

PSALMUS HUNGARICUS

A HUNGARIAN CULTURAL HISTORY

VOLUME III:
FROM 1867 TO 2000



Research Centre for
the Humanities

This book was produced under the auspices of the Research Centre for the Humanities
and with the support of the National Bank of Hungary and the Eötvös Loránd Research Network



ELKH | Eötvös Loránd
Research Network

© RCH, 2023

© Authors, 2023

Conceived by Margit Katalin Szakács

Edited by József Szentpéteri

Authors:

Pál Ács, Gábor Ágoston, János Barta, Gergely Buzás, Tünde Császtvay, Enikő Csukovits, Tamás Dobszay, Zsuzsa Domokos, Adrienne Dömötör, János Estók, László Felföldi, Pál Fodor, Zoltán Fónagy, Katalin Gellér, Ibolya Gerelyes, Jenő Gergely, László Gombos, Péter Halász, Antónia S. Hámori, Róbert Hermann, Magdolna Jákfalvi, János Jernyei Kiss, Zsuzsa Kakuk, János Kalmár, András Kappanyos, László Katus, Ferenc Kerényi, Terézia Kerny, Péter Király, Gyula Kocsis, László Kovács, Péter Langó, Edit Madas, János Mezei, Márta Mezei, Árpád Mikó, Antal Molnár, Teréz Oborni, Klára Pajorin, Géza Pálffy, András Pálóczi Horváth, Ágnes Papp, Júlia Papp, Attila Pók, Pál Pritz, János Pusztay, György Rácz, László Révész, Beatrix Romhányi, Ignác Romsics, Ágnes Sas, Gyula Siklósi, Balázs Sudár, Dániel Szabó, Zoltán Szabó G., Antal Szántay, István Szathmári, Judit Szeifert, Júlia Székely, Kornél Szovák, Miklós Takács, Lujza Tari, Ilona Tomisa, István Tringli, Attila Türk, György Tverdota, Gabriella Uhl, Györgyi Vajdovich, Balázs Varga, András Veres, László Vikárus, Vilmos Voigt, Attila Zsoldos

Reviewed by:

Gergely Angyalosi, József Bánkúti, János Barta, István Bóna, László Dobszay, Pál Engel, István Fazekas, Géza Galavics, Lea Haader, Zoltán Fónagy, Gábor Gelencsér, Klára Hegyi, Jenő Horváth, József Jankovics, László Katus, Ildikó Kríza, András Kubinyi, Edit Madas, Ernő Marosi, Mária Máta, János Mezei, Gábor Pajkossy, Peter Pastor, Gábor Pataki, Ernő Pesovár, Katalin Péter, Tibor Sándor, Júlia Szabó, Zoltán Szász, György Székely, László Szörényi, Tibor Tallián, Ilona Tomisa, Vilmos Voigt

Illustrations: Anita Csukovits

Bibliography: Judit Solti

Translated by Judit Pethő-Szirmai

English language editor: Judit Hézszer, Ian Kemp-Potter, Krisztina Milligan

ISBN 978-963-416-360-2 Ö; 978-963-416-358-9

Published by the Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest, 2023

Prepress preparation:

Institute of History, RCH, Research Assistance Team

Head: Éva Kovács

Cover design and page layout: Imre Horváth

Maps: Béla Nagy

Index: András Detre, Andrea Hudecz, Noémi Kalotai, Judit Lakatos

Printed in Hungary by: Prime Rate Kft.

László Gombos – László Vikárius – Lujza Tari

The Music Scene after the Austro–Hungarian Compromise (1867–1900)

The most significant result achieved in the field of music during the first decades of the dual monarchy was the establishment of the musical institutions which enabled Hungary to become an active participant of the European music scene. The most spectacular progress was reflected in the flourishing concert life, the establishment of the independent Opera House and of higher-level music education. The social class leading the political and cultural change differed from its Western European counterpart. Since the layer of industrial–commercial bourgeoisie was not sufficient in number in Hungary, the stratum leading societal change was comprised of the elements Magyarised during the second half of the century on the one hand, and of the part of the gentry taking on the classical role of the bourgeoisie, on the other. This duality was also mirrored in the polarisation of the music scene, where combining European high culture with the still rudimentary national art music turned out to be one of the most important challenges of the era. Zoltán Kodály described the unique Hungarian reality of the 19th century in the following way: “At the end of the century, in terms of the music scene, the country was divided into three completely separated groups. The subtly small group of musically educated people was fully absorbed in the cultivation of foreign masterpieces that expressed German and Italian mentality but had become international. This group perceived characteristically Hungarian music, even if somewhat condescendingly, to be represented by Erkel’s operas and Liszt’s rhapsodies. The oeuvre of

*Glee club festival in
Debrecen, Vasárnapi
Ujság, 1868*



the folk-style art music inherent in Gypsy music was not regarded as artistic music by them, nevertheless, it was embraced as the musical bible of the whole Hungarian middle class. And then there was the third group, the mysterious, unknown population of the villages.”

In the consolidated political atmosphere in the era of the Austro–Hungarian Compromise, the legal conditions were settled, which in turn allowed for the establishment of associations. In 1867, the Song and Music Society of Kassa, the Temesvár Society of Song and Music, the Hungarian Choral Society, the Buda Academy of Song and Music and the Music Lovers’ Society of Pest were

founded, while the Philharmonic Society recommenced its concerts and became an independent body. A few years later, a Liszt Society (1870) and a Wagner Society (1872) were also founded in the capital, followed by numerous others. The activities of the National Hungarian Cecilia Association (founded in 1879) played a decisive role with regards to Catholic church music. The activities of these societies, which included the promotion and organisation of music and often assisted in musical education, reached a wide urban audience. In addition to the Philharmonic Society, the Buda Academy of Song and Music was among Budapest's most illustrious institutions that performed concerts. Its amateur mixed choir and orchestra performed pieces as monumental as Verdi's *Requiem*, Haydn's *Oratorio* or Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. Later, its role was taken over by the Hungarian Women's Choral Society (1907), the Choral Society of Budapest (1910) and the Budapest Orchestral Society (1913), and after the fusion of the previous three, by the Budapest Choral and Orchestral Society.

Besides Gypsy bands playing pseudo-folk songs and marching bands, the male choir singers' movement attracted the biggest mass audience, thereby successfully functioning as a bridge between popular and high culture. In 1867, the singers' associations formed a national organisation and organised yearly meetings in alternating cities, attracting several thousand participants.

Music Venues and Concert Life

By the second half of the 19th century, instead of the nobility's castles, urban palaces and churches, the venues frequented by the middle classes became the main platforms of the music scene. Operas and other musical pieces were performed under the same roof as prose performances in the era's multifunctional theatres. These were also home to concerts of instrumental soloists, orchestras and choirs. A ballroom or hotel would often function as a concert hall. In the capital, concerts with full orchestras were organised in the Pest Redoute from 1865, and the first concert hall in the modern sense was opened in 1907 in the new building of the Music Academy.

The most obvious evidence of the blossoming music scene of that time was the popularity of concerts. In Budapest, one could hear the same music pieces and performers as in Western Europe, and many world touring artists also performed in cities in Hungary. The violin virtuosos Pablo Sarasate, Henryk Wieniawski, Joseph Joachim and Leopold Auer, the composers and also pianists Anton Rubinstein and Johannes Brahms, the cellist David Popper, the coloratura soprano singer Adelina Patti all visited Hungary. Florentine and the Hellmesberger String Quartet

were also regular visitors. Of the leading French composers, Saint-Saëns, Delibes and Massenet came to Budapest several times, and in 1875 Richard Wagner conducted his own works in the Hungarian capital.

The fact that Franz Liszt was regularly present in Budapest constituted a special force of attraction in the eyes of the learned circles, and Liszt's pupils (amongst others August Göllerich, Olga Janina,

*Jenő Hubay at the piano,
illustration in Vasárnapi
Ujság*



Sophie Menter and August Stradal) followed him here and added to the diversity of the musical scene with their performances. Outstanding artists among Liszt's Hungarian pupils were Károly Aggházy, Aladár Juhász, István Thomán and Árpád Szendy. Outstanding Hungarian violin artists to be noted are Ede Reményi, Nándor Plotényi and Jenő Hubay. The concerts of the Krancsevics string quartet that started in 1876 were very popular, and then the Hubay–Popper Quartet was founded in 1886 and operated for a quarter of a century. The quartet succeeded several times in involving the composer himself when organising their Brahms evenings.

The only professional orchestra in the Hungarian capital was the Philharmonic Orchestra founded in 1853, which consisted of the members of the National Theatre's, and from 1884, of the Opera House's orchestra. It organised about 500 concerts before the end of the First World War. Until 1871, this orchestra was conducted by Ferenc Erkel, who was followed by Hans Richter and later by Erkel's son Sándor in 1875. During the 1890s, Eduard Colonne, Hans Richter, Karl Goldmark, Siegfried Wagner, Richard Strauss, Ferdinand Löwe, Leopold Auer and Gustav Mahler were amongst the guest conductors of the orchestra. From 1900, the Philharmonic Orchestra was led by István Kerner, followed by Ernő Dohnányi from 1919. In the music scene outside of Budapest, the National Symphony Orchestra founded by László Kun played an important role, travelling from city to city.

The programmes of the 19th century concerts combined various genres, sometimes alternating with prose readings and recitation. The musical pieces were often followed by a night-long dance party, a tradition which continued – especially in the countryside – for a long time even in the 20th century. The world of public concerts was tightly interwoven with that of home musical entertainment and the salon culture of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. However, the organisation of events targeting large audiences slowly separated itself and became an independent business. The company Rózsavölgyi & Co already organised concerts in Budapest from the middle of the 19th century, while Harmonia

Ltd started its activities in the 1880s. Music played in clubs and coffee houses provided an important part of the music consumed by the middle class, and the Gypsy music played in restaurants – meaning mostly folksy Hungarian art music played by Gypsy musicians – also reached a broad audience.

Portrait of Franz Liszt
by Mihály Munkácsy



The Last Phase in Ferenc Erkel's and Franz Liszt's Career

In the first half of the 1870s, Ferenc Erkel retreated from the musical leadership of the National Theatre. Until his retirement in 1887, he focused on establishing and leading the Music Academy as well as on teaching piano classes. During these years, he gradually became isolated, and his operas composed in a renewed style were not received as well as his previous works. The piece *Dózsa György*, which premiered in 1867, was only played for a short while and his plays *Brankovics György* in 1874 and *Anonymous Heroes (Névtelen hősök)* in 1880 were only moderately successful. Distancing himself from the traditional composition consisting of several closed parts, Erkel moved towards the declamatory style and the folk music drama. The integration of some Wagnerian elements happened partly due to the fact that his musician sons – mostly Gyula – were increasingly involved in adding the finishing touches to his works.

From the 1860s, Franz Liszt established an increasingly closer relationship with his homeland: in 1865, he himself conducted the Budapest premiere of the piece *The Legend of St. Elizabeth* (*Szent Erzsébet legenda*), and he was present in the Matthias Church at the occasion of the 1867 coronation [of King Franz Joseph], when his Hungarian Coronation Mass was played. From 1869 onwards, he spent a few months in Hungary every year, from 1875 as the president of and professor at the Music Academy. In Budapest, he was surrounded by an enthusiastic group of followers, while the wider audience and the press increasingly failed to value his true significance, and his last works remained practically unknown. The thought of death occupied his mind a lot, and grieving and funeral music that often used extremely rudimentary techniques took the place of his virtuosic piano music (*Unstern, Csárdás Macabre, Am Grabe Richard Wagners, La lugubre gondola*). In his youth, Liszt was one of the leading figures of the Romantic generation. Now, he paved the way for the coming century with his music.

The Establishment of the Music Academy and Its Significance

The Royal National Hungarian Academy of Music opened its doors on 14th November 1875 as the first Hungarian institution of the highest-level music education. In the beginning, only piano and composition classes were taught in a building on Hal Square on the banks of the Danube. The first teachers were the Academy's president Franz Liszt, its director Ferenc Erkel, and also Robert Volkmann, the elder Kornél Ábrányi and Sándor Nikolits. In 1880, the Academy moved into its building on Andrassy Avenue (the Old Music Academy), and in 1907, today's Art Nouveau style building was erected. In 1882, Adel Passy-Cornet and Richárd Pauli started teaching at the vocal department and Hans Koessler at the organ department. Because of Volkmann's death in 1883, Koessler took on teaching composition too. Ernő Dohnányi, Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály and Leó Weiner were among his pupils, as well as the stars of the world-famous Hungarian operetta: Jenő Huszka, Viktor Jacobi, Imre Kálmán, Ferenc Lehár and Albert Szirmai.

The first teacher at the violin department that opened in 1884 was Károly Huber. After his death, he was followed by his son, Jenő Hubay, who returned from Brussels in 1886. Hubay led Hungarian violin education for fifty years and was the director of the Academy from 1919 to 1934. The first Hungarian world-famous child prodigies emerged from his class: amongst others were Stefi Geyer, Ferenc Vecsey and József Szigeti, and later Emil Telmányi, Jelly Arányi, Eugene Ormándy, Erna Rubinstein, Zoltán Székely, Ede Zathureczky and André Gertler who gained international reputation. A series of world touring string quartets also originated from Hubay's workshop: the Waldbauer–Kerpely, the Hauser–Son, the Léner, the Roth and the Végh Quartets. One of the conditions of Hubay's return to Hungary was the simultaneous employment of David Popper, so that cello education could commence at the Academy under his leadership. In 1887, Ferenc Erkel retired as the director, and he was succeeded by the outstanding composer Ödön Mihalovich. A couple of years later, the leadership of the piano department was taken over by two of Liszt's pupils, István Thomán and Árpád Szendy. The number of subjects constantly increased, and by the turn of the century all orchestra instruments were taught, and teacher training was introduced too. In 1911, master classes in piano, violin and cello were introduced under the leadership of Árpád Szendy, Jenő Hubay and David Popper.

The Opera House and Hungarian Opera

In the third quarter of the 19th century, operas were played in the National Theatre in Budapest, as well as in Kolozsvár, Kassa, Debrecen and Arad. During half a century, the National Theatre performed about one hundred and fifty operas and fifty ballets. More than a fifth of these productions were works of Hungarian composers, with Erkel's *Hunyadi László* and *Bánk bán* being the most prominent pieces.

Under Erkel's direction (1838–74), Verdi's works played a dominant role (in particular *Ernani* and *Un ballo in maschera*), while Gounod's *Faust* turned out to be the most successful French opera (later it was the most played opera in the Opera House too). Wagner could only gradually gain ground (*Lohengrin*, 1866 and *Tannhäuser*, 1871). In 1875, the People's Theatre (*Népszínház*) took over the musical folk plays (*népszínmű*) and operettas from the programme of the National Theatre, which became a theatre playing purely dramas after the opening of the Opera House in 1884. The Opera House had fifty plays on its repertoire at any one time, which was considered a high number even in international comparison. In terms of its artistic level, it belonged to the best opera houses in Europe, which can be attributed to the activities of Sándor Erkel (1870–1900), Hans Richter (1871–75), Gustav Mahler (1888–91) and Arthur Nikisch (1893–95).

More than two-thirds of the performances in the newly opened Opera House were French (Halévy, Auber, Thomas, Meyerbeer, Gounod) and Italian (Verdi, Bellini and Donizetti) operas. *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* were the most popular pieces by Wagner, however, the operas of Mozart or Beethoven were rarely performed. After the turn of the century, the repertoire fundamentally changed: Wagner and the new Italian school came to the forefront; the works of Mascagni, Leoncavallo and Puccini constituted almost half of the performances. Within three decades, more than fifty Hungarian plays premiered, these, however, had a minimal quantitative significance, because they were usually taken off the programme after having been performed only a couple of times.

In the eyes of the public, the Hungarian tradition was represented by Ferenc Erkel alone, who had realised a synthesis of the Italian opera and the elements of *verbunkos* in his plays *Hunyadi László* and *Bánk bán*, which were constantly being performed. The works of Karl Goldmark, with the very successful *The Queen of Sheba* amongst them, were rather part of the international traditions. Ödön Mihailovich's operas, *Hagbarth and Signe* (1874), *Wieland der Schmied* (1879) and *Eliana* (1887), were composed in the spirit of Wagner's musical drama innovations, while the opera *Toldi's Love* (*Toldi szerelme*, 1890) integrated the Wagnerian stylistic elements and the leitmotif technique into the Hungarian context. Jenő Hubay, who had spent his youth in Paris and Brussels, drew his inspiration from French music in addition to the German influence when composing for the stage. The *Violin Maker of Cremona* (1894) was not only one of the most frequently staged operas at the Opera House, but it was also performed in around seventy different theatres across Europe. Later, Hubay's *Anna Karenina* (1923) and *The Mask* (*Az álarc*, 1931) became very successful operas.

Main Trends in Hungarian Music in the Last Third of the 19th Century

While the music scene was becoming increasingly diversified, the separation of more sophisticated international elements from the still rudimentary Hungarian ones became more and more apparent. The representatives of the nationalist camp branded the musical high culture to be “foreign minded”, as this high culture still depended on importing works for a while, and a significant part of the bourgeois audience was German-speaking, and also the majority of trained composers created their works in the style and spirit of the international Romanticism. At the same time, national music, which was based on the *verbunkos* and folk-style art songs, could not advance towards greater forms of art music. Musical folk plays and Gypsy orchestras played an active role in spreading the unison, strophic Hungarian folk song, which also reached the rural population. The members of the middle class, well known for favouring these songs, were usually content with the songs of Béni Egressy, Elemér Szentirmai, Ernő Lányi, Pista Dankó and later Lóránd Fráter, which were becoming increasingly clichéd.

While Erkel was composing his national-themed historic operas, István Fáy, Kálmán Simonffy and others propagated a gradual approach and started by composing Hungarian salon pieces and sonatas; Gusztáv Szénfy urged to write musical folk plays, and Sándor Bertha composed a fugue made of

Hungarian themes. In the 1860s, Wagner's music was considered modern, but many of his followers soon became worried that the suggestive music of the German maestro would suppress and overshadow their domestic experiments. Choosing between the Hungarian or the European way, many considered the latter to be of greater importance (for example, Robert Volkmann, Karl Goldmark, Viktor Herzfeld, Ödön Mihalovich, Gyula

Beliczay, Hans Koessler and later, from the turn of the century onwards, Ernő Dohnányi and Albert Siklós), while others, on the other hand, attached equal importance to both types of compositions (amongst others Károly Aggházy, Ödön Farkas, Jenő Hubay, Károly Huber, Henrik Gobbi, Gyula J. Major and Árpád Szendy). Generally, it was typical that the Hungarian-style works of the very same composer strongly differed from his other creations.

Although the last third of the century did not produce any world-renowned Hungarian art music, which was constantly prophesied by the press to be happening soon, results in the area of composition are nevertheless noteworthy, as well as the results achieved in terms of establishing a European standard music scene and institutions. Our composers created Hungarian phantasies, rhapsodies, numerous men's choir pieces, and they also wrote many operas, symphonies, oratorios, string quartets, sonatas, with many creations of artistic value amongst them.



The 50-year commemorative coin of the Hungarian Music Conservatory (Magyar Zenei Akadémia), 1898

A New Century, a New Generation (1900–18)

When telling the history of 20th-century Hungarian music, we can hardly begin with the year of 1900. The events that made Hungarian music life and Hungarian art music typically 20th-century started around 1907, even though it was exactly in 1900 when the central figure of the century's new Hungarian music, Zoltán Kodály, enrolled both at the Academy of Music and at the faculty of arts at the University of Sciences in Budapest. A year earlier in the academic year of 1899/1900, it was a composer of internationally outstanding importance even today, Béla Bartók, who started studying at the Music Academy in Budapest. At this time, however, his imagination was still preoccupied with the task of how 19th-century ideas could be implemented with 19th-century musical tools and was under the influence of Ernő Dohnányi (Ernst von Dohnányi), who was four years his senior. Dohnányi, a pianist and composer of unparalleled talent, was the first pupil of Hungarian music education to become famous world-wide, after having studied at the Academy of Music in Budapest from 1894 to 1897. It was on Brahms's recommendation that his piano quintet in C minor, composed in 1895, was played in the programme of the *Tonkünstlerverein* [Musicians' Associations] in Vienna.

The start of Béla Bartók's career as a composer was complicated by his problematic relationship with Hans Koessler, his composition teacher, who was close to Brahms. During his student years, Bartók's development as a pianist under the guidance of István Thomán, himself a student of Liszt, seemed more promising. A decisive impulse for him to compose was triggered by the Budapest



Portrait of the young
Béla Bartók

premiere of Richard Strauss's tone poem *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, 1902). His symphonic poem, *Kossuth*, written in 1903, commemorated the failed Hungarian War of Independence of 1848–49. In it he aimed to establish symphonic music for a large orchestra with a national content in the framework of and using the stylistic tools of the Straussian genre of tone poems. The employment of the technique of thematic transformation, i.e. the presentation of the main musical subjects in different variations during the course of the work was probably also inspired by Liszt. Eventually, Bartók only deemed the work's final section, a funeral march mourning the failed revolution set in a characteristically Hungarian tone, worth publishing.

The critics celebrated Bartók as the creator of national art music after the premiere on 13 January 1904, just as they had celebrated Dohnányi after the premiere of *his* Symphony in D Minor on 7 January 1903 a year before. A couple of years later, after the performance of the *Serenade* (*Szereená*), the exam piece of another young talented musician, Leó Weiner, Kodály's classmate, the arrival of "the Hungarian symphony composer" was reported by Géza Csáth on 9 January 1907. Calling it "the Hungarian Serenade" went hand in hand with the critics calling Bartók's Suite No. 1 (1905) "the Hungarian Suite". While Bartók's Suite reached Vienna, Weiner's *Serenade* travelled across Europe.

At the beginning of the 1900s, music critics were constantly waiting for and celebrating the birth of the Hungarian style art music. Many

composers of lesser importance also wrote their suites, rhapsodies and symphonies under the spell of this ideal. Only Zoltán Kodály formed an exception in this regard, who later played the greatest role in renewing the style of national music. After the joint examination concert of Kodály and Weiner, where Kodály presented his orchestra piece *Summer Evening* (*Nyári este*), he practically fell silent for several years. Some pieces of work were being prepared in his workshop, but their final form was only taking shape with difficulty. In order for him to find his personal musical style, and also for Bartók to radically renew his composing language, two fundamentally new stimuli were needed: the discovery of folk music and getting to know new Western European compositional models.

The Discovery of Folk Music

In the beginning, the systematic research of folk songs that began in the 19th century mostly concentrated on the collection of lyrics. The most significant undertaking to publish folk songs is linked to the name of István Bartalus, who published seven volumes of folk songs with his own piano accompaniment, starting in the 1870s under the title *Magyar Népdalok Egyetemes Gyűjteménye* (*Hungarian Folk Songs: Universal Collection*). When Kodály handed in a proposal to compile a new "universal collection of folk songs" in 1913, he indicated that the deficiencies of Bartalus's publication lay in the relatively small number of tunes (730), in their uncertain source and in the lack of systematic organisation of the tunes. He estimated that the publication, which was planned by him together with Bartók and was going to be based mostly on their collections, would contain around 5,000–6,000 tunes and would be intended to present the material in a critically edited and also musically organised form. The proposal did not receive support at the time, so the plan of a comprehensive and systematic publication of Hungarian folk songs was postponed for decades. Nevertheless, the collection of folk songs continued partly through their own funds and partly supported by the National Museum.