

Péter BOZÓ

Institute for Musicology of the Research Centre for Humanities,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences, HUNGARY

Turandot on the Budapest Operetta Stage¹

ABSTRACT. In my study I deal with the musicotheatrical context of a failed operetta, premiered on 7th April 1888 at the Budapest Folk Theatre. Its composer, Jenő Sztojanovits, was a distinguished church musician, critic and music pedagogue of his time. The exotic piece in question bears the title *Peking rózsája* (The Rose of Peking); it was performed only thirteen times and its sources have never been studied since then, despite the fact that they survive almost entirely in the Budapest Széchényi National Library. Written by a certain Miksa (Max) Rothauser, the libretto is based on a well-known story: Carlo Gozzi's tragicomic *fiaba teatrale*, *Turandot*. Of course, this is a highly unorthodox and less bloodthirsty version of the subject than Gozzi's piece or Puccini's later opera. In the contemporary repertoire of the Folk Theatre we often find historical operettas whose plot takes place in the glorious past of the Hungarian nation (following Lecocq's example whose historical opéra-comiques were regularly performed in the 1870s and 1880s). The most successful early Hungarian operettas were adaptations of French vaudeville comedies set to music by a Polish-born "Hungarian" composer, József Konti. But why create an exotic Chinese operetta in a country that had no colonies at all and had no connections with the Far East? I will show what kind of musical devices Sztojanovits used to depict the Chinese local colour. I will argue that in his composition he imitated the style of Gilbert and Sullivan's Japanese operetta, *The Mikado*, whose Hungarian premiere took place in the Folk Theatre two years before that of *Peking rózsája*.

KEYWORDS: Turandot, exoticism, orientalism, Chinese local colour, parody, operetta, Budapest Folk Theatre, Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado*.

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Introduction

On the 7th April 1888, an interesting premiere took place in the Budapest Folk Theatre. According to the contemporary playbills and press reports,² a three-act operetta was performed there with the title *Peking rózsája*, i.e. *The Rose of Peking*, composed by a Hungarian musician named Jenő Sztojanovits to a libretto by a certain Miksa Rothauser. Sztojanovits (1864–1919) is little-known today and is often confused with his contemporary, Petar Stojanović (1877–1957), a Serbian composer likewise born in Budapest.³ Our Sztojanovits was a distinguished church musician, critic and music pedagogue;⁴ composer of ballets⁵ and operas,⁶ sacred pieces⁷ and – curiously enough – that of ten operettas.

² *Budapesti Hírlap*, 8th April 1888, p. 2; *Egyetértés*, 8th April 1888, pp. 1–2; *Pester Lloyd*, 8th April 1888, p. [5]; *Vasárnapi Újság*, 15th April 1888, p. 269; *Zenelap*, Vol. 3, 22nd April 1888, pp. 75–76.

³ For a biography of Petar Stojanović, see: Blažekovic, 1994, pp. 1526–1527; Duric-Klajn and Pejović, 2001, pp. 422–423.

⁴ For biographical details, see: *A Pallas nagy lexikona*, 1897, p. 839–840; Szinnyei, 1909, vol. 13, p. 1143; *Pester Lloyd*, 29th January 1919, p. 7 [obituary]; *Révai nagy lexikona*, 1925, Vol. 17, pp. 751–752; *Magyar Dal*, Vol. 34, 1st November 1929, pp. 341–343; *Magyar színművészeti lexikon*, 1931, Vol. 4, p. 322; *A Zene*, Vol. 16, 15th November 1934, pp. 42–46; *Zenei lexikon*, 1965, Vol. 3, p. 471; *Magyar életrajzi lexikon*, 1969, Vol. 2, pp. 803–804; *Brockhaus-Riemann zenei lexikon*, 1985, Vol. 3, pp. 474–475; *Új magyar életrajzi lexikon*, 2007, Vol. 6, pp. 530–531; *Magyar katolikus lexikon*, 2008, Vol. 13, pp. 496–497; Sztojanovits, Adrienne [in fact: Kroó, György]. "Sztojanovits Jenő halálának 50. évfordulójára". In: *Muzsika*, Vol. 12, 21st March 1969. Adrienne Sztojanovits was one of Jenő Sztojanovits' daughters but this article is in fact Kroó's work. Its typewritten draft is to be found in the Archives of the Hungarian Radio in Budapest (Borítéktár, broadcasted 21st January 1969. My special thanks go to Hajnalka Sütheő who made possible the study of this document).

⁵ *Új Romeo* (New Romeo, scenario by Lajos Steiger), 16th April 1889; *Csárdás* (Czardas, scenario by Samu Zárai and Lajos Mazzantini), 23rd December 1890; *Tous les trois* (to the composer's own scenario), 29th October 1892. All first performed in the Hungarian Royal Opera House, Budapest.

⁶ *Ninon* (libretto by Emil Ábrányi), 27th March 1898; *Othello mesél* (Othello recounts, libretto by Dezső Orbán), 27th May 1917. Both first performed in the Hungarian Royal Opera House, Budapest.

⁷ His sacred pieces kept in the Budapest Széchényi National Library: Ms. mus. 5485 *Ave Maria*, Op. 101 (vocal score by István Mikus Csák, dated 6th December 1928); Ms. mus. 5976 *Ecce sacerdos magnus* (transposition by Lajos Szalay from 1928); Ms. mus. 5991 *Kyrie* from his *Coronation Mass* (organ transcription by

Unfortunately, the piece in question – his debut in the Folk Theatre – was not really successful, I must say it was a failure: from the opening night to 10th December of the same year, when it was performed for the last time, there were altogether only thirteen performances, although, as it is well-known, thirteen is an unlucky number.⁹ Some of the members of the Folk Theatre orchestra meticulously recorded the order and number of the rehearsals in their partbooks.¹⁰ According to the evidence of these entries the operetta had less performances in Budapest than rehearsals.¹¹

Sándor Sárkány). A two-part little mass and two further *Ave Maria*, an *Ave maris stella*, a *Stabat mater*, a *Tantum ergo* and a *Regina cœli* are mentioned in a 1934 list of his works, see *A Zene*, Vols. 16, 15 November 1934, p. 43.

- ⁸ *Peking rózsája* (The rose of Peking, by György Ruttkay [= Max Rothauser]), Folk Theatre, 7th April 1888; *A kis molnárné* (The Little Miller's Wife, by Antal Radó), Folk Theatre, 29th January 1892; *A kis kofa (Phryné)* (The Little Market Woman [Phryné], by Richárd Falk), Hungarian Theatre, 20th November 1903; *A portugál* (The Portuguese, by Adolf Mérei [Merkli]), Hungarian Theatre, 3rd January 1905; *A papa lánya* (Daddy's Daughter, by Gyula Molnár), Hungarian Theatre, 4th October 1906; *Csók király* (The King's Kiss, by Dezső Orbán), Capital City Summer Theatre, 16th July 1908; *A szíami herceg* (The Siamese Prince, by Péter Pál), Capital City Summer Theatre, 27th August 1910; *Karikagyűrű* (Wedding Ring, by Dezső Urai, László Zsoldos, Dezső Orbán), Király Theatre, 18th November 1915; all first performed in Budapest. Without premier dates: *Gésagimnázium* (Secondary school for geishas); *Tanácsos úr menyasszonya* (Sir councillors' fiancée).
- ⁹ According to the playbills, promptbook, and to the MS entries of the parts Vlc., Cl. 2, Tr. 2, Trb. 2, the thirteen performances of the piece in the Folk Theatre took place on 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 16, 20, 24, 28th April, 5, 14th May, 16th June, and 10th December 1888.
- ¹⁰ According to the promptbook, and to MS entries of parts VI. 2, Cor. 1, Cor. 2, the order of rehearsals was the following: 22nd March 1888 (correction rehearsal), 24th March (correction rehearsal/staging rehearsal with piano), 25th March (staging rehearsal with piano), 26th March (correction rehearsal/staging rehearsal with piano), 27th March (correction rehearsal/staging rehearsal with piano), 28th March (ensemble rehearsal/staging rehearsal with piano), 29th March (ensemble rehearsal/staging rehearsal with piano), 31st March (ensemble rehearsal/staging rehearsal with piano), 1st April (ensemble rehearsal/staging rehearsal with piano), 2nd April (dress rehearsal), 3rd April (dress rehearsal), 4th April (dress rehearsal), 5th April (dress rehearsal with singers and actors in costumes, 6th April (in the evening dress rehearsal with lighting and full scenery).
- ¹¹ There were, however, some further performances in provincial towns: in Szeged (in December 1888) and in Kolozsvár/Cluj Napoca/Klausenburg (before 20th November 1888). See: *Zenelap*, Vol. 3, 20th November 1888, p. 189.

But why deal with such an unsuccessful theatre production? In my opinion, this piece is intriguing for two reasons. First, because – as I anticipated in the title of my paper – it is a rather unusual adaptation of a well-known subject, the story of the bloodthirsty Chinese princess Turandot. Second, because in the history of Hungarian operetta it is the earliest known example of an exotic piece whose plot takes place in the Far East. In my study I will attempt to give a short overview, in what kind of musictheatrical context the premiere of *Peking rózsája* took place or – to put it in another way – in what sense it is exceptional in the contemporary Hungarian operetta repertoire. After that I will try to interpret the unusual character of the work. I will argue that the beginnings of exoticism in the field of Hungarian operetta are due to the appearance of a new cultural transfer in Budapest: the Savoy operas of the British composer Sir Arthur Sullivan.

My investigations are based on the study of the extant sources of the operetta performances of the one-time Folk Theatre. These are preserved today mainly in three public collections in Budapest: in the Music and Theatre Department of the National Széchényi Library (henceforth H-Bn), in the Central Library of the Capital City Ervin Szabó Library (H-Bsk), and in the Capital City Archives (H-Bfl). It should be noted that the sources of this early period of Hungarian operetta have never been studied systematically by musicologists so far, despite Moritz Csáky's excellent book on operettas of the Habsburg Monarchy (see Csáky, 1996) and despite the fact that this corpus of documents is extremely and surprisingly rich. For example, from the 1888 performances of *Peking rózsája* we have the original manuscript promptbook,¹² staging manual,¹³ performing score,¹⁴ and most of the instrumental, solo vocal and choir parts.¹⁵ Besides

¹² H-Bn MM 5754.

¹³ H-Bn MM 5753.

¹⁴ H-Bn Népsz. 585/I, in 3 vols. (the copy of an unidentified copyist).

¹⁵ H-Bn Népsz. 585/II-IV (parts Fl. pic., Fl., Ob. 1., Ob. 2., Cl. 1, Cl. 2, Fg. 1, Fg. 2, Cor. 1, Cor. 2, Tr. 1, Tr. 2, Trb. 1, Trb. 2, Trb. 3, Timp./Tamb. pic./Gr. C./Tam-Tam/Camp./Trg., 5 Vl. 1, 2 Vl. 2, 1 Vla., 1 Vlc., 1 Cb.); H-Bn Népsz. 585/V (parts Altoum, Turandot, 2 Adelma, 2 Kalaf, Pa-Csu-Li, Jan-Cse-Kia, Skirina, Zuzumi, Barak, 3 Doktores; 7 Soprano I, 2 Soprano II, 2 Alto, 3 Tenor I, 2 Tenor II, 2 Basso I, 2 Basso II).

these, we have all of the printed playbills of the 1888 performances¹⁶ and a copyright agreement signed by the authors and the director of the Folk Theatre as well.¹⁷ No printed libretto, printed score and composer's manuscript survive. It is quite likely, however, that neither the libretto nor the music appeared in print.

The Contemporary Repertoire of the Folk Theatre

The Budapest Folk Theatre was established in 1875 for the cultivation of popular repertoire, pre-eminently for the genre *népszínmű*.¹⁸ *Népszínmű* was the Hungarian equivalent of the Viennese *Volksstück* and the term covers popular plays in a folk-like style interpolated with pseudo-folkloristic songs. In a musical sense, *népszínmű* represented what Eric Hobsbawm called “invented tradition” (*The Invention of Tradition*, 2003, pp. 1–2): an imaginary Hungarian “folklore” created in the early 1840s as a vehicle for nation building. Around 1860 when Offenbach’s one-actors – i.e. operetta as such – appeared on the Pest German and Hungarian stages, the *népszínmű* was already out of fashion.¹⁹ There was, however, a revival of the genre at the beginning of the 1870s and in the early period of the Folk Theatre, the majority of the pieces played there were *népszínmű*. Nevertheless, operetta became more and more favoured and, according to 1886 statistics, in the second half of the 1880s the number of operetta performances already exceeded that of *népszínmű* (Kolta, 1986, pp. 51–52). It should be noted that pieces belonging to other genres were also played in the Folk Theatre: spoken comedies, spectacular pieces, sometimes even Italian operas. Needless to say, the coexistence of these quite different genres exerted an influence on popular music theatre. To quote just one example, one of the first Hungarian operettas performed in the

¹⁶ H-Bsk Budapest Collection 792/692, Vol. 14, 1888.

¹⁷ H-Bfl IV. 1403. n., 1881–1913 “Szerződések” [i.e.: “contracts”], dated 21st February 1888.

¹⁸ For the repertory of the Theatre, see Berczeli A. Károlyné, 1958. For a selection of the administrative writings of the institution, see Kolta, 1986.

¹⁹ The first known Hungarian operetta, *A szerelmes kántor* (The Cantor in Love) by Géza Allaga first performed in the Buda Folk Theatre on 21st April 1862 was in fact a *népszínmű*, simply called operetta because this new, international genre of popular music theatre was much more fashionable at that time.

Folk Theatre, *Titilla hadnagy* by Ferenc Puks was written to a libretto which is a variant of one of the most popular *népszínműs*, *Szökött katona* [The Deserted Soldier] by Ede Szigligeti.

In the early Hungarian repertoire of the Folk Theatre we often find historical operettas (Table 1). In one type of these pieces the action takes place in the glorious past of the Hungarian nation; in an other type, the scene is 18th century France. Obviously, Hungarian historical operetta followed an international trend: it was largely modelled on Charles Lecocq's example whose historical opéra-comiques were regularly performed in Budapest during the 1870s and 1880s (Table 2). The parodistic type so characteristic for Offenbach's œuvre (see: Dörffeldt, 1954 and Yon, 2000) was, however, almost entirely absent in the Hungarian repertoire, although Offenbach's *opérettes* and *opéra-bouffes* were of course regularly staged in Budapest (see Bozó, 2013).

In general terms, during the first decade of the Folk Theatre, operetta meant mainly French operettas, despite the fact that works by Viennese authors such as Franz von Suppé and Johann Strauss Jr. were also played. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that among the Hungarian librettos we often find adaptations of French pieces (Table 3). For example, the book of the most successful early Hungarian operetta, *Az eleven ördög* (The Living Devil) by the Polish-born Jewish *Theaterkapellmeister*, József Konti (Joshua Cohn; 1852–1905), was an adaptation of a French vaudeville comedy by Bayard and Dumanoir, entitled *Le Vicomte de Letorières*.²⁰

²⁰ Konti was born in Warsaw, studied in Vienna and began his career in Salzburg. Nevertheless, from 1878 he worked and spent the rest of his life in Hungary and magyarized his original name. He became the most popular late 19th century composer of Hungarian operettas, despite the fact that he had obvious difficulties with the language of his adopted country. See: Verő, 1925, pp. 241–246.

First performance	Composer / librettist, title	Place and time of the plot
15 th Oct 1875	Károly Huber / Árpád Berczik, <i>A király csókja</i> (The King's Kiss)	Buda, under Matthias Corvinus (late 15th century)
16 th Jan 1880	Elek Erkel / Sándor Lukácsy, <i>Székely Katalin</i> (Katalin Székely)	Transsylvania under Duke Zsigmond Báthori, in 1594
27 th Feb 1880	Ferenc Puks / Jenő Rákosi, <i>Titilla hadnagy</i> (Lieutenant Titilla)	Hungarian village during the Napoleonic wars
29 th Oct 1886	József Konti / Gergely Csiky, <i>Királyfogás</i> (Catching a King)	Granada and Warsaw in the 16th century
25 th Feb 1887	Serly Lajos / Jenő Rákosi, <i>Világszép asszony Marcia</i> (Fair Woman Marcia)	Rome under Augustus
7 th Dec 1888	Szidor Bátor, Béla Hegyi / Sándor Lukácsy, <i>A titkos csók</i> (The Secret Kiss)	Paris and Versailles under Louis XV (in the second half of the 18th century)
15 th Nov 1890	Elek Erkel / Pál Vidor (after Ede Szligeti), <i>A kassai diákok</i> (The Kassa Student)	Hungary in the early 14th century
30 th Dec 1890	Dezső Megyeri / Dezső Megyeri, <i>Katonás kisasszony</i> (Martial Miss)	Versailles and Compiègne in 1750

Table 1. Historical operettas by Hungarian authors in the Budapest Folk Theatre, 1875–1890

Title	First performance in the Folk Theatre	Place and time of the plot
<i>La Fille de Mme Angot</i>	2 nd Dec 1875	Paris under the Directory (1797)
<i>La Petite mariée</i>	21 st Sept 1876	16th century Italia
<i>Le Pompon</i>	18 th Nov 1876	Paris, around 1700
<i>La Marjolaine</i>	14 th Sept 1877	16th century Flanders
<i>Le Petit duc</i>	11 th Oct 1878	Paris under Louis XIV (early 18th century)
<i>La Camargo</i>	28 th March 1879	Paris under Louis XV (mid-18th century)
<i>La Petite Mademoiselle</i>	5 th Sept 1879	Paris during the Fronde (mid-17th century)
<i>Le Jour et la nuit</i>	7 th Jan 1882	17th century Portugal
<i>Giroflé-Girofla</i>	22 nd March 1882	Spain, around 1250
<i>La Cœur et la main</i>	16 th Dec 1882	17th century Madrid
<i>L'Oiseau bleu</i>	24 th Oct 1884	Florence in the 15th or 16th century
<i>Ninette</i>	16 th Jan 1897	Paris in 1640

Table 2. Lecocq's 'historical' operettas in the Budapest Folk Theatre

First performance	Composer / librettist, title	French original
[Sopron German Theatre: 21 st March 1884] Folk Theatre: 16 th December 1885	József Konti / Antal Deréki, <i>Az eleven ördög</i> (The Living Devil; first perf. with German text as <i>Der kleine Vicomte</i>)	Bayard and Dumanoir, <i>Le Vicomte de Létorières</i>
27 th Dec 1886	Szidor Bátor, Béla Hegyi / Ferenc Reiner, <i>A milliomosnő</i> (The Millionaire Woman)	“after a French comedy” [libretto does not survive]
21 st May 1887	Szidor Bátor, Béla Hegyi / Jenő Rákosi, <i>Uff király</i> (King Uff)	Vanloo and Leterrier, <i>L’Étoile</i> [Chabrier’s operetta]
12 th Jan 1888	József Konti / unknown, <i>A suhanc</i> (The Stripling)	Bayard and Vanderbuch, <i>Le Gamin de Paris</i>
7 th Dec 1888	Szidor Bátor, Béla Hegyi / Sándor Lukácsy, <i>A titkos csók</i> (The Secret Kiss)	Bayard and Dumanoir, <i>La Vicomtesse Lolotte</i>
21 st Jan 1890	Béla Hegyi, <i>Pepita</i> (Pepita)	Gautier, <i>Regardez, mais ne touchez pas</i>
30 th Dec 1890	Dezső Megyeri / Dezső Megyeri, <i>Katonás kisasszony</i> (Military Miss)	Saint-Georges and Lopez, <i>Mademoiselle de Choisy</i>

Table 3. Hungarian operettas adapting French pieces in the Budapest Folk Theatre, 1875–1890

A Parody of the Turandot Subject

Peking rózsája does not show *népszínmű* character; in contrast to most of the contemporary Hungarian operettas, it is not based on a French libretto and its plot does not take place in a historical past. On the contrary, the scene is set in exotic China and the book is the parody of a well-known subject: it is based on Carlo Gozzi's 18th century *fiaba teatrale*, *Turandot*, a piece characterized as a tragicomic fairy tale by David Nicholson (Nicholson, 1979). On the playbills, only Gozzi is mentioned as a source, although it is quite likely that Rothauser also knew the German *Turandot* adaptation by Friedrich Schiller. Miksa (or rather Max) Rothauser (1863–1913) was a Budapest German Jewish journalist and theatre critic for the German newspapers *Budapester Tagblatt*, *Neues Pester Journal* and *Pester Lloyd*.²¹ Although he understood and sometimes even wrote in Hungarian under the magyarized name György Ruttkay, according to the sources of *Peking rózsája*, his mother tongue was German. The text of the libretto in the performing score is throughout in German and from corrections in the Hungarian promptbook and staging manual it is evident that originally the libretto was written in German and a Hungarian translation was made only after Sztojanovits composed the music. One of these corrections concerns the name of the unknown prince: in Rothauser's original his name is Kalaf like Gozzi's piece but in the promptbook and the staging manual the character was renamed to Hasszán, which is a Turkish name. Although the playbills do not tell that the Hungarian text is a translation, the promptbook and the staging manual mentions one of the translators: Viktor Rákosi (Kremsner; 1860–1923), who was brother of Jenő Rákosi, the first director of the Folk Theatre. Interestingly, Hasszán was created by a female singer, Lujza Blaha, the leading primadonna of the Folk Theatre.²² Trouser roles of this kind were typical in early Hungarian operetta (Table 4).

²¹ For biographical details see: Szinnyei, 1906, Vol. 11, pp. 1260–1261; *Magyar zsidó lexikon*, 1929, p. 759; *Magyar színművészeti lexikon*, 1931, Vol. 4., p. 74; *Magyar írói álnév lexikon*, 1992, p. 646; *Magyar irodalmi lexikon*, 1965, Vol. 2, p. 639; *Magyar életrajzi lexikon*, 1969, Vol. 2, p. 555; *Új magyar irodalmi lexikon*, 1994, Vol. 3, p. 1751; *Magyar színházművészeti lexikon*, 1994, p. 662; *Új magyar életrajzi lexikon*, 2004, Vol. 5, p. 881.

²² Blaha was perhaps the most popular female actor of her time. She was called “the nightingale of the nation”.

Composer, piece	Trouser role
Károly Huber, <i>A király csókja</i> (15 th Oct 1875)	pages (supporting cast)
Elek Erkel, <i>Székely Katalin</i> (1 st Jan 1880)	pages (supporting cast)
Ferenc Puks, <i>Titilla hadnagy</i> (27 th Feb 1880)	Ptitruvály = Lujza Blaha
György Bánffy, <i>A fekete hajó</i> (26 th Jan 1883)	Oziriádesz = Ilka Pálmay
Elek Erkel, <i>Tempefői</i> (16 th Nov 1883)	Tempefői = Lujza Blaha
József Konti, <i>Az eleven ördög</i> (16 th Dec 1885)	Letorières = Lujza Blaha
József Konti, <i>Királyfogás</i> (29 th Oct 1886)	Amadil = Irma Ligeti
Szidor Bátor, Béla Hegyi, <i>A milliomosnő</i> (27 th Dec 1886)	-
Lajos Serly, <i>Világszép asszony Marcia</i> (25 th Feb 1887)	Divusz = Lujza Blaha
Szidor Bátor, Béla Hegyi, <i>Uff király</i> (21 st May 1887)	Lazuli = Ilka Pálmay
József Konti, <i>A suhanc</i> (12 th Jan 1888)	Józsi = Lujza Blaha
Jenő Sztojanovits, <i>Peking rózsája</i> (7 th April 1888)	Hasszán = Lujza Blaha
Szidor Bátor, Béla Hegyi, <i>A titkos csók</i> (7 th Dec 1888)	René = Aranka Hegyi
József Konti, <i>A kópé</i> (7 th Feb 1890)	Hopsz = Lujza Blaha
Béla Szabados, <i>A négy király</i> (10 th Jan 1890)	pages (supporting cast)
Béla Hegyi, <i>Pepita</i> (21 st Jan 1890)	pages (supporting cast)
Elek Erkel, <i>A kassai diákok</i> (15 th Nov 1890)	Brebir Pető = Lujza Blaha
Dezső Megyeri, <i>Katonás kisasszony</i> (30 th Dec 1890)	-

Table 4. Trouser roles of Hungarian operettas performed in the Folk Theatre, 1875–1890

But what kind of Turandot is this? In our case the thing is a parody of the tragicomedy. The operetta Turandot, unlike her colleagues by Gozzi or Puccini, would rather like to kiss than kill. Incognito, in the disguise of Adelma, she herself invites his prince to apply for Turandot's hand (that is, for her own hand) and – for the sake of safety – she even gives him the solution of the three riddles. Things are further complicated, however, because after having solved the riddles, the not too clever prince publicly refuses to marry Turandot. He believes that the princess and Adelma are two different persons and he is in love with the latter woman. According to the law, he should be punished by putting out his eyes for the offence. Fortunately, before the execution of the sentence, Turandot-Adelma reveals her identity, and, the prince, instead of glowing iron, receives a glowing princess. As we can see, an important and witty idea in Rothauser's adaptation of the subject is that Turandot and Adelma – the forrunner of Puccini's Liù – are in fact one and the same person.

Why Create an Exotic Operetta?

Rothauser's choice of subject is rather surprising, regarding the fact that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had no colonies in the Far East hence no cultural connections with China. So, where then did the idea of creating an exotic operetta in Hungarian come from? Before *Peking rózsája*, there was no piece in the Hungarian operetta repertoire of the Folk Theatre whose plot takes place in the Far East.²³ Even in the international repertoire of the institution it was quite rare. Before *Peking rózsája*, only two pieces of this kind were performed: *Kosiki* by Charles Lecocq on 27th April 1877 and the British operetta: *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan on 10th December 1886, i.e. just two years before the premiere of *Peking rózsája*. In both cases, the plot is situated in Japan.

²³ I know of just one other early Hungarian operetta which probably had an exotic subject: *A gólyakirály* (King Stork), composed by baron György Bánffy (1853–1889) to a libretto by Baron Endre Kemény. According to the playbill (H-Bn) of its first performance (19th March 1881, Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca/Klausenburg), this operetta, probably written on the basis of Wilhelm Hauff's tale *Kalif Storch*, also included a Chinese dance. Neither the music nor the text of the piece does, however, survive.

Authors of operetta used oriental subjects for two reasons. As Derek B. Scott pointed out in his study on musical orientalism (Scott, 1998, p. 327), one possibility offered by subjects of this kind is that in the disguise of the distant and strange other civilisation it is possible to make ridiculous their own society's conditions. As an example, he quotes Ko-Ko's song from the first act of *The Mikado*. Ko-Ko is the Lord-High-Executioner of Titipu and his song (No. 5a "As some day it may happen that a victim must be found") is an exciting variant of the operatic *arie di catalogo*: a list of social offenders to be executed. Among others, he mentions such dangerous criminals as "the lady novelist". Policy makers are mentioned only in the last strophe, of course without names because everybody knows who policy makers are. Social critique also plays an important role in *Peking rózsája*, unfortunately, in most cases in the spoken dialogues. Social critique is represented in the piece first of all by the two comic male characters, the prime minister and astrologer Jan-Cse-Kia and the head of the Peking police, Pa-Csu-Li.

Beyond the critique of homeland conditions, another appeal of oriental subjects is that spectacular scenery and particular musical colour can be used apropos of the exotic milieu. In Sullivan's *The Mikado* at some points Japanese local colour is obvious even if it is just a thin surface. One of these points is the introduction choir in which we find unisono pentatonic sections in the melody (Example 1a–b). Likewise, a unisono more or less pentatonic march accompanies the entrance of the Mikado in the second act. As Michael Beckerman has pointed out (Beckerman, 1989, p. 307), this is an authentic Japanese melody used, however, in a slightly altered form (Examples 2a, 2b). I would say, Sullivan's version is a Japanese melody heard by an unfamiliar, European ear.

The operetta by Sztojanovits depicts the Chinese milieu with the same devices as Sullivan's piece whose scene is not China but Japan. What is more, Sztojanovits used these devices at the same points as Sullivan did. At the beginning of the introduction choir of *Peking rózsája*, we hear a pentatonic melody, at first played by unisono strings alternating with the wind instruments playing modal harmonies in the orchestral prelude (Example 3); later sung in a polyphonic version confronting female and male choir (Example 4).

a) mm. 1-17

b) mm. 35-50

CHORUS OF TENORS & BASSES in *Unison*

If you want to know who we are, We are gen-til-e-men of Ja - pan:

VI 1, Fl, Pic VI 1, Fl, Pic VI 1, Fl, Pic

Cl Cl Cl

Ob, VI 2, Vlc, Cor, Fg, Vlc, Cb Ob, VI 2, Vlc, Cor, Fg, Vlc, Cb

Vlc, Fg Vlc, Fg Vlc, Fg

On ma-ny a vase and jar On ma-ny a screen and fan, VI 1, Fl, Pic

VI 1, Fl, Pic VI 1, Fl, Pic

Cl Cl

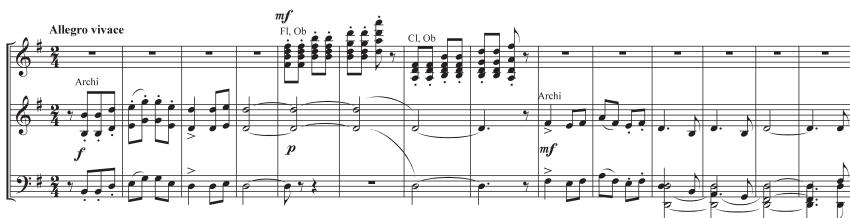
Ob, VI 2, Vlc, Cor, Fg, Vlc, Cb Ob, VI 2, Vlc, Cor, Fg, Vlc, Cb

Example 1. Sullivan, *The Mikado*, Act 1, No. 1, Chorus of Men

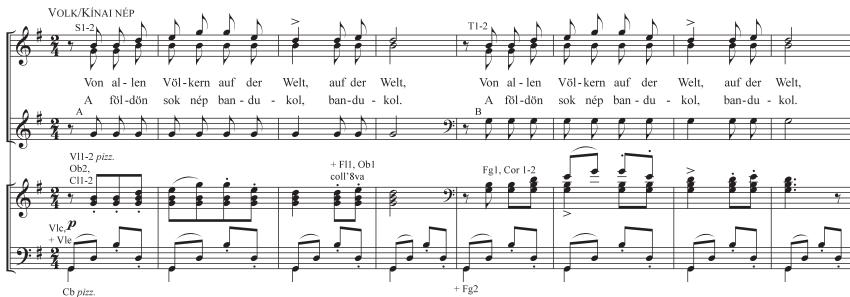
A musical score for 'The Star-Spangled Banner' in 2/4 time. The key signature is one sharp. The music is divided into two staves. The top staff consists of six measures of eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff consists of six measures, with the first five being eighth-note patterns and the last measure being a single eighth note followed by a rest. The notes are primarily eighth notes, with some sixteenth-note patterns in the first staff.

Example 2a. The Japanese melody used in *The Mikado* after Beckerman

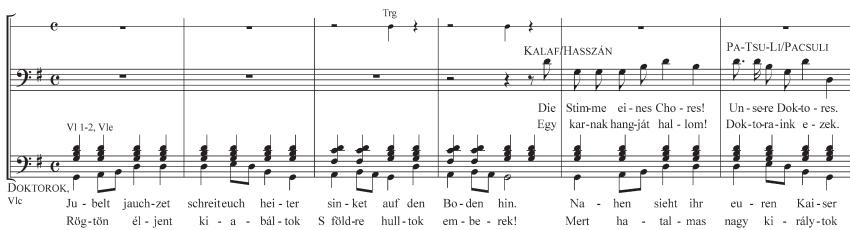
Example 2b. Sullivan, *The Mikado*, Act 2, No. 5, Entrance of Mikado & Katisha, mm. 13–24



Example 3. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 1, Introduction, mm. 1-14



Example 4. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 1, Introduction, mm. 28-35



Example 5. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 4, mm. 109-114

Another pentatonic melody played off-stage indicates in the No. 4 quartet the coming of the eight Chinese doctors (Example 5) and, in the next musical number the same theme is transposed to C major when the doctors appear on the stage. The pentatonic melody played in low register is, however, accompanied here by functional harmonies.

The ballet music played in the finale of the first act likewise shows orientalistic character. The cellos start with a pentatonic melody, at the end, however, the leading note and the functional harmonies also appear (Example 6). An important element of the orientalistic style is the instrumentation: the triangle sounding on strong beats.



Example 6. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 6, mm. 68–75

On the basis of these exotic details, it seems that the Japanese operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan left its influence on the Chinese piece by Sztojanovits. This is even more likely because *The Mikado*, unlike other pieces by Gilbert and Sullivan, was a remarkable success in Budapest. A contemporary music journal called *Zenelap* reported in April 1888 that it had already been performed more than a hundred times.²⁴ Writing about the premier of *Peking rózsája*, a critic at the same journal felt that there was a similarity between the two pieces, so much so that he did not fail to mention:

Since *The Mikado* met so striking success everywhere, the main interest of librettists turned to the magic and legendary, strange world of the East. In some respect rightly, because *this subject has played hardly any role in the farcical, kaleidoscopic, voluble world of operetta so far*. Nevertheless, if we continue to progress on this way, soon we will meet even the black people of Africa in the frame of operetta.²⁵

Black people of Africa do not play any role in *Peking rózsája*. It should be noted, however, that the Chinese style is just one element of the work's exoticism. Similarly to Puccini's later *Turandot* opera, the operetta by Sztojanovits also has a "Persian" style. After the introduction choir, Turandot-Adalma sings a romance in which she claims that she is a princess of Samarkand and her brother was killed by Turandot. This romance begins in a minor mode with Lydian fourth (Example 7), i.e. it uses the augmented second, which was commonplace in 19th century oriental music, and was also used by Puccini in the funeral march of the Persian Prince before the execution in the first act of his *Turandot*.

²⁴ *Zenelap*, Vol. 4, 3rd April 1889, p. 79.

²⁵ *Zenelap*, Vol. 3, 19th December 1886, p. 828.

ROMANCE. ROMÁNCZ.
Andante
ADELMA

Es kam ein Prinz aus Märchen-land aus Sa-mar-kand in ei - ner Reich ge - zo - - - gen. Und
Egy if - ju her - czez mesz-szi - ról, i - de ke - rül, e nagy di - cső or - szág - - - ba. Egy
VII-2
Cb, Vlc pizz.
+ Fgl, Cor1

die - ser Prinz aus Märchen-land aus Sa - mar - kand ward um sein Glück be - tro - - - gen.
if - ju her - czez mesz-szi - ról, i - de ke - rül és vesz - ve bol - dog - sa - - - ga.

pp

Example 7. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 1, Romance, mm. 3-8

Andantino
SKLAVINNEN/RABNÖK

Uns - re Her - rin ist be - reit, kom - men ist der Prü - fung Zeit.
Percz a - latt oh fe - je - de - lem Itt lesz lá - nyod - e he - lyen,
Ob. Cl
Vlc
Vl 2
+ Vle, Vl 2
+ Cello
+ Cor
Cb pizz.

Wird er glück - lich sie be - stehn, wenn die Göt - ter bei ihm steh'n.
Hogy a rej - tély fejt se - meg, Ég se - gitd a her - cze - get.
Ob. Cl
+ Fg coll. 8va bassa
Vl 1
Vle pizz.,
Tim.

Example 8. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 12, mm. 96-103

There is also another point in *Peking rózsája* that I would call “Egyptian-style”. In the second finale, in the choir of slave women before Turandot’s entrance, the use of Neapolitan second degree recalls Verdi’s Egyptian priestesses from *Aida* (Example 8).²⁶

This means that *Peking rózsája* does not imitate Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta in every detail. Another important difference is the

²⁶ Verdi’s opera was premiered at the Budapest National Theatre in 1875 and from 1884 it became a repertoire piece of the newly opened Hungarian Royal Opera House.

use of Viennese local colour: in *The Mikado* there are no waltzes. In the piece by Sztojanovits, however, the Chinese people sing frequently in waltz rhythm. To quote just two examples, Pa-Csu-Li and Jan-Cse-Kia sing a waltz refrain in their song of entrance to a text emphasizing the Chinese milieu (Example 9). Furthermore, at the beginning of the first finale, Turandot warns Hasszán, using a waltz melody, that applying for her hand can be dangerous (Example 10). This is hardly surprising, regarding the fact that – as already mentioned – Viennese operetta composers were also played at the Folk Theatre. Johann Strauss Jr. conducted some performances of his *Das Spitzentuch der Königin* and of his *Der Zigeunerbaron* himself just two months before the premiere of *Peking rózsája* (on 3rd and 4th February 1888).²⁷

Walzer tempo
PA-CSU-LI

Bei uns Chi-ne-sen wer-den die Bö-sen streng stens be-straf't doch es herrscht Dis-cip-lin;
Chi-ná-ba ná-lunk, csak igy csi-ná-lunk, nagy a szi-gor, de nagy a fe-gye-lem!

VII
Vcl
Cello
Bassoon
Vle
Vlc

Example 9. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 1, Introduction, mm. 426–433

Langsames Walzer tempo
TURANDOT

VI 1-2, Vle, Vlc
Cello, 2 Fg
Vle
Cor 1-2
Vlc

Um die-se Hand willst Fremd-ling du wer-ben, lass da rum ab er ist
Fi-gyel re-dam! Ha-ke-zen-re vá-gyol, Ször-nyi ha-lá-tól, ah!

si-che-rer Tod, Mit seh'n dem Au-ge in dein Ver-der-ben eilst du denn nim-mer wird dein Tu-ran-dot.
sem-mi sem-véd, Hull-jon szé-med-ról A-sú-rú fá-tyol! Nem, so-hu nem le-szek én a ti-éd!

Example 10. Sztojanovits, *Peking rózsája*, No. 6, mm. 1–20

²⁷ *Pester Lloyd*, 4th February 1888, p. [5]. and 5th February 1888, p. 5.

Conclusion

As we have seen, on the basis of the libretto and musical style of *Peking rózsája*, it seems that the Hungarian composer, who in all likelihood had never been to China, partly modelled the invented musical style of his exotic Chinese operetta on a Japanese operetta by a British composer. I failed to mention that the title role was created by Aranka Hegyi (1855–1906), i.e. the Gipsy primadonna of the Folk Theatre. *Das ist ja eine schwarzgelbe Prinzessin Turandot!*

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