

Between Province and Metropolis. The Opera Repertoire of the *Pressburger Stadttheater* in the Late Nineteenth Century¹

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Abstract: The establishment and development of the Municipal Theater in Pressburg in the period 1886–1920 was closely linked with the cultural and social development of the city in the period following the Austrian-Hungarian Compromise in 1867. The theater was built by the rising stratum of Pressburg townsmen, based on a requirement of the Hungarian government. The theater was in the possession of the town that rented it to theater directors and their German and Hungarian companies. The theater had a primacy among provincial theaters in Hungary. This was mainly due to the vicinity of Vienna and the efforts to resemble the metropolis, notably by the local patriotism of Pressburg inhabitants who wanted their locality to be regarded as a leading Hungarian town. The opera performances and their reception in the newspapers demonstrate the history of culture of the town, mentalities and collective identifications of its citizens, and last but not least the history of culture of Central Europe.

Keywords: Central Europe, Pressburg, Municipal Theater, local patriotism, German opera

The history of the Municipal Theater (today's historical building of the Slovak National Theater) in Pressburg (in Hungarian: Pozsony, in Slovakian: Bratislava) began in 1884 with the decision of the Municipal Committee to build a new theater. The construction took two years and the theater was first opened to the public on 22 September 1886. The building was in the possession of the town that rented it to theater directors staging productions in German and Hungarian. This method of operation was in use until 1920, when the organization changed due to the po-

1. A study carried out with support from the Visegrad Grants 2017–2018 for the project *Musical Theater Companies in Multilingual East-Central Europe* (21720187).

litical events and the theater started to mount regular performances of Czech and Slovak artists under the auspices of a newly established Cooperative of the Slovak National Theater (Družstvo SND).

Cultural and social environment in Pressburg towards the end of the nineteenth century

By the end of the eighteenth century, Pressburg was considered a center of German-language cultural life. However, once the Ottoman threat was gone, Emperor Joseph II decided in 1783 to move all Hungarian central authorities to Buda, which brought about the exodus of the higher nobility from the town. As a result, Pressburg quickly gained the ‘image’ of a provincial town which the citizens tried to disprove through personal contacts with Vienna. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Pressburg can be characterized as a calm town on the Danube River with a strong mercantile and viticultural tradition aspiring to the title of ‘the second town in Hungary.’²

An important milestone in the socio-political development became the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. According to available records, the change in the use of language did not happen right away, the prevailing language was still German. Still, in the 1880s, and especially in the 1890s, an intense Hungarianization of the population was evident, so at the time of World War I Pressburg already had a distinct Hungarian nature. The life in the town was characterized by mutual respect and tolerance, with inter-ethnic marriages being no exception. Apart from the German- and Hungarian-speaking population, the statistics also point out a considerably large number of citizens who thought of themselves as belonging to the Slovak nationality. Even in the latter half of the nineteenth century they represented the second largest group, right after the German-speaking citizens.³ However, they did not take part in cultural and social life in the town.

In terms of social structure, most German-speaking citizens of Pressburg belonged to the bourgeoisie which, together with Hungarian middle nobility, constituted the so-called Hungarian middle class, economically the most developed

2. For more information on the appearance of the town in the nineteenth century, see Jozef Tancer, “Obraz nie je odraz. Reprezentácie mesta ako výskumný problém” [The image is not a reflection. The city representation as a research problem], in *Medzi provinciou a metropolou. Obraz Bratislavy v 19. a 20. storočí* [Between province and metropolis. The image of Bratislava in nineteenth and twentieth centuries], ed. Gabriela Dudeková (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2012), 23–45.

3. Zuzana Francová, “Obyvatelia – etnická, sociálna a konfesijná skladba” [Inhabitants – ethnic, social and confessional structure], in *Bratislava. Zborník Mestského múzea 10* [Bratislava. Proceedings of the Municipal Museum 10] (Bratislava: MMB, 1998), 22.

class in the nineteenth century.⁴ The public manifestation of loyalty to the Hungarian government was a good way to obtain benefits. Referring to patriotism and deep loyalty to Hungary gradually led to compromises; trying to preserve their social status which, for them, was of utmost importance, the citizens were even willing to change their names to make them sound more Hungarian.⁵ The personal relationship with the town was the most important factor: local patriotism developed through a lively interest in social and cultural development of the town.

Social status was crucial for public life. Apart from the participation in the local political life, it was demonstrated through a membership in as many municipal associations as possible. Most associations were German-Hungarian in nature including those aiming at promotion and dissemination of Hungarian language. Throughout the nineteenth century, a couple of art associations were established in Pressburg. Undoubtedly the most famous music society was the St Martin's Cathedral Music Society which, due to its rich repertoire of religious and secular songs, became the main representative of the city's musical life. The Society's bandmasters included reputable artists such as Jozef Kumlik, Karl Mayrberger, Joseph Thiard-Laforest or Ludwig Burger. The Society also performed abroad and its repertoire included religious and secular works by Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, etc. Among the Society's honorary members was also the conductor Hans Richter.⁶

An important place was also occupied by choirs. The performances provided a great opportunity to present as a group and had a positive effect on collective identity.⁷ Among the most famous ones were the *Liedertafel*, a male voice choir, the *Singverein*, a mixed voice choir which performed at the concerts of St Martin's Cathedral Music Society and occasionally assisted at the Municipal Theater, and finally the *Typographenbund*, originally a male voice choir that quickly trans-

4. Cf.: Elena Mannová and Moritz Csáky, *Collective Identities in Central Europe in Modern Times* (Bratislava, AEP, 1999) and Eleonóra Babejová, *Fin-de-siècle Pressburg. Conflict & Cultural Coexistence in Bratislava 1897–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

5. Cf. Jozef Tancer and Elena Mannová, "Od uhorského patriotizmu k menšinovému nacionalizmu. Zmeny povedomia Nemcov na Slovensku v 18. až 20. storočí" [From Hungarian patriotism to minority nationalism. Alteration in the consciousness of Germans in Slovakia in the 18th to 20th centuries], in *My a tí druhí v modernej spoločnosti. Konštrukcie a transformácie kolektívnych identít* [Us and Others in the modern era. Constructions and transfigurations of collective identity], ed. Gabriela Kiliánová, Eva Kowalská and Eva Krekovičová (Bratislava: Veda – vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 2009), 389.

6. Jana Lengová, "Pressburg im letzten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts – das Musikmilieu der Jugendjahre Franz Schmidts," in *Franz Schmidt und Pressburg*, hrsg. Carmen Ottner (Wien: Doblinger, 1999), 11.; eadem, "Bratislava ako hudobný fenomén v poslednej tretine 19. storočia" [Bratislava as a musical phenomenon in the last third of the 19th century], *Musikologica Slovaca* 1(27)/2 (Spring 2010), 183–219.

7. See Jana Lengová, "Chorgesang als Medium von Interkulturalität: Formen, Kanäle, Diskurse," in *Das deutsche Chorgesangswesen in Preßburg am Beispiel der Preßburger Liedertafel – Nationale und regionale Identität*, hrsg. Erik Fischer, Annelie Kürsten et alia (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007).

formed into a mixed voice choir and performed with a great success in the opera productions of the Municipal Theater.⁸

Apart from aristocratic families (the family of Archduke Friedrich, the Esterházy, the Pálffy, the Batthyány), the art of music was also pursued in bourgeois families (Dávid, Dohnányi, Kovát, Loschdorfer, Mauthner, Ovary, Rigele, Tranta, Simonyi, Spányik).⁹ Music education and playing musical instruments were part of good upbringing; chamber music was performed in private, semi-public, and public concerts. Due to the absence of a music school, there were many private music teachers until 1906. The music life of the town was also represented by military bands, namely the band of the 72nd infantry regiment led by the bandmaster Franz Scharoch, and the *Honvéd* band led by Josef Stritzl. The picture would not be complete without evoking the Gipsy bands and their popular performances in local coffeehouses.¹⁰

From the perspective of Budapest and Vienna, Pressburg was a provincial town in the west of Upper Hungary. Given the town's famous past, its citizens regarded the label 'provincial' as an insult and did their best to avoid it. The construction of public buildings was a good way of demonstrating the cultural character of the town and its inhabitants. The visits to theater performances were integral part of social life and created a framework of collective representation. The decision to build a new theater can be perceived as a result of the efforts to strengthen collective identity and at the same time as a symbol of the era dominated by the bourgeoisie, or as an aspiration to catch up with towns of a similar composition and size of population. With respect to Pressburg's multi-ethnic character, one could also consider another reason: the externalization of the idea of a single nation.

The project of a new Municipal Theater

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Pressburg witnessed a considerable population growth, which was also reflected in the theater attendance. The seating capacity of the old theater, built in 1776, was not sufficient anymore and the condition of the building did not comply with safety regulations. In the autumn of 1879, a piece of plaster fell off the ceiling, which immediately raised safety concerns. The town put together a twelve-member committee which, after a thorough inspection of the building, concluded that its condition did not meet safety regulations and recommended the construction of a new building.¹¹ Yet,

8. Lengová, "Pressburg im letzten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts," 14.

9. *Ibid.*, 16.

10. *Ibid.*, 21.

11. Otto von Fabricius, *Das neue Theater in Preßburg. Festschrift* (Preßburg: Druckerei des Westungarischer Grenzboten, 1886), 6–7.

a final decision was taken only in 1884 based on a requirement of the Hungarian government. Negotiations and debates on the construction of the new theater demonstrate changes taking place in Pressburg towards the end of the nineteenth century. The bourgeoisie wanted the building to symbolize the restoration of cultural memory and present the town's rich history. At the same time they were well aware of the fact that the construction was only the beginning; the theater needed to be kept in operation. The construction of the new theater finally became reality under the influence of political events.¹²

Considering the long history of town, the invitation of Vienna-based architects Ferdinand Fellner Jr. and Hermann Helmer seemed to be a logical choice. Social and cultural life in the town was largely influenced by the vicinity of Vienna.¹³ Fellner and Helmer designed a new theater according to the latest safety requirements, in a historical Neo-Renaissance style with Neo-Baroque decoration of the interiors. The capacity of the theater was 1,170 seats. The comfort of performers was provided by a good equipment of dressing rooms, storage room for props, and by a larger and more modern stage. The audience appreciated the more comfortable seats that were so arranged as to provide a good view of the stage even from the highest (fourth) floor.

The program of the opening night, held on 22 September 1886, consisted of the following Hungarian works: the Hungarian national anthem was followed by the *Rákóczi March*¹⁴ and Mór Jókai's prologue *Lidércfények* [Jack-o'-lantern] performed by the actor Imre Nagy in the presence of the writer. The highlight of the evening was Ferenc Erkel's opera *Bánk bán* – the first act was conducted by the composer himself, the remaining acts by his son, Sándor. The programme was performed by the members of the Hungarian Royal Opera (*Magyar Királyi Operaház*) and the National Theater (*Nemzeti Színház*) from Budapest; the complete ensembles including soloists, chorus-singers, and members of orchestra worked for free this evening.¹⁵ Thanks to the helpfulness of István Keglevich, the general director of both institutions, the opening performance was followed by

12. Vladimír Zvara, "Auf der Suche nach dem Sinn der Oper: Die untote Kunstgattung in der Stadt Bratislava," in *Musiktheater in Raum und Zeit. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Theaterpraxis in Mitteleuropa in 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. Vladimír Zvara (Bratislava: Asociácia Corpus in Zusammenarbeit mit NM Code, 2015), 220–221.

13. A close connection with the imperial city, due to the fact that from 1536 Pozsony was the capital of Hungary, deeply marked its cultural history. Cf. Jozef Tancer, *Im Schatten Wiens. Zur deutschsprachigen Presse und Literatur im Pressburg des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bremen: Lumiere, 2008), 17.

14. According to the playbill and newspaper articles, Sándor Bertha's march, composed especially for the occasion, was to be performed. The programme seems to have been changed in the last moment.

15. The letters of István Keglevich, the general director of the Hungarian Royal Opera and of the National Theater, addressed to Ferenc Erkel show that the performance of Budapest artists was understood as a national cultural mission. The general director asked Erkel whether he would be willing to perform on the opening night under similar terms and conditions, stressing the importance of his presence in Pressburg. The composer agreed. Cf. National Széchényi Library (Budapest), Manuscript Collection, Fond XII/510, *Keglevich István levelei Erkel Ferenchez* [The letters of István Keglevich addressed to Ferenc Erkel], 26 and 28 August 1886.

other guest performances. In the next four days, the new theater staged operas and plays in Hungarian, which were received with great enthusiasm by the Pressburg audience.

The guest performances of the artists from Budapest terminated on 26 September. In the meantime, members of Max Kmentt's theater company arrived in town. Kmentt was to become the first director of the new theater. The date of the season opening performance was set on 30 September, which meant that the director had only four days left for the preparation. The opening performance was very important. Despite the construction of the new building, the maintenance of the theater was still very demanding; the success of daily operation being guaranteed by the tradition of German theater.

Rental and management of the Municipal Theater

The inauguration of the new theater in 1886 opened a new phase in the theatrical history of Pressburg. The theater was in the possession of the town that rented it to theater directors and their companies. The season lasted seven months, usually from late September till late April. The end of the season was often marked by Palm Sunday. It was a half-year season typical of province theaters, based on the number of inhabitants (at that time around 50,000) and the cultural demands of the bourgeoisie. As from the very beginning it was decided that the season would be divided into two parts (German and Hungarian), the six-month period needed to be shortened. This fact caused a problem with hiring a first-rate theater director. That was also the reason why the town, even prior to the theater opening, made an agreement on the alternate staging of German and Hungarian productions with the town of Temeswar/ Temesvár (Eastern Hungary; today: Timișoara, Western Romania) with a population comparable to that of Pressburg.¹⁶ The agreement was in force for thirteen years (1886–1899) and guaranteed the two directors the rental of the theater for six months.¹⁷ As at the time of construction of the new theater, the majority of population spoke German, the town decided to assign the winter season for the German productions. At the same time, the summer season was designated for Hungarian productions.¹⁸

16. The Municipal Theater Franz Joseph I of Temeswar, built in 1875, was designed by Ferdinand Fellner Jr. and Hermann Helmer who also designed the Municipal Theater in Pozsony. Cf. "Vom ungarischen Theater," *Pressburger Zeitung* 123/101 (11 April 1886), 3. See also Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová, *Geschichte des deutschsprachigen Theaters in der Slowakei* (Köln: Böhlau, 1997), 139.

17. Maria Pechtöl, *Thalia in Temeswar. Die Geschichte des Temeswarer deutschen Theaters im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Bukarest: Kriterion Verlag, 1972), 190.

18. The division was in place until 1899, when the town rented the theater to a director with both German and Hungarian ensembles. In 1902, however, the theater returned to the original model, although under different conditions. Hungarian productions were staged in winter and their number increased. Despite all changes,

The rental of the Municipal Theater was largely influenced by personal recommendations of the theater directors. The new renter was proposed by the Theater Committee, which served as an advisory body and was headed by the mayor. Among long-time members of the Theater Committee was Ján Batka, municipal archivist, music critic, and journalist of the daily *Pressburger Zeitung*.¹⁹ Once the proposal was approved by the Municipal Committee, the town made an agreement with the theater director specifying the terms and conditions of theater management in terms of both the performances and the maintenance. Based on the agreement, the performances took place on a daily basis. The agreement also stipulated the obligation to engage the ensemble and theater orchestra in order to ensure the repertoire of high quality.²⁰ The repertoire could consist of older works (operas, operettas, plays, slapstick and erudite comedies, and – later – modern dramas), however, the emphasis was put on the latest pieces that had been successfully staged in Viennese theaters.

Most productions were staged more than once during a season. The re-runs did not contravene the requirement to keep a high artistic level. The cast sometimes changed, as famous artists from Vienna and Budapest were invited to take part in performances. Press reviews show that the audience and the critics had a very specific idea of how the performances should look like, based on regular visits to Viennese theaters. The citizens of Pressburg kept track of the cultural life in Vienna and comparing the local ensemble with famous Vienna artists became an inseparable part of theater criticism. The director met the high expectations of the audiences if he staged operas on a regular basis. A difficult task, as he only had at his disposal an ensemble comprising an average of thirty soloists and twenty-five chorus-singers.²¹ Directors who succeeded in staging operas with decent singing performances at least once or twice per month (including several re-runs) were regarded as competent and promising ones.

German and Hungarian productions at the Municipal Theater altered until the arrival of Czech artists (1919) and the establishment of the Slovak National Theater in March 1920.

19. Ján (Johann, János) Nepomuk Batka Jr. (1845–1917), native of Pressburg. He received an excellent music education from his father, Ján Nepomuk Batka Sr., a musician and a music teacher. After graduation from the Law Academy in Pressburg he entered the municipal services as a first ever municipal archivist. In addition to his membership in the Theater Committee, he worked in favour of the Municipal Theater also as a music reporter of the *Pressburger Zeitung*. Cf. Zuzana Francová and Sylvia Urđová, *Ján Batka (1845–1917) a Bratislava* (Bratislava: MMB, 2017); Jana Lengová, “Batka, Johann, János, Ján,” in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik, Supplement*, hrsg. Ludwig Finscher (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2008), 37–38.

20. Before 1906, there was no permanently established orchestra in Pressburg, and so the director had to hire local musicians, mainly the members of St Martin’s Cathedral Music Society and some music teachers who, around 1897, established the *Pressburger Musikverein*. Apart from theater performances, the Music Society also performed in solo concerts. Cf. J[ohann] B[atka], “Zum morgigen Orchesterkonzerte des Pressburger Musikvereines,” *Pressburger Zeitung* 135/332 (3 Dezember 1898), 1. In case of contemporary operas that required a large orchestra, the theater hired the *Honvéd* band.

21. For more information on the members of ensembles in provincial theaters see Jiří Kopecký and Lenka Křupková, *Das Olmützer Stadttheater und seine Oper: “Wer in Olmütz gefällt, gefällt in der ganzen Welt”* (= *Neue Wege* 14) (Regensburg: Conbrio Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017), 257–268.

Between 1886 and 1919, that is, from the construction of the new building until the change in operation related to the establishment of the Slovak National Theater, ten theater directors managed the Municipal Theater.²² Three of them (Max Kmentt, Emanuel Raul, and Paul Blasel) were in charge of productions in German language, the others staged performances in Hungarian language (Károly Mosonyi, Ignác Krecsányi,²³ Iván Relle, Mihály Szendrey, Péter Andorffi, Kálmán Balla, and Károly Polgár). They all arrived in Pressburg with their own ensembles and staged performances in the newly built theater depending on the season, that is, either in German or in Hungarian language. The only exception was the era of Iván Relle, between 1899 and 1902, who simultaneously engaged a Hungarian and a German ensemble. Except for Max Kmentt, who only worked at the Municipal Theater for four seasons,²⁴ the staging of German productions was characterised by stability and success. That was true of both Emanuel Raul and his successor, Paul Blasel.

The performances in Hungarian language had long experienced low level of audience interest in Pressburg. Even Ignác Krecsányi, one of the best theater directors in the province, failed to attract sufficient number of people to the theater. Despite the Hungarian government's decision to stabilize the Hungarian theater in Pressburg, Krecsányi's successors suffered a similar fate. Except for Károly Mosonyi, who worked in Pressburg with a small ensemble that could not cover a wide-range repertory, and Iván Relle, who, due to the financial difficulties, did not manage to achieve even the minimal artistic level of performances, the offer of other directors was acceptable and Hungarian-language performances did not lack artistic merit. The alteration of directors created room for competition, and thus a possibility of quality growth. For many reasons, however, that did not happen. The theater had a primacy among provincial theaters in Hungary. This was mainly due to the vicinity of Vienna and the efforts to resemble the metropolis, notably by the local patriotism of Pressburg inhabitants who wanted their locality to be regarded as a leading Hungarian town.

Opera performances at the Municipal Theater

The program of the Municipal Theater in Pressburg corresponded with the traditional repertoire of provincial theaters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

22. These are theater directors who made the rental agreement with the town and staged performances during the six-month-long season. This number does not include directors of ensembles that gave guest performances at the Municipal Theater.

23. Jana Laslaviková, "Mestské divadlo v Prešporoku na sklonku 19. storočia a jeho riaditelia Emanuel Raul a Ignác Krecsányi" [The Municipal Theater in Pressburg at the end of the 19th century and its directors Emanuel Raul and Ignác Krecsányi], *Musicologica Slovaca* 7(33)/1 (Spring 2016), 19–51.

24. Jana Laslaviková, "Prvé roky fungovania Mestského divadla v Prešporoku a pôsobenie nemeckého divadelného riaditeľa Maxa Kmentta" [The first years of the Municipal Theater in Pressburg and its German theater director Max Kmentt], *Musicologica olomucensia* 25/1 (Spring 2017), 115–131.

century. As it was already mentioned, the genre of opera had a privileged position. Its educational role was combined with the entertainment of royalty and nobility and the representational function, highlighting the substantial growth of bourgeoisie and its presentation through the attendance of opera performances.²⁵ In the nineteenth century, the historical, mythical, and noble subjects were replaced by stage actions involving the representatives of the new society, thus pointing out their social emancipation.²⁶ From the very beginning, the opera repertoire of the Municipal Theater was dominated by Italian and French works, such as *Un ballo in maschera*, *La traviata*, *Il trovatore*, *Rigoletto*, *Aida* by Verdi, *Faust* by Gounod, *Carmen* by Bizet, *La Juive* by Halévy, *Guillaume Tell* by Rossini, *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète* by Meyerbeer. Many of them became part of the ‘operatic canon’ that included not only the particular pieces, but also the particular standardized staging.²⁷ In the summer of 1892, the International Exhibition of Music and Theater in Vienna presented works of the Italian *verismo*. Shortly afterwards they were premiered in Pressburg, so the local audience had the chance to get familiar with *I pagliacci* by Leoncavallo and *Cavalleria rusticana* by Mascagni. The Vienna exhibition also brought to Pressburg the premiere of Smetana’s *Prodaná nevesta* in German language. The Municipal Theater staged German romantic operas as well, such as *Das Nachtlager in Granada* by Conradin Kreutzer, *Hans Heiling* by Heinrich Marschner, *Martha* by Friedrich von Flotow, *Zar und Zimmermann*, *Undine* and *Der Waffenschmied von Worms* by Albert Lortzing, as well as *Das goldene Kreuz* by Ignaz Brüll. The repertoire also included the works of Richard Wagner (*Lohengrin*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*) the staging of which depended on the ability to recruit first-rate soloists or to engage guest soloists.

Between 1886 and 1899, the Municipal Theater was rented by two directors who staged opera productions during the German part of the season (directors of Hungarian seasons were relieved of this obligation until 1899): Max Kmentt and Emanuel Raul. Max Kmentt had worked in Pressburg before the construction of the new theater and became the first renter of the new Municipal Theater.²⁸ He

25. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 14: *Dissonanzen. Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie*, hrsg. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), 254–270; Carl Dahlhaus, *Allgemeine Theorie der Musik I. Historik – Grundlagen der Musik – Ästhetik*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 1, hrsg. Hermann Danuser, Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen und Tobias Plebuch (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2000), 287–302.

26. Phillip Ther, *In der Mitte der Gesellschaft. Operntheater in Zentraleuropa 1815–1914* (Wien – München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), 88.

27. Peter Stachel, “Die Oper als kulturelles Erbe Europas? Positionen der EU-Kulturpolitik,” in *Wie europäisch ist die Oper? Die Geschichte des Musiktheaters als Zugang zu einer kulturellen Topographie Europas*, hrsg. Peter Stachel und Philipp Ther (Wien–Köln–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 115.

28. There is only little information available on the personal life of Max Kmentt. He was born in Hungary, probably in Pressburg County. Before his arrival to the city, he worked as an actor in several towns of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Klagenfurt, Graz, Gorlitz, Sigmaringen, Poznan). He left Pressburg for Temeswar, and later Budapest. His wife, Beatrix, was an actress. Kmentt entered into the Municipal Theater rental agreement for a period of three years (1886–1889) and agreed to stage German productions in Temeswar. Kmentt was a passionate actor appearing in roles of heroes, lovers, and bon vivants. During his stay in Pressburg, he regularly performed at the theater.

spent a total of four seasons there, from 1886/1887 to 1889/1890. He was familiar with the composition and preferences of regular theater goers, but in the effort to attract broader audiences he focused mainly on entertaining repertoire: predominantly operettas and slapstick comedies. He regularly invited guest artists from Vienna and staged the latest operas shortly after they had been premiered in Viennese theaters. As for the contractual obligation to stage opera productions, at the end of the seasons Kmentt organized opera cycles with guest appearances of first-rate choruses either from Vienna or from other reputable theaters. Yet, Ján Batka did not approve of this way of operation and as a member of the Theater Committee he repeatedly made statements about the violation of the rental agreement. His main complaint was that Kmentt aspired for quick profit and did not care about the general artistic character of the theater.²⁹ However, Kmentt had many friends in the Theater Committee (the most important one being Iván Simonyi)³⁰ who always backed him up. In the season 1888/1889, when the Municipal Committee was to decide on the prolongation of the Municipal Theater rental agreement, Kmentt engaged opera soloists in his ensemble and staged opera performances during a proper season, as he did not want to risk.

In his first season at the Municipal Theater Kmentt staged a single new opera, *Der Trompeter von Säckingen* by Viktor Nessler, with the participation of the soloist Georg Schütte-Harmsen and the choir of the *Typographenbund* from Pressburg. The review of the opening night (30 December 1886) published in the daily *Westungarischer Grenzbote* (owned by Iván Simonyi) was very appreciative.³¹ The *Pressburger Zeitung* (sharing Batka's view of Kmentt), however, was more restrained in its review, praising mainly the contribution of the *Typographenbund* chorus and the performance of Schütte-Harmsen.³² By the end of the season, the opera had been staged ten more times, often before a sold-out auditorium, as the performances of local artists guaranteed good attendance. Among the guest artists were Anna Baier from the Vienna Court Opera, Therese Biedermann from the Theater an der Wien and Betti Münk from the German Theater in Prague.

The opera cycle in May 1887 offered several older works, staged with the participation of guest artists of the Vienna Court Opera: Verdi's *Il trovatore*, *La Juive* by Halévy, *Les Huguenots* by Meyerbeer, *Guillaume Tell* by Rossini, Wagner's *Lohengrin*, *Faust* by Gounod, *Martha* by Flotow, *Zar und Zimmermann* by Lortzing, as well as *Der Trompeter von Säckingen* by Nessler. The high level of these performances strengthened Kmentt's position. The next year, however, he did not

29. Cf. Joh. Batka, "Theater," *Pressburger Zeitung* 125/307 (6 November 1888), 4.

30. Iván (von) Simonyi (1838–1904), lawyer and writer. After the completion of his studies, he settled in Pressburg where, together with Móric Jókai and Edward Horn, he established the daily *Westungarischer Grenzbote* which was supposed to work as an opposition to the *Pressburger Zeitung*. Cf. "Unser Mitbürger Iván v. Simonyi," *Pressburger Zeitung* 141/183 (3 Juli 1904), 3.

31. F., "Der Trompeter von Säckingen," *Westungarischer Grenzbote* 15/4814 (31 Dezember 1886), 5.

32. E., "Der Trompeter von Säckingen," *Pressburger Zeitung* 123/361 (31 Dezember 1886), 5.

stage any opera, only a number of notorious older operettas, which resulted in the appearance of critical voices against him. Guest performances of Viennese singers, such as Theodor Reichmann from the Vienna Court Opera, Ida Liebhardt-Baier, Gusti Zimmermann, and Alexander Girardi from Theater an der Wien, Adolf Rakowitsch from the Theater in der Josefstadt, did not help him either. Instead of operas he staged operettas performed by the ensemble of Carltheater.³³

In the next season, during which the Municipal Committee was taking decision on the prolongation of rental agreement, Kmentt engaged opera singers to his ensemble, which allowed him to stage opera productions during the entire winter season. A chief soloist was Marie Bauer-Hellmer, other soloists included Frida Hawliczek, Marie Jira, Gabriele Mrak, Berthold Glesinger, Joachim Kromer, Georg Meder, Franz Nöthig, Leopold Tramer, Peter Zsitvay, and Stefan Widmann. The orchestra was led by an excellent opera conductor, Albert Hartl. In total, fifteen opera productions were staged during the season (among others Verdi's *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, and *Rigoletto*, Gounod's *Faust*, Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Lucrezia Borgia*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Le nozze di Figaro*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, as well as Halévy's *La Juive*) two of which were premiers (Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, and Bizet's *Carmen*).³⁴ Some performances were supported by guests from the Vienna Court Opera like Rosa Papier (she sang Azucena in *Il trovatore*), Antonie Schläger (singing *Lucrezia Borgia* in the opera of the same title), Minna Walter (she was Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*) and Theodor Reichmann (in the title role of *Hans Heiling* and that of *Der fliegende Holländer*).

The most anticipated premiere was *Carmen*. Kmentt actually promised to stage the opera in 1886 when he signed the rental agreement. The opening night took place on 2 February 1889, i.e. towards the end of the German season. The opera was a great success, mainly due to the singer Marie Bauer-Hellmer (who sang the title role) and the orchestra that coped with the task without any problems. According to Batka, the orchestra surprised by ample sound and the musicians made use of the variety of Bizet's rich orchestration, which was mainly due to the guidance of the conductor Hartl. The general good impression was increased by attractive decorations and costumes.³⁵ The premiers of *Hans Heiling* (14 November 1888) and *Der fliegende Holländer* (15 December 1888) met with a similarly positive

33. Guests from Vienna brought two new operas: *Der Sänger von Palermo* (A. Zamara) and *Der Glücksritter* (A. Czibulka). The response to the performances was enthusiastic. Zamara conducted his operetta in person, which increased the attractiveness of the guest performance. E., "Ensemble-Gastspiel des Operettenpersonals vom Karltheater in Wien," *Pressburger Zeitung* 125/116 (26 April 1888) 3–4.

34. This was the only Kmentt's season during which Ján Batka regularly reviewed opera productions for the daily *Pressburger Zeitung*. The reviews reflected Batka's animosity towards Kmentt, yet, the performances of the soloists were evaluated in a very correct manner. Batka's general complaint was related to the fact that, due to the lack of opera soloists, Kmentt was not able to cast individual roles appropriately. Moreover, Batka also pointed out improper training of the singers and the false notes of the chorus.

35. J[ohann] B[atka], "Carmen," *Pressburger Zeitung* 126/34 (4 Februar 1889), 3.

response. In the case of Marschner's work, Batka briefly summarized the course of the premiere,³⁶ while Wagner's work was analysed in an individual report.³⁷

During his fourth season, Kmentt seriously broke the agreement by subletting the Municipal Theater to a third party, namely Emil Berla, a comedian from the Graz theater. This fact resulted in the termination of the prolonged rental agreement. As far as the course of the season is concerned, Berla continued in 'Kmentt's style,' which means that he staged mostly entertaining repertoire like slapstick and erudite comedies, as well as operettas. He did not stage any operas, and after the end of the season he left Pressburg for good.

With the vacancy at the position of theater director, Ján Batka did not hesitate to recommend Emanuel Raul, at that time the director of theater in Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary), to the Theater Committee.³⁸ After winning the competition in 1890, Raul rented the Municipal Theater for a period of three years and agreed to stage German productions in Temeswar. From this moment, a fruitful cooperation started to develop between Batka and Raul, which lasted for nine years, i.e. until 1899, when Raul left Pressburg for good.³⁹ As a music expert and critic, Batka had a clear idea of which operas belonged to the high-quality opera repertoire and what the well-rehearsed opera productions would look like. Raul was very grateful for his advice, as he knew about Batka's scope of knowledge, education, and recognition in the international professional circles.⁴⁰ Raul's letters show that he regularly discussed the productions he intended to stage with Batka. He accepted most of

36. J[ohann] B[atka], "Hans Heiling," *Pressburger Zeitung* 125/316 (15 November 1888), 4.

37. J[ohann] B[atka], "Der fliegende Holländer," *Pressburger Zeitung* 125/346 (16 Dezember 1888), 5–6.

38. Emanuel Raul (Emanuel Friedmann, 1843–1916) was born in Boskovice u Brna. His wife, Katharina Hoppé, was an actress and operetta singer. As an actor and singer (playing lovers), he performed in theaters in Prague, České Budějovice, Linz, Klagenfurt, Vienna (Theater in der Josefstadt, later Theater an der Wien), Carlsbad, Odessa, Bucharest, and Ljubljana. In 1877 he decided to establish a theater company which performed in Sopron, Hungary and from 1880 in Carlsbad. In the period 1880–1883, he simultaneously rented the municipal theater in Olomouc, where he staged an opera repertoire similar to that in Pressburg, and between 1883 and 1886 he managed the municipal theater in Liberec. He first arrived in Pressburg in the autumn of 1890 after the end of the season in Carlsbad. Cf. Jitka Ludvová et al., *Hudební divadlo v českých zemích: osobnosti 19. století* [Music theater in the Czech lands: personalities of the 19th centuries], (Praha: Divadelní ústav, Academia, 2006), 434; Jiří Kopecký and Lenka Křupková, *Provinciální Theatre and its Opera: German Opera Scene in Olomouc 1770–1920* (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2015), 138–148.

39. On the outside, the period of Raul's management looked very stable and was dominated by productions in German language. Nevertheless, the Hungarian government imposed a strong pressure in order to establish Hungarian theater in Pressburg. Raul was well aware of this situation and was ready to fight for the Municipal Theater. The high-quality opera productions guaranteed him the trust of Pressburg citizens as well as a good attendance.

40. The evidence of the friendship between Batka and Raul can be found in the correspondence preserved at the Bratislava City Archives (hereafter abbreviated as AMB), fond Johann Nepomuk Batka (f. JNB), korespondencia (kor.), Emanuel Raul, inventárne číslo (inv. č.) 5, škatuľa (šk.) 26. In his first letter addressed to Batka on 24 May 1886, Raul wrote about the opening of a newly built Municipal Theater in Carlsbad where he worked as a director at that time. The opening night was attended by Iván von Simonyi, referred to as a protector by Raul, and his wife. Raul thanked Batka for the extensive positive review of the opening night in the *Neue freie Presse*. AMB, f. JNB, kor., Emanuel Raul, inv. č. 5, šk. 26, 24.5.[18]86. See also Alexandra Tauberová and Jarmila B. Martinková, *Johann Nepomuk Batka. Auswahl aus der Korrespondenz* (Bratislava: Museaum Musicum, 1999).

Batka's proposals, even if these had been made shortly before the beginning of the season.⁴¹ The cooperation between Raul and Batka was not limited to the Municipal Theater in Pressburg: Raul informed Batka about the opera productions of his ensemble in Temeswar as well.⁴²

Being well aware of Batka's demands, Raul paid an increased attention to hiring soloists and chorus-singers for his ensemble. It was a common practice that a good and gifted singer was offered an engagement in Vienna or another big city after one or two seasons spent in provincial institutions. As a result, Raul was permanently forced to search new members for his ensemble. He was also well aware of the fact that staging high-quality opera performances on a regular basis required a good orchestra, and therefore from the very beginning he paid a close attention to the number and quality of the orchestra members. He even managed to recruit a harpist, claiming that his predecessors had only known this musical instrument by hearsay.⁴³

Apart from the musical and musical-dramatic genres that dominated the repertoire, Raul also put emphasis on staging classical plays and modern realist dramas. He was the first to stage works by Gerhart Hauptmann and Hermann Sudermann in Pressburg. But opera productions had the biggest success, perceived by local people as a confirmation of the cultural character of the town and the reminiscences of its rich past. During Raul's stay in Pressburg (1890–1899), opera productions, mostly works from the nineteenth-century operatic canon mentioned above, were staged almost every week. For the re-runs Raul invited guests from the Vienna Court Opera or other reputable theaters, such as former members of his ensemble like Minna Baviera-Zichy, Betty Stojan, Marie Seiffert, Rudolf del Zopp, Alois Penarini, and Anton Passy-Cornet.

Celebrated guests of the Municipal Theater also included 'local' artists Josef Beck⁴⁴ and Irma de Spányi.⁴⁵ They were young ambitious singers who knew Ján Batka and Emanuel Raul personally and thanks to Batka's recommendations regularly appeared as guests at the Municipal Theater. In 1895 Beck suggested

41. AMB, f. JNB, kor., Emanuel Raul, inv. č. 5, šk. 26, (18 September 1896).

42. Ibid., 28 March 1895. Batka's correspondence includes a letter by the tenor Alois Penarini, a member of Raul's ensemble between 1893 and 1895, written in Temeswar. Penarini wrote about Batka's visit to the theater in Temeswar, which clearly shows that Batka as a member of the Theater Committee was interested in the professional level of the German-speaking performances in the partner town. AMB, f. JNB, kor., Alois Penarini, inv. č. 5, šk. 25, (24 March 1895).

43. AMB, f. JNB, kor., Emanuel Raul, inv. č. 5, šk. 26, (27 November 1892).

44. Josef Beck (1848–1903) was a son of Johann Nepomuk Beck, a baritone and a long-time member of the Vienna Court Opera. As an opera singer he performed in theaters throughout Europe and, during the 1890s, he toured the US. After the end of the tour he decided to settle down in Pressburg, together with his sick father, who had moved there from Vienna.

45. Irma de Spányi (Irma v. Spányik, Irma de Spagni, later Irma Spányik-Tomaszyk, 1861–1932) was born in Pressburg. After completing her studies, she left for Budapest and, encouraged by Batka, enrolled in the class of Salvatore Auteri, with whom she later left for Italy, where she made her debut as Brangäne in the Italian premiere of *Tristan and Isolde* in 1888.

Raul that he could perform in the opera *Hans Heiling*, which was not originally included in the program.⁴⁶ However, Batka managed to convince him,⁴⁷ and the result was an amazing production and the satisfaction of the successful guest soloist Beck.⁴⁸ Spányi mentions her debut at the Municipal Theater in 1892, in *Aida* (singing the role of Amneris), in her memoirs.⁴⁹ In 1894 she performed in *Carmen* (the title role) and *Aida* (Amneris), in 1896 in the premiere of *Mignon* (the title role) and in 1898 in *Lohengrin* (Ortrud). Spányi always claimed that guest performances in her native town were among her favourite.

During his nine-year-long stay in Pressburg, Raul staged the premieres of the following operas: Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (on 18 December 1891), *Jadwiga* by August Norgauer (10 January 1893, world premiere), *Mala vita* by Umberto Giordano (4 November 1893, the first production in German language), Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci* (30 December 1893), *Rose von Pontevedra* by Josef Forster (24 January 1894, in the presence of the composer), *Der Weise von Cordoba* by Oscar Strauss, (1 December 1894, world premiere), Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* (25 December 1894), *Enoch Arden* by Viktor Hausmann (19 January 1895, staged for the first time in the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire), *Mignon* by Thomas (28 January 1896), *Heimchen am Herd* by Carl Goldmark (5 December 1896), *Der Evangelimann* by Wilhelm Kienzl (9 January 1897), Bizet's *Djamileh* (20 November 1897), Puccini's *La Bohème* (8 January 1898), *Der Streik der Schmiede* by Max Josef Beer (27 November 1898), and *Griseldis* by Giulio Cottrau (29 December 1898). Each of the premieres was an exceptional event, and the audience was arriving well prepared by Batka's newspapers articles on the composers and their works. It is remarkable that almost all premieres took place without the appearance of guest artists, that is, only with the participation of members of Raul's ensemble, which confirms his skills and right choice of artists. The evidence can also be found in Batka's review of the premiere of *Der Evangelimann* claiming that the quality of the opera productions was guaranteed by the fact that Raul selected the members of his ensemble specifically for the productions he planned to stage.⁵⁰

The most famous soloists who worked in Raul's ensemble between 1890 and 1899 (apart from the above mentioned former members who established themselves in Viennese theaters) included Margit Delai, Rosa Duce, Rosa Fried, Mila Kühnel, Aurelie Noe, Helene Wiet, Karl Astner, Franz Bucar, Eugen Gussalewicz, Julius and Heinrich Kiefer, Richard Kornay, August Manoss, Heinrich Mezey,

46. Beck was considering the termination of his career, but in 1895 Raul offered him a chance to perform at the Municipal Theater as a soloist and chief opera director. He was a great asset to the theater. AMB, f. JNB, kor., Johann Nepomuk Beck a rodina, inv. č. 5, šk. 5, the letter itself is undated, the date 29 September 1895 was added in later.

47. AMB, f. JNB, kor., Emanuel Raul, inv. č. 5, šk. 26, (24 September 1895).

48. "Theater," *Pressburger Zeitung* 132/296 (28 Oktober 1895), 3.

49. Irma de Spányi, *Bühnen-Erinnerungen* (Pressburg: Im Selbstverlage, 1926), 57.

50. J[ohann] B[atka], "Der Evangelimann," *Pressburger Zeitung* 134/10 (10 Januar 1897), 5.

Don Renardi, Alfred Schauer, Sigmund Szengery, and Georg Unger. In the season 1897/1898 Raul engaged the young Bruno Walter in the position of conductor. Most of the soloists came either from Vienna or from other Austro-Hungarian towns with a theatrical tradition (Graz, Baden, Prague, Brno, Olomouc). Pressburg was their first bigger engagement; then they moved to Vienna or to other bigger theaters in the province and their life stories created the ‘memory map’ of nineteenth-century artists.⁵¹

Raul’s goodbye to the appreciative Pressburg audience was the performance of the opéra-comique *Les dragons de Villars* by Aimé Maillart, which took place on 31 January 1899.⁵² The symbolic gesture in the form of opera performance completed Raul’s effort to make opera repertoire available to Pressburg audience.

* * *

Looking at the theater life in Pressburg towards the end of the nineteenth century and the reception of opera performances at the Municipal Theater it is safe to say that opera productions were staged on a daily basis. While the era of Max Kmentt was characterized by guest appearances of stars, Emanuel Raul systematically built the opera repertoire by means of his ensemble. Due to his precious friendship with Ján Batka, an opera critic and a member of the Theater Committee, he offered new operas as well as older works of high quality for the audience.

The local patriotism of Pressburg citizens that can also be seen in Ján Batka’s activities in favour of the Municipal Theater points out the *genius loci* of this temple of culture. It was deeply rooted in the life of the town, its inhabitants, and their cultural life. The operational model of the Municipal Theater as well as social contexts and structures by which it was determined in the late nineteenth century created its image and secured its value. The history of the Municipal Theater can thus be incorporated into the town’s history of culture, the history of mentalities and collective identifications of its citizens and last but not least the history of culture in Central Europe.⁵³ The integration of the Municipal Theater into the context of Central Europe is therefore a direct and logical consequence of searching related elements within a large heterogeneous unit.

51. Wolfgang Göderle, “Migration,” in *Habsburg neu denken. Vielfalt und Ambivalenz in Zentraleuropa*, hrsg. Johannes Feichtinger und Heidemarie Uhl (Wien–Köln–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 140.

52. Raul had a strong interest in the prolongation of his Municipal Theater rental agreement; however, the Hungarian government was withholding the permission to stage German performances. Raul needed security, so he finally left Pressburg for good. Cf. Derra, “Neun Jahre Theaterdirektion Raul. Ein Abschnitt aus Pressburgs Theatergeschichte,” *Pressburger Zeitung* 136/43 (12 Februar 1899), 4–5.

53. Moritz Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis der Städte. Kulturelle Verflechtungen – Wien und die urbanen Milieus in Zentraleuropa* (Wien–Köln–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 62. See also *Kakanien Revisited. Das Eigene und das Fremde (in) der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie*, hrsg. Wolfgang Müller-Funk, Peter Plener und Clemens Ruthner (Tübingen–Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 2002).

