

# Sacrosanctity or Duty? The Reception of Beethoven's *Fidelio* in the Context of the Cultural-Political Situation in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century in Pressburg

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## ABSTRACT

Staging Beethoven's *Fidelio* in the second half of the nineteenth century in Pressburg drew on a long-standing Beethoven tradition prevalent in the town. Also, it stood at the center of protests against the growing influence of Hungarian theater in the newly constructed theater building since *Fidelio* was performed always at a time when the renewal of an agreement with a German-speaking director was being decided on (1889, 1892, 1895). The opera was staged with the participation of the choral societies and musical associations of the town. Its performances were held close to the annual festive masses of the most well-known association of Pressburg, the Church Music Association of St. Martin's Cathedral (Germ. Kirchenmusikverein bei der Dom-, Kollegiats- und Stadtpfarrkirche zu St. Martin, Hung. Szent Márton Pozsonyi Egyházi Zeneegylet), where Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* was performed. This enhanced the efforts of the supporters of the German theater to call Beethoven's oeuvre a carrier of "true art" and humanism and use it as a symbol of cultural identity in the discussions led about preserving the German season in the Municipal Theater (Germ. Stadttheater, Hung. Városi Színház).

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## KEYWORDS

Musical and theatrical life in Pressburg in the nineteenth century, Municipal Theater, Ludwig van Beethoven, Max Kmentt, Emanuel Raul, *Fidelio*

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In cultivating musical theater, the urban elite adopted models from the aristocratic theater, modified its contents and created its own version with shared codes.<sup>1</sup> With respect to the reception of Beethoven's works, his *Missa solemnis* in D major, Symphony No. 9 in D Minor and opera *Fidelio* are often mentioned as internally related opuses. They represent Beethoven's masterpieces which enjoyed a privileged position in music programs throughout the nineteenth century and whose reception achieved a Europe-wide dimension already during the composer's lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Beethoven's quest for the eternal ideal of truth, good and beauty undoubtedly resonated with several contemporaneous European artistic circles. This was the case in Pressburg, too, where the performance of Beethoven's works in the nineteenth century developed into a long-standing tradition. Its roots may lie in the composer's visit to Pressburg at his young age, in 1796, when he performed as a pianist at the public music academy along with Nicolaus Zmeskall, Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Zeno Menzel.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Beethoven's contacts with the family of Karl Keglevič and composer Heinrich Klein, teacher at the Music School supervised by the Normal School, Beethoven's works became well-known in Pressburg already in his lifetime.<sup>4</sup> Klein's friendship with Beethoven is documented also by conversation booklets in which his visits to the composer are mentioned.<sup>5</sup>

Liaising with Beethoven and trying to implement musical initiatives from Vienna was nothing exceptional at that time. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Pressburg was considered to be the center of German cultural life in Hungary. However, when the central Hungarian authorities were transferred from Pressburg to Buda in 1783 and Pressburg became a provincial town on the bank of the Danube, its connection to Vienna served for the preservation of its reputation of a town of culture. Besides the Napoleonic wars and the revolutionary years of 1848/1849, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 that resulted in centralizing efforts and Hungarianization tendencies in Hungary, was another important milestone in the further socio-political development of Pressburg. As the preserved records reveal, no significant change in the language occurred immediately. German continued to prevail over Hungarian in Pressburg even after the Compromise.<sup>6</sup> The turn came only in the subsequent decades when, from the 1880s and, especially, from the 1890s onwards, the population was subjected to intensive Magyarization.

At the time of Beethoven's death in 1827, his works were played at the residences of the local aristocrats. Gradually, however, the bourgeoisie took over the function of the main carrier, recipient/consumer and patron of art music. The bourgeoisie mostly consisted of German-speaking

<sup>1</sup> This study is based on an article published in the Beethoven year: Jana LASLAVÍKOVÁ, "Beethoven's *Œuvre* as an Argument: *Fidelio* Staged by the Municipal Theatre at the End of the Nineteenth Century and its Reception in the Context of the Beethoven Tradition in Pressburg," *Hudební věda: Musicology* 57/2 (2020), 130–152.

<sup>2</sup> Carl DAHLHAUS, *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1980), 62.

<sup>3</sup> For the latest information on Beethoven's performances in Pressburg, see Anna SCHIRLBAUER, "Beethoven in Bratislava 1796: Some New Facts to the Old Topic," presented at the conference "Music in Bratislava" on June 27, 2019, and published on the author's website as "Vor 3 Tagen begegnete mir Beethoven...: Beethoven, Keglevich, Zmeskall, *Adelaide* und Pressburg 1796 in unbekanntenen Briefen von Johann Daniel Ribini." <[https://www.academia.edu/41585010/\\_Vor\\_3\\_oder\\_4\\_Tagen\\_begegnete\\_mir\\_Beethoven/](https://www.academia.edu/41585010/_Vor_3_oder_4_Tagen_begegnete_mir_Beethoven/)> (accessed October 25, 2020.)

<sup>4</sup> Luba BALLOVÁ, *Ludwig van Beethoven a Slovensko* (Bratislava: Osveta, 1972), 19–20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Zuzana FRANCOVÁ, "Obyvatelia – etnická, sociálna a konfesijná skladba," in *Bratislava: Zborník Mestského múzea*, vol. 10 (Bratislava: AMB, 1998), 22.



inhabitants labelled as German Hungarians (Deutschungarn). They regarded Hungarian cultural traditions as their own and declared their loyalty to the Hungarian Government in public.<sup>7</sup> More important for them, however, was their relationship to Pressburg and they expressed their sectionalism by their wide-ranging participation in the social and cultural development of the town. Social status was crucial in public life and German-speaking Pressburgers were willing to Magyarize their names just to maintain their status.<sup>8</sup> However, in their private and cultural/social life, they remained true to their German culture and participated in concerts and theater performances whose character continued to be influenced by Viennese cultural traditions.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Beethoven's works enjoyed a prominent position in Pressburg in the second half of the nineteenth century. The question is, what role his opera *Fidelio* played in shaping the cultural traditions of this town situated near the border of the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen, whose predominantly German-speaking population oscillated from the 1880s onwards between loyalty to Hungary and its own cultural identity. Did the reception of *Fidelio* represent a return to a long-standing tradition that meant certainty at a time of socio-political changes or did it evoke the presence of something new, something unknown so far, that symbolized the longing of Pressburgers for change? Because of the complexity of this issue, the plurality of answers is unavoidable in spite (or maybe because) of the homogeneity of the contemporaneous sources in German. We can definitely say that *Fidelio* was never perceived as an entertaining opus but conveyed a deep truth about the eternal victory of good over evil. Members of municipal associations, whose artistic activities played a central role in the reception of Beethoven's opera in Pressburg, were one of the direct recipients of Beethoven's message.

## 1. THE ROLE OF MUNICIPAL MUSICAL ASSOCIATIONS IN DEVELOPING THE BEETHOVEN TRADITION

Building the cultural memory of the town was strengthened by sectionalism, to which artists' associations contributed to a large extent. Their participation in theatrical life has been mapped so far primarily from the aspect of the personalities and the repertoire. The most significant and longest-standing musical association in the town was undoubtedly the Church Music Association of St. Martin's Cathedral (hereinafter referred to as CMA, 1833–1950, 1953), headed by accomplished conductors like Josef Kumlik, Karl Mayrberger, Josef Thiard-Laforest and Ludwig Burger. It was a Klein student Josef Kumlik (1801–1869), a composer and conductor born in Vienna, who shaped the Beethoven musical tradition after the model of his teacher and performed the *Missa solemnis*, with the members of the CMA in 1835. It was one of its first complete performances within the liturgy and it became the beginning of its prominent tradition in the town, cultivated throughout the existence of the association. Its subsequent performances, most of them taking place on the Feast of Saint Cecilia, were accompanied by detailed reviews in local

<sup>7</sup> Elena MANNOVÁ, "Sebaprezentácia nemeckých stredných vrstiev v Bratislave v 19. storočí," in *Slovenský národopis* 43/2 (1995), 170.

<sup>8</sup> Jozef TANCER and Elena MANNOVÁ, "Od uhorského patriotizmu k menšinovému nacionalizmu. Zmeny povedomia Nemcov na Slovensku v 18. až 20. storočí," in *My a tí druhí v modernej spoločnosti. Konštrukcie a transformácie kolektívnych identít*, ed. by Gabriela KILIÁNOVÁ, Eva KOWALSKÁ and Eva KREKOVÍČOVÁ (Bratislava: Veda, 2009), 389.



dailies which highlighted the greatness of Beethoven's figure and pointed out continuity in cultivating the composer's message. The importance of the celebrations of the Feast of Saint Cecilia is documented also by the presence of guests from Vienna, with musicologist, art historian and custodian of the library of the Vienna University Alfred Schnerich repeatedly figuring among them in the 1890s. Schnerich highly valued the activities of the CMA in the liturgical performance of the *Missa solemnis* in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and emphasized the significance of performing Beethoven's mass in Pressburg.<sup>9</sup> Thereby, he helped enhance the reputation of Pressburg as a *town of music*.<sup>10</sup>

Besides sacred compositions, the repertoire of the CMA included musical-dramatic pieces such as instrumental opera preludes, choirs and arias composed by nineteenth-century composers. The CMA performed them in its concerts, often in chronological proximity to their performance in the Municipal Theater. In this way, the audience in Pressburg could hear the new musical-dramatic repertoire and respond to the premieres in the theater positively. One such example is the performance of Wagner's *Parsifal* at the CMA's concert on October 29, 1893. According to Johann Batka, senior secretary of the CMA, this association was the first music association in Hungary to have performed this work. In his concert critique, he underlined Wagner's work in connection to the performance of *Der fliegende Holländer* in the Municipal Theater, which Raul scheduled for a day before the concert of the CMA (on October 28, 1893).<sup>11</sup> Even though, in this case, the sequence was changed (the opera performance preceded the concert), Batka's words point to the connections between the repertoire of the CMA and that of the Municipal Theater.

Beethoven's works performed by the CMA besides his *Missa solemnis*, Mass in C Major, and oratorio *Christus am Ölberge*, included several of his orchestral pieces, including all his symphonies, the overture to his opera *Fidelio*, the *Leonore Overtures* No. 1 op. 138, No. 2 op. 72, No. 3 op. 72, the overture to his ballet *Prometheus*, the incidental music pieces *Die Ruinen von Athen*, the overture to *Egmont*, the overture to *Coriolan*, the Name Day Overture, the cantata *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*, the March with Chorus in E-flat Major op. 114, and *Wellingtons Sieg oder Die Schlacht bei Vittoria*.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the above-listed works were played at the festive concert in the Redoute on December 26, 1870, commemorating Beethoven's 100th birth anniversary. At that time, CMA was led by conductor Karl Mayrberger (1828–1881) from Vienna, successor of Josef Kumlik. The Association performed the overture to *Egmont*, Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, and the *Prisoners' Chorus* (Gefangenenchor) from the finale of act 1 of *Fidelio* with the participation of the Lieder-*tafel* choir. The concert also included Beethoven's songs with piano accompaniment *Neue Liebe, neues Leben* op. 75 no. 2, and *Lied aus der Ferne* WoO 137, sung by Aloisia Glasl. The Florentine

<sup>9</sup> Alfred SCHNERICH, *Messe und Requiem seit Haydn und Mozart* (Wien: C. W. Stern Verlag, 1909), 69. See also Jana LENGOVÁ, "Die multiethnische und multikulturelle Stadt Pressburg und ihre religiösen Traditionen um die Wende des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa: Mitteilungen der internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft an der Universität Leipzig*, vol. 11, ed. by Helmut LOOS and Eberhard MÖLLER (Leipzig: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 2006), 75.

<sup>10</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Pozsony als Musikstadt: Musik und Musiker in Pressburg," *Preßburger Zeitung* 150/352 (December 25, 1913), 46.

<sup>11</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Das Parsifal-Konzert," *Preßburger Zeitung* 130/300 (October 30, 1893), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Municipal Archive of Bratislava (MAB), the Church Music Association's Fund in Bratislava (1830–1950), sheet music.



Quartet with Jean Becker, rendering Beethoven's String Quartet No. 5 in A Major op. 18, was a prominent guest of the event. The evening program was preceded by a solemn mass in St. Martin's Cathedral in the morning, where CMA performed Beethoven's Mass in C Major, and, during the offertory, the Liedertafel choir sang his *Die Ehre Gottes* op. 84 no. 4, a song arranged for choir. The celebration of Beethoven's birth anniversary included a program in the Municipal Theater on December 20, 1870 where Goethe's tragedy *Egmont* was staged with Beethoven's incidental music. The reviews and critiques in the *Preßburger Zeitung* reveal that this anniversary represented a new milestone in the development of the reception of Beethoven's works in Pressburg.<sup>13</sup> They assigned Romantic attributes, such as an immortal master, or the creator of a novel, timeless music, to the composer, and the anniversary was to serve as an impulse for the subsequent faithful cultivation of true art.<sup>14</sup>

After Mayrberger, composer and conductor Josef Thiard-Laforest (1841–1897) from Bischof (Hung. Püspöki, today Podunajské Biskupice) became the conductor of the CMA and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor was premiered on October 22, 1882 under his direction. The soloists were Fanny Kováts (soprano), Irene Schlemmer-Ambros (alto), Anton Steger (tenor) and Anton Strehlen (bass), the choral movement was sung by the Liedertafel (Pozsonyi dalárda) and the choral societies Preßburger Singverein (Pozsonyi dalegyelet or Pozsonyi dalegyesület) choirs. An extensive critique written by municipal archivist in Pressburg and musical correspondent of *Preßburger Zeitung*, Johann Batka brought up the idea of Beethoven's religiosity which, according to Batka, the composer managed to transform into his sacred as well as secular works.<sup>15</sup> The spiritual dimension ascribed to Beethoven also by other correspondents of the Pressburg dailies pointed to the sanctity of the composer's works.

Besides CMA, the Beethoven tradition was cultivated in Pressburg also by the above-mentioned Liedertafel and Singverein choirs. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Liedertafel male voice choir repeatedly performed the *Prisoners' Chorus* from Beethoven's *Fidelio* at its concerts. As a notice in *Preßburger Zeitung* regarding a planned special concert in the Municipal Theater reveals, this composition found its way to the choir's repertoire already in 1861.<sup>16</sup> The choral society regularly participated in the performances of the CMA that included Beethoven's choral works.

The portfolio of the music associations of Pressburg also included the Preßburger Musikverein, whose members included professional musicians as well as members of the CMA. Ever since its establishment in 1897, the Preßburger Musikverein functioned as a theater orchestra (musicians from the CMA played in the theater like before but were contracted for each season separately) and also gave independent concerts. Besides musical-dramatic works, its repertoire consisted of orchestral compositions, including Beethoven's symphonies. This can be seen from the program of the first public concert of the association on March 6, 1898, where it played Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 in D Major, conducted by Mayrberger's student, composer and

<sup>13</sup> Jana LENGOVÁ, "Beethoven-Rezeption in Pressburg im Zeitraum von 1833 bis 1918," in *Beethoven-Rezeption in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Bericht über die Internationale musikwissenschaftliche Konferenz vom 22. bis 26. Oktober 2014*, ed. by Helmut LOOS (Leipzig: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 2015), 128.

<sup>14</sup> N. N., "Jubiläum-Feier," *Preßburger Zeitung* 106/299 (December 28, 1870), 3.

<sup>15</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Feuilleton: Beethovens Neunte Symphonie," *Preßburger Zeitung* 118/293 (October 23, 1882), 1.

<sup>16</sup> N. N., "Sonntag, den 24. März, um halb 8 Uhr abends außerordentliches Concert der Liedertafel im Theater," *Preßburger Zeitung* 97/67 (March 20, 1861), 3.



conductor of CMA, Ludwig Burger (1850–1936).<sup>17</sup> Beethoven's symphony was to signal that the new association wanted to keep up the musical traditions of the town (similarly to the CMA).

The above-mentioned examples from the performances of the music associations and choral societies of Pressburg do not exhaust the wealth of the Beethoven tradition in the town. They document the connectedness of the art institutions in performing Beethoven's works and demonstrate their link to the musical traditions of the town throughout the nineteenth century. All the more surprising is the fact that Beethoven's opera, *Fidelio*, was first staged in Pressburg only in 1873 and it was subsequently presented, compared to Beethoven's other works, only sporadically. This is probably where the reason for the absence of reflections of *Fidelio* in the given period by the scholarly community and for assigning a marginal significance to certain performances in the Municipal Theater in Pressburg in the nineteenth century may lie.<sup>18</sup> At that time, the theater was already at the center of attention and going to the theater was part of the cultural life of the Pressburg bourgeoisie. Opera performances enjoyed great popularity and their staging was based on contemporaneous theater practice, typically performing the popular operas repeatedly. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven, the most representative representatives of musical classicism, belonged to a special place in the program plan. On the one hand, they symbolized the ideal of contemporary aesthetics, on the other hand, their Germanity was of great importance for the German-speaking bourgeoisie in Pressburg. The staging of Beethoven's *Fidelio* was not as common as in the case of Italian or French operas. That is why the context of each performance and the specific circumstances under which the opera was staged is all the more important.

## 2. FIDELIO STAGED BY THE MUNICIPAL THEATER

Two theater buildings, both called Municipal Theater, played a major role in the history of Pressburg. The first one was erected in 1776 and the second in 1886 (see *Plate 1*). Their emergence and development was determined by the socio-cultural situation. The first theater was founded by the enlightened aristocracy whereas the second one was shaped by the ideals of the educated bourgeoisie. The erection of the first building of the Municipal Theater in 1776 can be viewed as the culmination of the institutionalization process of theatrical life in the town. The merit goes to Count György Csáky de Körösszegh IV, who funded the major part of the construction of the new theater building on the town's plot. The theater was situated roughly on the site of the present-day Historical Building of the Slovenské národné divadlo and it was opened on November 9, 1776. The program of the ceremonial evening was Johann Christian Brandes's play, *Die Medizäer*. Besides the theater hall, Count Csáky promised to build a Redoute (finished in 1793) next to the theater for concerts and dances. Pressburg was proud to have its own brick-and-mortar theater, which was not only comfortable but safe as well.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> R., "Erstes Konzert des Preßburger Musiker-Vereines," *Preßburger Zeitung* 135/67 (September 3, 1898), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Jana LENGOVÁ, "Bratislava ako hudobný fenomén v poslednej tretine 19. storočia," *Musicologica Slovaca* 27/2 (2010), 200.

<sup>19</sup> N. N., "Theatral-Neuigkeiten," *Preßburger Zeitung* 12/91 (November 13, 1776), 6–7.





**Plate 1** The Municipal Theater in Pressburg

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In this building, non-existent today, Beethoven's *Fidelio* was premiered under the direction of theater director Ignatz Czernitz on November 15, 1873. An extensive musical article<sup>20</sup> describing the music of the new work in detail to prepare the Pressburg audience for its upcoming premiere and the subsequent critique of the opera<sup>21</sup> point to a modern, romanticizing reception of Beethoven's works in Pressburg. Using superlatives to express a deep respect to the composer's works was an indispensable part of these writings. Three years later, on November 9, 1876, the theater celebrated its 100th anniversary of opening. The atmosphere of the festive evening was highlighted by Beethoven's overture *Die Weihe des Hauses* composed for the occasion of opening the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna and ordered by its director Karl Friedrich Hensler. The fact that Beethoven's composition was selected for the jubilee of the theater underlines the composer's significance for the artistic life of Pressburg and points to a continuity in the theatrical life of the town. From 1818 to 1825, the Municipal Theater in Pressburg was rented by director Hensler and, in 1822, a music academy took place in the theater, premiering Beethoven's *Menuet concertante* for orchestra, dedicated to Hensler, and his *Opferlied* op. 121b, dedicated to the organizer of the academy, Wilhelm Ehlers.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> N. N., "Feuilleton: Zur Aufführung des *Fidelio*," *Preßburger Zeitung* 109/263 (November 15, 1873), 1–2.

<sup>21</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Fidelio," *Preßburger Zeitung* 109/269 (November 22, 1873), 3.

<sup>22</sup> N. N., [Notice], *Preßburger Zeitung* 58/101 (December 20, 1822), 600.

In 1884, the building was demolished, and the new one was built and designed by Ferdinand Fellner Jr. and Hermann Helmer. The newly built Municipal Theater was ceremonially opened in Pressburg on September 22, 1886. Discussions about the need for a new theater had been going on for many years, as part of the representatives of the town were proposing an extensive renovation of the old building instead of building a new one. A key step was the decision of the Hungarian Ministry of Interior which, after inspecting the earlier theater building, announced it technically unfit and instructed the town to build a new one.<sup>23</sup> The architects designed the new theater according to state-of-the-art safety rules in a historical Neo-Renaissance style with an elaborate Neo-Baroque interior and a seating capacity of approximately 1,170. The placement of the new theater in roughly the same place where the old theater had stood pointed to the continuity of the theatrical tradition. At the same time, this theater was situated away from the historical center of the town and, consequently, a new cultural hub was created. It was to be the home of the local – Hungarian muse.<sup>24</sup> However, since the regular theatergoers consisted of the German-speaking bourgeoisie, the town decided to divide the season into two parts, a German and a Hungarian one, with their respective directors. It also decided that the German performances would take place in the autumn and winter months, which were more suitable from the aspect of theater attendance. Consequently, the director could afford to stage a costlier repertoire, including operas.

The years between 1886 and 1899 were crucial for the further direction of the theater, since extensive discussions came up between the director providing German performances and the representatives of the town whenever the three-year lease agreement of the theater was to be renewed. Ultimately, a change occurred in 1899 under the pressure of the Hungarian government and the theater was leased to a single (Hungarian) director with a bilingual (German and Hungarian) ensemble. This decision was to stabilize Hungarian theater in the town and spread the Hungarian language by increasing the number of Hungarian performances despite the constantly low attendance and the fluctuating standard of the performances.

The difference was felt all the more since, during the German seasons in the Municipal Theater before 1899, operas were played on a level well above that of a provincial theater. This was thanks to theater directors Max Kmentt (who rented the Municipal Theater from 1886 to 1890) and, mainly, to Emanuel Raul (who worked in Pressburg from 1890 to 1899). Both drew inspiration from the repertoire of the Vienna theaters and invited guest soloists from the Hofoper Vienna. A look at the programs between 1886 and 1899 reveals that the above-mentioned directors included Beethoven's *Fidelio* into the repertoire always at a time when negotiations were held about the renewal of the lease agreement. The reason for staging of Beethoven as a representative of German art at a turning point in the direction of the theater was to gain the sympathy of German-speaking elites in the city, which would ensure the current directors continue their work in the Pressburg theater. This was because they were aware of the fact that, in Pressburg, Beethoven's works symbolized the sanctity, or even sacrosanctity, of art music.

<sup>23</sup> *Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887. Zusammengestellt von Oberingenieur Anton Sendlein.* MAB, City Bratislava, Municipal Establishments, Theater, box 2940, inv. no. 15879, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> N. N., "Eröffnung des Preßburger Theaters," *Pester Lloyd* 33/264 (September 23, 1886), 3. The program of the opening performance consisted exclusively of Hungarian works and the evening culminated in Ferenc Erkel's opera *Bánk bán*. On Erkel's compositions, see Katalin SZACSVAI-KIM, "Die Erkel-Werkstatt: Die Anfänge einer Arbeitsteilung in der Komposition," *Studia Musicologica* 52/4 (2012), 27–46.





Because of the efforts of the inhabitants of Pressburg to remain loyal to the Hungarian government, Beethoven's opera was not presented as a manifestation of great Germanness as in some German-speaking towns in Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>25</sup> Rather, it emphasized the significance of the German-speaking theater in Pressburg and pointed to its irreplaceable role in shaping the cultural identity of the inhabitants of the town.

### 3. THE 1888/1889 SEASON

In the newly built Municipal Theater, *Fidelio* was staged for the first time in 1889 when Max Kmentt was taking care of the German season. This director, well-known in Pressburg thanks to his previous activities in the old theater from 1876 to 1880, had a reputation of a smart businessman. He was familiar with the preferences of the theatergoers in Pressburg and staged primarily entertaining repertoire, including frequent operetta performances with the participation of famous artists from Vienna theaters. He fulfilled the requirements of the theater committee in terms of placing an emphasis on the educational function of the theater by organizing frequent guest appearances from the Hofburgtheater in Vienna throughout the season and by securing a multiday performance of the opera ensemble of the Hofoper from Vienna at the end of the season. The way in which he handled the issue of the artistic standards of the theater was very different from the ideas of Johann Batka. As a member of the theater committee, Batka criticized Kmentt's cunningness and did not approve of his directorship in the Municipal Theater in Pressburg. Kmentt's three-year agreement with Pressburg expired in the 1888/1889 season and the director was very keen on having it renewed. He knew, however, that Batka would object to his "style of direction." Therefore, he decided to engage opera soloists (five women and seven men) in his ensemble, extend the choir (16 women and 14 men) and have Kapellmeister Albert Hartl conduct the orchestra. He included 13 earlier operas, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto* by Verdi, Gounod's *Faust*, Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Lucrezia Borgia*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Figaros Hochzeit*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Halévy's *La Juive*, Marschner's *Hans Heiling*, and two new operas: Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* and Bizet's *Carmen*, into the program plan.

*Fidelio* figured in the program at the end of the season when the ensemble was already coherent. The performance took place on January 22, 1889, and it was a fundraising evening of Georg Meder who sang the main role of Florestan. Leonore was sang by Marie Bauer-Hellmer, Marzelline by Gabriele Mrak, Don Pizarro by Joachim Kromer and Rocco by Carl Hellmann (a student of the Vienna conservatory), invited to guest perform in Pressburg by Georg Meder. Other guests of the evening included members of the Pressburg choral society Typographenhund (only some of its members – 14, according to the *Preßburger Zeitung*,<sup>26</sup> took part in the opera), whose presence "saved" the *Prisoners' Chorus*. The opera was played without its grand *Leonore Overture*. Writing about the performance in the *Preßburger Zeitung*, Batka, an expert in music, was well aware of the shortcomings of this staging and saw through the ulterior mo-

<sup>25</sup> Lenka KŘUPKOVÁ, "Beethoven und die deutschsprachige Stadt Olmütz," in *Beethoven-Rezeption in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, 123.

<sup>26</sup> [Theater playbill], *Preßburger Zeitung* 126/22 (January 22, 1889), 5.



tives of Kmentt, who did not care about high art but about the directorship. In his critique, therefore, he focused on highlighting Beethoven's figure as a composer (comparing him to "immortal artists" like Aischylus, Shakespeare and Michelangelo) and welcomed *Fidelio's* return to the stage of the Pressburg theater "after so many years" with great piety.<sup>27</sup> The rendition of soprano Marie Bauer-Hellmer was to enhance the tragic effect of Leonore and etch on the memory of the audience with her dramatical performance. According to Batka, fundraiser Meder did not match up to his role in spite of all his efforts and succumbed to its difficulty in act 2. The other performers managed to handle their roles without any major problems. Batka specifically thanked the members of the Typographenbund (whose fans filled the seats of the auditorium) and conductor Hartl. Another Pressburg daily, the *Westungarischer Grenzboten*, wrote about the performance in a similar spirit, commenting on the renditions of the performers, the conductor and the guest and, finally, it did not forget to mention the presence of the local aristocrats, especially Isabella, Archduchess of Austria-Teschen.<sup>28</sup>

Since the agreement was renewed, we may assume that Kmentt managed to convince the representatives of the town about his ability to direct the Municipal Theater. In spite of Johann Batka's protests, the theater was entrusted to Kmentt for another three years, provided that he continued staging operas regularly. Director Kmentt, however, had other plans. After the end of the summer of 1889, he appointed a comedian from a theater in Graz, Emil Berla, as the artistic director of the ensemble and left the direction of the German season in the Municipal Theater to him. Since it was forbidden to assign the direction of the theater to a third party, the renewed contract ceased to be valid and Kmentt had to leave the theater. Batka immediately seized the opportunity and invited Emanuel Raul, director of the Municipal Theater in Karlovy Vary, to Pressburg because he knew Raul would be able to stage operas in the Municipal Theater in Pressburg minimum on the level of a good provincial theater. Raul's correspondence with Batka reveals<sup>29</sup> that, from the very beginning of his activities in Pressburg, he counted on Batka's help in compiling the opera repertoire, especially in selecting new operas to be staged. Batka's contacts with the local artistic community and, mainly, his activities as a correspondent of the *Preßburger Zeitung* daily, helped Raul to quickly establish himself in the cultural circles of the town and win the favour of the regular theatergoers. Batka's activities within the CMA were also crucial. He could influence this orchestra in a way that the Municipal Theater also benefited from it, as the staging Beethoven's *Fidelio* also revealed.

#### 4. THE 1892/1893 SEASON

With Emmanuel Raul's arrival in Pressburg in 1890, the Municipal Theater entered into a nine-year phase when musical theater was cultivated continuously. Raul performed operas regularly every week (except for the first year when he offered operettas) and, as mentioned above, he discussed the selection of the works with Batka.

<sup>27</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Fidelio," *Preßburger Zeitung* 127/23 (January 23, 1889), 4–5.

<sup>28</sup> N. N., "Theater, Kunst und Literatur. *Fidelio*," *Westungarischer Grenzboten* 18/5543 (January 23, 1889), 4–5.

<sup>29</sup> MAB, Johann Nepomuk Batka Fund, correspondence, Emanuel Raul, inv. no. 5, box 26.



Under Raul's directorship in Pressburg, *Fidelio* was first staged in the 1892/1893 season, which was Raul's third season, when a decision was to be taken whether to renew his agreement with the town. This moment was seized by the influential representatives of the town, supporters of Hungarian theater, who proposed to engage a single director for Pressburg who would take care of the German as well as of the Hungarian performances throughout the year.<sup>30</sup> The proposal was to strengthen the position of Hungarian theater, with the supporters of the plan claiming that performances in Hungarian would be more successful in the theater if they were played at a time when attendance was the highest (i.e. in autumn and winter). After long discussions, the proposal was rejected with the justification that this way of leasing the theater would not be successful. Subsequently, director Raul's application for the renewal of his agreement was granted but with the condition that the town would take over the payment for the gas lighting in the theater building. This was the first renewal of an agreement where the discussion about supporting German-speaking theater ended in favor of Raul, although only after repeated voting.

The comparison of the repertoire performed during the third season with the one played in the previous seasons reveals a weakened, descending trend in selecting new works, which may have been caused by the fact that their purchase was costly and Raul might not have been sure whether Pressburg would be able to use the license for their performance again after the given season. He staged only one new opera, the one-act *Jadwiga* composed by Pressburg bank officer and composer, conductor of the CMA and pianist August Norgauer. From among the earlier operas, Raul staged well-known pieces such as Aimé Maillart's *Les dragons de Villars*, Verdi's *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Il trovatore*, *Ernani*, *La traviata*, Gounod's *Faust*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, as well as Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* and *Les Huguenots*.

*Fidelio* was played three times, on November 12 and 17 and on December 28, 1892. Although the last performance took place in the Christmas season and its reception was weaker because of the holiday, the first two performances took place close to the Feast of Saint Cecilia (November 22). This day was specially linked to an annual mass in Saint Martin's Cathedral (which took place always on the closest Sunday to the Feast of this Patroness Saint of Music) when the CMA commemorated the anniversary of its establishment and traditionally performed Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*. In 1892, Sunday fell on November 20 and the mass was attended by several prominent guests from Vienna too, including Alfred Schnerich and Josef Labor. Since it was the 60th anniversary of the Saint Cecilia Celebrations, the CMA organized a festive lunch after the mass. Beethoven's mass was regarded as a worthy ending to the "Beethoven Week" in Pressburg.<sup>31</sup>

As for the staging of *Fidelio*, Raul planned to perform the opera along with its grand *Leonore Overture* No. 3 in C Major, which, according to the news in the dailies, was to be played at the beginning of the performance. The soloists were the members of Raul's company: Marie Seiffert (Leonore), Sigmund Szengery (Don Pizarro), Michael Rainer (Florestan), Frida Rausch (Marzelline) and Richard Kornay (Rocco); the orchestra was conducted by Karl Hrubetz. As for its reviews in the dailies, the *Preßburger Zeitung* as well as the *Westungarischer Grenzboten* published critiques on both the performances from November. Batka expressed his great joy over

<sup>30</sup> N. N., "Städtische Generalversammlung," *Westungarischer Grenzboten* 21/6840 (October 4, 1892), 3.

<sup>31</sup> N. N., "Die 60. h. Cäciliendankmesse des Kirchenmusik-Vereines," *Preßburger Zeitung* 129/322 (November 21, 1892), 2.



the complete staging of the opera (i.e. with its grand overture) and praised the renditions of all the soloists, especially that of dramatic soprano Marie Seiffert. He interpreted Beethoven's message as one which was in line with the musical traditions of Pressburg and labelled the theater as the creator and carrier of culture. He did not forget to highlight director Raul, who managed to offer high-quality opera performances despite the prevailing conditions (he was referring to the discussions about the future director of the theater).<sup>32</sup> Regarding the second evening of Beethoven's opera, Batka said the attendance was low and it was a pity because of the high quality of the performance. At the end of his critique, he recommended the readers to participate in the Sunday mass as part of the celebrations of the CMA.<sup>33</sup>

Gustav Mauthner, music critic of the *Westungarischer Grenzboten*, wrote a critique for each of the two performances separately and, similarly to Batka, focused on the renditions of the artists and on the direction of conductor Hrubetz. Regarding Marie Seiffert rendering Leonora, he said her performance well exceeded the standards of a provincial theater.<sup>34</sup> In his critique of the second performance of the opera, Mauthner did not forget to criticize Raul for staging the opera repeatedly in such a short time span, which reflected in its low attendance.<sup>35</sup> Despite his active participation in the CMA, Mauthner did not combine the event in the Municipal Theater with the celebrations in the cathedral and did not talk about the composer as the carrier of tradition.

As mentioned above, the third performance of *Fidelio* during the season took place at Christmas time, on December 28, 1892 and, apart from a notice that the performance would take place, no reviews of it appeared in the dailies. Johann Batka called attention to this fact in connection with the concert of the famous Hellmesberger Quartet from Vienna in the beginning of the new year, on January 8, 1893. The program consisted of Beethoven's String Quartet in A Minor op. 132, and a long article appeared about it in the *Preßburger Zeitung* before the concert. In the article, Batka talked about the "sacred duty of each musical correspondent" to call attention to Beethoven's last quartets and expressed his great satisfaction with the season abounding with Beethoven's works.<sup>36</sup> By emphasizing the number and the selection of works of an exceptional value (three performances of Beethoven's only opera, *Missa solemnis* played twice, Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 played as part of a concert by CMA and, lastly, the opportunity to hear one of the last quartets of Beethoven), Batka noted that Pressburg was a town with a rich (German) musical tradition. The meeting of the theater committee took place at the time of the concert and the representatives of the town decided to renew the agreement with Raul. Batka could happily plan his further collaboration with director Raul.

## 5. THE 1895/1896 SEASON

During Raul's sixth season in Pressburg, the situation with the renewal of the lease agreement of the theater that occurred three years earlier repeated itself. Pressburg was interested in con-

<sup>32</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Fidelio," *Preßburger Zeitung* 129/314 (November 13, 1892), 5.

<sup>33</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Fidelio," *Preßburger Zeitung* 129/319 (November 18, 1892), 5.

<sup>34</sup> G[ustav] M[AUTHNER], "Theater und Kunst," *Westungarischer Grenzboten* 21/6882 (November 16, 1892), 4.

<sup>35</sup> G[ustav] M[AUTHNER], "Theater und Kunst. Fidelio," *Westungarischer Grenzboten* 21/6884 (November 18, 1892), 4.

<sup>36</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Beethoven's A-moll Quartett," *Preßburger Zeitung* 130/8 (January 8, 1893), 1.



tinuing its collaboration with Raul but a strong initiative arose in the influential pro-Hungarian municipal circles, such as the Toldy Kör association, calling for a change in the way the theater was leased. In early 1895, the members of the association sent a memorandum to the municipal council in which they demanded a change in the existing way of running the theater and the stabilization of Hungarian theater in the town by assigning the winter months to the Hungarian director.<sup>37</sup> Since they knew the change would not occur immediately because of the composition of the regular theatergoers, they suggested alternating the German and the Hungarian director in the winter season every year. The millennial celebrations, which were to take place in the following year, served as a suitable pretext to this proposal. The memorandum of Toldy Kör was supported by a letter calling for the stabilization of Hungarian theater, written on May 18, 1895 and sent to the town by the management of the Regional Hungarian Theater Association and Retirement Institution from Budapest,<sup>38</sup> an important body enforcing the interests of Hungarian theater in Hungarian provincial towns.<sup>39</sup>

In *Preßburger Zeitung*, which represented the interests of German-speaking theatergoers, negative reactions to the efforts of Toldy Kör appeared and the daily repeatedly called attention to the true intentions of the members of this association. It was not about their desire for Hungarian theater but about their effort to rise in local politics.<sup>40</sup> This is documented by the minutes from the meeting of Toldy Kör, which had 452 members in 1895. However, only 25 of its members attended the Hungarian performance in the Municipal Theater on March 30, 1895, where works awarded in a literary competition organized by Toldy Kör were performed.<sup>41</sup> As it turned out, membership in the association was a matter of prestige and not of one's own conviction. In the end, the representatives of the town (including members of the Toldy Kör) decided to renew the agreement with Raul for three more years (his last ones in the theater).

As for the artistic standard of the season, Raul staged few new works, similarly to his previous term. New operas performed consisted only of Thomas's *Mignon*, which was regarded to be an older opera at that time, and Smetana's *Bartered Bride*. Batka voiced his concerns over the selection and criticized Raul for not fulfilling the planned performances he had promised in the beginning of the season (we do not know which works he was referring to). He also reprimanded him for the composition of the ensemble, probably referring to Raul's letter in which the director was complaining about the disinterest of German-speaking artists to perform in Hungarian theaters where unfavorable conditions prevailed.<sup>42</sup>

Batka's words contradict the fact that Raul engaged a famous baritone, Joseph Beck, in his ensemble on Batka's recommendation. Beck had moved to Pressburg to take care of his ill father, Johann Nepomuk Beck, former chamber singer of the Hofoper in Vienna. Joseph Beck happened to be a member of Ignatz Czernitz's company in the 1873/1874 season and participated in the Pressburg premiere of *Fidelio* in 1873. His engagement in Pressburg after twenty years was truly

<sup>37</sup> Eleonóra BABEJOVÁ, *Fin-de-Siècle Pressburg: Conflict & Cultural Coexistence in Bratislava, 1897–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 80.

<sup>38</sup> MAB, Magistrate of Bratislava, Municipal Establishments, Theater, box no. 2940, inv. no. 15879.

<sup>39</sup> *Magyar színházművészeti lexikon*, ed. by György SZÉKELY (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994). <<http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02139/html/sz18/76.html>> (accessed August 25, 2020.)

<sup>40</sup> N. N., "Zur Frage der Stabilisierung des ungarischen Theaters," *Preßburger Zeitung* 132/61 (March 3, 1895), 1–2.

<sup>41</sup> BABEJOVÁ, *Fin-de-Siècle Pressburg*, 376, note 221.

<sup>42</sup> MAB, Johann Nepomuk Batka Fund, correspondence, Emanuel Raul, inv. no. 5, box 26, letter of September 24, 1895.





symbolic. Raul appointed Beck to be the chief opera director and entrusted him with staging an extensive opera repertoire, including pieces in which Beck had sung himself (Marschner's *Hans Heiling*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*), and also some other works (Ignaz Brüll's *Das goldene Kreuz*, Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied vom Worms*, Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, Verdi's *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*, Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, Gounod's *Faust*). World-famous mezzo-soprano Irma Spányik from Pressburg, engaged at that time in Italy, was another guest of the season. She performed along with Beck in the premiere of *Mignon*, whose staging directed by Beck was highly valued by Gustav Mauthner in the *Westungarischer Grenzboten*.<sup>43</sup>

The three performances of Beethoven's *Fidelio* (November 19, 1895, November 11, 1895, January 25, 1896) were "bright spots" in this controversial season (for the playbill of the performance on 19 November, see *Plate 2*). Joseph Beck rendered Don Pizarro, Leonore was sung by Minna Baviera-Zichy, Florestan by Josef Conrat, Rocco by Heinrich Kiefer and Marzelline by Sofie Lölius. The orchestra was conducted by Karl Hrubetz, who returned to Raul's ensemble after a three-year break. The dailies, just like back in 1892, informed about the performance of the opera, including its grand *Leonore Overture* No. 3. As the theater poster reveals, the overture was played between Act 1 and Act 2. The fact that the opera was played very close in time to the Feast of Saint Cecilia when the CMA was planning to play Beethoven's *Missa solennis* (the event took place on Sunday, November 24) is again significant. Just like in 1892, Batka pointed out this link in his review of the first performance of *Fidelio* and described the opera with words which, according to his own statement, he borrowed from Simon Julius Derra de Moroda, one of the main journalists of the *Preßburger Zeitung*. He talked about the opera as a solemn mass and Batka added that it was a "dramatical-musical solemn mass offered for the loyalty of woman."<sup>44</sup> By calling the opera a mass, Batka paid tribute to Beethoven. He also noted that his mass (the *Missa solennis*) had been played in Pressburg for several decades. Batka also talked about the excellent rendition in "small Pressburg," which was a name used by German dailies at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries when describing the town, emphasizing the significance of this "small" but important town lying on the Hungarian border.<sup>45</sup> Batka praised the rendition of Joseph Beck, of whom he thought very highly not only because of their friendship but also because of Beck's artistic qualities. The *Westungarischer Grenzboten* published a critique written by Gustav Mauthner, who was completely satisfied with the performance of all the soloists and, especially, with Beck's rendition of Don Pizarro. Mauthner did not mention the upcoming Sunday celebrations of the CMA at all.

A critique of the second performance, with the same cast, was written by Dr. Friedrich Hefty, an independent correspondent of the *Preßburger Zeitung*. He followed in the footsteps of Batka in his praises and (similarly to the case of the second performance of the opera in 1892) noted that it was indeed a masterful performance but it was unfortunately played to a half-empty auditorium.<sup>46</sup> The *Westungarischer Grenzboten* did not report on the second performance of the opera.

<sup>43</sup> Gustav MAUTHER, "Mignon," *Westungarischer Grenzboten* 25/8010 (January 29, 1896), 4–5.

<sup>44</sup> J[ohann] B[ATKA], "Fidelio," *Preßburger Zeitung* 132/319 (November 19, 1895), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Jozef TANCER, "Obraz nie je odraz: Repräsentácie mesta ako výskumný problém," in *Medzi provinciou a metropolou. Obraz Bratislavy v 19. a 20. storočí*, ed. by Gabriela DUDEKOVÁ (Bratislava: Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2012), 32.

<sup>46</sup> Dr. F[riedrich] H[EFT]Y, "Theater: Fidelio," *Preßburger Zeitung* 132/326 (November 27, 1895), 4.



Plate 2 Theater playbill from *Preßburger Zeitung* (November 19, 1895)  
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**K. freistädt. Theater in Preßburg.**  
 Theater-Direktion: Emanuel Naul.

Im Abonnement. (Ungerade) Vorstellung Nr. 39

**Heute:**  
 Herr **Joseph Beck** als Gast.

Oper. Zum 1. Male in dieser Saison: Oper.

**Fidelio.**

Große Oper in 2 Aufzügen. Der 2. Aufzug ist in 2 Abtheilungen. Musik von L. v. Beethoven. Regie: Emil Kaborke.  
 Dirigent: Kapellmeister Karl Grubez.

Zum Beginne des 2. Aufzuges:  
**Overture „Leonore“ Nr. 3 (C-dur) von L. v. Beethoven.**

**Kouponsarten 30 kr.**

**Kassa-Eröffnung  $\frac{1}{4}$  7 Uhr, Anfang 7 Uhr.**

In this season, the last performance of Beethoven's opera took place on January 25, 1896, and it was a fundraising event of Joseph Beck. Beck mentioned preparing this event in his letter addressed to Batka,<sup>47</sup> saying that he was annoyed by the silence of the *Westungarischer Grenzbote*, which did not call attention to his fundraising performance at all. He asked Batka to publish an extensive notice in the *Preßburger Zeitung*, invite the members of the municipal council and write a positive critique after the performance. In his letter, Beck also mentioned that he would have liked Irma Spányik to participate in his fundraising evening, but she did not feel fit enough vocally to sing the role of Leonore. *Mignon* was premiered three days later and Beck and Spányik sang the main roles in it. Consequently, the preparations of *Fidelio* receded to the background because of the rehearsals before the premiere.

In the end, a critique was written about Beck's fundraising evening by Friedrich Hefty in the *Preßburger Zeitung*, since Batka's words might have been perceived as less objective because of his friendship with Beck. Right in the beginning, Hefty praised the artistic repertoire and welcomed that, instead of an effective opera, true art valued by only a small but precious part of the audience (i.e. those who did not criticize the German season) was chosen; Hefty was referring to the discussions of the representatives of the town about the lease of the theater. The most prominent members of the audience were Archduke Friedrich of Austria-Teschen and his wife, Archduchess Isabella, along with Count Géza Zichy, who came to listen to Beck's famous performance. The other participants, according to Hefty, also rendered their roles faithfully and

<sup>47</sup> MAB, Johann Nepomuk Batka fund, correspondence, Johann Nepomuk Beck and family, inv. no. 5, box 5, letter of January 25, 1896.



contributed to the exceptionally successful performance.<sup>48</sup> The opera was played along with its grand *Leonore Overture*.

The situation with the “Beethoven harvest” repeated itself that season, too. The theater staged *Fidelio*, the CMA played the *Missa solemnis*, and the guest Hellmesberger Quartet performed Beethoven’s String Quartet in C-sharp Minor op. 131. The *Preßburger Zeitung* again published an extensive notice about the planned concert, in which the author (probably Batka) expounded Beethoven’s work to the readers.<sup>49</sup> Subsequently, Dr. Hefty in his critique of the concert appreciated, “with a pious attitude to the great Beethoven,”<sup>50</sup> Batka’s efforts to convey his musical message to the young generation. Hefty all the more acknowledged Batka’s efforts to bring high art to the local audience because he discerned a regressive trend in the musical life of Pressburg. He attributed this to the fact that the Pressburg audience had to travel to Vienna for culture, which was a manifestation of their desire for education. Hefty’s words were directed against the Magyarization, which, as it was already evident at that time, were to result in decreasing the number of German performances and modifying the theater programs in favor of the Hungarian theater.

Archduchess Isabella with her daughters also attended the concert and their presence further enhanced the festive character of the evening and the prestigiousness of the guest quartet. This honor befell the quartet at a time when, according to Max Kalbeck, its glory was already on the decline (the critic labelled the quartet as an ailing ensemble already in 1887 after Josef Hellmesberger Sr. left it).<sup>51</sup> In part, the reason for their choice may have been the lower standard of the concert scene in Pressburg compared to Vienna. However, in the given political and social context, it might have been about consciously highlighting the culture of Vienna.

Beck remained in Pressburg even in the next season of 1896/1897. He participated in earlier as well as newer operas and handled the opera direction, although Beethoven’s *Fidelio* was no longer on the program. A similar situation arose even during Raul’s next to last and last season in Pressburg, and this supports the idea of “using” Beethoven in favor of the German-speaking theater, since *Fidelio* made its way to the Municipal Theater only at times when discussions were held about the existence of an independent German season.

Raul finished his activities in Pressburg in 1899 and, by that, one chapter in the history of German theater in Pressburg was closed and the continuous cultivation of musical theater in German came to an end. The role of *Fidelio* as the “symbol” of high German culture ended, too. From 1902, the town returned to the original model of leasing the theater, but the number of Hungarian performances increased, and they were played in the more favourable autumn and winter months. At that time, concert life was booming in the town because the German-speaking theatergoers shifted to concert halls. Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* continued to be played in Saint Martin’s Cathedral and his chamber pieces and orchestral works enjoyed a permanent place in the concert programs.

<sup>48</sup> Dr. F[riedrich] H[EFT]Y, “Theater. Benefiz Joseph Beck,” *Preßburger Zeitung* 133/25 (January 26, 1896), 5.

<sup>49</sup> N. N., “Beethovens Cis-moll-Quartet op. 131,” *Preßburger Zeitung* 132/341 (December 12, 1895), 1–2.

<sup>50</sup> Dr. F[riedrich] H[EFT]Y, “Quartett Hellmesberger,” *Preßburger Zeitung* 132/342 (December 13, 1895), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Max KALBECK, “Concerte,” *Die Presse* 42/329 (November 29, 1889), 3.



## 6. CONCLUSION

The institutionalization of the theatrical life by the construction of the first and the second building of the Municipal Theater that contributed to the development and instillation of the theater in the life of Pressburg, its inhabitants and their cultural life. The theater stood at the center of the cultural developments and its regular attendance was part of the everyday life of the inhabitants of the town. The operational model of the theater, and the social contexts and structures that determined it, co-created its image and participated in creating its value.

The stagings of Beethoven's *Fidelio* in the Municipal Theater in Pressburg in the second half of the nineteenth century exhibit some common features. Firstly, they pointed to the sanctity of Ludwig van Beethoven and the respect to him that accompanied each performance of his works. Also, because of the socio-political situation and the discussions about the existence of German performances in the 1890s, they were accompanied by Johann Batka's significant efforts to place the performances of Beethoven's only opera into the context of his other prominent pieces, such as the *Missa solemnis* and his late string quartets, being performed in Pressburg. Moreover, they revealed a visible effort of the theater directors to stage it as well as possible to make the compositional genius of Beethoven stand out all the more. Although *Fidelio* never became a "model opera," as Carl Dahlhaus put it,<sup>52</sup> its stagings carried a clear message which the Pressburg audience understood and to which it reacted very sensitively. At times when the fate of German theater was at stake in Pressburg, *Fidelio* embodied the symbol of classical cultural values on which the inhabitants of Pressburg built their own cultural identity and whose loss would have meant a loss of their cultural memory.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> DAHLHAUS, *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 66.

<sup>53</sup> This study came into being as part of the VEGA Grant No. 2/0040/18 *Musical Theater in Bratislava from the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century to the First Half of the 20th Century*. (*Personalities, Institutions, Repertoire, Reflections*) research conducted at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and was written as part of the APVV-15-0764 *Slovak Theater and Contemporary European Theater Culture – Continuity and Discontinuity* research project carried out at the Institute of Theater and Film Research ARC of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

