to talk to him about publishing the orchestral material of the opera, because the opera was poised to be a success. In November 1923, Vítězslav Novák tried to invite Emil Hertzka to the Brno premiere.<sup>68</sup> Two years later, he once again asked him to come see the opera: "It would be so nice if you would finally be willing to listen to my *Lantern* – perhaps in May, as it is going to be performed at the National Theatre with three recast roles."<sup>69</sup> The score for *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was also never published.

## Conclusion

During the 1930 National Theatre production of Vítězslav Novák's dramatical works (which was meant to celebrate the occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday), the aforementioned long-term conflict between Vítězslav Novák and the director of the opera, Otakar Ostrčil, came to a head. This conflict eventually grew to include Zdeněk Nejedlý (along with his supporters),<sup>70</sup> to whom Novák ad-

68 Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 9 November 1923. See *ibid.*, p. 222.

69 Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 20 April 1925. See *ibid.*, p. 224.

70 On this, see note No. 50.

dressed his book *Zdeněk Nejedlý v zrcadle své vědecké kritiky* [Zdeněk Nejedlý in the Light of His Scientific Criticism].<sup>71</sup> The book is a reaction to Nejedlý's 1921 analysis of the Novák oeuvre published in the journal *Smetana*.<sup>72</sup> It is clear that the composer was frustrated with Zdeněk Nejedlý's criticism and the middling success of his operas. With the exception of revising his final opera, *Dědův odkaz* [The Grandfather's Legacy], for a 1943 production at the National Theatre, Vítězslav Novák gave up on the genre. In 1931, he began working on *Podzimní symfonie* [Autumn Symphony], which he completed three years later. This was followed both by new large orchestral works and new chamber compositions. Novák therefore returned to the things for which he received the most acclaim early on in his career. Following his death in 1949, his operas were produced only sporadically. *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was performed in the Slovak National Theatre as late as 1947. The last time it was performed in the Prague National Theatre was in 1964 and, in 2004, there was a production of it in the Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre in Pilsen. *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] received even fewer performances. The opera has not been performed at the Prague National Theatre since 1958. The last professional production was at the František Xaver Šalda Theatre in Liberec in 1982. There was a student performance of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] at the Bratislava Conservatory in 1984 and a recent one (in 2015) at the Prague Conservatory. The Slovak National Theatre has not brought the opera back since its 1929 introduction. Although Zdeněk Nejedlý definitely had a negative impact on Vítězslav Novák's operas and their later reception, it is difficult to know whether their fate would have been different were it not for Nejedlý's influence – Leoš Janáček's operas, after all, achieved success despite Nejedlý's scathing critique. After the introduction of *Jenůfa* at the National Theatre in Prague, Leoš Janáček became serious competition not only to Vítězslav Novák, but also to Otakar Ostrčil and Josef Bohuslav Foerster. Apart from their apparent dramatic imperfections and unfortunate librettos, Novák's operas also became stylistically and thematically outdated during the interwar period. Nevertheless, Vítězslav Novák's operas do not deserve to be forgotten – modern approaches to staging could perhaps find a way around these issues and help uncover the excellent music found even within these parts of Vítězslav Novák's oeuvre.

71 NOVÁK, V. *Zdeněk Nejedlý v zrcadle své vědecké kritiky* [Zdeněk Nejedlý in the Light of His Scientific Criticism]. Praha : A. Neubert, 1931.

72 NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák. Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews]. Praha : Melantrich, 1921.

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*The costume design for the production of *The Zvíkov Imp* at the Slovak National Theatre in 1929. The Theatre Institute Bratislava, 850/KN, 851/KN.*



*The scene design for the production of *The Zvíkov Imp* at the Slovak National Theatre in 1929. The Theatre Institute Bratislava, 903/SCN.*



## ”Cultural Exchange“ on the Stage of the Slovak National Theatre at the Time of the Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945)

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**Abstract:** New social-political conditions related to the creation of the independent Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945) at the time of the Second World War brought remarkable changes in the area of culture. Passing over the changes in the internal musical culture, which involve independence (including the newly formed Slovak Radio and its orchestra, and subsequently the Slovak National Theatre) and the birth of a new cultural institutions (e.g. the birth of the State Conservatory in 1941), the “cultural exchange” between the “allied” states was very important. This “cultural exchange” enriched through the appearance of orchestras, chamber ensembles, choirs, and soloists – the instrumentalists and singers – the cultural life of the capital Bratislava. The visiting artists came from the countries of the Axis states, or their allies. Despite the aggravating circumstances during the war, there were nevertheless very considerable events (the majority of the names of the artists is still well known in the cultural consciousness of Europe). On the stage of Slovak National Theatre, besides the appearance of the guest soloists or conductors, the cultural exchange took its form in the bringing of operatic novelties from „allied“ states to the scene: this included 4 operas during the war – *Peer Gynt* (1941) by the German Werner Egk (1901 – 1983), *Salambo* (1942) by Bulgarian composer Veselin Stoyanov (1902 – 1969), *La farsa amorosa* (1943) by Riccardo Zandonai (1883 – 1944) and *Ero s onoga svijeta* [Ero The Joker, 1943] by Croatian composer Jakov Gotovac (1895 – 1982). In this contribution I want to introduce these operas, their artistic realisations and perception in the cultural life of Bratislava.

**Keywords:** Slovak National Theatre, operatic dramaturgy, cultural exchange, Štefan Hoza, Werner Egk, Veselin Stoyanov, Riccardo Zandonai, Jakov Gotovac

### The Slovak National Theatre in 1939 – 1945

In 1939 – 1945, the Slovak National Theatre (SND) was an institution of cardinal importance – it was the only professional theatre in the whole state,



and its aim was to cultivate musical dramatic works. Although it had been in existence for twenty years when the First Czechoslovak Republic was dissolved, the "Slovakness" of the Slovak National Theatre posed a major problem. The Slovakisation of the institution was one of the greatest achievements of the new regime in cultural politics. Slovakisation was carried out, with various intensity, in the field of economics (the state interfered with the economic matters of the institution, but it figured as an entrepreneur, not as its founder), dramaturgy (all operas were staged in Slovak, so it was necessary to hastily translate the whole repertoire into Slovak) and human resources (but only to a certain extent – the young Slovak culture was not yet prepared to staff the theatre without foreign, especially Czech, help).

The political turmoil in the autumn of 1938 brought to an end the entire period, and the important one, in which the director Antonín Drašar (1880 – 1939), the conductor Karel Nedbal (1888 – 1964), and the stage director Viktor Šulc (1897 – 1945?) developed a new approach to staging operas in the 1930s, based on their inclination toward symbolic theatre, often with a political message, contrary to the conventional illustrativeness that dominated the theatre at that time (the most significant productions were *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* by Dmitri Shostakovitch (1935) and Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1936), in reaction to the actual political situation in Nazi Germany). Shortly after the Declaration of Slovak Autonomy (6 October 1938), the new government began to resolve, very vigorously, the question of the theatre. Director Antonín Drašar was accused of fraud and arrested on 15 October. After a short detention, he was expelled from Slovakia. On 22 October, a new director, lawyer Dušan Úradníček (1899 – 1985), a lawyer and governmental commissary for the Slovak National Theatre, was appointed to the theatre, who executed his duties without remuneration. Officially, the theatre was supervised by the Ministry of Education from 1 November. On 1 December 1938, a new head of the Opera Department, Josef Vincourek (1900 – 1976), and a new dramaturge, Štefan Hoza (1906 – 1982), who remained in office until 1945, were appointed. Practically, the whole theatre was led by Štefan Hoza<sup>1</sup>.

1 For more on the turbulent years of 1938/1939, see LAJCHA, L. *Dokumenty SND 1920 – 1945* [Documents of the SND 1920 – 1945]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2002; BLAHO, J. *Opera SND v období 1939 – 1945* [The Opera SND in the Period 1939 – 1945]. In HORVÁTHOVÁ, K. (ed.). *100 rokov nového operného divadla v Bratislave* [100 Years of the New Opera Theatre in Bratislava]. Almanac from a Musicological Conference on 2 October 1986, Bratislava : Mestský dom kultúry a osvety, 1986. Many pieces of important

Despite the enormous efforts of the Slovak political leaders, it was not possible to reorganize the artistic staff of the theatre without Czech artists – the head of the Opera Department, Josef Vincourek, and conductors Ladislav Holoubek (1913 – 1994) and Juraj Villiam Schöffer (1897 – 1972) were all born in Prague. The first Slovak conductor, Tibor Frešo, was engaged in the 1941 – 1942 season. Changes occurred also in the ensemble of soloists – although the majority of the staff left Slovakia, some soloists of Czech origin remained, such as Arnold Flögl (bass), Zdeněk Ruth-Markov (bass), František Hájek (tenor), and Milada Formanová (dramatic soprano); in 1939, the baritone singer Emil Schütz was engaged from Prague. There was also a Slovenian alto, Mária Peršlová (from 1927), a Slovenian baritone, Franjo Hvastija (from 1940; similarly to Schütz, he remained in Bratislava until the end of his career), and two Russian singers (the bass Boris Jevtušenko and the mezzosoprano Jelizaveta Evertová) in the staff. The most experienced Slovak singers were Janko Blaho (tenor) and the soprano Helena Bartošová. Later on, many other Slovak soloists (mostly graduates of the professor Josef Egem's vocal class at the Academy of Music and Drama in Bratislava) were contracted, and they became the founders of the tradition of Slovak vocal art (the sopranos Margita Česányiová, Zita Frešová, Mária Kišonová, Janka Gabčová, the mezzosoprano Dita Gabajová, and tenors Štefan Hoza and Rudolf Petrák).<sup>2</sup>

### **The Dramaturgy of the Slovak National Theatre under Štefan Hoza**

Generally speaking, Štefan Hoza's dramaturgy was relatively conventional (Hoza was a man of theatre, indeed), with preference for the Italian romantic repertoire, which dominated every season (this kind of operatic repertoire is, of course, the most favoured one by the audience – regardless of time and place). The most frequently played composers were Giuseppe Verdi (*Un ballo in maschera*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Aida*, *Il Trovatore*, *Otello*), Giacomo Puc-

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information can be found in memoirs like NEDBAL, K. *Půl století s českou operou* [A Half Century with the Czech Opera]. Praha : SNKLHU, 1959; HOZA, Š. *Ja svoje srdce dám...* [I'll Give my Heart...], 1, 2. Based on the notes in Hoza's diary, and his articles, letters and other writings, prepared for publishing by B. Machýnková. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1989.

2 For more on the soloists of the opera at that time, see BLAHO, J. *Opera SND v období 1939 – 1945* [Opera in the period 1939 – 1945]. In HORVÁTHOVÁ, K. *100 rokov nového operného divadla v Bratislave* [100 Years of the New Opera Theatre in Bratislava].

cini (*La bohème*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Tosca*, *Turandot*, *Il tabarro*, *Gianni Schicchi*) and Gioacchino Rossini with his *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. The veristic couple *I pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo and *Cavalleria rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni was unthinkable. Beside the works of Italian origin, some popular French pieces were also staged, e.g. *Mignon* by Ambroise Thomas, *Carmen* by Georges Bizet, *Manon* by Jules Massenet. Czech operas (in their Slovak translation) were also in high demand: *The Bartered Bride*, *The Kiss*, *Two Widows*, *The Secret* by Bedřich Smetana, *Rusalka*, *The Devil and Kate* by Antonín Dvořák, and *Jenůfa* by Leoš Janáček. The German operatic repertoire was represented by *The Flying Dutchman* by Richard Wagner, *Elektra* by Richard Strauss, and some popular pieces like *Hänsel and Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck, or *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Otto Nicolai. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was present on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre with his most famous operas: *Don Juan*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Two Russian operas were performed in 1939 – Piotr Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and Modest Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*<sup>3</sup>. With the outbreak of the war with the Soviet Union in June 1941, for political reasons, it was no longer possible to play Russian operas. It is touching how the new director (officially State intendant), Ľudovít Brezinský (1907 – 1994, in this function from 1 September 1940 to 4 April 1945), tried to promote the most significant works of Russian romantic opera and play them in state-run institutions (Ministry of Education and Propaganda Office)<sup>4</sup>.

Besides world opera repertoire, it was necessary to give scope to domestic operas and operatic novelties from abroad, too. The question of domestic works was especially acute. The management of SND, strongly supported by state institutions (especially by the Propaganda Office), promoted domestic works to give opportunity for a Slovak national opera to be composed, which was something still missing in Slovak culture (unlike in its neighbouring countries). There were only two works composed by Slovak composers, which had previously resonated with the audience of SND – *Wieland the Smith* by Ján Levoslav Bella (1926) and *Detvan* by Vilam Figuš-Bystrý (1928), but neither of these became a truly national opera because of their ideological and qualitative aspects. In 1940, the situation prompted the Ministry of Education to issue a call for a libretto for a national opera. In the end, the jury,

3 For more on the repertoire, see BLAHOVÁ-MARTIŠOVÁ, E. *Súpis repertoáru SND 1920 – 2010* [Register of the Repertoire of the SND 1920 – 2010]. Bratislava : SND, 2010.

4 See LAJCHA, L. *Dokumenty SND 1920 – 1945* [Documents of the SND 1920 – 1945]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2002.

consisting of musicians (Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský, Friso Kafenda, Štefan Hoza) and writers (Andrej Mráz, Andrej Žarnov – the poet acting under his official name František Šubík) and headed by state commissary Ľudovít Brezinský, did not award the first prize and did not even recommend libretti to any composers because of their serious imperfections. At that time, the young Eugen Suchoň became interested in composing a national opera. He was probably aware of the call and the subjects, but these did not satisfy him. He wrote the libretto of his opera *Krútnava* [*The Whirlpool*] (1949, based on Milo Urban's novel *Behind the Upper Mill*) himself with the help of Štefan Hoza.

Ultimately, four domestic works were staged in the Slovak National Theatre during the time of the First Slovak Republic, *Čalmak* (1940) by Jozef Rosinský, and three operas by Ladislav Holoubek (rehearsal leader and conductor at SND). The reflection of Holoubek's modernistic opera *Stella* (1939) came to an end with the turbulent events connected with the birth of the new state, but his more traditionally conceived opera *Svitane* [*Daylight*] (1941, free adaptation of Svetozár Hurban-Vajanský's poem *Herodes*) was, despite of the imperfections of its libretto, closer to the ambitions of a national opera. His fairy tale opera *Túžba* [*Desire*] (1944) is an opera for children. These works have had no resonance in Slovak musical culture since then – neither the traditionalist Jozef Rosinský, nor the young Ladislav Holoubek, who was at that time still searching for the right musical concept of an opera, came up to the expectations of the institutions, the critics and the public for a Slovak national opera.

### **Cultural Exchange in the Light of the Changing Political Regimes**

This article focuses on the staging of novelties from abroad, which was another part of the dramaturgy of SND under the leadership of Štefan Hoza. Four such works were staged in 1941 – 1943. The first one was *Peer Gynt* (world premiere in Berlin in 1938, staged by SND in 1941) by Werner Egk (1901 – 1983), followed by *Salambo* (1940 in Sofia, 1942 in Bratislava) by the Bulgarian composer Veselin Stoyanov. In the following season, it was *La farsa amorosa* (1933 in Rome, 1943 in Bratislava) by Riccardo Zandonai (1883 – 1944), and the last such opera was *Ero s onoga svijeta* (*Ero the Joker*, 1935 in Zagreb, 1943 in Bratislava) by the Croatian composer Jakov Gotovac (1895 – 1982). As mentioned above, the audience was familiar with the German and Italian operatic repertoire (in the interwar period as well as at the

time of the First Slovak Republic), especially with the Romantic one. From the modern repertoire, only *Il Dibuk* (1934, in Bratislava in 1937) by the verista Lodovico Rocca (1895 – 1986) was performed, and no German opera composed in the interwar period figured in the repertoire of SND from the time of its establishment in 1920. In this respect, the works of Werner Egk and Riccardo Zandonai (despite the age gap between the composers) also documented some trends in actual German and Italian operatic production.

On the other hand, the works of Bulgarian and Croatian provenance represented the much younger, nascent musical culture of smaller nations, similar to that of Slovakia. There were more Croatian (or Yugoslavian) operas in the interwar period – as for cultural exchange, it is important to note that, along with Romania, Yugoslavia (until 1929 officially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) was the main ally of Czechoslovakia in the region (they formed the Little Entente). In 1925, the historical opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinski* (from 1876), with a plot about fighting the Turks, composed by Croatian composer Ivan Zajc (1832 – 1914) was staged. In 1929, a one-act opera, *Suton* [The Sunset] by Serbian composer Stevan Hristić (1885 – 1958) was performed, with the composer conducting its Bratislava premiere. In the late 1930s, works by the Croatian composers Božidar Širola (1889 – 1956) – *Dubrovnícke fašiangy* [The Carnival in Dubrovnik] (1937 in Bratislava) – and Autun Dobronić (1878 – 1955, a student of Vítězslav Novák at the Prague Conservatory) – *Vdova Rošlinka* [Widow Rošlinka] (1938 in Bratislava) were staged. From the contemporary Bulgarian production, the opera *Tsar Kalyan* (1936, in Bratislava already in 1937) by Pancho Vladigerov (1899 – 1978) was performed.

The late 1930s witnessed an expansion of Nazi Germany, which changed the social and political situation in southeast Europe. Romania, a former ally of Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria adopted monarchical fascist regimes, and Yugoslavia was totally devastated after the German intervention of April 1941. It was the Independent State of Croatia (formally a monarchy ruled by King Tomislav II (Aimone, Duke of Aosta, 1900 – 1948), related to King Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy; he never resided in Zagreb) which dominated the region. The real power, however, was in the hands of "poglavnik" Ante Pavelić (1889 – 1959), who built an extremist fascist regime in the country. These changes were welcomed by the political leaders of the First Slovak Republic (e.g. entire numbers of the journals *Slovák* and *Gardista* were dedicated to the birth of the Independent State of Croatia and its anniversaries). Despite the geographic (and also linguistic) distance from Bulgaria, and besides the

official alliance with the Axis powers, it was the former tsar Ferdinand (of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, 1861 – 1948) who became associated with Slovakia. After his abdication in 1918, he often visited his patrimonial properties in Slovakia (manor houses in Svätý Anton and Predná Hora, for the last time in 1944).

Also, Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovakia were the three Slavic states that retained their formal independence within the dictatorial system of Nazi Germany. No wonder that cultural exchange was the most intense between these three states. It is important to note that many artists from other allies appeared in the concert cycles of the Slovak Radio Orchestra. Besides artists from Germany, these included musicians from Romania and Finland, who achieved success in the cultural life of Slovakia, especially in its capital, Bratislava.<sup>5</sup>

### **Werner Egk: Peer Gynt**

Štefan Hoza described his first encounter with Egk's opera *Peer Gynt* in his memoir.<sup>6</sup> It was in the autumn of 1939, when Hoza was recording some songs for the Odeon Company. He utilized this trip (he travelled with the head of the Opera Department and artistic director Josef Vincourek) to familiarize himself with the operatic repertoire of the German "Reich" because the "Kulturamt" (the German cultural bureau in Slovakia) called on him to stage some new German operas<sup>7</sup>. Hoza attended the performances of Richard Wagner's *Siegfried*, Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina*, concerts with the works of Richard Strauss, the performance of *Die Bürger von Calais* by Rudolf Wagner-Regény (1903 – 1969), and *Peer Gynt* by Werner Egk in the Berlin Opera. Although neither of these two Slovak artists were interested in the opera of Rudolf Wagner-Regény because of the dreariness and complicatedness of its plot, they were enthusiastic about the music of Werner Egk, which immediately fascinated them with its "outstanding dramatic and lyrical passages".<sup>8</sup>

Werner Egk, a significant exponent of German Neoclassicism and modern opera theatre, was born on 17 May 1901 in Auchsesheim near Donau-

5 See STRAČIAKOVÁ, B. *Hudobný život Bratislavy v rokoch 1939 – 1945, Koncertný život v dobovej tlači* [The Musical Life of Bratislava in 1939 – 1945. Concert Life in the Press]. [Master's thesis]. Bratislava : Filozofická fakulta, Univerzita Komenského, 2018.

6 HOZA, Š. *Ja svoje srdce dám...* [I'll Give My Heart...], p. 180.

7 Ibid., p. 179. But I have not found any official note on this in the documents. (Author's note.)

8 Ibid., p. 180.





*Werner Egk: Peer Gynt. The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 1941. Franjo Hvastija (Peer Gynt). Direction Bohuš Vilím. Photo by Anton Illenberger. The Slovak National Theatre archives.*

wörth, Bavaria, Germany as Werner Joseph Mayer. His pseudonym Egk is an acronym (Ein guter Komponist, or he derived it from his wife's initials: Elisabeth, geborne Karl – Elisabeth, née Karl). He used it from 1923 and he changed his name officially in 1937. He attended the grammar school and conservatory in Augsburg and, later, he studied in Frankfurt am Main and Munich (with Carl Orff). He worked for the Bavarian Radio from 1930. In 1936 – 1941 he was the conductor of the Unter den Linden State Opera in Berlin. After 1941, he worked as a freelancer. In 1950 – 1953, he was the director of Hochschule für Musik in West Berlin, and he was also a member of several organisations and institutions. He died in 1983 in Inning am Ammersee. In his works, Werner Egk preferred orchestral and operatic music.



In 1935, he composed the opera *Die Zaubergeige* [The Magic Violin], which became his first significant success. It was followed by *Peer Gynt* in 1938, but his other operas were performed only after World War II: *Circe* after Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1948, new version in 1966), *Irische Legende* [The Irish Legend] after William Butler Yeats (1955/1975), *Der Revisor* [The Government Inspector] after Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol (1957), and *Die Verlobung in San Domingo* [Betrothal in St Domingo] after Heinrich von Kleist (1963). He wrote also five ballets, the second of which, *Abraxas*, was based on the theme of Faust by Heinrich Heine (1948) and became one of the greatest scandals in the history of musical theatre after World War II (a black mass was performed on the stage). Werner Egk was also engaged in literary works. He wrote the libretto of *Abstrakte Oper Nr. 1* [Abstract Opera No. 1] composed by Boris Blacher (1953), many essays and reflections about music, and a memoir *Die Zeit wartet nicht* [Time Does Not Wait].

After the success of his opera *Die Zaubergeige* [The Magic Violin] in 1935, which was conceived as a modern folk opera, Werner Egk turned to a “big theme” – *Peer Gynt* by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen from 1867 (this otherwise successful play had not been staged in Copenhagen until 1876 because of performing difficulties). From an ideological point of view, this extensive work, centered around nature and the character of the world (“Weltgedicht”), is similar to such works as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*, or Richard Wagner’s *Ring*. In the complicated architecture of the play, the hero oscillates between good and evil in many diverse positions – as a Scandinavian hunter, fraudster, philosopher, a kind of Faust who tackles the question of his own existence, and also a predatory Don Juan. There are no fewer than thirty-eight characters in various situations and places (in a Norwegian village, in the mythological world of the trolls, in South America etc.) in the cast of this five-act play, so the plot had to be reduced radically. Werner Egk, who wrote the libretto himself, treated the subject very skilfully, with enormous sense for operatic dramaturgy. At the same time, he stayed away from the concept of Wagner’s *Ring* (1876), where the plot was divided into several evenings, or from the concept of Sergei Prokofiev’s opera *Voyna i mir* [War and Peace], based on Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy’s (1941 – 1952) novel, a kind of a historical fresco opera with seventy-two characters. Werner Egk succeeded in accentuating the difference between good and evil and the eternal oscillation of the hero between these two extremes. Also, the other characters are conceived as archetypes – the most significant one being Solveig, the personification of eternal femininity,

who, unlike Goethe's Gretchen, is not a victim but the only person whom Peer did not wrong and who saves him in the end.

It was no easy task for Werner Egk to compose the music for this opera. In his setting, he competed mainly with Edvard Hagerup Grieg, who wrote original incidental music for Henrik Ibsen's play, performed in Copenhagen in 1876. Grieg composed about ninety minutes of music in the original score (Op. 23, containing twenty-six numbers), out of which he later chose and reworked eight parts for two suites (Op. 46 and 55). Because of their inventiveness and national character, these became the most popular works of the composer and are still among the most famous pieces of Romantic music.

Nevertheless, Werner Egk composed his music for the opera in accordance with his own ideas. He was inspired by Norwegian folk music in the initial scenes of the opera, he composed the scenes taking place in South America with the use of melodic and rhythmic elements of Latin American music (e.g. tango), and there are many elements of dance and popular music used in the troll scenes (can-can, Charleston, galop, polka). In the troll hymn ("Tu nur, was dich erfreut"), the composer used a melodic and harmonic progression that evokes deformed Protestant hymns (naturally, this was condemned at the premiere). In several scenes (troll scenes, scenes with merchants, the scene with a president, or the scene of judgement in Act III), he used Kurt Weill style songs from the 1920s, coming close to the concept of Bertolt Brecht's and Kurt Weill's music theatre.

No wonder that the work, with such a musical concept, was condemned at its premiere on 24 November 1938 under the baton of the composer. It was a time when the Nazi regime was established and the work was attacked in the press, too. The main objection was that its music was very close to Bertolt Brecht's and Kurt Weill's concept of musical theatre and that there were many inspirations from jazz, and "negro" music in it<sup>9</sup>. Although the opera was not banned officially, it was performed only in Düsseldorf (1939) and Frankfurt am Main (1940), despite the fact that its performance in Berlin on 31 January 1939 was attended by Hitler and he was delighted with it. In his memoir, the composer describes his feelings when conducting this performance after having heard that Hitler was in the audience, and his feelings when, after the performance, he entered the office of the intendant

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9 DAHLHAUS, C. (ed.). *Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters, Band 2*. München, Zürich : Piper, p. 121.

Heinz Tietjen<sup>10</sup>, who announced to him that Hitler was satisfied with the opera<sup>11</sup>. Given that this work was ignored by German theatres during the war, its staging in Bratislava in 1941 was an interesting act. After the war, the circumstances changed significantly – the work was performed in Munich (1952), Braunschweig (1953), Berlin (1954), and Lübeck (1955), and there is a live recording compiled from its performances in Munich in 1982 (under the baton of Wolfgang Sawallisch).

For the Slovak National Theatre, it was a real challenge to perform Werner Egk's *Peer Gynt*. Despite its clear structure and communicability (which impressed not only Štefan Hoza and Josef Vincourek at its performance in Berlin but Hitler himself, too), it was a modern piece, which meant enormous problems in terms of staging and performance.

The libretto was translated into Slovak by Mária Rázusová-Martáková, the conductor was Josef Vincourek, and the stage director, whose task was difficult, was Bohuš Vilím. In his memoir, Štefan Hoza recalls an accident which helped him cast the hero. There was no baritone capable of rendering Peer in the ensemble, but a Slovenian baritone, Franjo Hvastija joined in the season of 1940/1941, who handled the problematic role of the title character in an outstanding way<sup>12</sup>. Solveig was performed by Marka Medvecká, Asse by Mária Peršlová, the red haired maid by Helena Bartošová. The premiere on 1 March 1941 was a real success, the critics appreciated the work (especially the treatment of the plot and the inventive music), the staging and the performance (as mentioned above, the most prominent soloists of the ensemble, with interpretational experience, took part in the production). It was also an outstanding success for Franjo Hvastija: "It was a triumph for Franjo Hvastija. He depicted the character of Peer with unique verity, with an inner instability, with constant unrest, with dreaminess etc. It could not have been better. His vocal and acting skills are unusual. He has command over a whole range of possible expressions, which he uses so finely that it is astonishing. With his energy, he led the whole dramatic progression, held it in the right

10 Heinz Tietjen (1881 – 1967) was a significant figure of German theatrical life from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s. Besides being the director of the Prussian theatre, he was the artistic director of the Bayreuth Festival in 1931 – 1944. In Berlin, he supported Egk.

11 EGK. W. *Die Zeit wartet nicht* [Time Does Not Wait]. München : Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, Musikverlag, 1981, pp. 311 – 313.

12 Hoza, Š. *Ja svoje srdce dám...* [I'll Give My Heart...], p. 180.

course and gave it the necessary momentum. Hvastija triumphed."<sup>13</sup> The critics commended the accomplishments of the main female roles in a similar way: "... Medvecká understood her role well, and this made her Solveig (sol = sun) a bright character full of womanly tenderness. Mária Peršlová was unforgettable as Asse..."<sup>14</sup> A critic from the journal entitled *Slovák* appreciated the production but, on the other hand, he had serious objections regarding Slovak articulation: "... If his [Hvastija's] singing had been comprehensible, he would have surely achieved an even bigger success. As an actor and singer, he is good, but he must learn the right Slovak articulation... The same fault can be pointed out for most of our soloists."<sup>15</sup>

In the case of Hvastija, this "defect" is understandable – it was the first season for this Slovenian baritone in Bratislava. The problem is much larger and it concerns the specific problems of the "Slovakisation" of the repertoire – in 1941, it was only two years from the whole repertoire being translated into Slovak; until then, Czech translations had been used and there had been many foreign, especially Czech, artists in the ensemble.

The "moral" success of the performance was heightened by the visit of the composer and his conducting on 9 March 1941. By 29 May 1941, the opera had been performed at the Slovak National Theatre seven times.<sup>16</sup>

### **Veselin Stoyanov: Salambo**

The next modern piece chosen by the dramaturge of SND for staging in Bratislava was *Salambo* by the Bulgarian composer Veselin Stoyanov. Stoyanov, together with Pancho Vladigerov (1899 – 1978), was a significant exponent of the youngest generation of Bulgarian composers who created in the interwar period the form of Bulgarian national music using the modality and the characteristic rhythms of Bulgarian folk music and connecting them with elements of Impressionism and relics of the late Romantic style. This was very similar to the ambitions of the contemporary young generation of Slovak composers. Veselin Stoyanov was born in 1902 in Shumen

13 of. Premiéra Peera Gynta v SND [The Premiere of Peer Gynt in SND]. In *Gardista*, 1941, Vol. 3, Issue 52, p. 6, 4 March 1941.

14 Ibid.

15 J. H. Peer Gynt ako opera [Peer Gynt As an Opera]. In *Slovák*, 1941, Vol. 23, Issue 53, p. 7, 4 March 1941.

16 BLAHOVÁ-MARTIŠOVÁ, E. *Súpis repertoáru SND 1920 – 2010* [Register of Repertoire of SND 1920 – 2010], p. 274.



Veselin Stoyanov: *Salambo*. The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 1942. Ludvika Svobodová (*Salambo*), Harry Kluska (*Shahabarin*). Direction Bohuš Vilím. Photo by Anton Illenberger. The Slovak National Theatre archives.

in the family of a music teacher. He studied at the Music Academy in Sofia and, from 1926, in Vienna with Joseph Marx and Franz Schmidt, a native of Bratislava. For a short time, he acted as a concert pianist, from 1937, he was a professor and, in 1943 – 1944 and 1952 – 1962, a chancellor at the Music Academy in Sofia. He died in 1969 in Sofia. He wrote three operas: *Žensko carstvo* [The Kingdom of Women, 1935], *Salambo* (1940), and *Chitar Peter* [Sly Peter, 1959], orchestral works, chamber music. Unlike his first opera, which was inspired by such works as *Zhenitba* [The Marriage] – a fragment by Modest Mussorgsky (1868), or *Nos* [The Nose] by Dmitri Shostakovich (1929) and was conceived as a conversational opera, in his other works Stoyanov turned to the Romantic opera (the technique of leit-motifs, monumental choir and ballet scenes, large orchestra, etc.). The truly romantic subject of *Salambo* required such techniques indeed. Gustave Flaubert's famous novel from 1862 inspired many composers – probably Modest Mussorgsky first, who worked on an opera of the same name between the years 1863 – 1866. The French composer Ernest Reyer (1823 – 1909) whose *Salambo* was performed for the first time in Brussels in 1890, was more

successful. In 1929, the subject was set to music by an Austrian modernist, Josef Matthias Hauer (1883 – 1959).

An opera libretto based on this extensive novel was written by Boris Borosanov. He reduced the episodes of the plot and the monumental structure of the novel to a love story of the title heroine and a conflict between her love (to the soldier Matho), duty, and religion. The symmetric concept of the libretto – or rather, the order of the dramatic situations – is very interesting. There is a motif of offering a glass of wine in scenes 1 and 6. While in Scene 1, it symbolizes the beginning of the love story of Salambo and Matho, in Scene 6, the wine is poisoned and kills the lovers. Another important dramaturgical motif appears in a similar way: the veil of goddess Tanit is stolen by Matho in Scene 2 (whereby he wants to win the love of Salambo) and, in Scene 5, Salambo brings the veil to the temple, conscious of her duty. The central scenes form the emotional climax of the story (the meeting of Salambo with her father Hamilkar in Scene 4). Stoyanov filled this libretto with inventive music inspired by elements of Bulgarian and Turkish music (Bulgarian modality and Turkish maqams) and their characteristic irregular rhythms. However, the first performance of the opera in Sofia on 22 May 1940 was not a real success. It was condemned by the critics, probably because of its exotic plot, which was not in line with the actual trends in Bulgarian national culture. Apart from its staging at the Slovak National Theatre in 1942, it was going to be staged in Vienna, but this did not happen because of the war. There was another performance of it in Sofia in 1977, and it was recorded under the baton of Ivan Marinov (1928 – 2003).

The first performance of the opera in Bratislava (translated by Arnold Flögl, conducted by Josef Vincourek, stage direction by Bohuš Vilím) took place on 11 April 1942. Its difficult rhythmic structures, colourful instrumentation, and difficult score placed high demands on the soloists and the orchestra. Nevertheless, the performance was well prepared, which was confirmed by the composer himself too, who was present at the performance. The critic Konštantín Hudec noted: "The composer was very satisfied with the achievement. He found Vincourek's dramatic rendering of the score much better than in Sofia."<sup>17</sup> The title heroine was outstandingly performed by Ludvika Svobodová, her father Hamilkar Barkas by Franjo Hvastija, Matho by Štefan Hoza. The other roles were sung by

17 HUDEC, K. Bulharská opera na scéně SND [Bulgarian Opera on the SND Stage]. In *Elán*, 1941 – 1942, Vol. 12, Issue 8, p. 10.



Boris Jevtušenko (Autharit), Harry Kluska (Shahabarim, the high priest), Arnold Flögl (Narr'Havas). This excellent production had been performed six times until 19 May 1942. Until today, this was the only production of the opera outside Bulgaria.

### **Riccardo Zandonai: *La farsa amorosa***

Contrary to both the preceding composers, Riccardo Zandonai (1883 – 1944) was a generation older and belonged to the second generation of Italian veristi. He was born in 1883 in Borgo Sacco in Rovereto, Austria-Hungary at that time. He did not complete his studies at the conservatory in Pesaro, but he met Pietro Mascagni there, who was one of his professors. It was just before World War I when he achieved success with his operas *Il grillo di focolare* (after Dickens *The Cricket on the Heart*, Turin, 1908), *Conchita* (Milan, 1911) and, especially, *Francesca da Rimini* after Gabriele D'Annunzio's adaptation of Dante's *Inferno* (Turin, 1914, libretto by Tito II Ricordi), which is still played sporadically today. His *Giulietta e Romeo*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's play about the Veronese lovers, was premiered in 1922 in Rome. Its libretto was written by Arturo Rossato, who was the author of all the subsequent operas of Riccardo Zandonai. The following operas of his were performed: *I cavalieri di Ekebú* (after Selma Lagerlöf's novel *Gösta Berling*) in La Scala, Milan in 1925, *Giuliano* (after Gustave Flaubert) in Naples in 1928, the one-act opera *Una Partita* in Milan in 1933. Shortly afterwards, they were followed by *La farsa amorosa*, libretto by Arturo Rossato based on the play *El sombrero de tres picos* (1874) by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón (1833 – 1891), first performed in Teatro dell'Opera in Rome on 22 February 1933. This was the last opera completed by Riccardo Zandonai (towards the end of his life, he was working on the opera *Il bacio* [The Kiss], which was performed in Rome in 1954).

This very popular plot was moved by the librettist to Lombardia at the time of Spanish occupation in about 1630, so he could preserve several original Spanish names of the characters. Besides Alarcón's play, both artists were strongly inspired by the local tradition of *commedia dell'arte*, which played a role in the final concept of the libretto. In this sense, *La farsa amorosa* by Riccardo Zandonai may be assigned to the Neoclassicist trend in Italian opera, which was standardized by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari (1876 – 1948) at the beginning of the twentieth century in his operas *Le donne curiose* [The Inquisitive Women, 1903], *Quattro rusteghi* [The Four Codgers, 1906], and



*Riccardo Zandonai: La farsa amorosa. The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 1943. Janko Blaho (Renzo), Margita Česányiová (Lucia). Direction Bohuš Vilím. Photo by Anton Illenberger. The Slovak National Theatre archives.*



*Il segreto di Susanna* [Susanna's Secret, 1909]. These works were a reaction to the expressive veristic style and the operatic symphonism which had spread to Italy from Germany.

*La farsa amorosa* is divided into three acts and five scenes, with two scenic intermezzos. These short choir scenes are inserted between the scenes in the peripheral acts – the first intermezzo is a genre picture of vintage (vintage forms the framework of the whole story), while the second one is a comic scene depicting the return home of an unsuccessful seducer, Don Ferrante. A rare element in the libretto is a couple of donkeys, Ciccio and Checca, who have fallen in love. They help to depict the whole atmosphere of a folk feast and the author of the libretto gives them some allegorical consequences. This simple story was set to music by the experienced composer using a wide range of expressions from drastic fun to lyric passages, full of wide cantilena. The orchestration is brilliant and uses many impressive effects.

In Bratislava, the opera was performed on the sixtieth birth anniversary of the composer,<sup>18</sup> and was chosen by the dramaturgy of SND as the newest opera (although it was about ten years old) of the greatest living Italian composer. The difficult score (the extensive choir and ensemble scenes, difficult parts of the orchestra etc.) was rehearsed by Ladislav Holoubek, the stage director was Bohuš Vilím, and the libretto was translated by Arnold Flögl. The three main characters were performed by Margita Česányiová (Lucia), Janko Blaho (Renzo), and Emil Schütz (Don Ferrante), and the comic characters by Arnold Flögl (Spingarda) and František Hájek (Frulla).

The reaction of the critics in Bratislava was relatively reserved – the main reason was the subject, the simple, conventional opera plot underlined by relatively traditional staging (“... it would have been better if the staging had parodied this naivety.”)<sup>19</sup>. Although Konštantín Hudec in his critique wrote about a creative crisis in contemporary operatic production (“So we reached this current situation, this cluelessness in operatic production.”). On the other hand, he tried to point out the qualities of Riccardo Zandonai’s composition style: “Zandonai, who transformed his “*La farsa amorosa*” to the most comic sphere, tried to follow a new path by using melodiousness in the ensembles and choruses, although, in the recitatives, his music is explosive and makes use of instrumental effects.”<sup>20</sup>

By 29 May 1943, Riccardo Zandonai’s *La farsa amorosa* had been performed on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre five times.

### **Jakov Gotovac: *Ero z onoga svijeta***

The last of the four above-mentioned operas was a folk opera based on a story from the Dalmatian milieu, *Ero z onoga svijeta* [Ero the Joker] by Jakov Gotovac (1895 – 1982). The composer was born in Split, where he graduated from a grammar school (1913) and began to study music (with Josip Hatze and Autun Dobronić). Later, he studied law at the Academy in Zagreb and music at the Music Academy in Vienna (with Joseph Marx). After returning home, he worked shortly in Šibenik, but, in 1923, he left for Zagreb, where

18 K. Premiéra opery v Národnom divadle [The Premiere of the Opera in the National Theatre]. In *Slovák*, Vol. 25, Issue 87, 14 April 1943, p. 6.

19 Ibid.

20 HUDEC, K. K premiére Zandonaiho opery *Lúboštná komédia* [On the Premiere of Zandonai’s opera *La farsa amorosa*]. In *Elán*, 1942 – 1943, Vol. 13, Issue 8, p. 9.



Jakov Gotovac: *Ero z onoga svijeta*. The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 1943. Helena Bartošová (Julka), Boris Jevtušenko (Marko). Direction Bohuš Vilím. Photo by Anton Illenberger. The Slovak National Theatre archives.

he worked as a conductor (and, for a short time, director) of the Opera House until 1958. Gotovac, strongly inspired by Croatian and, especially, Dalmatian folklore, wrote many vocal pieces, orchestral works and, especially, operatic works. He achieved significant success in Yugoslavia with his opera *Morana* (1930). His next opera, *Ero z onoga svijeta*, first performed in 1935, was an international success and soon became the most frequently played Croatian opera. His other works, performed after World War II, included historical drama *Mila Gojsalica*, Op. 28 (1951), the operatic legend *Dalmaro* (1958), the one-act opera *Stanac* (1959), and the opera-oratorio *Petar Svačić* (1969). Jakov Gotovac died on 16 October 1985 in Zagreb.

The subject of the opera *Ero z onoga svijeta* comes from a Croatian folk legend from the times of Turkish occupation, and some scenic elements are based on the carnival play *Der fahrend Schüler im Paradeis* [The Wandering Student in Paradise] by Hans Sachs from 1560.<sup>21</sup> Ero is an archetypal char-

21 DAHLHAUS, C. (ed.). *Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters*, Band 2, p. 514.

acter, a folk hero, a kind of a Croatian Eulenspiegel. The librettist, Milan Begović, moved the plot to the nineteenth century and to his native village Vrljika, eliminating the Turkish elements and giving more scope to Croatian national elements – Croatian songs and dances, and folk humour, which were the reason for its enormous success abroad and its persistence on the Croatian stage. Gotovac appeared with his opera at the right time – its spontaneity based on folk elements was a much-desired contrast to many contemporary trends in European opera. The opera was performed in Karlsruhe in 1938, in Berlin in 1940, and, shortly afterwards, on nearly eighty other European stages. From the aspect of form, it is a work with a traditional concept – the musical progression through musical pieces and scenes is separated by recitatives.

The production in Bratislava was prepared by the conductor Ladislav Holoubek, and the stage director was Arnold Flögl, who translated libretto, too. *Ero* was performed by Janko Blaho, Julka (Djula in original) by Helena Bartošová, Doma (Julka's stepmother) by Janka Gabčová, the peasant Marko and the miller Sima were outstandingly performed by Boris Jevtušenko and Franjo Hvastija, respectively. The audience and the critics were greatly satisfied with the performance. First of all, they pointed out the inventiveness and the national character of the work: "For a long time, the theatre had not surprised us in such a way as it did at the premiere of the opera *Ero the Joker*, the pride of the Croatian nation. Our joy is increased by the fact that it is an opera of our brother, the Croatian nation, and not only because the libretto and the music were written by the members of this nation, but we greatly admire what this opera brings to the stage, visually as well as musically: the life that this Croatian nation lives."<sup>22</sup> Zdenka Bokesová in the journal *Elán* was more critical: "In a word, Gotovac got caught up in combining folk songs, or tunes that imitate folk songs, through recitatives. And maybe only to highlight the folkiness, he presented a folk tune, quoted in a musically primitive way, everywhere where a wider cantilena and a richer elaboration of the ensemble and the choir would have been required, and that may be the reason why he remained so unsophisticated harmonically and instrumentally."<sup>23</sup> Bokesová also noted the problem of casting – she found

22 en. *Ero z onoho sveta na scéne ND* [*Ero the Joker staged in the National Theatre*]. In *Slovák*, 1943, Vol. 25, Issue 229, p. 6, 6 October 1943.

23 BOKESOVÁ, Z. Jakov Gotovac: *Ero z onoho sveta* [*Ero the Joker*]. In *Elán*, 1943 – 1944, Vol. 14, Issue 8, p. 9.

the main character of *Ero* too demanding and too prominent for a lyric tenor, to whose character it is assigned. The lyric soprano of Julka was not performed in an ideal way by Helena Bartošová, who used to sing more dramatic roles. On the other hand, the "overly soft rendering" of the character of Doma, Julka's stepmother, by Janka Gabčová, lacked the roughness which Gotovac relied on to illustrate it".<sup>24</sup>

By 7 January 1944, *Ero z onoga svijeta* had been performed ten times.

The above four operas of German, Bulgarian, Italian and Croatian origin, performed in 1941 – 1943 on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre, document the ambitions of the dramaturgy of the theatre to introduce to the Bratislava audience the latest, or rather, the dominating trends in operatic production in the major part of Europe. Although the ideological conditions were still present, the choice of the repertoire was noteworthy for its diversity. *Peer Gynt* by Werner Egk represented the German productions of the late 1930s, Riccardo Zandonai's *La farsa amorosa* was the legacy of a traditional operatic "superpower", Stoyanov's *Salambo* embodies the ambition to create a national musical style, while Gotovac's *Ero z onoga svijeta* is a traditional folk opera. At the same time, all the scores are really difficult to perform and this, on one hand, testifies the potential and the abilities of the ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre and, on the other hand, it helped to raise its niveau.

## Conclusion

The above four operatic novelties from abroad performed on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre document the ambitions of the dramaturgy of the theatre to introduce the latest trends in the operatic repertoire of its allies: Germany (*Peer Gynt* by Werner Egk, performed in Bratislava in 1941), Bulgaria (*Salambo* by Stoyanov, 1942), Italy (*La farsa amorosa* by Riccardo Zandonai, 1943), and Croatia (*Ero z onoga svijeta* by Gotovac, 1943). At the same time, each work represented a different approach to operatic production in these countries, motivated mostly by the different cultural conditions in these countries and, partly, also by the generation gap between the composers. While Werner Egk drew near to the concept of Brecht and Weill in his opera, Stoyanov, on the other hand, used mostly the elements of Romantic opera, filled with contemporary trends in European music. Riccardo Zando-

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24 Ibid.

nai's *La farsa amorosa* follows the traditional concept of a music comedy of Italian provenance, while Gotovac was heading towards spontaneous folk opera and a simple formal and musical concept. Despite all these differences between the musical and dramaturgical concept of these works, they represented a challenge for the artistic ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre. The staff mastered them to their honour, as documented by the reflections of the audience and the critics.

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# The Impact of European Theatre on Slovak Opera Staging Practice

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**Abstract:** A cross-cutting study offering an insight into the 20<sup>th</sup> century key European theatrical poetics that transcended the Opera of the Slovak National Theatre during its century-old existence. In the 1920s and 1930s, artists, inspired by German expressionism and the Russian avant-garde, entered into controversy with the prevailing art decorativeness and illusive imitation of reality. The fifties were marked by the tethering doctrine of socialist realism shielded by the name of Konstantin Stanislavsky. The sixties and seventies were shaped by an effort to revive Slovak staging practice according to the principles of Walter Felsenstein's psychologically realistic music theatre. And, last but not least, the final part of the study highlights the upsurge of artistic transfers in the current open Europe space.

**Key words:** Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, German expressionism, theatre of the avant-garde, socialist realism, Konstantin Stanislavsky, Walter Felstenstein, Peter Konwitschny

## The Inter-war Period and Expressionism

At first glance, the history of opera in Slovakia may appear to be more of a history of music and singing rather than of theatrical interpretation. Nevertheless, since the founding of the Slovak National Theatre (SND, 1920) until the present, there has been an ambition to invoke an idea that opera is both theatrical and musical art. The most valuable inspirations came – either directly or indirectly – from the international artistic environment.

The earliest modern theatrical stream to have penetrated the young opera of the Slovak National Theatre was German expressionism. Naturally, not in its model form, as defined by the German theatre shaped by Max Reinhardt, Leopold Jessner, Erwin Piscator, Alfred Roller, etc., but rather in its diluted version that took account of the deplorable financial situation and imperfect theatre engineering and stage machinery of the SND in the 1920s.

In 1923, the then only twenty-one-year-old Ľudovít Hradský (1902 – 1973), became the historically first scenographer of the SND. He was a graduate of the School of Applied Arts in Vienna, where he attended a course in architecture and scenography under professor Otokar Strnad, collaborator of Max Reinhardt and of Leopold Jessner. This happened between 1921 and 1923, with Alfred Roller being school principal. Ľudovít Hradský was the first to try to implant the ideas of expressionism into the SND stage practice. As stated by theatre historian Ladislav Lajcha: “Hradský did not have a different model. He simply transferred this expressionist style to Bratislava.”<sup>1</sup>

Ľudovít Hradský worked in the SND as a scenographer from 1923 to 1927, whereby his most noteworthy designs were created for the SND drama ensemble (especially for Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, 1925, directed by Miloš Nový). However, right from the outset, his activity in opera was quite significant and throughout the 1930s, he carried on with it in the form of external collaboration with the SND. In this context, his stage design for Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal* (1935, directed by Bohuš Vilím) was particularly well received.<sup>2</sup>

The stage designs housed by the Theatre Institute in Bratislava are compelling evidence of Ľudovít Hradský’s mastery, as well as of the influence of Adolphe Appia and Alfred Roller on his work. They demonstrate his inspiration by expressionist aesthetics, light direction, and the architectural perception of scenography: his stage designs capture stairways, an expressionist use of the colour scheme or a tower-like arrangement of the movable platform following the example of “Roller towers.” In this connection, theatre scientist Robert Bayer highlighted an interesting fact: Although it is a production from 1935, Ľudovít Hradský’s stage designs are dated 1932, which means they had originated two years before the first new production of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth, which replaced the original production by Richard Wagner.<sup>3</sup> Alfred Roller was its scenographer, but given the outcry of tradi-

1 LAJCHA, L. Európsky podnet scénografii SND. Vplyvy expresionizmu v diele Ľudovíta Hradského [European Impulses to the SND Scenography. The influence of Expressionism in the work of Ľudovít Hradský]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 1992, Vol. 40, Issue 4, p. 338.

2 Ľudovít Hradský had a valuable viewer’s experience with Wagnerian repertoire gained in the Vienna State Opera which he had frequented since his childhood.

3 For more about *Parsifal* at the SND refer to BAYER, R. Bratislavská „krádež“ svätého Grálu. Rekonštrukcia inscenácie Wagnerovho *Parsifala* v Opere SND z roku 1935 [Bratislava “Robbery” of the Holy Grail. Reconstruction of Wagner’s *Parsifal* production at the Opera of Slovak National Theatre (1935)]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2019, Vol. 67, Issue 1, pp. 5 – 22. DOI: 10.31577/sd-2019-0001.

tionalists who were reluctant to give up Wagner's original production, Alfred Roller's intentions could only be implemented in part.

Ľudovít Hradský did not turn out better with his ideas either. In the words of Ladislav Lajcha, "in Wagner's *Parsifal*, he experienced the bitterness of the defeat of a scenographer when sadly comparing designs and their realisations. He categorically rejected the stage decoration and insisted on replacing it with different sets."<sup>4</sup> However, this fact does not diminish Ľudovít Hradský's contribution to Slovak theatre, opera including. As Ladislav Lajcha aptly summarises: "He was among the artists building a bridge between European stimuli and national Slovak artistic ambitions. The value of his contribution is all the greater because he stood at the very beginning of a never-ending process."<sup>5</sup>

Another personality bringing Slovak operatic and dramatic arts closer to European events was the avant-garde director Viktor Šulc (1897 – 1945). Like Ľudovít Hradský, Viktor Šulc was mostly preoccupied with drama direction (between 1932 – 1938, he was drama director of the Czech drama company of the SND), but his contribution to the Slovak opera theatre is equally fundamental.<sup>6</sup> Between 1934 and 1938, he staged eight productions at the SND Opera, opposing the ideas of trivial illustrativity and approach to visual arrangement that dominated the local opera staging practice. The directorial poetics of the leftist theatre professional combined the influences of German expressionism and the Russian avant-garde. They were reflected in the visual element through a dramatic-semantic stage lighting or in combining illusive wings with anti-illusive movable platforms, and the element of acting was liberated from portraying details which were subordinated to the dramatic whole. But perhaps Viktor Šulc's most revolutionary contribution to opera was the ideological engagement of his concepts and also conviction that music theatre, just like drama theatre, should fulfil its social function (in this case, especially socio-critical). He introduced the opera to a dimension which the Slovak opera staging practice had never before, and after, been exposed to.

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4 LAJCHA, L. Európsky podnet scénografii SND. Vplyvy expresionizmu v diele Ľudovíta Hradského [European Impulses to the SND Scenography. The influence of Expressionism in the work of Ľudovít Hradský]. In *Slovenske divadlo*, 1992, Vol. 40, Issue 4, p. 353.

5 Ibid.

6 For more about Viktor Šulc's opera productions at the SND refer to BLAHO, J. *Operné inscenácie Viktora Šulca 1934 – 1938* [Viktor Šulc Opera Performances 1934 – 1938]. [online]. [cit. 2 December 2020]. Available at: <http://udfv.sav.sk/dokumenty/opera.SND-Sulciada.pdf>.

Viktor Šulc collaborated with the SND senior stage designer Ján Ladvenica (1898 – 1947) on the first two opera productions, Gounod's *Faust* (1934) and on the work by contemporary Austrian composer Alexander Zemlinsky, *Der Kreidekreis* [The Chalk Circle, 1934]. Ladvenica catered to the director's request for a light, allusive scene, using neutral movable platforms instead of robust wings. Three productions that followed were staged by Viktor Šulc in collaboration with František Tröster (1904 – 1968), who was a creative professional, one generation younger than Šulc, and was among the most acclaimed personalities not only in Czechoslovakia, but also in the world scenography of the second third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mentally, he was deeply connected with Viktor Šulc – he also tended towards German expressionism and the Soviet avant-garde theatre, and by majoring in architecture, he would disprove of flat painted sets and old, naturalistic representations of reality. In 1935, in the article *Lžitvary a kritický plyš* [Deceptive Forms and Critical Plush], Viktor Šulc explained their aesthetic preferences: "(...) we want to liberate ourselves from the illusive and static means of naturalistic theatre (...) we strive for reaching constructive and dynamic means. We no longer want mock-up items and we replace them with metal ones."<sup>7</sup> Viktor Šulc and František Tröster were able to materialise the idea thanks to the fact that in 1934, a sweeping reconstruction and refurbishment of the SND stage took place. A turntable, spotlights, projection, and sound equipment were mounted – the stage machinery became an integral part of their joint drama and opera productions.

*Les Contes d'Hoffmann* [The Tales of Hoffmann, 1935] by Jacques Offenbach, the first joint operatic piece by Viktor Šulc and František Tröster, was characterised by a kinetic understanding of space and the dramatic function of scenography. For example, they used mirror glass as a material facilitating dynamism and enhancing changes in the mood of individual stage actions. An important function was played by colour lighting or conjuring with shadow play and projection, which enhanced the surreal tone of Jacques Offenbach's opera. In the stage cantata of Slovak composer Alexander Moyzes *Svätopluk* (1935), the creative professionals did not attempt to reconstruct

7 ŠULC, V. *Lžitvary a kritický plyš* [Deceptive Forms and Critical Plush]. In *Robotnícke noviny*, 17 May 1935. Cit. According to LAJCHA, L. *Predvojnová Bratislava a František Tröster* Pre-war Bratislava and František Tröster (1934 – 1937). Symposium to Commemorate the 100th Birth Anniversary of professor of architecture František Tröster. Prague, 29 November 2004. [online]. [cit. 2 December 2020]. Available at: <http://host.divadlo.cz/frantisek.troster/symp/lajcha.pdf>.

period facts of life, but rather build the scene using staircases, platforms, and erected poles.<sup>8</sup> In his study reflecting on the poetics of Viktor Šulc, opera historian Jaroslav Blaho underscores the fact that the spatial arrangement of a stable, horizontally and vertically richly split stage area, had both practical and symbolic connotations. The raised platform acquired the shape of a circle and its two separated halves created acting spaces for the antagonised choirs of the Bavarians and of the Slavs. Two large blocks crossed over each other were placed by the right portal, which was interpreted by Jaroslav Blaho as a “sign of conflict.”<sup>9</sup>

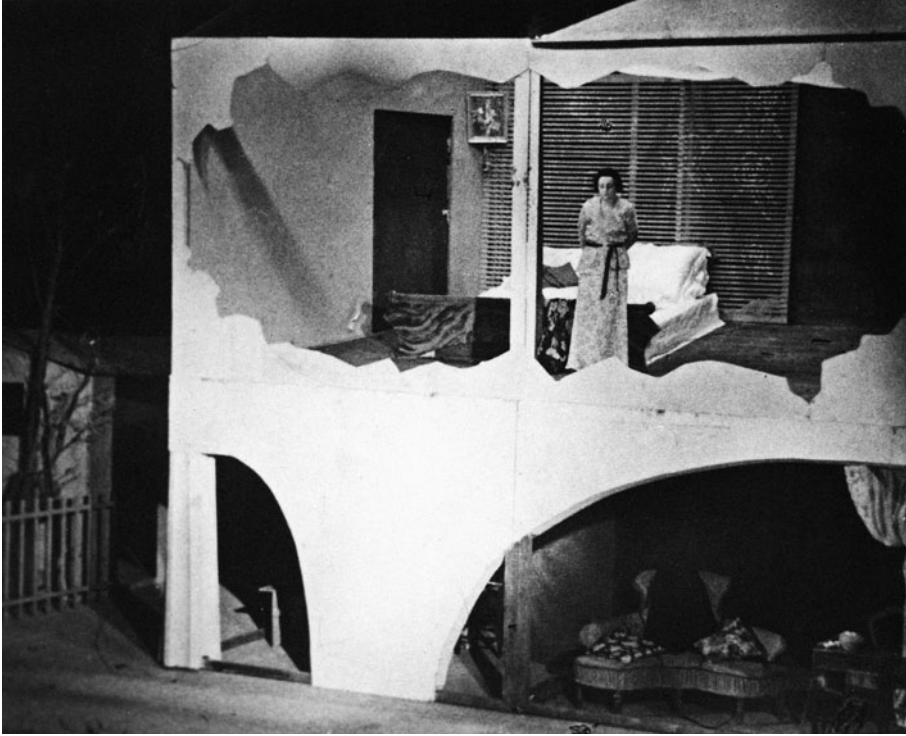
The production of this team that followed Dmitri Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, staged in Bratislava under the title *Russian Lady Macbeth* (1935), is one of the most memorable events in the century-old history of the SND Opera.<sup>10</sup> In this case, the basis of František Tröster’s most functional stage was the structure of a house composed of allusive walls and blocks and its placement on a turntable which allowed for rapid transformations of the story setting. Allusive stylisation stood in contrast with naturalistic and realistic details, which were applied both inside the structure (one could look into it through wide slits) and in the surrounding environment. According to reviews, it was the last, i.e., the fourth act, having the most powerful impact. In it, the story moves from inside of the house to the river bank, along which the convicts continue on their way to exile. Viktor Šulc empathically tuned into Dmitri Shostakovich’s sympathy for Katerina Izmailova, broken by empty life, as well as into the socio-critical dimension of his work: “The drama ends with endless pain and sadness, with almost a prayer for empty, forsaken, and lonely lives.”<sup>11</sup>

8 František Tröster’s stage designs of *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* and of *Svätopluk* by Alexander Moyzes were awarded the golden medal at the VI Triennial of Milan International Exhibition, 1937.

9 BLAHO, J. *Operné inscenácie Viktora Šulca 1934 – 1938* [Viktor Šulc Opera Performances 1934 – 1938], p. 7.

10 The production of almost a novelty by the 29-year-old Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich (world premiere in 1932) is among the most progressive dramaturgical achievements of the opera director Karel Nedbal, although it was not a European premiere, as believed by the creators and by the period press. Actually, it was the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm taking historical primacy over the SND, premiering Shostakovich’s work a week earlier than Bratislava, on 16 November 1935.

11 ŠULC, V. – PÁTEK, J. Šéfredizér V. Šulc o premiére opery Ruská lady Macbeth [Director-in-chief Maintains about the Premiere of Russian Lady Macbeth]. [Interview]. In *Robotnícke noviny*, 1935, Vol. 32, Issue 268, p. 6, 23 November 1935.



*Dmitri Shostakovich: Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District (staged under the title Russian Lady Macbeth). The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 1935. Milada Formanová (Katerina Izmailova). Direction Viktor Šulc. The Slovak National Theatre archives.*

The production of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1936) had a higher ambition than just to idyllically unfold the story of a faithful conjugal love. The concept created on the eve of the tragic war events satisfied the principles of a thought-provoking, engaged, appellative, and foreboding theatre. The clearly rhythmic space was dominated by a broken, collapsed ancient column, which epitomised the decline of civilisation and the decline of values. A powerful symbol of almost a visionary dimension were metal columns with barbed wire wrapped around them heralding the coming of the time of ruthless killing.<sup>12</sup> The opera's finale mirrored Viktor Šulc's left-wing political orientation: freed prisoners waving red flags in their hands alluded to revolutionary popular rallies.

<sup>12</sup> At the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life, Paris 1937, František Tröster was awarded Grand Prix for his *Fidelio* stage design.



*Fidelio* stirred an unprecedented heated debate in domestic press. However, favourable reactions outnumbered those who called the production “anti-Beethovenian” and demanded the comeback of traditional approaches. The then Slovak critique – with but a few rare exceptions – failed to capture Viktor Šulc’s directorial poetics using adequate terminology and to place it in international theatrical context. However, it goes without saying that by his concept of progressive operatic theatre, he planted a viable seed in the way it was perceived. The growing understanding of opera reviewers for modern theatrical currents in opera is also evidenced by the reception of the opera novelty *Dibuk* [The Dybbuk, 1937] by the contemporary Italian composer Lodovico Rocca,<sup>13</sup> which was staged by Viktor Šulc in collaboration with stage designer František Zelenka. The opera, whose story draws on a Hasidic legend of the reincarnation of the souls of the dead into the living, was staged by Viktor Šulc and František Zelenka on an almost empty stage. By using curtains and a turntable and thanks to an extensive work with the lights, the mysticism and symbolism of the theme were highlighted. The author whose articles were published by the left-wing daily *Slovenské zvesti* clearly pointed out “modern tendencies gravitating toward the transformation of colour wings, theatrical gestures, and various illusionist effects embellishing the opera into a live stage form.”<sup>14</sup> *Dibuk*, by its poetics tying into *Ruská lady Macbeth* [Russian Lady Macbeth], was referred to him as a proof of “(...) the immense importance to be attached to an uncompromising requirement for innovative experiment”: by that meaning a conscious transformation of scenography and the actor’s and the singer’s breaking away from “stiff and emotionless movements”.<sup>15</sup>

An epilogue to Viktor Šulc’s short yet invaluable contribution to the Slovak opera theatre was Amadeus Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* [The Magic Flute, 1938], which he designed in collaboration with Stanislav Kuttner, creative artist from Pilsen. The two theatre makers renounced the fairy tale decorative art style or architectural robustness that until then had been associated with this work in Slovakia. Instead, they worked with allusions, stylisation, geometric projection, and colour toning. Their consistent guidance of ac-

13 The work was staged by the SND only three years after its author had won composition competition Teatro alla Scala in Milan and his reputation as a composer accrued in value thanks to the productions in Europe and in the USA.

14 M. P. Premiéra “Dibuka” [The Premiere of “The Dybbuk”]. In *Slovenské zvesti*, 1937, Vol. 2, Issue 75, p. 6, 18 April 1937.

15 Ibid.



tors was both seen on soloists and the choir, the latter performing in geometrically precise lines. Viktor Šulc's staging principle was summarised by Jaroslav Blaho, "For Šulc, colour is a fantasy element, while geometry is an ideological element, epitomising order, a system."<sup>16</sup>

The Bratislava era of Viktor Šulc – and of his life in the years that followed – was disrupted by the tragic political events of 1938: the break-up of the Czechoslovak Republic, the rise of fascism, and a forced expulsion of Czech citizens from Slovakia. His short yet intensive collaboration with the Opera of the Slovak National Theatre was imprinted in the history of the ensemble as the first conceptually formulated and consistently implemented art manifesto of a progressive European theatre. Regrettably, it was the last one in the period that followed. The priorities of theatre makers during the Second World War Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945) shifted to setting up a Slovak ensemble and to translating opera librettos into the Slovak language (until then, the vast majority of titles had been performed in Czech). The sprouting ambitions of a handful of modern opera makers (Croatian director Branko Gavella, his Czech colleagues Jiří Fiedler and Karel Jernek, the internationally acclaimed Czech scenographer Josef Svoboda), who after the war endeavoured to introduce a more elaborate, psychologically justified style of acting or stage stylisation and the metaphor into the visual arrangement routine, was to be soon disrupted by the doctrine of the so-called socialist realism, soon to become a binding norm after the communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia (25 February, 1948).<sup>17</sup>

### **Socialist Realism and Stanislavsky System of Acting**

It was Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863 – 1938), leading personality of the Russian interwar theatre avant-garde, Soviet actor, director, and pedagogue, founder of the famous Moscow Art Theatre (MKHAT Theatre), lending his name to socialist realism. Regrettably, his psychological and realistic system of acting whose noble aim was to attain veracity and authenticity of art, was presented on socialist stages in an ideologically vulgar form. Communist aesthetics, with-

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> In 1948, at the Congress of National Culture in Prague, the criteria of the prominent ideologist of Soviet art Andrey Alexandrovich Zhdanov (1896 – 1948) were presented as a recommended direction for art development, while the IX Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia adopted Zhdanov's propositions of class, revolutionary, and people's art as a binding norm.

in the meaning of the propositions of the prominent ideologist of Soviet art, Andrey Zhdanov, insisted on enforcing Stanislavsky system as a whole, which “is a set of theorems based on the experiences of Soviet theatre, it is a manifestation of the Marxist interpretation of theatre, it is part of the Marxist theatre aesthetics.”<sup>18</sup> Anything not corresponding to the official concept of progressive, ideological, class, revolutionary art, disseminated among the popular masses in an understandable form, was labelled as formalist, decadent bourgeois pseudo-art. Other than class-motivated interpretation of the works of art was inadmissible. A visual allusion, the metaphor, and other means of expression employed by the theatrical avant-garde had to yield to the straightforward illustrativity of painted backcloths and to the robust stage sets imitating reality.

Jiří Fiedler, art director of the SND Opera, was the leading proponent of Stanislavsky method. In the 1950s, this former adherent of the avant-garde moved towards the aesthetics of socialist realism which he implemented in a systematic and consequential manner so typical of him. To give an example: when staging the opera *Tiefland* [The Lowlands, 1951] by Eugen d’Albert, he had the protagonists of three village gossipers, who struggled with a convincing rendition of their parts, walk in Bratislava streets and look for the models of rendered characters. The actresses found them in the market place where they kept observing quarrelling market women. “From then on, our acting improved, and at some rehearsals, our gossipers were so convincing that our colleagues found it difficult to believe that it was all play-act.”<sup>19</sup>

By their sophistication and intricacy, some of Jiří Fiedler’s productions (Beethoven: *Fidelio*, 1951; Alexander Borodin: *Prince Igor*, 1952), moved close to the idea of a realistic theatre avoiding trivial illustrativity. In general, however, the artistic side of the productions which were mostly reviewed by their musical quality,<sup>20</sup> was belittled by acting clichés and mock-up stage design. Using the words of theatre historian Ladislav Čavojský, this resulted in an unwished-for paradox: “(...) instead of reinforcing opera performances in the meaning of real-life veracity, directions with superficial and naturalist portrayal of life began to proliferate. (...) For the most

18 KARVAŠ, P. Niektoré problémy našej opery a systém Stanislavského [On Some Problems of Our Opera and Stanislavsky System]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 1954, Vol. 2, Issue 2, p. 142.

19 Herci o svojich úlohách [Actors Reflecting on Their Roles]. In *Eugen D’Albert: Nížina* [The Lowlands, programme booklet]. Bratislava : SND1951, pp. 14 – 15.

20 At that time, the SND boasted a high-quality ensemble and conductors.

part, it was about debasing Stanislavsky's heritage rather than its creative use."<sup>21</sup>

In a study published in the early 1950s in the scientific journal *Slovenské divadlo*, playwright and theatre theorist Peter Karvaš maintains: "Today, it is no longer possible to claim that Stanislavsky system encountered resistance; to the contrary, his propositions are accepted, his Method is brought to life. But not everywhere this happens out of a deep conviction and of inner need, based on an artist's personal knowledge that this very system of theatrical work is the best means for operatic realism in direction and acting; on the contrary, inconsistent provision of the most favourable conditions for the application of this Method is an eloquent symptom of the system being introduced from the outside, often by the Establishment, or that it was successful elsewhere, or that it was given general recognition. (...). If Stanislavsky system is to be the path to truth on stage, it is clear that the main front here will be an opera, musical-dramatic character, credible interpersonal relations between the characters, the persons/people on stage."<sup>22</sup>

Peter Karvaš, much like other contemporary theoreticians, critics, and art journalists, made references to the Soviet director Nikolai Severianovich Dombrovsky who staged *Eugene Onegin* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1952) in Bratislava, followed by Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1954). In his study *Niektoré problémy našej opery a systém Stanislavského* [On Some Problems of Our Opera and Stanislavsky System, 1954], Karvaš referred to Dombrovsky's works as "isolated peaks": "They have introduced, and in an exemplary fashion met, the requirement for a truthful social and period environment in an operatic work, communicating the need for and the concrete opportunities of acting and singing on a live (...) music and dramatic character, they have revealed our new perception of the relations between characters (...), while contributing to solving certain partial issues of the opera staging practice, the role and the technique of the extras, costumes, props, working with the lights, etc."<sup>23</sup>

The visits of guest Soviet directors in the countries of the socialist bloc were a targeted mission, with an aim to promote realistic art. Inviting a vi-

21 ČAVOJSKÝ, L. Križovatky našej opery [Our Opera Intersections]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 1962, Vol. 10, Issue 3, p. 311.

22 KARVAŠ, P. Niektoré problémy našej opery a systém Stanislavského [On Some Problems of our Opera and Stanislavsky System], p. 142.

23 Ibid, p. 140.



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: *Eugene Onegin*. The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 1952. Scene 1. Direction Nikolai Severianovich Dombrovsky. The Slovak National Theatre archives.

siting Soviet director to an opera ensemble had a strong ideological justification. The opera was perceived as a place where formalism managed to maintain its position while socialist realism succeeded in other art forms. Dombrovsky, director of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, was also regularly seconded to friendly countries in the 1950s, and alongside Bratislava, he directed opera performances in Budapest, Prague, and Tirana. He introduced the SND to a hitherto unexperienced work performance across all the interpretive elements and in parallel with staging a production, he attended discussions with theatre makers, performers, students, and critics. Director Jiří Fiedler summarised the working principles applied in the staging of *Eugene Onegin* in the article *Skúsenosti z práce režiséra N. S. Dombrovského* [Experiences from the Work of Director Nikolaj Severianovich Dombrovsky].<sup>24</sup> The principles included a close collaboration between the conductor and the di-

<sup>24</sup> FIEDLER, J. *Skúsenosti z práce režiséra N. S. Dombrovského* [Experiences from the Work of Director N. S. Dobrovsky]. In *Divadlo*, 1952, Vol. 3, Issue 5, pp. 448 – 453.

rector, a dramatic character's logic of action, emphasis on interpersonal relationships of dramatic characters, the art of listening to a partner, the correct singing expression derived from the style of singing peculiar to a particular operatic piece, intelligibility of the word sung and its meaning, authentic, personified style of acting (to achieve it, performers were tasked with elaborating internal monologues of their characters). Likewise, Dombrovsky gave a lot of weight to ensemble rehearsals and to working with choir and ballet ensembles. The choir's task was not only to provide for background music or to be a decorative embellishment, but rather act as a dramatic factor, with each individual having a role to play. A similar principle applied to the ballet element. Nothing on stage could be there for the sake of decoration or for filling in the space, every prop and every piece of furniture were given a legitimate place and function.

The reviews of *Eugene Onegin* unanimously agree that the director managed to connect music, singing, acting, and visual elements into a powerful dramatic whole and to do away with operatic mannerism, thus putting on a performance which was genuine theatre captivating the viewer by its truthfulness and by an appetite for life. Opera historian Ladislav Čavojský, who referred to the attempts of domestic directors to apply Stanislavsky system of acting to the opera staging techniques as being "perfunctory" or "overstated", made mention of just a single exception from perfunctory, naturalist portrayal of life, and that were two guest directions by Nikolai Dombrovsky: "They were a proof that the Method could also be applied to opera. Above all, they were a transposition of MKHAT drama staging techniques onto the opera stage."<sup>25</sup>

### **The Theatricalisation of Opera – Walter Felseinsten's Music Theatre**

In the period that followed, stage realism remained to be the predominant poetics of opera and drama, however, realised through elaborate acting and veritable music theatre rather than through embellished, colour idyll. In the politically relaxed 1960s, the ambition to enforce the idea that opera is both theatre and a musical art was apparent in theoretical and in practical terms. Critics and teatrologists repeatedly called on directors to cleanse their productions of realistic-descriptive clichés and acting routine, which were especially symptomatic of romantic and veristic operas. Scientific and

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25 ČAVOJSKÝ, L. Křižovatky našej opery [Our Opera Intersections], p. 312.

professional journals regularly featured analyses or extensive reviews of productions and also more general texts on domestic and foreign opera theatre, or papers from thematised conferences.

Speaking about the realisation side, the beginnings of the departure from trivial illusiveness are noticeable especially in the productions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century operatic works, which by their very nature provided space for implanting more progressive scenic elements and a more civilian acting poetics. Needless to say, the results were not clear-cut either. In general, it may be stated that the productions of modern opuses increased the ensemble's acting potential, which was gradually reflected in the classical repertoire, even though it was a slow process, involving both successes and failures.

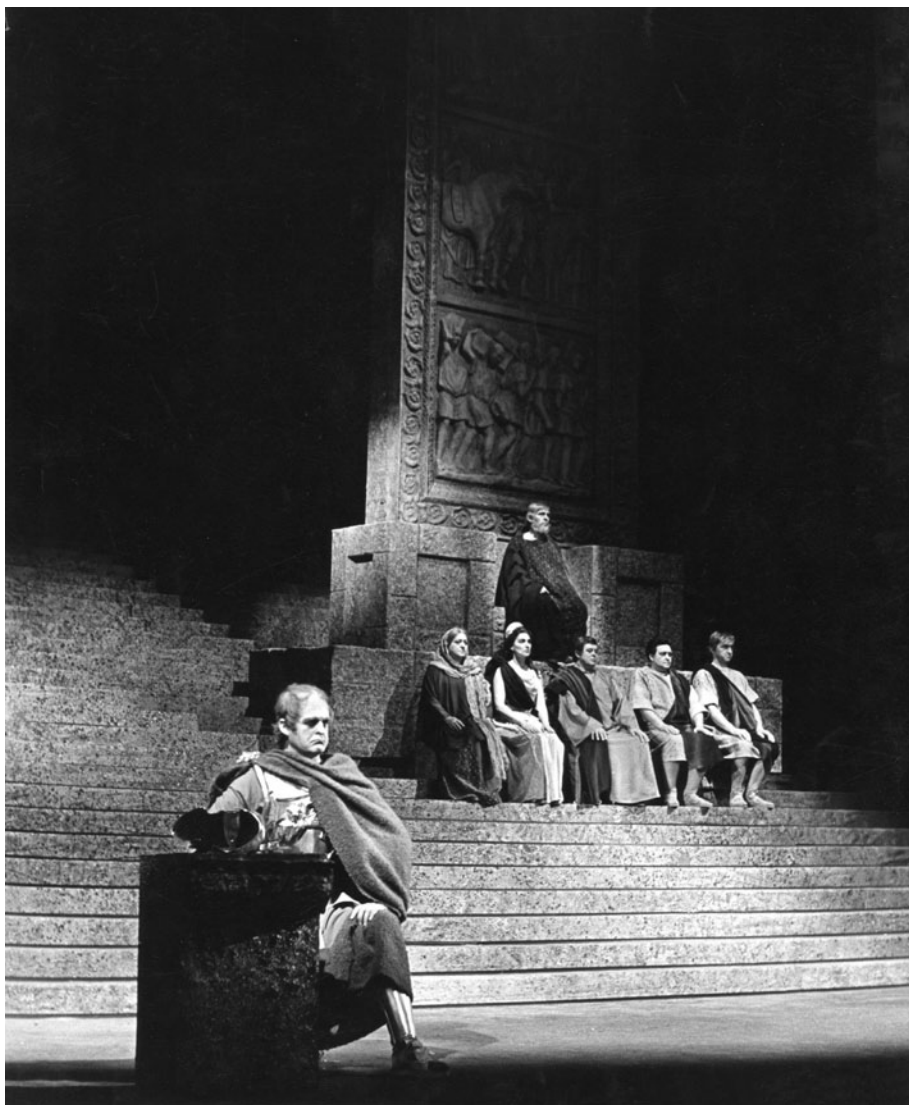
It was not only the stage where the origination of new music theatre was accompanied by difficulties. Initially, at the theoretical-critical level, the ideas about it were defined rather vaguely, without a clearer specification or set criteria.<sup>26</sup> While in the 1950s, the theatre professionals and critics of Slovak theatre were shielded by the name of Konstantin Stanislavsky, in the decades that followed, the East German director and pedagogue Walter Felsenstein became the representative of the ideal. His productions and the work of his students Götz Friedrich and Joachim Herz at the Komische Oper Berlin in (East) Berlin were based on a clear motivation of characters' action and a compelling acting interpretation. The director's interpretation was to augment the intellectual charge of the works, especially by emphasising their socio-critical aspects. So, if in the early 1960s, Slovak opera critics called for a modern music theatre, it was because they saw the model in the performances of East Berlin opera, or in the application of its principles in the creation of the opera houses in Dresden and Leipzig.

The only foreign theatre makers visiting the SND during this period also came from the German Democratic Republic. In Bratislava, director Klaus Kahl from Dresden staged an opera by Paul Dessau based on Bertolt Brecht's libretto *Odsúdenie Lukulla* [The Condemnation of Lucullus, 1962], which was highly rated by critics but not particularly well received by viewers, in which the elements of epic theatre were applied in a stunning way. A year later, he directed Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (1963), with much the

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26 Viac k tejto téme pozri napr. HAVLÍČKOVÁ KYSOVÁ, Š. Teoretické dílo Miloše Wasserbauera v kontextu dobového myšlení o operní inscenační tvorbě [Theoretical Work of Miloš Wasserbauer in Relation to the Contemporary Thinking about Staging Opera]. In *Theatralia*, 2017, Vol. 20, Issue 2, pp. 69 – 95. DOI: 10.5817/TY2017-2-4.





*Paul Dessau: The Condemnation of Lucullus. The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 1962. Direction Klaus Kahl. Photo by Anton Šmotlák. The Slovak National Theatre archives.*

same intentions. However, Brecht's poetics, which proved rather difficult to render useful in Slovak drama theatre and the results were ambivalent, was not eventually put into practice in the SND Opera and there were no domestic followers of the path outlined by Klaus Kahl. The principle of observing rather than empathising was alien and undiscovered to the Bratislava en-



semble. The production of George Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess* (1974), staged by a visiting team from Leipzig, called forth a keen reaction. Director Günter Lohse achieved the production's consistent realism by building exacting actor's actions and by individualising the choir, while bringing out the hitherto unexpected acting skills of some singers. The final form, in which every detail was meticulously incorporated into a dramatic whole, oscillated between a drama set to music and a modern opera.

However, since foreign directors made only sporadic visits to the SND Opera in the period in question, the poetics of Walter Felsenstein's psychologically-realistic music theatre was only indirectly imported to Slovakia, through the experience of the creators visiting German theatres or festivals as spectators, and through scientific literature and expert discourse. In his approach to opera scores in the 1960s and 1980s, his poetics was creatively transformed especially by director and teacher Branislav Kriška (1931 – 1999), who tuned to Walter Felsenstein's perception of opera as a synthetic theatre uniting all branches of stage arts, which are jointly subordinated to the main idea of the work and the scores. His productions were preceded by a meticulous dramaturgical preparation, which entailed learning about the vocal and instrumental plans of the opera, analysis of characters and their actions, and psychological motivations. Martin Bendik, Branislav Kriška's student at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, characterises him as a representative of "theatricalised" opera within the meaning of a sweeping Felsensteinean reform, with a refined taste in art consistently applying the psychological probability of subtexts and with a consequential argumentation underlying the use of theatrical devices within the interpretation framework, using a simple term – directorial concept.<sup>27</sup>

Branislav Kriška was a travelling artist and spectator, leaving behind accounts of his foreign experiences in the form of several reviews that revealed the roots of his taste formation and of his directorial signature. He believed that exposure to foreign opera and theatre activity was an important prerequisite of the formation of Slovak opera directors: "The lack of original works and translations is a significant impediment to our art education and directorial practice. Since the directors, who are referred to in Europe as personalities setting the tone of the world of contemporary opera (Giorgio Strehler, Juraj Herz, Boris Pokrovsky, Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, Luca Ronconi,

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27 (mb). [M. Bendik]. Reprezentant zdivadelnenej opery [The Theatricalised Opera Representative]. In *Portál SND*, February 2016, p. 29.

Götz Friedrich), have not yet come to direct operas in our country, it is necessary to get to know their works either by travelling to a performance (which is the best), or from their theoretical works, television, or film.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Opera of the Slovak National Theatre as Part of an Open Europe**

The events of November 1989, which brought the rule of the party-state – the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – to an end, cleared the way for open state borders and a free contact with international opera activity in both directions: the viewers were free to travel and see foreign productions and conversely, foreign producers were free to travel and see their viewers. While the audiences at the National Theatre in Prague were exposed to the work of acclaimed European directors quite early (for instance, David Poutney, Robert Wilson, Ursel and Karl-Ernst Herrmann, and others), the Opera of the SND remained a “provincial” scene in this respect.

Artistic transfers within the meaning of visiting foreign production teams were accelerated after 2000. The leading representative of a new era in Slovak opera shaped in direct contact with the latest European theatrical trends was Peter Konwitschny (1946), who put on five productions at the SND between 2005 and 2018: *Eugene Onegin* (2005) by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, *Madama Butterfly* (2007), and *Bohéma* [La bohème, 2014]<sup>29</sup>, *Vec Makropulos* [The Makropulos Affair, 2015] by Leoš Janáček, and the grand opera *Židovka* [The Jewess] by Fromental Halévy (2018). Peter Konwitschny’s signature is a synthesis of the tradition of politically and socially appellative theatre of Bertolt Brecht, of Walter Felsenstein’s psychological realism, and of the stylised symbolism of Ruth Berghaus. It claims affinity with the anti-capitalist aesthetic theory of Theodor W. Adorno which interprets opera as an active politics within the meaning of the Greek word polis. His productions are characterised by social criticism, political commitment, and moral appeal. Opera theatre understands it as a space where the creator can (or even must) convey to the audience his view of society and of the values professed (or rejected by it). In his productions, he shares his critical view of the patriarchal organisation of Western society, of the dependence of modern civilisation on matter, of the consumerist way of life, and of ensuing disruption of moral values, whereby

28 KRIŠKA, B. – MACHALA, D. Režisér má byť divadlom posadnutý [The Director is to Be Obsessed with Theatre]. [Interview]. In *Nové slovo*, 28 February 1980, p. 13.

29 The three cases were a remake of his earlier works on German opera stages.



*Leoš Janáček: The Makropulos Affair. The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, 2015. Finale scene. Direction Peter Konwitschny. Photo by Jozef Barinka. The Slovak National Theatre archives.*

he is especially intrigued by their impact on an individual's psyche and interpersonal relationships. Foto Mojžišová\_4

During almost half a century of professional activity, Peter Konwitschny has developed a rich database of isotopies, by which the viewers are pushed outside their reception comfort to activate their socio-critical perception and to appeal to civic responsibility. Peter Konwitschny puts to use a variety of methods, to break through the so-called fourth wall. Among the methods most frequently used and experienced by the audiences in Bratislava was turning on the lights in the auditorium during key scenes, an alienating contact-making between the performers and the audience, developing plot situations amidst the audience, or creating emotional distance from emotionally powerful opera scenes through a grotesque stylisation of acting expression. The recipients of Peter Konwitschny's productions, within the meaning of Theodor W. Adorno's aesthetics defying "culinary" approach to art<sup>30</sup> and Ber-

<sup>30</sup> The concept was first introduced by the members of the Frankfurt School and by its prominent member musicologist Theodor W. Adorno, to refer to operatic art which wants to be enjoyed in the first place.

tolt Brecht's socially engaged theatre, should not indulge in an aesthetic experience but rather leave the theatre emotionally stricken, concerned, and engrossed in thoughts.

The acclaimed director has introduced the Slovak opera to the staging criteria of leading European theatres: a clearly formulated artistic opinion and placing high professional requirements on all parts of the stage form. Not all performers were able to identify themselves with his uncompromising requirements (there were conflicting situations cropping up especially during the rehearsals of *Židovka* [The Jewess]), but without doubt, his distinctive signature had a profound impact on the perception of opera theatre by both Slovak audiences and domestic artists.

From among Slovak opera directors, Peter Konwitschny's most prominent mental ally is Martin Bendik (1960), student of Branislav Kriška, in the domestic community of directors enjoying the status of the only consistent proponent of the principles of the so-called Regietheater [director's theatre]. His theatrical concepts had departed from the traditional interpretations of operatic works and had been deeply socio-critical long before he, as playwright of the SND Opera, was first-hand exposed to the work of Peter Konwitschny, so it is questionable to what extent the mise-en-scènes resembling the work of his famous German peer, are an outcome of direct inspiration and to what extent they are Bendik's authentic authorial input. The influence of Peter Konwitschny's signature on him is most visibly evoked by Bendik's production of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio* (2016), not only by its political-critical concept, with the central idea being a warning against the detrimental influence of oligarchs on state policy (at that time it was an issue causing strong emotional response in Slovak society), but also by specific stage means (e.g. additionally written part of the alienating dramatic speech by the protagonist of the despotic governor Don Pizarro, turning on the lights in the auditorium, etc.).

Alongside Peter Konwitschny, there were also other reputable European theatre makers visiting the SND, e.g., Mariusz Treliński (Christoph Willibald Gluck: *Orpheus and Eurydice*, 2008), Gintaras Varnas (Charles Gounod: *Faust*, 2010), Andrejs Žagars (Richard Wagner: *Lohengrin*, 2013), David Radok (Antonio Vivaldi: *Arsilda*, 2017), and others. Though these were one-off collaborations, they brought variety, in better cases, enriching tones, to the still relatively closed Slovak opera theatre. Another form of artistic transfers, which is slowly but steadily gaining a foothold in the SND, are co-production collaborations with foreign theatres. A regular confrontation between do-

mestic creators, spectators, and international trends is undoubtedly among the positive achievements of an open opera in Europe.

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# Contemporary Dance in the Context of Slovak and European Discourse

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**Abstract:** In 2006, five young Slovak dancers Milan Herich, Milan Tomášik, Anton Lachký, Peter Jaško, and Martin Kilvady founded an independent Les SlovaKs Dance Collective in Brussels, which is one of the centres of contemporary dance. Les SlovaKs focused mainly on contemporary dance, and gradually each of the members devised his own language and unique means of expression. In parallel with their interpretive activities, they also began to work as choreographers. Their cooperation oscillated between foreign and Slovak productions. In no time, Les SlovaKs dancers ranked among the top contemporary dancers, and the collective's work and direction represent one of the fundamental impulses for Slovak and Central European contemporary dance. In addition to characterising the poetics of this collective connecting "domestic" and "world" attributes, the study focuses especially on the work of choreographer Anton Lachký, who puts to use extreme music means of expression in both his creation and the Puzzle Work technique of composition.

**Keywords:** contemporary dance, Kathak, dance composition, Puzzle Work, Les SlovaKs, Anton Lachký

## Slovak-Belgian Les SlovaKs

In recent decades, contemporary dance has been undergoing diversification and transformation into one of the most progressive fields of art. New systems of composition are being introduced to a strictly dance discourse especially from live art<sup>1</sup>, but also theatre and digital media<sup>2</sup>. Establishing the artist position of dramaturg in contemporary dance should not be overlooked,

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1 For more see GOLDBERG, R. L. *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present*. New York : Thames & Hudson, 2011, pp. 207 – 215.

2 Among contemporary creative professionals experimenting with new sonic and visual technologies is American performer Andrew Schneider. For more information visit: <https://www.andrewjs.com>.



as its starting principles of work are different from those of dramaturgy and yet, its contribution to an open dialogue during the creation process is equally important.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary dance, despite its partial inclination to work with the text and flirt with performativity<sup>4</sup>, is primarily created via movement as the predominant means of expression. Thanks to this a priori ability to communicate based on physical expression it is regarded as one of the few export and competitive commodities.

Considering the fact that the early attempts at modern, and later, contemporary dance, were made in our territory as late as the early 1980s, within Slovak art, it gained international recognition within a comparatively short period of time.<sup>5</sup> The plethora of international festivals focusing on contemporary dance is a proof of the expansive nature of dance,<sup>6</sup> i.e., of platforms annually featuring the names of Slovak male and female dancers and choreographers. However, it is debatable whether Les SlovaKs Dance Collective which is the focus of our study, should be referred to as a Slovak dance collective, since up until recently, its members, five Slovak male dancers, and presently, well-known choreographers, Milan Herich, Milan Tomášik, Anton Lachký, Peter Jaško, and Martin Kilváy, lived and worked in Belgium.

Since the 1990s, Brussels has been among the most sought-after centres of contemporary dance, and P.A.R.T.S.<sup>7</sup> dance school is to be given credit for

3 By that I mean the current tendency to establish this art position at the level of training and education at the academies of art and universities. For more information on the topic see an essay by dance dramaturg Anna Mokotow. MOKOTOW, A. Decentring Dance Dramaturgy. In *The Theatre Times*, 1 September 2016. [online]. Available at: <<https://thetheatretimes.com/decentring-dance-dramaturgy/>>.

4 By that I mean an input of other means of expression in contemporary dance, working with video, text, deliberate transgression of genre and art norms/aesthetics, and the interdisciplinarity of genres.

5 Alongside Les SlovaKs, one may list a generation of male and female dancers and choreographers of the middle generation, i.e., in their forties. Of them, Jaro Viňarský and his collaboration with the Belgian choreographer Karine Ponties, is worth mentioning. In 2013, he was awarded Bessie Awards for a solo in *The Painted Bird*. Among them is also Daniel Raček and his collaboration with the Norwegian choreographer Karen Foss or Nikoleta Rafaelisová and Andrej Petrovič and their collaboration with Akram Khan in Akram Khan Company.

6 International dance festivals like ImpulzTanz (Vienna), Full Moon (Pyhäjärvi), b12 (Berlin,) and others.

7 P.A.R.T.S. is a European centre of education and research in contemporary dance, whose international character builds on the work of visiting professors, lecturers, and practitioners covering dance, martial arts, meditations, visual art or performance art. Another

that. While being in Belgium, Les SlovaKs put on stage several fundamental productions: *Opening Night* (2007), *Journey to Home* (2009), *The Concert* (2010), and *Fragments* (2012). Despite being short-lived,<sup>8</sup> the collective with its four productions gained local recognition followed by an intensive international tour after each production. It is worthwhile mentioning that the collective operated as a dance group without a choreographer and its productions were noted for their structured improvisation. The above productions demonstrate a visible progress in the range of expression employed by each creative professional, his specificities and inclination towards diverse systems of compositional procedures within the choreographic and interpretive work.

The short existence of the group was also influenced by the fact that over time, the work of individual members as performers and choreographers expanded, they left Brussels and expanded internationally. Milan Tomášik went to live and work in Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he was engaged in his solo projects and in collaboration with the SEAD dance school in Salzburg. In addition to his solo career, Milan Herich has performed in productions of the dance group *Ultima Vez* under the direction of Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and collaborated with Belgian-Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. For almost 15 years now, he has been an assistant to the Venezuelan-American choreographer David Zambrano. Martin Kilvály was a member of the well-known Belgian dance group ROSAS and *Ultima Vez*, later on, he collaborated with David Zambrano and Chris Parkinson, he has also given several workshops at P.A.R.T.S. He currently works on projects in his residential centre in Belgium. Peter Jaško, like his colleagues from Les SlovaKs, collaborated with David Zambrano and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and at the same time, he pursues his solo and pedagogical careers. After graduating from the Ján Levoslav Bella Conservatory in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia), Anton Lachký joined the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, modern dance, which he left after a short time and enrolled at the P.A.R.T.S. dance school and became a student of the school's founder Anne Teresa de Keers-

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reputable school in European space is SEAD based in Salzburg, Austria, with study programmes similar to those of P.A.R.T.S. and with an even more experimental approach, with prevalent masterclasses and workshops and with lecturers from diverse fields of humanities.

8 Officially, Les SlovaKs existed between 2007 and 2018. The group's dissolution date reflects the fact that recently, Les SlovaKs dance collective has not put on a new production, although in 2018, *Journey Home* had its dernière at the Greek Kalamata International Dance Festival.

maeker (Rosas). In 2004, as a performer, he went on a two-year world tour with the dance production MA directed and choreographed by Akram Khan.

### **Inspirations – Integration – Implementation**

Anton Lachký, who took up folk dance as a three-year-old boy, after graduating from the Slovak schools mentioned above, embarked on a collaboration with acclaimed choreographers in Belgium. He maintained that collaboration with Akram Khan, an English dancer and choreographer of Bangladeshi descent, had a profound impact on him: “There is definitely an influence of a friend of mine, a choreographer, who I have been working with, Akram Khan. He has been using a lot of Kathak dance precision and a lot of speed.”<sup>9</sup> By combining the elements of Slovak folk dance with the most current composition choreographic approaches, Lachký created Puzzle Work, his own choreographic, interpretive and training dance technique. It is a combination of the elements of martial arts, mostly karate and Afro-Brazilian capoeira, Slovak folk dance elements, and the transformed principles of Akram Khan, such as working with the detail and the elements of Indian traditional dance Kathak.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the choreographic system makes use of the dancer’s self-assertive nature, i.e., of the predisposition and inclination toward an extraordinary dynamics of a plastic body, as well as of the dance performer’s own experience.

While Akram Khan “tells stories,”<sup>11</sup> Anton Lachký notionally turns to the ancient ideal – one could speak of *kalokagathia*, a philosophy of a bodily, moral, and spiritual whole. His entire creation and work with Les SlovaKs are imbued with the elemental joy of sheer dance. Lachký is relaxed in physical expression, notwithstanding the dynamic changes of his body which are centre-controlled.<sup>12</sup> Flexibility is enhanced by constant movement filling in the entire space. He transforms the body’s frenetic movement into scenic form and makes the space literally pulsate. Although Anton Lachký’s creation may

9 Interview is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiPWUuLjCY4>.

10 The traditional Indian dance Kathak is noted for its particularly rigid figures based on precise gestures or complex movement and speed.

11 Akram Khan keeps accentuating that among the ambitions of creation has always been a desire to tell stories. For more visit: <https://www.akramkhancompany.net/productions/the-silent-burn-project/>.

12 The centre is to be understood as the bottom part of the abdomen, where energy is activated.



*Anton Lachký*

be regarded as fixed improvisation, he has choreographic thinking and an ability to react ad hoc within the given spatial arrangement. Solos alternate with duets and group choreographies take over. The final scenic form considerably unmask the assignment given during the rehearsal process. The body and its dynamics and expression possibilities are among the exposed resonators. In places, it may appear to be a manifestation of the dancer's movement possibilities, with Anton Lachký's choreographic approach building on stamina and explosiveness. Performance orientation combined with exceptional dynamics is evocative of Anton Lachký's endeavour to push the body beyond its limits in contemporary dance. One level up, apprehension, even fear of death, is evoked. The moments of tranquillity and physical peace are disrupted and eliminated by the dynamics of dance scores. Here Anton Lachký's choreographies seem to allude to ontic, ontological even, need of the modern world and of the human,<sup>13</sup> which is the cause of producing con-

13 Ontological need is, said in the words of the Czech phenomenologist Anna Hogenová, "need which by its nature is a situation when life is at stake. (...) The human loses certainty (...). It is a risk of something we are unable to name exactly, which is frightening, which changes into the possibility of death." See HOGENOVÁ, A. *Život je dar, za který se taky musí platit* [Life Is a Gift You Once Have to Pay for]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpkCWKJ8Qqo&t=767s>. In Anton Lachký, an effort to delay the moment of "self- encounter" is reflected in creation which is life per se. However, in a dynamic pace and in the processes of continuous creation fear is accentuated.

stant movement. Puzzle Work delays the moment of slowing-down and, in a way, responds to and even replicates the modern globalised world which is dependent on the speed of information in the distribution process. As if an opposite pole is non-existent, as if there only existed running without a possibility to breathe out, life without solitude is disrupted by countless impulses representing complicated and physically challenging dance scores. His recent choreographic work offers more performative elements of contemporary dance, such as working with the text in the form of the dancers' verbalised expression, theatricality,<sup>14</sup> and an effort to implement distinctly dramatic elements of theatre.

### Pushing away

One of the fundamental transformation processes of Anton Lachký's choreographic and directorial work lies in the musical side of his productions – specifically, in the transition from reproduced electronic music to classical, often canonised, works of classical music. While the productions of Les SlovaKs worked exclusively with authorial scenic music, which was composed for them by the French composer Simon Thierrée, Anton Lachký withdrew from a close collaboration with the composer and opted for reproduced music. Apparently, the nature of the Puzzle Work technique of dance training and composition as a physically extremely challenging and dynamic work required acoustic back-up. When Lachký first began with Puzzle Work, techno music became an integral part of work sessions, workshops, and the rehearsal process. In a pragmatic sense, it was an acoustic support for a long and physically strenuous performance of the participants.

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14 By that I mean returning to the systems of composition of the first or second avant-garde, which gave up on the purity of genres and created works of interdisciplinary nature. By that I specifically mean inspiration by Greek or medieval theatre which culminated in performance art in the form of the live art genre typology which is a condensation of largely visual arts and performing arts. Among its compositional pillars is the work with presentness, public space, active viewer, and ephemerality. In contemporary dance it is distinct work with the conventional dramatic arc, work with the text, be in monologue or dialogue form. For more see MUSILOVÁ, M. Teatralita veřejných událostí – uvedení do problematiky [An Introduction to Theatricality of Public Events]. In *Theatralia*, 2014, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 9 – 24. Available at: [https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/bitstream/handle/11222.digilib/129835/1\\_Theatralia\\_17-2014-1\\_5.pdf?sequence=1](https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/bitstream/handle/11222.digilib/129835/1_Theatralia_17-2014-1_5.pdf?sequence=1).

Techno music, its emergence and variously modified sub-genres, came to the fore in Great Britain, on the verge of the 1980s. Among the distinctive characteristics of techno music, also when it comes to Anton Lachký's choreographic creation, is BEAT. It constitutes its essence, with BPM<sup>15</sup> ranging between 120 and 200 beats, which determines dynamic and atmospheric character, i.e., from "chill out techno" to "dark and raw techno." A component part of rave genre is its presentation, which is standardised to sets running several hours or even days long.<sup>16</sup> The seemingly monotonous nature of techno music aids the basic principle of Puzzle Work and performance orientation. Techno BEAT, its bass tones, produce a robust sound which makes the listener feel the resonance of body organs. Among the dominant Puzzle Work features is also employing the elements of traditional folk dance, irrespective of its regional origin. The musical elements are concentrated on legs and on footwork, and Anton Lachký puts to use the steps, foot stumping, jumps, and bounces peculiar to the Slovak regions of Horehronie and Detva.<sup>17</sup> The two Slovak regions are characterised by rotating dances, and part of their choreographic structure is a solo improvised dance<sup>18</sup> with various embellishments. This choreography also works with steps, specifically "symmetrical repeated shuffle steps, transferring weight from one foot to the other or various modifications of the sliding step, such as step side single, double, or triple."<sup>19</sup>

The way Anton Lachký combines techno and Slovak folk dances is suggestive of the choreographic thinking of his teacher Akram Khan, who also combines two basic elements in his choreographies – the traditional Indian Kathak dance whose rigid form is intertwined with the elements of contemporary dance. Formally, Anton Lachký employs a similar principle, and replaces Kathak with the Slovak folk dance elements peculiar to him which are

15 BPM – Beats per Minute.

16 A standard techno party format at Berghain Club in Berlin goes on non-stop for the entire weekend. It goes without saying that it is not featuring a single DJ or music producer. Concrete sets take 4 to 6 hours on the average. An essential part of a techno party is acoustic and physical experience of full-sounding bass tones causing the body parts to vibrate. Visually, a techno party is aesthetically anchored in minimalism for the most part, whereby one of the few elements is stroboscope or video-mapping or videoart.

17 Horehronie and Detva are regions located in the central part of the Slovak Republic.

18 DÚŽEK, S. – GARAJ, B. *Slovenské ľudové tance a hudba na sklonku 20. storočia* [Slovak Folk Dances and Music at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]. Bratislava : Ústav hudobnej vedy Slovenskej akadémie vied, 2001, p. 29.

19 Ibid.



combined with the systems of composition and means of expression unique to contemporary dance, whereby the concept is singularised by a distinctive work with isolations.

The concept of isolation and its use can be found in various dance techniques. Its character is unique to each of them, but the common starting point is a precise execution of a specific movement – its origin, quality, and the possibilities of expression. A significant feature is synchronous work of several movement centres independently coexisting side by side. They are interconnected by the dancer's body and the technique is based on a combination of different movement qualities of concrete centres. The basic centres are made up of a vertical division of the body, i.e., first comes the head and the neck, followed by hands and legs come last. Throughout the process, more complex movement and dance combinations are added with the hands divided into two centres – the left and the right, etc. The more centres are under the dancer's control, the wider the range of movement, the more diverse, mobile, and more plastic the movement becomes. Anton Lachký's system of composition enables the dancers to work in a more diverse fashion. One of the features of isolation could be movement detection, which is aimed at determining a concrete movement, its quality, of a specific body part. Another form of isolation is used mainly in improvisation, with the work being focused on a concrete movement, which when repeated and rehearsed across various qualities, creates space for researching it.

Like Akram Khan, Anton Lachký pursues composition dichotomy. On the one hand, it is tradition and history embodied in discipline, something very spiritual and sacred. On the other hand, it is contemporaneity offering a scientific laboratory and a range of possibilities. The elements of the Slovak folk dance are a certainty for Anton Lachký, literally, they are a pillar with a clearly ordered and almost changeless structure. Combined with the elements of contemporary dance, in which the attributes and qualities of a dancer/interpreter/performer are determined mainly on the basis of the dancer's flow and centre work, flexibility, etc. (i.e., not strictly on mastering a specific technique), choreographically, Anton Lachký's Puzzle Work is unparalleled globally. If one understands that parts of folk dance, especially of Horehronie and Detva regions, or their derivatives, constitute a component part of the Puzzle Work system taught all over the world, one can say that it is a very specific language with clear cultural roots.

Anton Lachký clearly belongs to a group of choreographers, contemporising traditional folk dance. The shift may be seen especially in his choreo-



graphic work and in the existence of folk dance elements in other than traditional context. He deals mainly with the variability and plasticity of the selected folk dance elements. Like Akram Khan, who integrated Kathak and its elements into his choreographic work, Anton Lachký incorporated folk dance elements, in both cases, however, it is about recontextualising the tradition. A characteristic feature of this process is the dichotomy of the traditional and the new (non-traditional). In Anton Lachký's staging practice the reference to Slovak folk dance is apparent and it constitutes a pillar of his creation, however, digression from tradition lies especially in the absence of rituality which used to be the quintessence of a concrete dance. The event initiating the dance and determining its nature, be it transient, ceremonial, "ritual" dance<sup>20</sup> or the celebration of cyclical events,<sup>21</sup> is no longer a stimulus for the dance per se. The point of departure for traditional folk dance, i.e., the relationship between form and content, is reduced to a set of concrete dance steps, figures, or entire scores. These are combined with other means of expression of contemporary dance, regardless of their content, formal, cultural or religious tradition associated with the content. The decisive factor in choosing a specific movement or dance step, exceptionally entire scores, seems to be its potential and the flexibility of the coexistence with other dance or movement figures.<sup>22</sup> In this spirit, movement becomes a component part of fixed choreographic structure having the form of a fixed movement and dance score. Recontextualisation may quickly turn into decontextualisation, when the presence of the original context is not renewed in the form of creating a new context, in an effort to picture, capture or review the "traditional" content, but rather space is set up for the creation of a new context containing several other contexts.<sup>23</sup>

20 Partner dances which existed in the context of a concrete social event (a wedding, for instance) and were distinct by their clear structure, both in terms of form and content.

21 For instance, harvest or welcoming spring dances.

22 By potentiality and flexibility I mean the choreographer's individual idea of the final form, which in a choreographer's work changes the elements depending on their potential inside a dance part as well as within the overall expression of a concrete scene or production.

23 By that I refer to the staging practice of international dance groups in which mutual enrichment connected with the concrete performer's individuality is among the focal points of work which reflects their cultural context, education, and personalities. A clash of contexts appears to be a possible stimulus in contemporary dance creation. For more see COOLS, G. *Imaginative Bodies. Dialogues in Performance Practices. The Memory Is in the Body*. Amsterdam : Valiz, 2016, pp. 44 – 58.

Anton Lachký's reference to folk dance is inevitably connected with the choreographer's cultural identity and it is culturally anchored, although in a totally different form. Conscious work with the elements of traditional folk dance implemented by Lachký represents a pool of movement and dance register and at the same time manifests the process of the liberation of form from content.

"Heritage is a concept that comes close to tradition. Both have something to do with time and connections between yesterday, today and tomorrow. (...) At the same time we see them as two different processes, and behind them different meanings and results concerning dance. (...) Maybe contemporizing is a time concept pointing to something we do, in a new time, parallel to localizing that means that something is transferred in space and done in a new place."<sup>24</sup> The above quotation from a study by Swedish ethnologist Mats Nilsson may also be understood as alerting to identity, providing one admits that Anton Lachký's concept is about a continuous contact with the tradition. In an interview posted on YouTube Lachký maintains: "The identity colour that comes with what I do, probably the strong traditional influence how I started. The biggest part of the idea of Slovak dance would be joy. (...) Singing and dancing was the way how to make life easier. That would be one thing I try to keep in a specific way in the dance. Other things I like, of course, I like pushing powerful energy with the body."<sup>25</sup> Contemporary dance in Lachký's language of movement continues to implement the elements of traditional dance ridden of the historical and religious sediment of its realisation connected with specific events or facts.

Contemporary dance has evolved from a postmodern eclectic way of thinking, which made it possible to perceive dance which, in the words of the Czech dance theorist Nina Vangeli, "achieved two goals: freedom of expression and the precision of articulation of dance speech; it leaped over its development to a point where the ecstasy of wildness intersects with the ecstasy of discipline."<sup>26</sup> Both of these premises are uniquely present in Puzzle Work. Wildness is represented by constant movement, which looks to be free, however, thanks to its technical complexity and precision, it is subor-

24 NILSSON, M. *Dance, Gender and Meanings Contemporizing Traditional Dance*. Praha : AMU, 2012, p. 154.

25 Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFGjPCJ\\_6n4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFGjPCJ_6n4).

26 VANGELI, N. *Čítanka světové choreografie 20. století* [The 20th Century World Choreography Textbook]. Praha : Konzervatoř Duncan Centre, 2005, p. 24.

minated to discipline. Perfection in movement is one of the starting points. The physicality and precision of bodily expression seems to be the element facilitating progress. Anton Lachký maintains: “That’s the only way you can keep growing. If you succeed in a certain form, you must change the form, otherwise, there is nothing what you’re improving.”<sup>27</sup> For him, progress entails constant training and development of physicality, or rather the possibility of physical expression with an emphasis on precision and dynamics. Workshops and productions focus on performance, endurance, and constant movement, with BPM bordering on dark techno.

## LUDUM

In 2012, Anton Lachký founded the dance group Anton Lachky Company, with dancers from all over the world. He devotes himself entirely to the choreographic work and during the eight years of the ensemble’s existence, he has prepared four full-length dance performances – *Mind the Gap* (2013), *Side Effects* (2015), *CARTOON* (2017), and *LUDUM* (2019). This was a time of his transition from primary electronic reproduced music to composers of classical and orchestral music (e.g., Antonio Vivaldi, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Ludwig van Beethoven). He used classical opus, specifically Giuseppe Verdi’s *Requiem*, for the first time during his collaboration with the Iceland Dance Company, for which he created the production *A Perfect Day to Dream* (2011): “I’ve never used classical music. This is my first encounter with music which is different from the one used in previous productions which was, let’s say, more dynamic. Not necessarily electronic but with a more abstract sound. I kept listening to Verdi’s *Requiem* for a year. It’s very powerful and there’s a lot of frailness in it, which allows me to use its potential in various ways.”<sup>28</sup>

Verdi enabled Anton Lachký to expand the context of Puzzle Work and experiment not only in terms of bodily expression, but also in terms of music, which, unlike techno music, is more fragmented, sophisticated, and dramatic. *Requiem* has advanced Lachký to a more theatrical thinking: he no longer thinks only through the resulting movement material in the form of choreography, but in an effort to make the theme more concrete, he reaches

27 Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFGjPCJ\\_6n4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFGjPCJ_6n4).

28 From an interview to the production *A Perfect Day to Dream*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBTklRULwGA>.

out for scores which are dramatic, rich in sounds, tempo and rhythm. Often, they are enriched by dramatic text outputs. Starting with the production *A Perfect Day to Dream*, Anton Lachký has put to use theatricalised dance expression in his full-length productions, largely through an exaggerated and intensified facial expression of the dancers.

In his most recent production *LUDUM*,<sup>29</sup> he focused on virtual reality and eliminating the boundaries between virtual and real. According to the production annotation, the dancers “wander in the wilderness of virtual reality. They enjoy an artificially created reproduction of reality and in glee they are drawn into a whirl in which even the wildest fantasies are possible. Genuine happiness is at your fingertips! The dancers are beautiful, strong, and immortal, their rapid movement is on the edge of the possible and reality pushes its limits to the horizon of infinity. Playing with the limits of the possible and the impossible to a point of eliminating the edges between them raises the question of what will become of Ludum and of its inhabitants? Are we still able to discern between reality and virtuality, the latter absorbing us more and more? Are we able to keep distance and maintain our sense of real life?”<sup>30</sup> Anton Lachký added a narrative line to the abstract theme, which frames the entire production. At the end, there is a direct interaction with the viewer. According to Slovak dance critic Barbara Brathová who reviewed the production, “(...) with the arrival of a bizarre couple evoking a snobbish married couple without taste (he is dressed up in a pink suit, cowboy boots and a hat, she is in a glittering evening gown), we get to understand that everything we have seen so far, is the creation of these ‘entrepreneurs’, of a computer programme that is, in which everyone is situated. (...) The protagonists change into puppets and turn into an implanted part of a computer game in which not only their dreams come true, but they are almost magically abducted by it. The couple even verbalises its amazement at this modern invention into the micro ports.”<sup>31</sup>

29 *LUDUM*. Anton Lachky Company, premiered on 2 April 2019 at the Theatre La Balsamine, Brussels. Choreography: Anton Lachký. Lighting and sound design: Tom Danielis. Costumes: Britt Angé. Cast: Angel Duran, Lewis Cooke, Patricia Rotondaro, Guilhem Chatir, Hyejin Lee, Anna Karenina Lambrechts, Ioulia Zacharaki, Maria Manoukian/Mami Izumi.

30 Annotation to production *LUDUM* staged during the main programme of the International Festival of Contemporary Dance Bratislava in Movement 2019. [online]. [cit. 1 December 2020]. Available at: <https://www.plast.dance/podujatie.php?lang=sk&id=468>.

31 BRATHOVÁ, B. Ludum, mesto oklamanej pravdy [Ludum, the City Deceiving with Truth]. In [www.tanecportal.sk](http://www.tanecportal.sk), 13 October 2019. [online]. [cit. 1 December 2020]. Available at: <http://www.tanecportal.sk/casopis/clanok/ludum-mesto-oklamanej-pravdy>.



*Anton Lachky Company: LUDUM. The Theatre La Balsamine, Brussels, 2019. Choreography and direction Anton Lachký. Photo by Hichem Dahes.*

Interpretation at the choreographic/dramaturgical level is replicated by associative notions of speed, effect, and flow of information. In the first half, the dancers seem to be copying information bits at an extremely dynamic pace, and choreographic patterns are suggestive of the information algorithms of the information movement on the Internet. The principle is revealed gradually. The production opens up by Anton Lachký's almost "Wilsonian" introduction of the dancers standing against the backdrop and performing short solos on the proscenium. The entrée is characterised by dynamic movement accentuating the dancers' physical limitations and plasticity. The production is a bright mix, musically and acoustically. In addition to shamanic drums, the sounds of classical music are transformed into electronic sound lines evocative of "analog techno."<sup>32</sup> The sound element is not as augmented as in previous projects, whether it was techno or classical music, but it rather represents a relatively eclectic array of sounds. Through music, Anton Lachký tries to capture the birth and development of a civilisation, from shamanic drums through classical music, down to electronic music, which is reduced in *LUDUM* finale to sounds evocative of the signal sounds of machines, of their beeps, whistles, squeaks, and the like.

The Puzzle Work technique of composition is strongly represented in the performers' movement terminology. In the introduction, Anton Lachký deliberates two movement extremes – a standing dancer on the horizon versus a dancing dancer on the proscenium, while the spatial division allows the viewer to perceive the gap between passivity and activity. The dance extreme, augmented mostly to the dynamic position of the performers, is present in all of Lachký's Puzzle Work creation. A unique coherence is created by the body metaphor as a piece of information whose transmission speed determines time. For the greater part, the production is an information warfare, where exhibition<sup>33</sup> solos blend with duets, and the latter with group choreographies. The transitions are among the most powerful moments of the piece given the clear timing work and the plasticity of expression. It fluctuates and from an initially energetically binary position "tension and relaxation," it shifts from adagio through animato down to allegro vivace and prestissimo, which are Anton Lachký's most natural tempos.

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32 These are modular synthesizers which are also used as digital beats.

33 By that I mean the exhibition of form expressed in exacting movement and dance parts in which the content constitutes a secondary, or tertiary even, layer.



In a relatively legible image, Anton Lachký presented the concept of social levelling, the process of controlling information and the desire of the elites for uniformity. The initially colourful and dynamic singularities of performers were transformed into machines repeating the same movement. The dance unisono continues until a final effort to interact with the audience is made, which may also lead to embarrassment and resentment. In it, Anton Lachký's cowboys tried to convey a virtual reality that is not real, but its power is dangerous. The epilogue was again an interactive dialogue between two dancers and the audience. Reviewer Barbara Brathová appreciated that "the dancers of Anton Lachky Company were convincing in communicating the message to the audience, dancing perfectly, with matter-of-fact professionalism and with an amusing authenticity of an attractively beautiful acting of the two main protagonists."<sup>34</sup>

The dancers' creations may also be viewed from a different perspective. What the reviewer referred to as "attractively beautiful acting" was, in fact, the weakness of otherwise elaborate production. An effort to render their parts in a natural way had the opposite effect – as if their stylisation masked the dancers' inability to interpret the text in a civil, natural, and playful manner. Uncertainty in the interpretation of the text itself, which was supposed to be the gloss of the whole theme (as follows from the intent), draws attention to one of the weaknesses not only of *LUDUM*, but also of many other dance productions. Although the dividing line between acting and performing arts is thin, and one could talk about liminal nature, both art forms, whether it be performance art or performing arts, operate in a similar field of the viewer's perception. If the dancer's presence is flawless in bodily expression, the dancers are challenged with acting and textual elements. Nowadays, alongside dance skills, it is an essential part of the performers' predisposition. The strength of Anton Lachký's dancers in *LUDUM* lies in their bodily expression, so the qualitative difference in acting was even more noticeable. In the context of Lachký's full-length productions, this is a significant qualitative shift, despite some reservations. *LUDUM* is a production where Anton Lachký's Puzzle Work system coheres with the content. The speed of information transfer follows the dancers' movement and the production theme and utilised means converge on a relatively consistent form, which cannot be said of his previous productions, in which content was often diminished by form.

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34 BRATHOVÁ, B. *Ludum, mesto oklamanej pravdy*. [Ludum, the City Deceiving with Truth]. In [www.tanecportal.sk](http://www.tanecportal.sk), 13 October 2019. [online]. [cit. 1 December 2020]. Available at: <http://www.tanecportal.sk/casopis/clanok/ludum-mesto-oklamanej-pravdy>.



## Conclusion

The paradox of contemporary dance is returning to narration using means other than dance and movement. Working with the text and its interpretation is progressively making its way into dance art. The process comes natural to some creative professionals, and they are able to enrich the dance piece with it. Occasionally, untapped potential at basic levels is noticeable, mainly due to a lack of the acting training of the dancers. This manifests itself especially in the uncertainty, which then – as in the case of the analysed production *LUDUM* – leads to an expression in which natural (civil) acting is confused with stylisation, which accentuates the discrepancy between the original intent and the acting limits of the dancers. Other untapped potential of such productions are insufficient articulation and the absence of diction, oftentimes the argument being the authenticity of the narrative and performativity. In an attempt to make contact with the audiences and have them understand their creations, the dancers reach out for words and the text, which affects the quality of dance art and weakens the belief in the power of its natural communication. In a most refined way, the dancer's exposed body stands in contrast with working with the word and verbal expression.

The abstract language of contemporary dance does not necessarily rely on the support of monologues. Currently, the plasticity of the dancer's expression lies in his/her ability to deal with the word outside its inherent information value – that is, in the dancer's compelling alternation of verbal and dance expressions, thus expanding the register in interpreting the text and clearly crossing the line of physical expression.

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## A Theatre of Visual Excellence

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**Abstract:** The authoress provides an analysis of the hitherto creation of Odivo, a Slovak independent theatre group, transiting different forms of theatre. By creating rich metaphoric images and by its playful approach to the puppet, material (often, live and natural), and to an object, the imagination of child and adult viewers is stirred, and the group's creation acquires intercultural and interdisciplinary perspectives. Given the fact that its creation is primarily based on non-verbal images, enhanced visually and musically, it is transferable to the international theatre scene.

**Key words:** Odivo, poetics, performance, experiment, puppet theatre, materiality, imagery, visual language

The changes in the paradigm of the 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre arts were accompanied mainly by reflections on the scenic potential of a dramatic work, new possibilities of theatre and its overlap with other art forms (especially in the so-called visual and performance or performing art forms), and the social functions of theatre in the broad sense of understanding the needs and expectations of society. They explored the position of the actor vis-à-vis the audience, the architecture of theatre and public spaces, theatre communication strategies, etc. On the other hand, these considerations revisited the origin of dramatic expressions – the ritual origin of theatre, the possibilities of creating universally understandable archetypal images, inspirations in the performative elements of oriental and third-world cultures, their transfer to the creation of performing arts of the Western world and vice versa. They have sparked a global debate on the concept of intercultural theatre. With the growing internationalisation of theatre, interest in intercultural projects and theatre outside the mainstream of Western cultures, by that meaning especially the so-called interpretive theatre, intercultural studies began to thrive. The architects of these theories (for example, Patrice Pavis, Erika

Fischer-Lichte) sought to appreciate cultural production stemming from intercultural transfers.<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenon of interculturality in performing arts is generally seen as a mutual exchange, a dialogue of theatre makers from different cultural backgrounds or as a creative inspiration for otherness in the creation of a dramatic work. Just as interculturality may come about in the staging/performative approaches of theatre makers to a dramatic work (at the level of the work's creation and structure), it is also present in the reception and communication relationship between the viewer and the dramatic work (at the level of reception and interpretation).<sup>2</sup> Interpretive and semantic subtleties of the interculturality of a dramatic work are revealed in the reception of the work per se. "Every culture has its unique way of coding, use, and contextual incorporation of multi-channel systems of non-verbal and paraverbal expressions and their transformation to art."<sup>3</sup> Viewers opt for their own interpretive keys and individual signs and codes are associated with cultural contexts close to them.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, the capacity of a dramatic work to communicate across cultural borders, i.e. in a manner facilitating the recipient's decoding the signs outside a cultural system known to him/her (within the meaning of semiotic theories), should prove the work's universal value, no matter how abstract this construct may sound.

At a pragmatic level, the capacity of a dramatic work to become "universally understandable" may be deliberated from the perspective of its flexibility to connect to the current international context or of its communicativeness beyond the border of national culture. This "transferability" is linked to a number of external and internal factors, such as, for instance, national cultural policy, the availability of grant schemes facilitating the staging of dramatic works abroad, participation in international workshops and training courses, foreign theatre scene contacts and focus, theatre professionals

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1 CARLSON, M. *Dejiny divadelných teórií* [Theories of the Theatre]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2006, p. 418.

2 BALLAY, M. Interkultúrne inscenačné tendencie v súčasnom divadle [Intercultural Staging Tendencies in the Contemporary Theatre]. In *Európa – interkultúrny priestor* [Europe – the Intercultural Space]. *Acta Culturologica*. Vol. 18. (Eds. Z. Slušná, V. Gažová). Bratislava : Národné osvetové centrum, 2010, pp. 12 – 13.

3 SCHECHNER, R. *Performancia: teórie, praktiky, rituály* [Performance: Theory, Practice, Rituals]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2009, p. 269.

4 BALLAY, M. Interkultúrne inscenačné tendencie v súčasnom divadle [Intercultural Staging Tendencies in the Contemporary Theatre]. In *Európa – interkultúrny priestor* [Europe – the Intercultural Space], p. 19.

motivation, compactness, the size of scenic props for a particular dramatic work, etc. Last but not least, the theme and manner of its scenic realisation, i.e., an overall attractiveness of the work to be staged abroad, are not to be overlooked. Odivo is a good example of an independent theatre group from Slovakia which has the potential for creation that is “easily transferable abroad.” Its creation leans on performative forms, it experiments with puppetry methods, and the power of the communication of its works is in the creation of visually and musically powerful non-verbal images.

### **Odivo, a Theatre of Images, Movement, and Action**

Odivo is a Slovak independent theatre and performative group with the creative core around Monika Kováčová and Mária Danadová who invite a broad range of theatre professionals to collaborative projects, among them being musicians, actors, performers, puppeteers, stage designers, light designers, and others. Founded in 2014, Odivo formally operates as a civic theatre association and an impetus for establishing a platform with legal personality was given by the collaboration between Monika Kováčová and Mária Danadová on the production *Láska P a Vášně B* [Love P and Passion B, 2014].

The vision and artistic-production direction of the group are tied to the international context in several ways. Odivo is a group without a permanent space and several works were created on the basis of residential projects financed by national (the Art Support Fund) or international grant schemes (the Visegrad Fund). Odivo regularly (with the exception of 2017) applies for funding in the programme of the Art Support Fund intended for the presentation of art abroad or for international mobility. It is also worth mentioning that Odivo shows interest in building strategic international partnerships. Odivo's founder, Monika Kováčová, sets specific priorities every year and selects the countries with which she is keen to develop cooperation. Odivo has so far established partnerships mainly with neighbouring countries - the Czech Republic and Poland.<sup>5</sup> The female creators probably bet on the well-known contacts in these countries as well as the relationship between the cultural and socio-political framework, which presupposes similar viewing experiences. At the same time, it may be related to the availability of the grant scheme of the Visegrad Fund and with the benefits of its residential

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5 Odivo attended several theatre festivals in Bulgaria, Slovenia, or Croatia.

creation programme for a group that does not have its own space.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly important is the rich metaphorical, visual, and in relation to puppetry and to performative arts, experimental language developed in Odivo's creation, which is attractive to and interesting for the international theatre scene as well.

In his publication dedicated to the developmental transformations of puppetry arts the Polish theatrologist Henryk Jurkowski maintains: "If now, in the artistic transformation process, individual theatre elements are being shaped in a novel way (fewer words, more images, or, on the contrary, depending on the artist's will), what it simply means is that creative professionals with a new sensitivity begin to appear in theatre, having a novel vision of reality."<sup>7</sup> Odivo theatre projects put emphasis on the creation of images whose reception does not require the knowledge of and the expertise in specific socio-cultural systems or in concrete languages. According to Patrice Pavis, the image in contemporary theatrical practice has become a concept and expression that stands in opposition to the text, plot or action.<sup>8</sup> Let us now consider Odivo repertoire and projects as briefly outlined above. An exception is the staging of a puppet debut *Láska P a vášně B* [Love P and Passion B, 2014], which is based on an original dramatic text, as well as the production for children *Divočiny* [The Wilderness, 2015], whose staging is based on a fairy tale by Maurice Sendak [Where the Wild Things Really Are]. In their work, the female theatre makers digressed from the traditionally constructed plot based on a source text, the creation of dramatic actions and the verbal language means in the style of acting. Increasingly, their work began to show inclination towards imagery and visual representation of the theme. Patrice Pavis deliberates the theatre of images, which spontaneously prefers visual thinking, as a concept with an ability to suggest a deep unconscious dimension of the work.<sup>9</sup> Having the

6 Odivo's very first production *Láska P a vášně B* [Love P and Passion B] was promoted within the performing arts residencies under the Visegrad Fund grant scheme. Since 2019, Odivo's project *Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer] has been on the list of successful applicants for the performing arts residencies funding (envisaged staging in 2020). For more visit the Visegrad Fund. Performing Arts. Results. [online]. [cit. 28 November 2020]. Available at: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/results/performing-arts/?c=2019>.

7 JURKOWSKI, H. *Metamorfózy bábkového divadla v 20. století* [The Metamorphoses of Puppet Theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 155.

8 PAVIS, P. *Divadelný slovník* [Dictionnaire du théâtre]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 284.

9 Pavis bases himself on Freud's hypothesis that the image is a more suitable representation of unconscious processes than conscious thinking and the language. Visual thinking is

knowledge of a language system of a particular country is not imperative in this case.

The scenic realisations of Odivo are characterised by performative forms and they are close to multiform artistic expressions. The attributes of the forms of experimental, chamber, multimedia, puppet or visual theatre meet and connect together in Odivo's works. The female theatre makers experiment with the methods of puppet (figurative and non-figurative), object, movement, and physical theatre, tending towards creative principles with enhanced visibility and music. When it comes to the musical element, emphasis is often placed on rhythm, for the most part created live on stage by a musician playing a musical instrument (for example, drums, the guitar, percussion instruments). It is characteristic of Odivo that the performances are also given in non-theatrical spaces or on small studio stages, in which they maintain close contact with the audience. In this way, the theatre makers evoke an intimate atmosphere, important for the overall understanding of the stage form. The themes probed into by the female creators require the intimacy of space in order to establish closeness with the viewer. The poetics of their creation is linked to intimate themes and personal experiences with love, passion, desire (*Láska P a vášně B* [Love P and Passion B, 2014]), experiencing a mental disorder – schizophrenia (*Stopy v pamäti* [The Footprints in Memory, 2017]), the quest for light and man's tumbling into darkness (*Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer, 2020]). Having regard for the depth of these sensitive and delicate themes, the theatre makers opted for suitable scenic elements. Therefore, their language is poetic, metaphorical, and symbolic in many ways. In their performances for children, they reveal fantasy magical worlds – in the production *Divočiny* [The Wilderness, 2015], the hero Max gets into an exotic land full of bizarre creatures, where he becomes a king. In the performance *Aero* (2018), the images of flying objects are created, in the production *Neviditeľní* [The Invisible, 2019], a group of researchers travels in space and discovers the habitats of mysterious beings whose existence has never been established.<sup>10</sup>

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closer to unconscious processes than verbal thinking, because in terms of evolution, it is older. In PAVIS, P. *Divadelný slovník* [Dictionnaire du théâtre], p. 121.

- 10 The repertory of Odivo also features a movement production *Verzus* [Versus], and of the creative duo Monika Kováčová – Mária Danadová, it was only the latter one working on the project together with other theatre makers. *Verzus* is a dance and movement reflection of a female vision of the world and a probe into her inner world, contributing to a range of delicate and engaged themes brought on stage by Odivo group. See Odivo. *Verzus*. [online]. [cit. 25 November 2020]. Available at: <https://www.odivo.sk/repertoar/verzus/>.



**From a Dramatic Source Text to Authorial Production,  
from Word to Image**

The staging of a debut work *Láska P a vášně B* [Love P and Passion B, 2014] was loosely based on the play by the Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca *Láska dona Perlimplína a vášnivost' Belisina* [The Love of Don Perlimplín and Belisa in the Garden]. The dramatic conflict builds on a love triangle between the old Don Perlimplín, his maid Marcolfa, and young Belisa. It is a comedy with characters and a story typical of *commedie dell'arte*: an old man falls in love with a young woman, the maid is in platonic love with her master who marries a much younger woman who cheats on him. The way out of the situation is an artful scheme, but, alas, it had a tragic end. Belisa does not love Perlimplín back, she craves for more passion and cheats on him with other men. However, she falls in love with a secret admirer who writes her love letters. The secret admirer is none other than Don Perlimplín, her husband in disguise. The story, in which desire, passion, and jealousy appear as elementary motifs, comes to a sad end, with Don Perlimplín dying.

Odivo captured the play as an intimate puppet production with elements of grotesque puppetry, poetry theatre, movement theatre, and performance. The narrative did not have linear interpretation, the female creators deconstructed it by inserting unfulfilled dreams of their characters. There were three versions of staging the wedding night scene and the scene of Perlimplín's death, reflecting the illusions of individual characters. When portraying the visions of these events, the theatre makers changed the form of scenes and means of expression, depending on the attitudes and interpersonal relations between dramatic characters. Perlimplín's blind infatuation with Belisa became an inspiration for a movement-lyrical scene illustrating the vision of his first night with Belisa. In it, Mária Danadová, in calm and gentle tone of voice, recited into a microphone the loving words that Perlimplín had addressed to Belisa. The actress worked with comic stylisation of the puppet scene, portraying Marcolfa's fantasy of what might have happened after the wedding and Marcolfa's romantic fantasies looked pretty grotesque. The scene of the wedding night, as conveyed by Belisa's ideas of reality, was conceived by the theatre makers as a performative puppet mini-play. Mária Danadová put on a white shirt, white high-heeled shoes, and placed a white tiara around her head, adorned with lace ribbons. Dressed up, she animated the puppet figures of Perlimplín and Belisa on a bed behind a transparent curtain. In Lorca's original text, after Perlimplín had fallen asleep during the

wedding night, Belisa cheated on him with five males. The storyline was elevated by the female creators to a more metaphorical level and Belisa's lust and sensuality were accentuated. Mária Danadová, dressed up in a white costume with an artistically unique folk bridal headband, kept walking past the bed in the centre of the performance area. She would stop by the microphone, making sounds like erotic sighs and sobs which blended in with reproduced sounds. In addition, she kept making gestures as if taking pairs of different men's shoes into her hands, only to let them fall to the ground the next instance.

When it comes to the diverse forms of scenic expression, it was this early work in which Mária Danadová's sense of flexibility was first demonstrated. Following a "Schechnerian" understanding of a performer's function, thanks to her skills, single space was transformed into diverse spaces.<sup>11</sup> In *Láska P a vášeň B* [Love P and Passion B], Odivo alluded to a tendency to accentuate the importance of the acoustic element by employing music. Matej Štesko, who accompanied Mária Danadová by playing his electric guitar live, is to be given credit for background music and creating sound effects. Overall, it was music significantly contributing to a dramatic expression of the above scenes. All puppets were made of wood (self-growths) combined with natural products (Marcolfa's head), with leather and textiles, and by their overall appearance, they were symbolically connected with the types of characters rendered. Skinny arms and legs were connected to Perlimplín's elongated body and his head was dominated by a distinctive nose. Marcolfa's stout body was clad in a red cloth garment and a white rock. Conversely, Belisa's puppet had a slim waste, with pieces of natural wood sticking out of her head (a type of exotic plant species).<sup>12</sup>

### **Immersion in the Soul Using a Visually Strong Theatrical Language**

The inclination towards movement and creation of images primarily by visual means was more pronounced in the authorial performance *Stopy v pamäti* [The Footprints in Memory, 2017]. The theme was an encounter of both the female creators with paranoid schizophrenia, as their brothers were diagnosed with the disease, and clinical signs and manifestations of this mental

11 SCHECHNER, R. *Performancia: teórie, praktiky, rituály* [Performance: Theory, Practice, Rituals], p. 189.

12 Puppets were created by stage designer Mikoláš Zika.

illness served as a source of their performance. *Stopy v pamäti* [The Footprints in Memory] had not ambition to be a fact-based documentary or self-art therapy. Quite the contrary, immersions into the fragility of the soul and the processes of consciousness and unconsciousness of a schizophrenic person and the patient's relationship with the real-world environment were mediated by the authoresses of the theme, concept, and the realisation of the work using evocative non-verbal images. Movement, physical action, and especially a metaphorically rich playing with the light, shadows, objects, and puppets enjoyed a unique position in this authorial performance. This time, Mária Danadová and the drummer Ján Fiala were on stage together with Monika Kováčová. The viewer observed a series of captivating scenes evoking different levels of the state of mind of a mentally ill person and his struggle with everyday life, which could be understood through the lens of the disharmony of the inner and outer worlds of a schizophrenic person or his reverse perception of chaos and order. For example, in the opening scene, Mária Danadová lied down on the floor amidst the objects lying flat on the ground, such as empty pots, pots with tall dry plants, plastic bags with loam soil, a spray plastic bottle, and floor lamps knocked to the ground. While Monika Kováčová kept lifting the items from the floor each time she walked by, placing them in the upright position, Mária Danadová would return them to a lying down position.

In piercing silence which took possession of the stage in the first part of the performance, the theatre makers accentuated the processualism and details of portrayed actions. Several reviewers unanimously agreed on their enchantment by the image of a non-verbal puppet play, in which Mária Danadová animated a large wooden puppet with a mounted head of a baby roe deer dressed in a white nightgown.<sup>13</sup> With caution and curiosity, the deer puppet kept slowly taking out items from the plant pot – a small wooden ladder with a falling ball, a plush teddy bear, an apple, and nuts. Mária Danadová meticulously built a relationship between the puppet – the deer – and other objects. The deer was free to go in pursuit of these objects and to find them – it played with the ladder, the teddy bear; it kept rolling the nuts and cracking them with a wooden leg only to place them in the teddy bear's lap and slowly laying down by the bear's side. The tranquil moments of

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13 The puppet was made by Pavol Rosenberger. It was made up of the head of a roe deer baby dying after a combine harvester broke its legs. The author created the puppet in its memory.

the performance gradually outgrew into a more dynamic part enhanced by the performer's dynamic movement and action and by the drummer's loud and rhythmic drumming.

Increasingly, the individual scenes resembled light and shadow installations. The shadow was presented in a variety of forms (it was created by the performers' silhouettes or by the silhouettes of objects), it turned into a repetitive visual element urging to seek an archetypal dimension of the performance. In his performance review, theatrologist Miroslav Ballay paraphrases some passages from *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* by Carl Gustav Jung. He maintains that the biggest risk lies in an absolute liberation of archetypal images from the control of the conscience of a psychiatric patient. The condition may occur when patients, due to the dissociation of their conscience, quickly fall into the snares of such archetypes and are no longer conscious of them. The presence of Monika Kováčová and her action on stage are interpreted by Miroslav Ballay as a "quasi hounding element" or the shadow archetype, part of a split self, hounding her second half and being a source of her anxiety.<sup>14</sup> Of the performers' duo, it was Monika Kováčová having the light on stage under control. She kept switching the lights on and off, she would illuminate Mária Danadová's action while her shadow was cast on stage (for instance, when Mária Danadová was teetering on the edge of a wooden log or was planting a flower in the plant pot). By illuminating withered tree branches using a small torch, an impressive shadow transcending the entire space was produced. The illusion of robust overgrowing branches or thicket created by the shadow play of the plants, she was able to demonstrate, by employing utterly elementary associations, the paranoid thoughts of a person suffering from mental illness.

Based on interviews with some viewers and their spontaneous reactions after the performance, Monika Kováčová is convinced that the performance "opens inner gusts in people. They need not be necessarily conscious of the source material being schizophrenia and its clinical manifestations (...). Rather, it unlocks themes that are deeply personal for people which they

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14 BALLAY, M. Archetypy a tiene pamäti [The Archetypes and the Shadows of Memory]. In *Monitoring divadiel.sk* [Theatre Monitoring], 4 December 2017. [online]. [cit. 29 November 2020]. Available at: <https://www.monitoringdivadiel.sk/recenzie/recenzia/archetypy-a-tiene-pamaeti/>.

have not been exposed to for a long time or have been subdued in them.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the universality of visual language and the power of the subliminal nature of composed images not only open a wider field of interpretation to viewers, but also become a prerequisite for cross-cultural intelligibility. At the end of a paper on visual theatre, Henryk Jurkowski maintains that “in all countries, visual theatre has its door open to any type of audiences. (...) Literary theatre requires a special ability of the audience – the knowledge of language and their psychic predispositions to hear and understand it through the scenic behaviour of actors or puppets.”<sup>16</sup>

In the so-called multimedia puppet performance *Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer, 2020], the female theatre makers of Odivo immerse even deeper into the inner world of man by employing a visually strong theatrical language. The performance was created in collaboration with the Slovak puppet artist and technologist, performer, actor, and director Ivan Martinka, who was the project originator and promoter of its underlying idea, author of the theme and libretto and, last but not least, creator of the puppets employed in the performance.<sup>17</sup> Its libretto has the form of a symbolic literary story and it is based on the motif of seeking light as “archetypal, multicultural understandable image (...) which has vanished or for a fleeting moment has gotten out of sight.”<sup>18</sup> The theatre makers unfold motives on stage in a sequence of associative, largely non-verbal images, accentuating their visual aspects, such as desire to find lost light (within the meaning of joy, the purpose of

15 MAŠLÁROVÁ, M. Tvoríť sa dá s vlasom, s penou, so žuvačkou aj s virtuálnou bábkou [You Can Create with Hair, with Foam, with Chewing Gum and with a Virtual Puppet]. In *kôd*, 2020, Vol. 14, Issue 7, p. 8.

16 JURKOWSKI, H. *Metamorfózy bábkového divadla v 20. storočí* [The Metamorphoses of Puppet Theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], p. 155.

17 The theme of *Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer] matured in Ivan Martinka for quite some time. In the performance, the motif of seeking light and man’s encounter with darkness may metaphorically allude to anxiety or depression. Thematising feelings of anxiety and depression was present in Ivan Martinka’s production earlier on, for instance, in *Pinocchio* staged by Nové divadlo in Nitra (New Theatre Nitra). Ivan Martinka portrayed Pinocchio as a small boy making a bad decision and overwhelmed by anxiety. For more see DZADÍKOVÁ, L. *Svetlonos a Svetlonosky*. In *Loutkář*, 2020, Vol. 70, Issue 4, p. 78.

18 Partial, and yet, relevant inspiration for writing the libretto was the fairy tale *Slnčový kôň* [The Sun Horse] by Pavol Dobšínský. See DANADOVÁ, M. *Fenoméni figúry v súčasnom bábkovom divadle* [The Phenomenon of a Figure in Contemporary Puppet Theatre]. [Dissertation]. Bratislava : Vysoká škola múzických umení, 2020, p. 87. [online]. [cit. 11 February 2021]. Available at: <https://opac.crzp.sk/?fn=detailBiblioForm&sid=60B4917E3BAC23F10071AF27651C&seo=CRZP-detail-kniha>.

life, life stamina), seeking to escape the destructive forces in life or getting to know the dark side of our personality (the shadow archetype in Jungian understanding).<sup>19</sup>

However, building the storyline is noticeable through the escalating presence of darkness, which appeared repeatedly in various artistic and visual forms. Darkness, for example, was epitomised by a black ball, which Ivan Martinka pulled out from his shoe along the line of clown gags and, together with Mária Danadová, alternately kept putting it over their hands like a glove puppet while shaping it into a monster. Later it was discovered by a child who played with it like it was a football. The climax of alluded situations was the image of Svetlonos [The Torchbearer] in its concrete puppet form.<sup>20</sup> An animatronic puppet was used, i.e., an electromechanical backpack puppet,<sup>21</sup> a technologically and artistically elaborate structure made by Ivan Martinka. The figure bore the likeness of a monster with a long neck (tentacle), a small head, glowing eyes, and a glowing chest. Mária Danadová had the aluminum structure strapped to her shoulders and over the torso, and in a sensomotoric way animated it from within.<sup>22</sup> By employing this striking figure and by playing with it, theatre makers managed to create a surreal and evocative theatrical image of supper during which monster Svetlonos (the performer slipped inside the device) and performer Ivan Martinka sat at opposite ends of a long table. In silence stretching out in space, all that was heard was a loud chewing sound made by Svetlonos over an empty plate. An illusion of a man's (performer's) falling into the trap of Svetlonos was artistically accentuated by a long dark cloak resembling a thick cobweb. It stretched from the shoulders of Svetlonos across the table all the way to the performer, eventually wrapping around his body. In parallel, the situation was observed

19 Ivan Martinka's creation is noted for its spiritual inclination. To give an example – within the context of his collaborative projects with Andrej Kalinka in performative group Med a prach [Honey and Dust] such themes and their realisations were introduced that “corresponded to the humanistic understanding of the world and man's mission, to spiritual and Christian beliefs.” For more see KNOPOVÁ, E. Ivan Martinka a Andrej Kalinka. In PREDMERSKÝ, V. (ed.). *Dejiny slovenskej dramatiky bábkového divadla* [The History of Slovak Puppet Theatre Plays]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2020, p. 663.

20 In mythology Svetlonos [The Torchbearer] is a being that lures people by its light, strays them from the right path and brings them into darkness.

21 DANADOVÁ, M. *Fenomén figúry v súčasnom bábkovom divadle* [The Phenomenon of a Figure in Contemporary Puppet Theatre], p. 93.

22 The technological details of the figure are given by Mária Danadová in her doctoral dissertation. See *ibid* pp. 93 – 96.

by a child – a puppet animated by the performer and violoncellist Mariana Bódyová, who moved the puppet around the table and alternately moved it from one side of the table to the other. Reviewer Lenka Dzadíková interpreted this impressive image as a moment of facing one's fears, whereby familiarising oneself with fear (darkness) can bring light back into our lives.<sup>23</sup> Aside from the animatronic puppet, the use of a virtual puppet was an absolute novelty in the context of Slovak puppetry scene. It was a programmed light figure, epitomising the sought-after light, whose movement was controlled directly on stage by a game joystick.

In the spirit of performativity, the creators also tended towards processual art, i.e., to capturing the liveliness of the events portrayed on stage. Everything inanimate (matter, material) took shape directly on stage with the participation of the audience and acquired a dominant position in the performance. To give an example: the entire process of making the puppet of a child and its bringing to life was visualised live. Ivan Martinka pieced together the individual puppet components on stage (fabric body, wood chips representing limbs and head with controls). Simultaneously, the activity was recorded on a camera, so the viewer could watch the process of shaping the puppet's body on a projection screen. Accompanied by live singing and music, the performers also dressed the puppet of the child before the audience and mounted its face mask, with Ivan Martinka putting final touches to it while the performance was on.<sup>24</sup> The image imbued with mysticism and accentuating the course of the action was an outcome of the performers modelling a conical shape of clay with a hole (epitomising a shrine), into which Ivan Martinka later inserted his head to get to the light source.

Creative professionals declare that their underlying motivation was to “react to a persistent feeling of a need to re-define the puppet in modern world in direction of its spiritual content”<sup>25</sup> which was also reflected in the choice of the means of expression. *Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer] is yet another visually and musically inspirational piece in Odivo's repertory in which the poetics of a theatre group couples with Ivan Martinka's prin-

23 DZADÍKOVÁ, L. Dlhoočakávaná bábková inscenácia! [Long Awaited Puppet Production!] In *MLOKi – Mladí o kultúre inak*, 23 September 2020 [online]. [cit. 24. 02. 2021]. Available at: <https://mloki.sk/dlhoocakavana-babkova-inscenacia/>.

24 It was made by heating up thermoplastic material from Ivan Martinka's face mould. For more see DANADOVÁ, M. *Fenómén figúry v súčasnom bábkovom divadle* [The Phenomenon of a Figure in Contemporary Puppet Theatre], p. 90.

25 Ibid.



ciples of theatrical creation and thanks to technology and digital art, their creative approach is elevated into aesthetically novel and visually captivating forms.

### **Odivo and the Child Viewer**

Experimenting with puppet theatre methods, a sense of work with materials, performativity, and a sense of imagery are among the creative principles applied by Odivo, and this is also unique to their creation for children. Its role in the theatre group's dramaturgical profile is just as important as puppet and performative creation is for adult audiences. The verbal element is also dominated by visual and musical aspects stimulating the receptivity of the child viewer. The female creators deliberately avoid unfounded overexposed contact with the child viewer, which is a frequent feature of contemporary children's theatre production, especially of privately owned theatres and small touring ensembles putting on performances for kindergartens and elementary schools. "We try to calm the children down, as a lot of children's theatre performances are by nature loud, posterlike, and simplistic."<sup>26</sup> The poetics of Odivo children's performances is rooted, inter alia, in endeavours to push the limits of the quality of the overall production of drama and puppet performances for children in Slovak theatre.

In their manner of performing, the live sound in both the acting and music elements fully replaces words and literal names. The actors on stage reduce the acoustic means of acting to emotional and expressive sounds covering a wide range of emotional expressions, which they produce in line with the content meaning of the events portrayed (the mimicking of animal sounds, sighs, sobs, cries of joy, sadness, anger, etc.)<sup>27</sup> *Divočiny* [The Wilderness, 2015] is a puppet production with elements of performance, inspired by the children's book *Where the Wild Things Are* (adapted from a Czech trans-

26 MAŠLÁROVÁ, M. Tvoríť sa dá s vlasom, s penou, so žuvačkou aj s virtuálnou bábkou [You Can Create with Hair, with Foam, with Chewing Gum and with a Virtual Puppet], p. 5.

27 Given the context of the theory of performance aesthetics, Richard Schechner attributes a universal meaning to such acoustic and facial expressions and sounds like shouting, laughter, sobbing, and stamping. To his mind, such expressions capture almost the same human emotions in all cultures and compose the core of human scenic art and rituals. According to Richard Schechner, they provide material that could serve as an example for an intercultural study of human communication. See SCHECHNER, R. *Performancia: teória, praktiky, rituály* [Performance: Theory, Practice, Rituals], p. 276.

lation *Tam, kde žijí divočiny* by Jan Jařab) by Maurice Sendak. It is the story of Max, a boy who torments animals – in the performance, it is the cat. Max finds himself in a fantasy faraway country, where he encounters the wildlife, exotic monsters and eventually becomes their king.

The actors in *Divočiny* (Mária Danadová and Filip Hajduk) not only manipulated the puppets, but by making sounds and movements they also added finishing touches to the scenes of Max's adventurous story. They made sounds like howling, whistling, imitating the sounds of the wind, splashing water, of a thunderstorm, and other sounds. With respect to the performed action, live music on stage (drums, percussion instruments, the vibraphone, the guitar) became a full-fledged element creating the story's atmosphere and interpretation. For example, to suggest that Max was exposed to the wilderness, actors with faces smeared with black colour would dance around a wooden box, making Native American sounds. Hajduk's expression also made use of very simple acrobatics (juggling with rubber ducks, carrying on his chin a bigger tree branch decorated with bicycle accessories). To stimulate the children's imagination without literally naming things, the theatre professionals also worked with visual allusiveness. The sea or the ocean was evoked by a blue fabric, Max's stranding in the wilderness was symbolised by an object of a small lighthouse, and the like.

The motifs of exoticism and wildness were developed into visually inspirational forms of animal puppets and other objects. In her review, theatre critic Martina Mašlářová, spontaneously referred to the puppets as the production's "best visual delicacy."<sup>28</sup> For example, an unusual tree that caught Max's attention was made of the pieces of a living branch, on which the female creators hung rudders and bike bells. Odivo creative professionals maintain that their approach to working with objects and things and their materiality "oscillates between it being rooted in their original functions and their metaphorical meanings."<sup>29</sup> To give an example, a bicycle wheel was used as a basic component of a chain carousel mechanism. The puppets of wild animals were made of a combined material – self-growths and parts of old bicycles (pedals as bird legs, the spring as an

28 MAŠLÁŘOVÁ, M. Kiosk 2016 – Deň tretí [Kiosk 2016 – The Third Day]. In *MLOKi – Mladí o kultúre inak*, 9 August 2016. [online]. [cit. 29 November 2020]. Available at: <http://www.mloki.sk/bez-okolkov/kiosk-2016-de%C5%88-tret%C3%AD#/0>.

29 MAŠLÁŘOVÁ, M. Tvorit sa dá s vlasom, s penou, so žuvačkou aj s virtuálnou bábkou [You Can Create with Hair, with Foam, with Chewing Gum and with a Virtual Puppet], p. 11.

animal's neck).<sup>30</sup> The roughness and naturalness of materials semantically enhanced the illusion of wilderness, which the theatre makers strived to conjure in a figurative way.

Odivo targeted the visual sensuality of the youngest viewer by a performative piece, the so-called 'batolatórium' *Aero* [*bambinarium Aero*, 2018], "a theatre of objects par excellence" or "a theatre-object poetry", as the performance was referred to by theatre critic Vladimír Mikulka.<sup>31</sup> *Aero*, in which the female creators elevated everyday items to a level of imaginary play (for instance, a fan, a hair dryer, pumps, plastic bags), was targeted at a young viewer of eighteen months. The framing idea of this visual performance was examining the physical property of air in relation to diverse material, such as confetti, balloons, balls, fabric, etc. Two performers (Mária Danadová and Juraj Smutný), by literally examining and discovering the reactions of the material used – a straw stick, paper, plastic bags – created live images of flying objects, by allowing the air to circulate. In *Aero*, music (although reproduced), with soothing melodies predominating, was a full-fledged semantic element of individual scenes. To give an example, the actors on stage folded a plastic bag into a dummy and (together with a balloon) had it hover over fans with circulating air. A hair dryer blew coloured straw sticks apart, bird feathers in glass vessels, a white sheet was blown away, and colour confetti were scattered by a fan only to get trapped in a transparent square-shaped plastic sheet, and a lot more experiments were made.

The production *Neviditeľní* [The Invisible, 2019], was mounted in the Bratislava Puppet Theatre, i.e., not under Odivo brand, but Monika Kováčová and Mária Danadová feature in it as authors of the libretto and directing. It is a musically and visually powerful production based on the alternation of the scenes sung by actors and the associative scenes of exploring expeditions (five actors as explorers) to the lands of magical beings associated

30 The visual concept was developed by set designer Ivana Macková. A component part of the scenic design concept was a portable stage platform on wheels – a functional wooden box on which the puppet play was staged. The box had a tilt feature and the side wings allowed for their positioning. It was foldable and portable with storage space for puppets and objects.

31 MIKULKA, V. Divadlo evropských regionů [Theatre European Regions]. In *NA DIVADLO*, 27 June 2019. [online]. [cit. 30 November 2020]. Available at: [https://nadivadlo.blogspot.com/2019/06/mikulka-divadlo-evropskych-regionu\\_27.html?fbclid=IwAR0sRba28ARd\\_t\\_3n2IDNnlBrs0osj84Z3RIZDScKXaXhHs2EHH2thLQRDFw](https://nadivadlo.blogspot.com/2019/06/mikulka-divadlo-evropskych-regionu_27.html?fbclid=IwAR0sRba28ARd_t_3n2IDNnlBrs0osj84Z3RIZDScKXaXhHs2EHH2thLQRDFw).



*Mária Danadová, Monika Kováčová: The Invisible. The Bratislava Puppet Theatre, 2019. Direction Mária Danadová, Monika Kováčová. Photo by Juraj Starovecký. The Bratislava Puppet Theatre archives.*

with internationally popular legends (Loch Ness monsters, elves, yetis, dragons, and sprites). The show was dominated by expression through an object, through the material, and by an audio-visual experience of working with them. Surprisingly, the puppet per se did not appear in this project at all. The female creators used a combination of natural and artificial materials (artificial grass, water in a glass aquarium, tree branches, living soil) and in a playful, Odivo-like way, it interacted with the actor and other objects on stage. For example, the quest for the Loch Ness monster was portrayed through playing with water in an aquarium – the actresses kept blowing into the water through narrow tubes, ruffling its surface to create bubbles, and in the darkness, a torch was used to illuminate the aquarium filled with water which changed colours and abstract shapes were formed on a piece of glass from the water foam. By projecting clusters of live branches onto a white surface in utter darkness, they created an illusion of a haunted forest, a dragon's abode, thus enhancing the mood and the atmosphere with the sound of the wind and the noise evoking the heartbeat.

## Toward Interdisciplinarity

The performances of Odivo group are visual puppet shows, they are a theatre of the object and material, a theatre of diverse means of expression. Although their performances carry a certain degree of theatricality, they are predominated by the aesthetics of performance, in which the main actor – performer – is given a multifunctional role. Slovak teatrologist Ida Hledíková writes that in the field of contemporary puppet art, we have advanced very little when it comes to the development of figurative and non-figurative visual theatre and we hold fast to a literary text. The theatre created is “descriptive, narrative, we tend towards playing without the puppet – and even when puppets are employed, then only with an illustrative purpose or without material.”<sup>32</sup> By contrast, Odivo’s theatre production breaks out of this condition. The puppet, an object or material, and the visuality connected with them, are given main thrust in their projects. Theatre professionals organising their expression set the puppets and objects in motion, often-times fulfilling the role of animators and sometimes narrators, and, above all, they are performers maintaining their flexibility.<sup>33</sup> At times, it is physical action predominating (*Stopy v pamäti* [The Footprints in Memory]), while elsewhere, the performer’s role vis-à-vis the puppet is subordinate and everything inanimate that is animated by the performer assumes a dominant position (*Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer]). The performer also becomes a musician, in line with accentuating the musical element of the show. The most recent project *Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer] is a good example of not keeping the musician in the “marginal zone” but rather have him actively approach the animation of puppets and objects on stage (DJ Lukáš Kubičina, together with Mária Danadová and Ivan Martinka dressed up the puppet of a small boy and violoncellist Mariana Bódyová animated the puppet in a scene with a robotic monster). *Svetlonos* [The Torchbearer] is a good example demonstrating the overlap of the activities of professionals of diverse artistic and non-artistic professions (including electrical engineering, video technology,

32 HLEDÍKOVÁ, I. Premeny a diverzita bábkarských postupov vo vybraných inscenáciách slovenských režisérov [Transformations and Diversity of Puppetry techniques in Selected Productions of Slovak Directors]. In *Divadelní režiséři na prelome tisícročí* [Theatre Directors at the Verge of Millennia]. (Ed. E. Knopová). Bratislava : Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy SAV, 2014, p. 189.

33 JURKOWSKI, H. *Metamorfózy bábkového divadla v 20. storočí* [The Metamorphoses of Puppet Theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], p. 202.

or IT fields), and by their ability to transcend other people's areas of expertise, an interdisciplinary puppet-performative work is produced. According to Czech theatrologist Jana Pilátová, interdisciplinarity is among the determining attributes of the so-called "Third theatre."<sup>34</sup> In her understanding, the Third Theatre turns to the concept of otherness in the broad sense of the word which does not only apply to theatrical conventions and to the signs taken over from other cultures, but, in addition to ethnic boundaries, it also transcends the boundaries of other art forms, the boundaries that separate the arts from science, praxis and theory, professionalism and amateurism.<sup>35</sup> The Odivo group gravitates toward such otherness and their projects may be deliberated not only in the context of their intercultural but also interdisciplinary significance.

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<sup>34</sup> The term was coined by Eugenio Barba, founder of the Odin Teatret in Denmark, who, in 1976, was given the task of organizing a conference on theatrical research by UNESCO and the Institut International du Théâtre.

<sup>35</sup> PILÁTOVÁ, J. Třetí divadlo [The Third Theatre]. In *Stretnutie kultúr a divadlo*. [Encounters of Cultures in Theatre]. (Ed. S. Šimková). Bratislava : Vysoká škola múzických umení v Bratislave, 2000, p. 75.

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## **Cultural and Artistic Transfers in Theatre and Music**

### **Past, Present and Perspectives**

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