

Untying the “Musical Sphinx:” Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 in Nineteenth-Century Pest-Buda¹

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that Beethoven’s Ninth was followed by a temporary crisis in the genre of the symphony: the next generation found it difficult to get away from the shadow of this monumental piece. The Ninth was first performed in Hungary in 1865, more than 40 years after the world-premiere. We should add, however, that during the first half of the nineteenth century, no professional symphonic orchestra and choir existed in Pest-Buda that would have coped with the task. Although the Hungarian public was able to hear some of Beethoven’s symphonies already by the 1830s – mainly thanks to the Musical Association of Pest-Buda – in many cases only fragments of symphonies were performed. The Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society, founded in 1853, was meant to compensate for the lack of symphonic concerts. This paper is about the performances of Beethoven’s symphonies in Pest-Buda in the nineteenth century, and it especially it focuses on the reception of Symphony No. 9 in the Hungarian press, which cannot be understood without taking into consideration the influence of the Neudeutsche Schule (New German School).

KEYWORDS

symphony, nineteenth century, reception, orchestra, New German School

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1. ANTECEDENTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC IN PEST-BUDA

Founded in 1853 and still active today, the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society (Filharmóniai Társaság Zenekara) was Hungary's first professional symphony orchestra.² The establishment of the ensemble, or at least the first major step of the endeavor, was owed to Franz and Karl Doppler, musicians at the National Theater in Pest (pesti Nemzeti Színház): it was the Doppler brothers who, returning in the summer of 1853 from their concert tour abroad, formulated a petition asking the director of the National Museum (Nemzeti Múzeum) to make the ceremonial hall of the institution available for a series of philharmonic concerts, so that Pest would not remain behind the culturally significant cities in terms of artistic events (see *Plate 1*).³ However, the idea of organizing public concerts as well as the personal encouragement of the Doppler brothers was probably Franz Liszt's doing. During the above-mentioned summer tour, the Doppler brothers visited Liszt in Weimar, and in December 1853, following the first successful concert of the Philharmonic Society, they wrote Liszt a letter of thanks for his support:

After our return from Germany, we shared Your view with our ingenious Erkel, who immediately devoted himself to the matter with an enthusiastic sensation of art. Actively cooperating with several artists of our orchestra, we have organized philharmonic concerts – with the best possible local conditions that we could achieve –, that were successful enough to make our audience (who are not really sympathetic to this type of music) honestly and exceptionally enthusiastic about our concerts.⁴

Prior to the foundation of the orchestra and beginning of the public concerts, there was a lively orchestral tradition in Hungary. At the eighteenth-century private concerts held at aristocratic courts, professional musicians performed secular instrumental music; and by the turn of the

² For important works on this topic, see Imre MÉSZÁROS and Kálmán ISOZ (eds.), *A Filharmóniai Társaság múltja és jelene 1853–1903* [The past and present of the Philharmonic Society from 1853 to 1903] (Budapest: Hornyánszky Viktor császári és királyi udvari nyomdája, 1903); Béla CSUKA, *Kilenc évtized a magyar zene-művészet szolgálatában. A Filharmóniai Társaság Emlékkönyve 90 éves jubileuma alkalmából* [Nine decades in the service of Hungarian music. Memory book of the Philharmonic Society for its 90th anniversary] (Budapest: Filharmóniai Társaság, 1943); János BREUER, *A Budapesti Filharmóniai Társaság Zenekarának 125 esztendeje (1853–1978)* [125 years of the Philharmonic Society of Budapest (1853–1978)] (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1978); Ferenc BÓNIS, *A Budapesti Filharmóniai Társaság százötven esztendeje, 1853–2003* [150 years of the Philharmonic Society of Budapest, 1853–2003] (Budapest: Budapesti Filharmóniai Társaság–Balassi Kiadó, 2005).

³ See Kálmán ISOZ, “Erkel és a szimfonikus zene,” [Erkel and the symphonic music] in *Erkel Ferenc emlékkönyv*, ed. by Bertalan FABÓ (Budapest: Pátria, 1910), 132. Also available online: <<http://mek.oszk.hu/08600/08689/>>, (accessed November 29, 2019).

⁴ “Nach unserer Rück[k]unft aus Deutschland, theilten wir unsern [sic] genialen Erkel Ihre Ansicht mit, welcher sich sogleich mit begeisterter Kunstempfindung der Sache hingab. Im thätigem [sic] Vereine mit mehreren Künstlern unseres Orchesters, haben wir nun – mit der, unsern Localverhältnissen möglichst grossartigsten Art – philharmonische Concerte bewerkstelligt, welche so glücklich ausgeführt werden, dass unser – (sonst leider nur wenig für diese Art Musik sympat[h]i[sie]rendes Publikum) nun den höchsten wahrhaft empfundenen Eifer für diese Concerte bezeigt.” See Mária ECKHARDT, “Liszt és a Doppler-testvérek szerepe a Filharmóniai Társaság alapításában” [The role of Liszt and the Doppler brothers in the foundation of the Philharmonic Society], in *Zenatudományi Dolgozatok 1982*, ed. by Melinda BERLÁSZ and Mária DOMOKOS (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Zenatudományi Intézete, 1982), 135.



Plate 1 Franz and Carl Doppler's petition to Ágoston Kubinyi, the director of the National Museum

Gefuchtwahrsinniger Brief

Dem in künstlerischer Beziehung nicht nur
gebildetsten Völkern der In- und Auslandes
maßgebenden, haben sich die Kunstschaffenden
mit den unergieblichsten Wünschen verbunden
begegneten, sind und gesonnen in der In- und
Kunstigen Minder, in der Musikischen der Persönlichen
Orchester-Personals der National-Theaters, Galleries, der
Eitel an der Größe, so wird mit Zögerniß besonders
Kunstschaffenden, 4 bis 6 große Concerte in der Stadt
„Philharmonische Concerte“ zu veranstalten.

Der eine einseitig fingt der Museum-Saal der unergieblichen
Lokal der unergieblichen, wie über die unergieblichen
Abstraktion eines Theils der unergieblichen
die baufähigen Museum-Personals befehlen
wollen, nachdem wir sind die unergieblichen
Hochwohlgebornen anzuweisen zu bitten, geeigneten
Ortes offentlich zu wollen, daß diese Concerte in dem
genannten Saale stattfinden können.

Mit besonderer Aufmerksamkeit weisen wir
für die Gefuchtwahrsinnigen anzuweisen

Franz und Carl Doppler
Angewandter der National-Theater

Budapest den 30^{ten} August 1853.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both the church and the theater, two seemingly different locations, were musical factors of decisive importance. The secularization of the *musica figurata*, i.e. the vocal-instrumental repertoire performed in churches, was characteristic of Hungarian towns as well: it was a common practice to replace the gradual and the offertory with secular and non-liturgical works. Moreover, the itinerant theater companies, playing first in German and later in the Hungarian language – almost always with the contribution of an orchestra – had an important role in creating the conditions for public orchestral performances. At the spoken theater performances, these orchestras performed the opening music, as well as *intermezzi* or



interludes during the intervals (with the appearance of virtuoso instrumentalists). These tasks were occasionally fulfilled by additional musicians, even in the case of non-musical theatrical pieces.⁵ In the case of musical theater pieces, there were already 26 orchestral members, as evidenced by the payment voucher of the first Hungarian-language singspiel performance in Pest-Buda (now Budapest) in May 1793.⁶

The emergence and development of nineteenth-century bourgeois concert life was closely linked to the existence of theater orchestras as well. The German Theater of Pest (Pester Stadttheater), inaugurated in 1812, provided a suitable venue for concerts as well. Along with the German-language theater companies following one another, a significantly large orchestra participated in the performances already during the year after the opening of the institution.⁷ *Grosse musikalische Akademien* were organized at the theater, having two parts and lasting for approximately two and a half hours. Ferenc Erkel, the most significant Hungarian opera composer of the nineteenth century, was employed by the German Theater for a short period as the second conductor, before he was engaged by the Hungarian Theater in Pest (1837) to organize a Hungarian opera company of high standards by the beginning of the next year (1837).⁸ The organizational process was quite difficult: there was a tension between the spoken theater and opera departments. The basic question of the so-called *operaháború* (opera war) was about the task of theater: was its role educational or entertaining? In contemporary discourse, the former was embodied by the drama and the latter by the musical theater, that is, by opera performances.⁹

It was an important step towards the consolidation of the Hungarian Theater in Pest (Pesti Magyar Színház), which was formerly supported by the Pest County and which acquired countrywide national support in August 1840, thereby changing its name to the National Theater (Nemzeti Színház). The new name appeared on the playbills on August 8, on the occasion of the premiere of Erkel's first opera *Bátori Mária*. The number of opera performances increased during the 1840s, and so did the number of the orchestra's permanent members (see *Table 1*). In 1853, the orchestra of the National Theater had 45 members, and the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society had 47 members. Although the number of the members might seem promising, the recruitment of musicians was still difficult.¹⁰ The majority of the orchestral musicians came

⁵ György SZÉKELY, Ferenc KERÉNYI, Tamás GAJDÓ and Éva BALÁZS (eds.), *Magyar színháztörténet* [Hungarian theatrical history], vol. 1: 1790–1873 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), 76.

⁶ The first Singspiel was presented in Buda in May 1793 by the Hungarian National Theatrical Society (Magyar Nemzeti Játsszó Társaság) – led by László Kelemen. The text of *Prince Pikkó and Jutka Perzsi* (Pikkó herceg és Jutka Perzsi) was translated from German into Hungarian by Antal Szalkay, the music was written by József Chudy. Unfortunately, the music of this piece is not preserved. The extract of the musicians' fee is available at Pest County Archives IV. 76.

⁷ Tibor TALLIÁN, "Opernorchester in Ungarn im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *The Opera Orchestra in 18th- and 19th-Century Europe*, vol. 1: *The Orchestra in Society*, ed. by Niels Martin JENSEN and Franco PIPERNO (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag), 171.

⁸ Ferenc BÓNIS, "Hogyan lett Erkel Ferenc a Pesti Magyar Színház karmestere?" [How did Ferenc Erkel become the conductor of the Hungarian Theater in Pest?], in *Erkel Ferencről és koráról* [About Ferenc Erkel and his time], ed. by id. (Budapest: Püski, 1995), 45–54.

⁹ Ferenc KERÉNYI, *Az operaháború: Egy színháztörténeti jelenség komplex leírása* [The opera war. A complex description of a theater history phenomenon], (Budapest: Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, 1977).

¹⁰ The recollections of an orchestral musician, Károly Huber (the member of the National Theater), testify that even in 1861 it was quite difficult to hire new members. February 10, 1861: Károly Huber's recollections about his trip to Prague. His duties included: "to inquire after musicians worthy to fill in orchestral positions that became vacant through death? ... Looking for orchestral members, I found a good French horn player, named



Table 1 Orchestra of the Pest National Theater, 1838–1853

	VI 1	VI 2	Va	Vlc	Cb	Fl	Picc	Ob	Cl	Fg	Cor	Trp	Trb	Oph	Timp	Gr C	Trg	Hrp	All
1838	3	4	2	2	2	2		2	2	2	2	2	3		1				29
1839	4	4	4	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3		1				34
1840	4	4	4	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3		1	1	1		36
1841	4	3	4	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3		1		1		34
1842	4	4	4	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1	1	1		37
1843	4	4	4	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3		1	1	1		36
1844	4	4	2	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3		1	1	1		34
1845	4	4	2	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3		1	1			33
1846	4	4	1	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3		1	1			32
1847	5	4	3	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1	1			36
1848	5	4	3	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1	1		1	37
1849	5	4	3	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	3	2	1	1	1		1	37
1850	5	4	3	2	2	2		2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1	1		1	37
1851	4	4	3	2	3	2		2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1	1		1	37
1852	5	4	3	2	3	2		2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	39
1853	6	6	4	3	3	2	1	2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	45

from abroad.¹¹ The Musical Society of Pest-Buda (Pestbudai Hangászegyesület) was created in 1836 by Gábor Mátray, for the purposes of professional music-making; the Singing School of the Musical Society of Pest-Buda (Pestbudai Hangászegyleti Énekiskola) was established in 1839–1840; the two institutions merged into the Musical Conservatory of the Music Society of Pest-Buda (Pestbudai Hangászegyleti Zenede) in 1851.¹² Members of the Music Society contributed significantly to the boosting of concert life both before and after the formation of the Philharmonic Society. Among others, they made the Pest-Buda audience familiar with a series of orchestral works, including some of Beethoven's symphonies.

Károly Weber. I did not find a second bassoonist either in Prague or Vienna; in my opinion, József Hikes, a member of the German Theater in Pest, who usually replaces the second bassoonist of our orchestra for a daily fee, when missing because of illness, should be given a contract. If the most respected direction were to reinforce the orchestra, I would be willing to make a list with the names of the individuals to employ.” National Széchényi Library, Music Department (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Zeneműtár), Fond 4.

¹¹ For example Franz and Karl Doppler who were engaged as conductors, flutists and composers in the National Theater.

¹² In 1867, the institution adopted the name National Music Conservatory (Nemzeti Zenede). Its legal successor, a middle-level educational institute, is known today under the name of Béla Bartók Conservatory of the Liszt Academy Budapest (Zeneakadémia Bartók Konzervatórium). For more details on the history of the institution see Lujza TARI and Márta Sz. FARKAS (eds.), *A Nemzeti Zenede* [The National Music Conservatory] (Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem Budapesti Tanárképző Intézete, 2005). Higher education in music came into being in Budapest only in 1875, as the National Royal Hungarian Academy of Music (Országos Magyar Királyi Zeneakadémia) was founded.



2. BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONIES IN PEST-BUDA

One of the concerts Liszt gave at the Hungarian Theater of Pest on January 11, 1840 was meant in particular to initiate the funding of the above-mentioned Music Society's Conservatory, which was to be established at that point in Pest. The program included the *Andante* from Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in his transcription. At the end of the year 1839, Liszt set out on a concert tour with the aim to support the installation of the Beethoven statue in Bonn.¹³ Later on, he performed several concerts in Pest as a pianist and donated the income to support not only music education, but the Hungarian Theater as well.

The Music Society's mission to spread art-music was indeed taking off; one of its results was that the members of the Music Society had already programmed Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 as the National Theater's "extraordinary performance" held on December 25, 1846. However, the concerts of the Music Society had not yet fully satisfied the musical needs of one reviewer as it was reported in a cynical account of the review *Honderű*, published in connection with the concert held on March 28, 1847, which included the performance of the first movement from Beethoven's Symphony No. 3:

This fourth concert of the society was a little less boring than the former ones. – The dullness of the Music Society's concerts has become so widely known here, ... that we could even say "Music Society-like" instead of "dull"!¹⁴

On March 25, 1851, the Music Society and the orchestra of the National Theater held a concert with Beethoven's works. Among others, Beethoven's entire Symphony No. 5 was performed and announced as "the great *symphonia* in C Minor." Furthermore, it was claimed in the same playbill that this concert was organized "in memory of the world-famous composer, on the eve of his death 25 years ago." The date on the playbill needs to be rectified, as 1851 actually saw the 24th anniversary of Beethoven's death (see *Plate 2*). On December 23, 1852, Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony was performed, again with the contribution of the National Theater's orchestra and the Music Society's members. A short press announcement informs us that the Conservatory of the Music Society signed a contract with the National Theater for six concerts per year.¹⁵

The Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society, founded in 1853, was meant to compensate for the lack of symphonic concerts. Its opening concert included Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, conducted by Erkel. One year later, the orchestra performed Symphonies Nos. 2, 5, 6, and in 1855 Symphonies Nos. 3 and 8. As far as Symphony No. 9 was concerned, only the *Scherzo* was played at a concert that took place in 1855. Beethoven's symphonies played a central role in the concerts given by the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society. We can state that during the first 13 years of the orchestra's existence there were no concerts without Beethoven's symphonies, conducted by Erkel (see *Table 2*).¹⁶

¹³ Alan WALKER, *Reflections on Liszt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 33–34.

¹⁴ "Ezen negyedik hangversenye az említett egyletnek valamivel kevesbbé unalmas volt, mint az előbbiek valának. – A zeneegylet hangversenyeinek unalmassága nálunk épp oly példabeszéddé vált, ... (hogy) nálunk is úgy lehetne mondani unalmas helyett hangászegyesületies!" *Honderű* 5/14 (April 6, 1847), 278.

¹⁵ *Pesti Napló* 3/829 (December 12, 1852), [3].

¹⁶ *Table 2* is based on BÓNIS, *A Budapesti Filharmóniai Társaság*.



Plate 2 Playbill of the Beethoven concert the National Theater (March 25, 1851)

Reproduced by kind permission of the Theater Department of the National Széchényi Library, Budapest

RENDKIVÜLI ELŐADÁSUL.

NEMZETI  SZÍNHÁZ.

Bérlet szünet.
Pest, kedden, márczius 25-én, 1851.

Beethoven L.

világhírű zeneszerző emlékeül, 25 év előtt történt halála előestéjén,
A pestbudai hangászegyleti zenede javára:

Nagy hangverseny.

2 SZAKÁSZBAN.

Első szakasz:

- 1.) Előszó. BEETHOVEN emlékére. Szerző S. K.; szavalja Szigeti ur.
- 2.) BEETHOVEN LAJOS nagy C-moll symphoniája, a nemzeti színház zenekara s hangászegyleti tagok által előadva.

Második szakasz:

- 1.) Hármás dal, BEETHOVEN „Fidelio“ operájából. Éneklik: Kaiser Erntné, assz. Lovassi Betti k. a. s Köszeghi ur.
- 2.) Beethoven nagy hegedüversenye; előadja Singer Edmund ur, a helybeli német színház zenekarának magánjátékosja. A benne előforduló cadentia Joachim Ján. ur szerzeménye.
- 3.) Beethoven nagy zongora-versenye C-mollból, zenekarkísérettel. A zongorarészt JAELL ALFRÉD ur játsszandja.
- 4.) Foglyok karéneke, Beethoven „Fidelio“ operájából; a hangászegylet dalnoktagjai s a nemzeti színház karszemélyzete által előadva.

JAELL ALFRÉD ur, valamint a fennevezett művészek s műkedvelők ezen emlékünnepe s jótékony cél tekintetéből lesznek szívesek működni.

Mind a nemzeti színház igazgatósága, mind a hangászegylet a halhatatlan szerző fennebbi művei előadása által legczélszerűbben véli nyilváníthatni azon kitünő figyelmet, melylyel a magyar nemzet mindenkor viseltett az egész világban classica szerzőnek ismert s a zeneművészetre nézve igen is korán elhunyt férfi munkáit iránt.

Kéretnek a páholy- és zártszékébről t. cz. uraságok, bérlet helyeik iránt méltóztassanak reggeli 10 óráig reudelkezni, azontul mások kívánata fog figyelembe vétetni.

Helyárak pengőpénzben:

Földszinti s első emel. páholy 5 for. Második emel. páholy 4 for. Földszinti támlás karszék 1 for. 20 kr. Földszinti zártszék 50 kr.
Másod. emel. zártszék 30 kr. Földszinti bemenet 30 kr. Második emel. bemenet 20 kr. Karzat 8 kr.

Kezdeté 7 óraker. vége 9 kor.

 Márczius 22-én a színházban találattott egy k a r p e r e c z; ugy szinte az előbbi hetekben 2 n y a k k e n d ő. egy s z e m ű v e g, s két k i s é t a p á l c z a, az illetők visszavehetik az irodában.

Nyomatik Lukács Lászlónál, Országut, Kunowalderház.



Table 2 Beethoven symphonies on the program of the Philharmonic Society
(Unless otherwise stated, the concerts were conducted by Ferenc Erkel)

Date	Place	Symphonies
Nov. 20, 1853	National Museum	Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92
Dec. 22, 1853	Buda, House of Parliament	Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92
March 12, 1854	National Museum	Symphony No. 6 (Pastoral) in F Major, op. 68
March 25, 1854	National Museum	Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 36
Dec. 3, 1854	National Museum	Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, op. 67
Feb. 25, 1855	National Museum	Symphony No. 8 in F Major, op. 93
March 25, 1855	National Museum	Symphony No. 3 (Eroica) in E-flat Major, op. 55
Dec. 2, 1855	National Museum	Symphony No. 9, in D Minor, op. 125 – Scherzo
Dec. 16, 1855	National Museum	Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 36
Feb. 17, 1856.	National Museum	Symphony No. 8 in F Major, op. 93
Nov. 9, 1856	National Museum	Symphony No. 6 (Pastoral) in F Major, op. 68
Dec. 21, 1856	National Museum	Symphony No. 3 (Eroica) in E-flat Major, op. 55
March 22, 1857	National Museum	Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major, op. 60
March 14, 1858	National Museum	Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, op. 67
Nov. 27, 1859	National Museum	Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92
Dec. 16, 1860	National Museum	Symphony No. 6 (Pastoral) in F Major, op. 68
March 17, 1861	National Museum	Symphony No. 8 in F Major, op. 93
March 25, 1862	National Museum	Symphony No. 3 (Eroica) in E-flat Major, op. 55
Apr. 6, 1862	National Museum	Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 36
Dec. 21, 1862	National Museum	Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92
Dec. 18, 1864	National Museum	Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, op. 67
March 25, 1865	Redoute	Symphony No. 9, in D Minor, op. 125
Apr. 11, 1865	Redoute	Symphony No. 9, in D Minor, op. 125
Apr. 23, 1865	Redoute	Symphony No. 8 in F Major, op. 93
Dec. 17, 1865	Redoute	Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92
Nov. 17, 1867	National Theater	Symphony No. 9, in D Minor, op. 125
Jan 5, 1868	National Theater	Symphony No. 3 (Eroica) in E-flat Major, op. 55
Nov. 25, 1868	Redoute	Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major, op. 60
Dec. 30, 1868	Redoute	Symphony No. 8 in F Major, op. 93
Dec. 16, 1870	Redoute	Symphony No. 9, in D Minor, op. 125 (cond. by Liszt)



3. BEETHOVEN'S NINTH

The Hungarian premiere of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 took place on March 25, 1865 although the news of a performance was already published in the press in February 1864.¹⁷ The delay for almost a decade in performing Symphony No. 9 seems to be considerable, especially in the light of the vivid Beethoven cult, emerging in Hungary after the composer's death. However, when compared with the first performances of Symphony No. 9 in some of the surrounding cities in East-Central Europe, the Pest premiere does not count at all as a late one in this area.¹⁸

A letter written by Liszt reveals that Kálmán Simonffy, a popular songwriter of the period, was also convinced that the Ninth had already been performed in Pest earlier. Liszt's memory, however, did not fail, so he won a bet against Simonffy, whom he addressed in his letter from May 1865 – the matter was probably on the agenda in connection with a concert of the Philharmonic Society, held in March that year. The content of Liszt's letter to Simonffy is also eloquent in terms of the earlier difficult situation of the Ninth Symphony, when almost everywhere audiences and professional musicians alike were against the performance of this monumental symphony:

Monsieur,

Je serais fâché de vous occasionner la perte d'un pari, mais puisque vous réclamez mon information pour savoir "si la 9me symphonie de Beethoven a été exécutée à Pest en 1840" je dois vous répondre que non. Du reste il n'y a lieu de s'étonner beaucoup du retard qu'a souffert l'exécution de ce prodigieux ouvrage à Pest. En 1840, la 9me symphonie était considérée comme un épouvantail des plus épouvantables, par la plupart des musiciens et des soi-disant "connaisseurs" en musique, d'Europe. A peine l'avait-on essayée *cahin-caha*, – fragmentairement d'abord à quelque occasion exceptionnelle; pour ne plus s'en occuper du reste, – dans deux ou trois villes d'Allemagne; le Conservatoire de Paris ne s'y aventura que plus tard sans trop d'entraînement, – et même après la Révolution de 1848 il semblait hasardeux d'en décorer les Programmes des Sociétés de Concert les plus respectables, vu mauvais sort qui s'attachait à la 9me symphonie à cause des sots et pitoyables jugements qu'elle avait dû subir.

Recevez, Monsieur, l'assurance de ma parfaite considération.

F. Liszt

Vatican 21. Mai 1865

¹⁷ "A folyó februárius havában bővében leszünk a hangversenyeknek. Amint értesülünk, lesz philharmóniai hangverseny, melyben Beethovennek még itt nem hallott 9-ik symphoniáját fogják előadni." (In the current month of February, we will be abounding in concerts. As far as we know, there will be a Philharmonic concert where Beethoven's Ninth Symphony will be performed for the first time here.) *Zenészeti Lapok* 4/19 (February 4, 1864), 152.

¹⁸ For more about performances of Beethoven's symphonies in East-Central European cities see Helmut LOOS (ed.), *Beethoven-Rezeption in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Leipzig: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 2015).



(Sir,

I would be sorry to cause you to lose a bet, but since you are asking for my information to know “if the 9th symphony of Beethoven was performed in Pest in 1840” I must answer you that no, it was not. In fact, there is little reason to be very surprised at the delay in the [first] performance of this prodigious work at Pest. In 1840, the 9th symphony was considered as one of the most appalling scarecrows, by most of the musicians and the so-called “connoisseurs” of music in Europe. Hardly had it been tried *cahin-caha*, – fragmentarily at first on some exceptional occasion; so as not to deal with the rest – in two or three cities in Germany; the Paris Conservatory did not venture there until later [and] without too much training, – and even after the Revolution of 1848 it seemed risky to decorate the most respectable Concert Society Programs, given the bad luck that was attached to the 9th symphony because of the stupid and pitiful judgments it had had to undergo.

Receive, Sir, the assurance of my perfect consideration.

F. Liszt

Vatican May 21, 1865)¹⁹

In 1855 only one movement of the symphony was presented. Was this caused by the lack of performers, or rather an appropriate venue, or the audience was not ready for it? Earlier literature referred to the lack of performers, claiming that because Erkel did not have the necessary choral ensemble at his disposal, he had to perform only the *Scherzo*.²⁰ However, the 1855 almanac of the National Theater reveals that the institution had 36 permanent choral musicians (18 male and 18 female singers), which did not increase significantly in the 1860s (when the choir had a total of 40 members).²¹ The idea that a proper venue was missing is reinforced by the fact that Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 was eventually premiered at the inaugural concert of the Redoute (Vigadó), re-opened in 1865. From this time on, the location of the Philharmonic Society’s concerts was moved from the earlier venue, the ceremonial hall of the National Museum to the Redoute. The vile acoustics of the new venue was mentioned in almost every account of the performance.

Although the Redoute’s first famous guest artist, in the year of its opening, was Johann Strauss Sr., who came to Pest in November 1833 with his full orchestra, it was not conceived, in fact, as a proper concert venue: later in the second half of the nineteenth century it was mainly used to host balls.²² The building fell victim to cannonballs and was set on fire during the 1848–1849 Revolution and freedom fight, and one had to wait 16 years for its reconstruction in 1865. The Great Hall of the Redoute was indeed the most suitable venue for the large number of audiences attending the highly popular concerts of the Philharmonic Society. It could accommodate more spectators than the National Theater: after its building had been transformed

¹⁹ An Kálmán von Simonffy. *Franz Liszt: Briefe aus ungarischen Sammlungen, 1835–1886*, ed. by Margit PRAHÁCS (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966), 121–122.

²⁰ ISOZ, Erkel és a szimfonikus zene, 140.

²¹ See the Theater Pocketbooks of the National Theater. National Széchényi Library, Theater Department (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Színháztörténeti Tár).

²² István GÁBOR, *A Vigadó története* [The history of the Redoute] (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1978), 11.



in 1847–1848, the National Theater could seat a maximum of 2,000–2,050 visitors.²³ The spaciousness of the renovated Redoute's Great Hall was described by Liszt in a letter addressed to Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, in connection with the performance in August 1865 of the oratorio *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth*, conducted by the author himself on the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Pest-Buda Conservatory. In his letter, Liszt wrote that the oratorio's premiere took place with the contribution of 500 performers; the Redoute's Great Hall was magnificent and richly decorated, and it was larger than the Capitol in Rome as it could certainly accommodate up to 3,000 people.²⁴

The playbill of the premiere of Symphony No. 9 in the concert of the Philharmonic Society on March 25, 1865 testifies that not only the audience, but also the performers were present in an increased number: the National Theater's reinforced orchestra as well as the full staff of the National Theater's chorus and four vocal soloists. After the premiere, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 was performed a second time on April 11. After this performance, the tenants of the Redoute presented Erkel with a silver baton, bearing the following inscription: "Respectfully dedicated to Chief Music Director Erkel, in memory of the first performance on March 25 of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, by Frigyes Seeger and Jakab Klözel, tenants of the City Redoute Rooms."²⁵

Following these concerts, the Ninth was performed again in November 1867, in a concert that began at noon. As is clear from contemporary documents, this performance of the symphony was actually a stopgap arrangement. The minutes of the Philharmonic Society's meeting held on September 10, 1867 reveal that the original intention was to perform Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, and the Buda Choral Society (Budai Dalárda) was appointed to study the piece, but the choir's leader stated that the ensemble felt still too weak to take part in the performance of Beethoven's mass, and that he was unfortunately forced to cancel the choir's contribution.²⁶ As a result, the decision was taken to perform the Ninth with the National Theater's chorus. The fact that the performance on November 17, 1867 took place at the National Theater indicates that the orchestra, the chorus, and the soloists employed in the Symphony had enough space on the Theater's stage. Consequently, the symphony's possible performances before 1865 could not be impeded by the lack of space for a large number of performers. Additionally, the playbill does not include the term "reinforced orchestra," and the review of the performance reveals that amateur musicians also participated in the orchestra:

The company's reinforced orchestra did a careful study under Ferenc Erkel's excellent direction to do justice to the composition, and even if we cannot claim that the performance met all the demands associated with this work, we can at least say, that the audience enjoyed it. ... The National Theater's orchestra has excellent players for all the instruments; the same is not true for all the art lovers who joined the orchestra.²⁷

²³ SZÉKELY, KERÉNYI, GAJDÓ and BALÁZS (eds.), *Magyar színháztörténet*, vol. 1, 290.

²⁴ *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, vol. 3, ed. by LA MARA (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902), 85.

²⁵ ISOZ, "Erkel és a szimfonikus zene," 163.

²⁶ See Amadé NÉMETH, "A Budapesti Filharmóniai Társaság 1867–1868. évi jegyzőkönyve" [Minutes of the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society, 1867–1868.], *Erkel Ferencről és koráról* [About Ferenc Erkel and his time], ed. by Ferenc BÓNIS (Budapest: Püski, 1995), 142–167.

²⁷ "A társulat megerősített zenekara gondos tanulmányt fordított Erkel F. kiváló igazgatása alatt annak méltó előadására s ha nem is mondhatjuk, hogy minden tekintetben és minden részletében kielégíté az e műhöz kötött igényeket, de annyit igen is, hogy élvezettel hallgathatta a közönség. ... Minden hangszerre nézve kiváló



Plate 3 Liszt, Wagner and Beethoven

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The symphony was played next at the Beethoven Centenary in 1870, when it was conducted by Liszt at the Pest Redoute. Once again, the announcement of the concert on December 16 contained a list of numerous contributors, such as the orchestra and chorus of the National Theater, the Buda Singing and Music Academy (Budai Ének- és Zeneakadémia), the National Conservatory of Pest, and the Buda Choral Society.

There is one more aspect related to the performance of Beethoven's symphony that is particularly important in this era, namely, the acquisition of the sheet music material. According to the preserved sheet music inventory of the Philharmonic Society's orchestra, categorized as the so-called "old material," the parts for Symphony No. 9 came from Breitkopf und Härtel, and the full score from Litolf. Liszt prepared his two-hand piano versions of all Beethoven's symphonies for the publisher Breitkopf between 1863 and 1865, i.e. in a period close to the premiere of Symphony No. 9 in Pest (see Plate 3). Liszt's rich correspondence with his publisher informs us that he had been sent newly engraved freshly published full scores in 1863, but the funeral march of the *Eroica* Symphony and Symphony No. 9 were delayed, only reaching the composer in April 1864.²⁸ Litolf, however, already began publishing Beethoven's works in 1862; by 1864 these were spread worldwide in the series *Litolffs Bibliothek Classischer Compositionen*.²⁹ So, it

képviselőkkel bir a nemzeti színház zenekara, de nem a műkedvelők mind, kik benne résztvettek." *Zenészeti Lapok* 8/8 (November 24, 1867), 124.

²⁸ Imre MEZŐ, "Transcriptions for Piano of the Symphonies by Beethoven," in *New Liszt Edition*, vol. 2/4: *Symphonies de Beethoven Nos. 8–9*, ed. by Géza GÉMESI, Zoltán FARKAS, Imre MEZŐ and Imre SULYOK (Budapest: EMB, 1993), XVI.

²⁹ Ted M. BLAIR and Thomas COOPER, "Litolf, Henry," *Grove Music Online*, 2001; <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000016780>> (accessed January 16, 2020); Fritz STEIN, "Litolf," *Grove Music Online*, 2001; <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>

seems that it was Litolf's full score that reached the orchestra of the Philharmonic Society. Was it precisely because of the lack of Breitkopf's full score that the premiere of Symphony No. 9, scheduled for 1864, had to be postponed, as it was claimed in press reports? It is certain that Henry Litolf had a lively connection to the Pest music scene during this period. In January 1867, the virtuoso pianist gave a series of concerts at several venues in Pest.

4. THE RECEPTION OF THE NINTH SYMPHONY IN THE HUNGARIAN PRESS

The premiere of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 was reviewed at length by the Hungarian-language musical press. The reviewers only briefly discussed the quality of the performance; they highlighted the difficulty of performing the monumental symphony; generally, they accepted Erkel's performance with the orchestra, drawing attention to some inaccuracies such as the poor acoustics of the Redoute's new hall. Much more attention was paid to the description of the symphony itself – two reviews by important musicians and music writers of the era (Kornél Ábrányi and István Bartalus) are noteworthy. The two extensive writings are intertwined at many points, the most striking similarity being Wagner's role related to the interpretation of Symphony No. 9, which is compared to the solving of the Sphinx's puzzle. Kornél Ábrányi offers the following interpretation:

It rises above the infinite horizon of art, like a giant pyramid, next to which even Beethoven's most colossal works are dwarfed. ... Richard Wagner ... in 1845–1846, as a conductor at the court in Dresden, undertook the task of its performance, with the involvement of the best artistic forces, and worthy of the great spirit's intention down to the smallest details. The Sphinx was solved.³⁰

The very same article later observes with satisfaction: "So far, the musically interested audience of the capital of our country has only known this musical Sphinx by repute. Now, our public has an idea of it."³¹ In the other review, written by István Bartalus, we find the same image formulated in the following way: "Eventually Wagner has managed to decipher the Sphinx, and it seems that today's generation has accepted it."³² Indeed, Wagner's performance of Symphony No. 9 in Dresden played a decisive role. It became remarkable, among others, through the fact that Wagner arranged the performers on the stage in a manner that was perceived as revolutionary at that time. The choir was not placed between the orchestra and the audience, but in semi-circles behind the orchestra, thus creating the symphony's stage design that is still in use

grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000016779 (accessed January 16, 2020).

³⁰ "Mint egy óriás gúla úgy emelkedik az fel a művészet végtelen láthatárán, mely mellett még maga Beethoven legkolosszálisabb művei is csak eltörpülnek. ... Wagner Richárd ... 1845–46-ban mint drezdai udv[ari] karmester, a legelső művészi erők közreműködése mellett, annak méltó s a legkisebb részletéig is a nagyszellem intentioja szerint vezetett előadására vállalkozott. A sphinx meg lőn oldva." *Zenészet Lapok* 5/27 (Ápril 6, 1865), 210.

³¹ "Hazánk fővárosának zeneközönsége még eddigelé csak híreből ismerte e zenészeti sphinxet. Ma már fogalma van róla." *Zenészet Lapok* 5/30 (Ápril 27, 1865), 235.

³² "Végre Wagnernek sikerült megfejteni a sphinxet, s úgy látszik, a mai nemzedék el is fogadta." *Koszorú* 3/15 (Ápril 9, 1865), 332.



today.³³ However, in order to decipher the Sphinx's question – i.e. where exactly does the idea of the musical Sphinx come from? – we need to dig a little deeper.

The author of the first considered review was Kornél Ábrányi, Editor-in-Chief of *Zenészet* *Lapok*, who published a series of articles on Beethoven's Ninth in four issues of the journal. Ábrányi was an indispensable figure of nineteenth-century Hungarian musical history, mainly due to his role in musical life and his publications, but he was also a skilled composer and practicing musician. At the end of the century, he wrote a large-scale summary about nineteenth-century Hungarian music, a volume that has been ever since an important source of the national musical history of the time.³⁴ The other review was written by István Bartalus, a music historian and collector of folk songs; he was one of the pioneers of Hungarian music historical research of the century and became a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia). Bartalus was a board member of *Zenészet* *Lapok*, edited by Ábrányi, from its foundation in 1860 until the middle of the year 1863. One of the reasons for his break with the journal and his subsequent decades-long ideological opposition was that Bartalus joined the circle of János Arany, the important poet of the nineteenth century. The focal point of the disagreement can be found in the articles published during Wagner's first visit to Pest.³⁵ Kornél Ábrányi published an excerpt from Wagner's *Oper und Drama* in his own translation on July 23, i.e. on the day of Wagner's first guest concert.³⁶ Then, from July 30, he initiated a lengthy series of publications, entitled "Wagner Richárd és hangversenyei" [Richard Wagner and his concerts], which came to an end in the issue from August 27. At the same time, he was launching (from August 13) his never-ending series, entitled "Wagner Richárd élete s működése (műszempontból tekintve)" [The life and work of Richard Wagner (from an artistic point of view)] and published in significant lengths on an almost weekly basis (only two issues of the review were void of articles in the series) forming a total of 12 parts; even on December 17 he promised the continuation of the series. It is worth comparing the opening phrase of the review about Wagner's first concert with the beginning of the review on Beethoven's Ninth, written less than two years later:

³³ Raymond HOLDEN, "The Iconic Symphony: Performing Beethoven's Ninth Wagner's Way," *The Musical Times* 152/1917 (Winter 2011), 5.

³⁴ Kornél ÁBRÁNYI Sr., *A magyar zene a 19. században* [Hungarian music in the nineteenth century], (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 1900).

³⁵ Wagner had personal experience of musical life in Pest – he gave two concerts of his own works at the National Theater in July 1863. The "heavily fortified" orchestra was conducted by the composer himself. Wagner's letter – dated September 1863, immediately after his stay in Pest – designating the capital as "die unmusikalischste Stadt," may be a biting remark referring to the quality of the National Theater's orchestra during the period. See *Richard Wagner an Freunde und Zeitgenossen*, ed. by Erich KLOSS (Berlin, Leipzig: Schuster & Loeffler, 1909), 364.

³⁶ Later, in 1866, Ábrányi prepared the first Hungarian translation of Wagner's *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, fragments of which he also published in *Zenészet* *Lapok*.



The irresistible power of true spiritual greatness and art, this evening once again, enriched with a glorious page the yearbook of art history.³⁷

The irresistible power of true creative spiritual greatness has not been more brilliantly demonstrated by anyone or anything than Beethoven and his works.³⁸

The concordance of the idea reveals that, for Ábrányi, who had a significant influence on Hungarian public discourse about musical themes, the works of Wagner and Beethoven represented the same high level of German intellectual value.

István Bartalus also wrote about Wagner's concerts in *Koszorú*. In his text, he speaks highly of Wagner's art, but notes that it has not yet been fully understood by the Hungarian audience. In his last sentence, he points out that the aim would be for Hungarian composers to write Wagnerian operas. However, this statement was questioned by the editor of the review, János Arany, who added the following comment to Bartalus' writing:

We do not wish to argue with our distinguished reviewer, we are delighted to recognize Wagner's outstanding talent, and we find even his operatic reform to be a welcome response to the exaggerations of contemporary opera. However, for the opera of the future, as we know it from theory, we cannot promise a great future, because it wants to compete with the prosaic drama, of which it is incapable, and for that reason it is compelled to paralyze what any opera could achieve.³⁹

The commentary was immediately responded to by the editorial board of *Zenészet* *Lapok* in a communiqué, with a rather dissatisfied tone, entitled "Néhány szó Wagner R. érdekében" [A few words in the interest of R. Wagner]:

The highly respected editor of *Koszorú*, expressed through his opinion in a few lines, his wishes to devastate in a stroke all the work of the great reformer so far, as well as the indisputable accomplishments of the initiated artistic world and of the criticism and theory that had been struggling for years. ... Otherwise, we can justly say that they only deny, doubt, but prove nothing – which is, undoubtedly, a very comfortable procedure.⁴⁰

³⁷ "A valódi szellemi nagyság s a művészet ellenállhatatlan hatalma, ez este ismét egy dicső lappal gazdagítja a műtörténelem évkönyvét." *Zenészet* *Lapok* 3/44 (July 30, 1863), 350.

³⁸ "A valódi teremtő szellemi nagyság ellenállhatatlan hatalmát senki és semmi sem igazolta be fényesebben, mint Beethoven és az ő művei." *Zenészet* *Lapok* 5/27 (April 6, 1865), 210.

³⁹ "Nem kívánunk t. referensükkel vitatkozni, örömet elismerjük Wagner kitünő tehetségét, sőt operareformja is úgy tűnik fel előttünk, mint egy s más tekintetben üdvös reactio a jelenkori opera túlzásai ellen. Azonban a jövő operájának, amennyire elméletből ismerjük nem ígérhetünk nagy jövőt, mert a szavalati drámával kíván versenyezni, mire képtelen s mert amiatt kénytelen megbénítani azt is, amit minden opera elérhetne." *Koszorú* 2/7 (August 16, 1863), 166.

⁴⁰ "A *Koszorú* általunk nagyon tisztelt szerkesztője, e néhány sorban kimondott véleménye által, egy csapással csaknem semmivé akarja devalválni a nagy reformator minden eddigi munkáját, valamint a szakavatott művészi világ s az évek óta küzdő kritika s elmélet elvitázhatatlan vívmányait is. ... Különbön joggal elmondhatjuk, hogy csak tagadnak, kétségbevonnak, de semmit sem bizonyítanak. Mi kétségkívül igen kényelmes eljárás." *Zenészet* *Lapok* 1/48 (August 27, 1863), 386.



Given the importance of the author in the Hungarian-language press, it is no wonder that the origin of the Sphinx imagery, mentioned in connection with Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 by both Ábrányi and Bartalug, can be found in Wagner's writings. In his controversial article, first published under a pseudonym in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, under the title "Das Judenthum in der Musik," Wagner writes the following about Bach's music:

The language of Bach stands to the language of Mozart, and finally to that of Beethoven, in the same relation as did the Egyptian Sphinx to Grecian sculpture; and, in the same way as the Sphinx with its human face seems to strive to quit its animal body, so does the noble human figure of Bach seem to strive to quit its ancient periwig.⁴¹

It is a really strange, almost gruesome image, with which Wagner actually wants to exemplify the evolution of music. According to Wagner, Beethoven, in the second half of his life, following the *Eroica* Symphony, transcended "absolute musicality" to some degree. Instrumental absolute music – at least to Wagner's reading – is not a genre with solid outlines, but rather a path in the historical development of music, leading towards music drama.⁴² Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 was a particularly important example for Wagner's conception; for example, he assembled a program note, consisting of quotations from Faust and their aesthetic commentaries, for the above-mentioned Dresden performance (1846), and he conducted the Ninth to celebrate the laying of the foundation-stone for the Festspielhaus in 1872.

Another article exemplifying musical progress (*Fortschritt*) was published in *Zenészeti Lapok* by Franz Brendel, editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. It was Brendel who coined the term Neudeutsche Schule (New German School), the circle of composers consisting of Liszt, Wagner, and Berlioz.⁴³ In the summary of Brendel's article, published in multiple parts under the title "Párhuzam Mozárt [sic], Haydn és Beethoven között" [A parallel between Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven], the Hungarian audience could read:

Haydn's childish purity was blurred and lost; we have crossed the threshold of an adult, but sinful world; an ideal figure appears in the Magic Flute, the moral nobility of Sarastro. Beethoven wrenches himself out of the Mozartian immersion into the private world; he turns his eye to heaven, his continuous pursuit is progress; at the height of his position all difference is lost; he embraces the whole human nation with the same love.⁴⁴

⁴¹ "Die Sprache Bachs steht zur Sprache Mozarts und endlich Beethovens in dem Verhältnisse, wie die ägyptische Sphinx zur griechischen Menschenstatue: wie die Sphinx mit dem menschlichen Gesichte aus dem Tierleibe erst noch herausstrebt, so strebt Bachs edler Menschenkopf aus der Perücke hervor." *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 33/20 (September 6, 1850), 109.

⁴² Carl DAHLHAUS, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, transl. by Roger LUSTIG (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 25.

⁴³ Gerhard J. WINKLER, "Neudeutsche Schule", in *Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon online*, <https://www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik_N/Neudeutsche-Schule.xml> (accessed January 16, 2020).

⁴⁴ "Haydn gyermeki tisztasága pedig elhomályosult, elveszett; nagykoru bár, de bűnös is azon világ, melynek küszöbén átléptünk; egy eszményi alak tűnik fel a 'varázssípban', Szarasztrónak erkölcsi nemessége. Beethoven kiragadja magát a Mozárt-féle [sic] elmélyedésből a különvilágba; szemeit ég felé fordítva, haladása folytonos törekvés felfelé; álláspontja magasságán elenyésznek minden különbségek; egyforma szeretettel karolja át az egész emberi nemzetet." *Zenészeti Lapok* 4/11 (December 10, 1863), 84.



The Sphinx metaphor, used by Wagner in 1850, is echoed two years later in a letter by Liszt, this time clearly alluding to Beethoven's music exclusively:

In the 1820s, when a large part of Beethoven's creations symbolized a kind of sphinx for most of the musicians, Czerny played Beethoven exclusively, not only with an excellent understanding but with an adequate, effective technique.⁴⁵

The nineteenth-century Hungarian discourse on Beethoven's music cannot be understood without taking into consideration the influence of the New German School – this is especially true in the case of Symphony No. 9. The contemporary press tells us that Wagner and Liszt had a profound influence on Hungarian musical life, through both their appearances as performers on Hungarian stages and through the spreading of their writings in Hungary. Hence, the reception of Beethoven's music was obviously filtered through their lenses. Not only did they affect the interpretation or performance of the works as a whole, but their thoughts penetrated into the public consciousness down to the most elementary level of musical discourse – as it is shown by the example of the musical Sphinx.

In 1882, two years before the opening of the building of the Hungarian Royal Opera House (Magyar Királyi Operaház), Hungarian sculptor Alajos Stróbl was commissioned to produce the statues situated before the entrance. In addition to the statues of Erkel and Liszt, to this

Plate 4 Sphinx statue in front of the Hungarian State Opera House



day there are two large Sphinx statues guarding both sides of the Opera House's main entrance

⁴⁵ "In den zwanziger Jahren, wo ein grosser Theil der Beethoven'schen Schöpfungen für die meisten Musiker eine Art von Sphinx war, spielte Czerny *ausschliesslich* Beethoven mit ebenso vortrefflichem Verständniss als ausreichender, wirksamer Technik." *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, vol. 1, ed. by LA MARA (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893), 219.

(see *Plate 4*). An article published in 1913 in *Új Idők*, a review dealing with literary and artistic topics, is still unsure about the meaning of the Sphinx statues: “What do the two Sphinxes represent? Perhaps they speak in riddles to the passers-by, like the riddles sung by members of the Opera in Hungarian?”⁴⁶

Erkel’s tombstone was inaugurated in Budapest in 1904, 11 years after his death. The bronze relief depicts a female figure, singing the Hungarian national anthem. At the top of the monument, a large Sphinx carved in stone can be seen. According to a contemporary press report, it symbolizes a Hungarian symphony, although Erkel did not compose any.⁴⁷ The Sphinx, formerly symbolizing Beethoven’s significant and mysterious monument to Wagner and Liszt, and perhaps to the entire Hungarian public, has been guarding Erkel’s tombstone since 1904.

⁴⁶ “Mit jelképez a két szfinx? Talán azokat a rejtvényeket adták föl az arrajáróknak, amiket az Opera tagjai magyar szöveg gyanánt énekelnek?” *Új Idők* 19/32 (August 3, 1913), 146.

⁴⁷ *Hazánk* 11/265 (November 8, 1904), 6.

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