

*Religious Songs on Hungarian Gramophone Records (1900–1920)**From Church Hymns to the "Church Scene"*

FERENC JÁNOS SZABÓ



Ferenc János Szabó (DMA) is a research fellow at the Institute of Musicology (Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences) and lecturer at the Music Academy in Budapest. He is member of the “Lendület” Archives and Research Group for 20th and 21st Century Hungarian Music. His research fields are the history of the Hungarian recording industry and the performance practice of classical music.

I. Introduction

In the following article¹ I would like to add some findings to László Dobszay’s research on the historical background of Hungarian church hymns,² but will do so from a distinctively different point of view. I shall not investigate the folkloristic tradition; instead I am interested in the urban appearance of church hymns, especially in larger cities, and the traces it has left in the form of commercial products, that is, gramophone records. First I would like to introduce the surprisingly rich repertoire available, then I will discuss the religious recordings of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera, and finally I would like to examine the role of Hungarian church music recordings made around the beginning of the 20th century. The relevant time frame of my discussion is the milestones of acoustic sound recording, that is 1899 to 1926, but most of the examples are from the first 15 years of the 20th century. When looking at the repertoire and the performers I have to emphasize that this research is not complete, the number of records available today is just a fragment and I hope there are still many records dating

back to the beginning of the century that are to be discovered somewhere. There is also much to be researched about the biographies of the performers who can be heard on the recordings.

As more and more record companies offered their products in the first years of the 20th century, they started competing for the customers with special selections. Some companies signed exclusive contracts with star singers,³ put a brand new operetta piece on the market⁴ while publishing a record related to a particular event also proved to be profitable business. Record companies launched Christmas songs and church hymns every year as the Christmas season approached. Practically all record companies had such selections in their repertoires. According to currently available information, other religious holidays were not given such attention, except for two Easter hymn recordings made at the beginning of the century.⁵

The record companies did not put much effort into recording many different Christmas songs, and this provides sufficient information about what the most popular songs were in those days. Practically all companies published the Hungarian Christmas songs “Mennyből az angyal” [From heaven the angel] and “Pásztorok, pásztorok” [Shepherds, shepherds], or the German songs “O Tannenbaum” and “O du selige” – of course, in Hungarian – in their repertoire. Besides these, the most popular recordings were the Hungarian church hymn about the Blessed Virgin Mary with the incipit “Boldogasszony anyánk” and the Hungarian version of the Geneva Psalm 90 (“Tebenned bízunk elejétől fogva”) which is one of the most important hymns of the Hungarian Reformed Church. The singers usually remained unidentified and we hardly know anything even about the popular ones.

According to the 1910 census, more than half of the population of Budapest declared themselves to be Roman Catholics, nearly 25 % said they were Jewish, 10 % vowed Calvinist and 5 % claimed to be Lutheran.⁶ The statistics of records with

¹ This article is an expanded version of a lecture given at the musicological conference in memoriam László Dobszay, held in 2012 in Budapest at the Institute of Musicology (Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences), organized by the Hungarian Musicological Society. In a shorter version it was published in Hungarian in *Magyar Egyházzene* [Hungarian Church Music] 20/1 (2012–2013), pp. 43–54. I would like to offer my thanks for Dr. Klára Bajnai (record collector, founder of Pécs Sound Archives), Dr. Balázs Mikusi (head of Music Department of the National Széchényi Library) and the Music Department of the Győző Csorba Library (Pécs), for giving me access to the relevant sources. I would also like to thank Christian Zwarg for answering my questions related to discography, Ágnes Papp, László Kósa and András Dávid Pataki for their notes relating to Church Music and History of Hungarian Christianity, and Katalin Avar for her help in the English text.

² Dobszay, László: *A magyar népének I* [Hungarian Church Hymn, Vol. 1] (Veszprém: Veszprémi egyetem [University of Veszprém], 1995).

³ See e.g. Béla Berkes jr. and his gipsy orchestra who had an exclusive contract with Columbia Gramophone Company: *Zenekereskedelmi közlöny* 4 (1914)/1, p. 11.

⁴ For example, the recordings from *Leányvásár* by Viktor Jacobi were made before the premiere of the operetta, see [Anonymous]: “A Leányvásár” [The Marriage Market], *Zenekereskedelmi közlöny* 1/9 (1 November, 1911), p. 11.

⁵ “A keresztfához megyek” (I am going to the Cross) and “Alleluja, alleluja” (Hallelujah, hallelujah). Performed by Lajos Hegedüs. Columbia Records E 3235 (matr. 44789 and 44791).

⁶ Gápar, Zsuzsa (ed.): *Egy közép-európai birodalom. Az Osztrák-*

religious content are in harmony with the census results, except for the significantly higher number of Judaica records.⁷ The early recordings of Christian music are not only church hymns. Besides the several versions of Gounod's *Ave Maria*, soloists recorded other religious songs in the acoustic era. For example, Bernát Ney, a baritone singer of the Royal Hungarian Opera, performed several movements from the Latin mass (**picture 1**).⁸

Before analysing the repertoire and the recordings, I have to mention the fact that most recordings from the beginning of the century containing church hymns belong to what contemporary aesthetics call “arty”, that means they use tools of different forms of art but the result is slushy and serves commercial purposes. Since we have sufficient information about the circumstances under which these recording were made, we have to question their authenticity. Even if the inscription on the label indicates, one should not imagine a church with a gigantic organ and a big choir, whose members are wearing festive garments, but rather a small studio where a harmonium served the accompaniment; the choir was in most cases one person per voice. Frequently, church bells can be heard before the harmonium starts playing the Christmas song and these bells may reappear after the song, or even between verses. These are incompatible with the authentic performance of church hymns described in László Dobszay's textbook *Magyar népének* [Hungarian Church Hymn].⁹ In addition these singers were professional musicians, while Dobszay gives in his book a summary of authentic folk “performance practice” of church hymns.

II. Recordings of Christian church choirs and cantors

Most of the Hungarian religious records are Catholic, as they contain songs about Christmas, Easter and the Virgin Mary. The most significant performers were soloists and church choirs, among them we have to point out the members of the Matthias Church choir (or as the record labels says: “the soloists of the Coronation Church of Matthias”) whose performance was recorded in 1912 by Columbia Records, and we know of several US editions that were sold to Hungarian Americans at that time (**pictures 2 and 3**).

This Columbia series contained four Christmas songs, a Virgin Mary hymn, and, surprisingly, the Lutheran hymn “Erős vár a mi Istenünk” [A Mighty Fortress Is Our God], starting with the text: “Erős város az Úristen” [A mighty town is God]. This last hymn (matr. 67237) was performed by the soloist János Hajdú, the choir joins in only for the last line of the hymn. Although the choir is not mentioned on the label, on the

basis of the matrix numbers we can assert that it is sung by the Matthias Church Choir (**picture 4**).¹⁰

COLUMBIA RECORDS
[orig. Columbia Doubleface label],

1912, Budapest

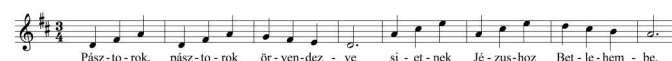
János Hajdú (voice [only in matr. Nr. 67237])
Choir of the Matthias Church, conducted by Zoltán Bibary
With organ accompaniment

Matrix Nr.		Title	Title in English
67231	Columbia, E 1549	Csendes éj	Silent Night
67232	Columbia Doubleface, D 6857	Pásztorok, pásztorok	Shepherds, Shepherds
67233	Columbia Doubleface, D 6857	Mennyből az angyal	Angel from Heaven
67234	Columbia, E 1549	Szűz Mária a világnak	Virgin Mary, Queen of the World
67235	Columbia, E 1550	Krisztus Jézus született	Jesus Christ was Born
67236			
67237	Columbia, E 1550	Erős város az Úristen	A mighty town is God

The well-known song “Pásztorok, pásztorok” [Shepherds, Shepherds] was sung – instead of the even time signature of the well-known version – in a slightly unusual odd time signature ($\frac{3}{4}$) that would surely be strange for modern Hungarian listeners (see examples 1a and 1b).¹¹ Interestingly, the female voices can be heard very well on these recordings, although it was usually male voices that were well recordable.



Example 1a “Pásztorok, pásztorok...”, as it is known today



Example 1b “Pásztorok, pásztorok...”, as it was recorded in 1912 (Columbia Doubleface D 6857, matr. 67232)

Lajos Hegedűs was one of the most important performers of Roman Catholic religious songs as he recorded several songs connected to Christmas, Easter and the Virgin Mary as well. His recordings are witnesses of the Hungarian immigration wave at the beginning of the 20th century: his recordings were made in New York studios, in 1917 and 1918 with Columbia Records (**picture 5**) and later, in 1925, at Victor.¹² These gramophone records were sold in the United States to Hungarian immigrants. Lajos Hegedűs was not only an acknowledged religious music singer, but Hungarian folk-like art songs and humorous scenes can also be heard on his Columbia recordings.¹³

Magyar Monarchia (1867–1918) [A Central European Monarchy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire]. (Budapest: Officina, 2008): p. 164.

7 Several well-known Jewish cantors made recordings in the beginning of the 20th century. Some of the Hungarian recordings have appeared on CD-s: *Jewish Liturgy. Great Hungarian Cantors 1910–1948* (Pannon Archiv PA 6669) and *Hungarian Cantors. Archiv Recordings* (Pannon Archiv PA 6673).

8 “O salutaris hostia” and “Graduale”, Lyrophon 6204 and 6203, the recordings were made in 1905.

9 To sum up briefly: (1) even, only a little nuanced phonation which makes the melody clear, (2) clear articulation of the units of the musical form, (3) vigorous, but continuous enunciation of the text with pliable rhythm, and (4) inserting embellishments into the sung legato. Dobszay, op. cit., p. 12.

10 The choir of the Matthias Church is mentioned on the label of the other side of the disc.

11 Ágnes Papp and Réka Kővári informed me that similar odd-time-signature versions of this song appear on field (phonograph) recordings of authentic folk music.

12 Matrix numbers B-32922, B-32923, B-32924, BVE-33370 and BVE-33371. See the online database of the American Discography Project (ADP).

13 For example, the Hungarian folk-like art songs “Kitették a holttestet az udvarra” (They put the corpse in the courtyard) and “A templomba vasárnap se mentem” (I did not go to church on Sunday), Columbia Records E 3177, matr. 44633 and 44634.

Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10



Picture 11



Picture 12



COLUMBIA RECORDS,
1917, New York
Lajos Hegedüs (voice)

Matrix nr.	Cat. nr.	Title	Title in English
44790	E 3236	Boldogasszony anyánk	Our Blessed Mother [Virgin Mary hymn]
44792	E 3236	Őh életünk reménye	Oh, hope of our life [Virgin Mary hymn]
44789	E 3235	A keresztfához megyek	I go to the Cross
44791	E 3235	Alleluja, alleluja	Hallelujah, Hallelujah
58408	E 3564	Mennyből az angyal	Angel from Heaven
58409	E 3564	Pásztorok, pásztorok	Shepherds, shepherds

COLUMBIA RECORDS,
August or September 1918, New York
Lajos Hegedüs (voice)

Matrix nr.	Cat. nr.	Title	Title in English
84622	E 4140	Salve Regina	Salve Regina
84623	E 4140	Szűz Mária, hazánk reménye	Virgin Mary, the hope of our fatherland

According to current information, Hungarian Lutherans are much less represented on early recordings, with a smaller number of singers and an overall smaller repertoire, for example, Luther's "Erős vár a mi Istenünk" [A Mighty Fortress Is Our God] is performed by either Catholic church choirs or Calvinist cantors. I have not yet come across the notation "Lutheran" or "Evangelical" on record labels. All non-catholic performers and hymns were called either Calvinist or summarized as protestant. It is known that in Hungary there was a plan of creating a Protestant (Evangelical and Reformed) union in the 1840s but despite the great enthusiasm in the beginning and despite the Prussian model from previous years, it never happened.¹⁴ This planned union most certainly had little to do with record labels, but it does refer to the fact that, in Hungary, protestant confessions were still mentioned under one collective name even in the first decades of the 20th century. On the other hand, the fact that Lutheran hymns were so underrepresented on Hungarian records of this time is surprising, because their church music was much variegated than that of Calvinists.¹⁵

Calvinists did not have their own choirs on records, only cantors and their solos were recorded with harmonium accompaniment. János Szomorjay, a Calvinist cantor and teacher, recorded several series of Christmas songs in the first half of the 1910s, one of them with piano accompaniment. These records were so popular that we know of several reissues by different recording companies, which help us to reconstruct the series. Szomorjay's name does not always appear on the labels of the reissues, but the recordings can be identified based on the matrix numbers (pictures 6 and 7).

ODEON,
1911, Budapest
János Szomorjay (voice)

Matrix nr.	Label, cat. nr.	Title	Title in English
He 267-X	Jumbola, 15541 Diadal, D 44	Pásztorok jöjjetek be (= Mennyből az angyal)	Shepherds, come in (= Angel from Heaven)
He 268-X	Jumbola, 15542 Diadal, D 44	Csendes éj	Silent Night

DACAPO RECORD,
1911/1912, Budapest
János Szomorjay (voice)

Matrix nr.	Label, cat. nr.	Title	Title in English
5721	Dacapo Record, 5721 ABC grand record, 5721	Csendes éj	Silent Night
5722	Dacapo Record, 5722 ABC grand record, 5722	Jézus Krisztus született	Jesus Christ Was Born
5723	BeKa Record, 5723 Szabadi Record, 48	Pásztorok, pásztorok	Shepherds, shepherds
5724	BeKa Record, 5724 Szabadi Record, 48	Mennyből az angyal	Angel from Heaven

KALLIOPE (LABEL: METAFON),
1912/1913, Budapest
János Szomorjay (voice)

Cat. nr.	Matrix nr.	Title	Title in English
7522	8990	Mennyből az angyal	Angel from Heaven
	8991	Csendes éj	Silent Night
7523	8992	Jézus Krisztus született	Jesus Christ Was Born
	8993	Pásztorok jöjjetek be (= Pásztorok, pásztorok)	Shepherds, come in (= Shepherds, shepherds)

The titles on the labels are often ambiguous. On the Metafon disc there is a song "Pásztorok, jöjjetek be" [Come in shepherds] which is the well-known version of the above mentioned Christmas song "Pásztorok, pásztorok" [Shepherds, Shepherds], while the "Pásztorok, jöjjetek be" [Come in shepherds] title on Diadal and Jumbola discs is actually the "Mennyből az angyal" [Angel From Heaven] song. On this recording Szomorjay sings the well known song with piano accompaniment, resulting in a unique variation which – because of the *a* instead of *b flat* in the third measure and because of the omission of the repeated third bar – differs from the melody and harmonisation with which the song is sung today:



Example 2a "Mennyből az angyal" as it is known today



Example 2b "Mennyből az angyal" as it was recorded by János Szomorjay
(Jumbola 15541, matr. He 267-X)

The religious records of Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár¹⁶ (First Hungarian Record Company) with Antal Jánossy and Kalmán Feké (both Calvinist cantors) are not Christmas songs but

¹⁴ Kósa, László: *Magyar művelődéstörténet* [Cultural History of Hungary]. (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), pp. 409–410.

¹⁵ Based on a letter from László Kósa, 13 September 2012.

¹⁶ For more information about the Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár [First Hungarian Record Factory] see Marton, Gyula, dr. — Bajnai, Klára, dr.: *Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár – Premier Records*. (Budapest: JOKA, 2008). The discography of the Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár contains further Christmas series where the names of the performers are not mentioned on the labels, only saying "male choir with organ and bells", or the ad hoc "Orchestra of the First Hungarian Record Company". See, for example, the male choir recordings M 2213

rather typical protestant hymns. The reformed cantor and teacher Kálmán Feke had two discs recorded by the First Hungarian Record Company – on Special Record label – but we only have information about them from catalogue data: besides Geneva Psalm 27, there are two Calvinist hymns still used today and a Calvinist funeral hymn. The only biographical data which is known about Kálmán Feke is that in January 1938 he became the cantor and presbyter of the Calvinist congregation of Pestszentimre and the choirmaster (cantor) of the Soroksárpéteri Református Dalárda (Calvinist choir of Soroksárpéteri), founded in 1925.¹⁷

ELSŐ MAGYAR HANGLEMEZGYÁR (SPECIAL LABEL),
after July 1912, Budapest
Kálmán Feke, reformed cantor (voice)

Cat. nr.	Matrix nr.	Title	Title in English
12464	[unknown]	A fájdalom édes nyila	The sweet arrows of pain (funeral hymn)
	[unknown]	Nagy Isten téged imád [menny minden lakója]	God, everybody loves you in the Heaven
12466	[unknown]	Mennyből felséges Isten	God all Mighty
	[unknown]	Az Urísten az én világosságom	God is my Light (Psalm 27)

We hardly have any information about Antal Jánosy as a cantor, although, several of his records have been preserved. Most of his record labels indicate Püspökladány as his workplace; the only exception is one label mentioning the town of Fülöpszállás (matrix nr. 1448, **pictures 11 and 12**). As it became evident during the research he was actually member of the presbytery of Püspökladány in 1914 and in 1916 – in 1915 he was enrolled in the army.¹⁸ His gramophone repertoire included two Geneva Psalms, some Christmas songs, funeral songs, Calvinist hymns and Luther's "Erős várunk az Úristen" [A Mighty Fortress Is Our God].

ELSŐ MAGYAR HANGLEMEZGYÁR,
(date unknown, presumably before July 1912), Budapest
Antal Jánosy, reformed cantor (voice)

Cat. nr.	Matrix nr.	Title	Title in English
1448	1448	Boldog az ember nyilván	Psalm 128
1449	1449	Karácsony est	Christmas Eve
1450	1450	Gyászdal	Funeral song

(Mennyből az angyal [Angel from Heaven]), M 2214 (Pásztorok, pásztörök [Shepherds, shepherds]), M 2215 (Csendes éj [Silent Night]), M 2216 (Oh jöjjetek mind ide kis gyermekek [Oh come all ye little children]), M 2217 (Mennyből jövök most hozzátok [From Heaven I come to you]), M 2218 (Oh te boldogító [O du Selige...]); and the orchestral recordings 9050 (Csöndes éj [Stille Nacht]), 9051 (A boldogság [The Beatitude]), 9052 (A karácsonyfa [O Tannenbaum]), 9053 (A magas mennyekben [Vom Himmel hoch]). M 2217 and M 2218 were re-issued on Phonix, with the catalogue number 2406a and 2406b (see **pictures 8, 9, and 10**).

¹⁷ *Az első 25 év: a Pestszentimrei református egyház története 1916–1941* [The First 25 Years; The History of the Calvinist church of Pestszentimre]. (Budapest: Bethlen Printing House, 1941). Available on the Internet: <http://freeweb.dnet.it/e25ev/tort1641.htm> (checked on 9 January, 2016).

¹⁸ According to Lilla Bihari (Püspökladány) the 1914 and earlier presbytery records are not available and Antal Jánosy's name does not appear in the books after 1917. I have not been able to get any further information about Fülöpszállás.

1451	1451	Nincs már szívem félelmére	Psalm 35
[...]			
1454	1454	Rákóczi imája	The Prayer of [Ferenc] Rákóczi
1455	1455	Erős várunk az Úristen	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

His performance is very convincing. He sings the psalms according to the revision of the reformed hymnal in 1877, that is, he consequently sings the final cadence with *diesis* and uses rhythmisation to a minimal extent.¹⁹

On the recording of Psalm 128 it is clearly audible that he likes to expand high notes. On his record titled *Rákóczi imája* [The Prayer of Ferenc Rákóczi] – which is actually the Calvinist hymn starting with the line "Győzhetetlen én kőszálom" [My invincible Rock], known today as "Rákóczi Ferenc bús éneke" [The Sad Song of Ferenc Rákóczi] – the declamation in his singing is also well audible.

If our presumption is correct, these signs of his singing talent are due to the fact that he may have taken singing lessons at the Hungarian Academy of Music. According to the yearbook of 1893–1894 there was an Antal Jánosy listed as the singing student of the operatic tenor Richard Pauli.²⁰ A year later presumably the same person appears as a scholarship holder of the Royal Hungarian Opera.²¹ If the listings do refer to the same person as the one we hear on the recordings, it cannot be ruled out that the cantor took advantage of the situation that during the recording session he was not in charge of his congregation and demonstrated his potentials as a soloist.

III. Religious songs performed by the Choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera

In December 1911 there were many wonderful recordings among the new releases of the Diadal Record company.²² Since it was just before Christmas, besides Hungarian folk-like art songs (*magyarnóta*), satirical songs, operetta excerpts, military marches and *csárdás* recordings, the company added a few religious pieces to the catalogue. All we know about them is the following quotation of an advertisement in the *Zenekereskedelmi közlöny* [Music business bulletin] "The male choir of the Opera House has recorded an artistic interpretation of Roman Catholic and protestant Christmas songs with organ and church bell accompaniment."²³ Since the catalogue appeared

¹⁹ For a detailed description of the 1877 revision of the 1806 Calvinist Songbook see: Csomasz Tóth, Kálmán: *A református gyülekezeti éneklés* [Calvinist congregational singing] (Budapest: Magyar Református Egyház [Hungarian Reformed Church], 1950), pp. 183–185.

²⁰ Harrach, József, dr. (ed.): *Országos Magyar Királyi Zene-Akadémia Évkönyve, 1893/1894* (The 1893/94 Yearbook of the Royal Hungarian Music Academy) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1894), p. 81.

²¹ He was a scholarship holder of the Hungarian Royal Opera House between 1 September, 1893 and 31 August, 1894, see: *A Magyar Királyi Operaház évkönyve 50 éves fennállása alkalmából* [Yearbook of the Opera House to honor its 50th anniversary] (hereinafter: "Opera Yearbook 1934") (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Operaház [Royal Hungarian Opera], 1934), p. 93.

²² For the Diadal Record Company see: Bajnai, Klára dr. —Simon, Géza Gábor—Borsos, Tibor: *A „Diadal” Hanglemezyár története és diszkográfiája* [The History and Discography of Diadal Record Company] (Budapest: JOKA, 2010).

²³ "Az Operaház férfikara orgona és harangjátékkal kísért karácsonyi, rom[ai] kath[olikus]. és protestáns egyházi énekeket interpretált művésiesen." [Anonymous]: "Új hanglemezekről" [About new records], *Zenekereskedelmi közlöny* 1/10 (1 December, 1911), p. 5.

in December, we assume the recordings were made during the autumn of 1911 (picture 13).

DIADAL RECORD,
Autumn 1911, Budapest
Male Choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera

The Christmas series, according to catalogue numbers:

Cat. nr.	Matr. nr.	Title	Title in English
D 515	53251	Csendes éj	Silent Night
	53249	Oh te boldogító	O du Selige...
D 517	53250	Mennyből az angyalok	Angels from Heaven
	53252	Pásztorok, pásztorok	Shepherds, shepherds
D 519	53253	Jövel oh hívő sereg	Adeste fideles
	53254	Oh jőjjetek mind ide, kis gyermekek	Oh, come ye all, little children
D 521	53255	Boldog asszony anyánk	Our Blessed Mother [Virgin Mary hymn]
	53299	Ím arcunkra borulunk	Here, we all prostrate
D 529	53259	Erős vár a mi Istenünk	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
	53261	Mint a szép hűvös patakra (protestáns)	As the deer pants for streams of water (Psalm 42)
D 531	53260	Aki csak Istenre dögát hagyja	Who leaves all matters to God
	53263	Mennyből jövök most hozzátok	I come from the Heaven to you

The records do not have continuous catalogue numbers: odd numbers between D 515 and D 531 are the religious recordings we know today, while even numbered records (D 516, D 518, D 520, D 522, D 524, D 526, D 528) are Hungarian folk-like art songs and cabaret songs.²⁴ If we follow the logic of the record company it is likely that D 523, D 525 and D 527 are also religious songs and if take a closer look at the order of matrix numbers it is quite evident that there are exactly six numbers (53256, 53257, 53258, 53262, 53264 and 53294) where the content is unknown. These six sides could be the missing three records. It is also striking that the hymn “Ím, arcunkra borulunk” [Here, we all prostrate] was recorded much later as the other part of the series.

The recordings, according to matrix numbers:

Matrix nr.	Cat. nr.	Title	Title in English
53249	D 515	Oh te boldogító	O du Selige...
53250	D 517	Mennyből az angyalok	Angels from Heaven
53251	D 515	Csendes éj	Silent Night
53252	D 517	Pásztorok, pásztorok	Shepherds, shepherds
53253	D 519	Jövel oh hívő sereg	Adeste fideles
53254	D 519	Oh jőjjetek mind ide kis gyermekek	Oh, come ye all, little children
53255	D 521	Boldog asszony anyánk	Our Blessed Mother [Virgin Mary hymn]
...			
53259	D 529	Erős vár a mi Istenünk	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
53260	D 531	Aki csak Istenre dögát hagyja	Who leaves all matters to God
53261	D 529	Mint a szép hűvös patakra	As the deer pants for streams of water (Psalm 42)
...			
53263	D 531	Mennyből jövök most hozzátok	I come from the Heaven to you
...			
[53267–53272]			Recordings of Károly Ferenczy]
[53273–53282]			Cabaret recordings of Aurél Göndör]
[53292–53293]			Recordings of the gypsy orchestra of Béla Berkes]
...			
[53295–53298]			Recordings of the gypsy orchestra of Béla Berkes]
53299	D 521	Ím arcunkra borulunk	Here, we all prostrate

Picture 13



Picture 14



Picture 15



Picture 16



²⁴ The numbering system of Diadal Record Company was unique at the time in Hungary, because they started using the catalogue number connecting the two sides of the disc, as early as the 1910s.

The Gramophone Company released choral recordings for the Christmas market at the same time.²⁵ According to the record labels a vocal ensemble called “Gramophon Quartet” can be heard (**picture 14**). Unfortunately we hardly have any information about them. According to the recording ledgers, which have luckily survived, the recording was made on 17 October 1911, but no performer name has been noted.²⁶ The Christmas offer of the *Zenekereskedelmi Közlöny* includes some information that could help identify the singers. The following advertisement appeared: “The highlight of the new releases is definitely the ten Hungarian Christmas songs, performed by the four greatest members of the Opera House. These sacred songs that were recorded with church organ and bell ringing accompaniment undoubtedly deserve compliment.”²⁷ The “four greatest members of the Opera House” most certainly refer to the members of the male chorus, because we have found some other contemporary gramophone recordings where the opera chorus is referred to as “male quartet”. On the other hand, if they had been soloists of the Opera, the record company would have put their name on the label, at least, for commercial purposes.

THE GRAMOPHONE COMPANY,
17 October, 1911, Budapest
“Gramophon-Quartet”

[Members of the male choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera]

Cat. nr.	Matrix nr.	Title	Title in English
74562	2885ae	Oh te boldogító	O du Selige...
74563	2886ae	Csendes az éj, szent ez az éj	Silent Night
74564	2887ae	Pásztorok, pásztorok örvendezve	Shepherds, shepherds
74565	2888ae	Mennyből az angyal	Angel from Heaven
74566	2889ae	Ah hol vagy magyarok	Oh, where are you, glorious star of Hungary (St. Steven hymn)
74567	2890ae	Oh jöjjetek mind ide kis gyermek	Oh, come ye all, little children
74568	2891ae	Boldogasszony anyánk	Our Blessed Mother [Virgin Mary hymn]
74569	2892ae	Jövel oh hívő sereg	Come, oh, believers
74570	2893ae	Krisztus az én életem (Protestáns zsoltár)	Christ is my life (Protestant hymn)
74571	2894ae	Te benned bízunk elejétől fogva	We believed in you all along

Why the name of the Royal Hungarian Opera has been omitted from the gramophone record label and is not mentioned in the recording ledgers either still needs to be answered. We can only have some presumptions. It is a fact that the Royal Hungarian Opera is mentioned even in those cases where the male choir is represented by merely four people, in other words, a quartet.²⁸ In this case it cannot be ruled out that The Gramo-

phone Company, or the Hungarian Branch of The Gramophone Company wanted to advertise itself by using the name Gramophon Quartett, and it was only a journalist working for the journal *Zenekereskedelmi Közlöny* who was so well informed that he knew the identity of the singers. Another explanation could be that the Diadal Records and The Gramophone Company made a deal according to which – or on the contrary? – The Gramophone Company published the names of the performers only in the *Zenekereskedelmi Közlöny*, and not on the label. This question remains a mystery for the time being.

The religious recordings of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera seem to have been a success, as next year two further series were recorded by Lyrophon and Pathé with the same choir and the same repertoire. From the Lyrophon series we know three discs but only five sides (**picture 15**), because the sixth side of the available copy is a recording of a soloist of the Basilica of St Steven in Budapest (district of Lipótváros), Ms. Leontin Pallády, with the organ accompaniment of Béla Jandl (Lyrophon U. 47091, matr. 47091, “Dicsőség mennyben az Istennek” [Glory to God in Heaven]).²⁹

LYROPHON,
around 1912, Budapest
Male choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera

Cat. nr.	Matrix nr.		
U. 47497	47497	Oh te boldogító	O du Selige...
U. 47498	47498	Mennyből az angyal	Angel from Heaven
U. 47499	47499	Pásztorok, pásztorok	Sheperds, sheperds
[...]			
U. 47501	47501	Tebenned bízunk	We believed in you all along [Psalm 90]
U. 47502	47502	Krisztus az én életem	Christ is my life

As the matrix numbers show, one record side (U 47500) is missing between the recordings of the Opera choir. It is not sure whether the above-mentioned recording of Pallády and Jandl was published on the other side of the disc because the missing matrix number was unpublished, or even the recording went wrong. Another version is that U 47500 was recorded but the existing copy is a reissue of a different coupling.

While the Lyrophon series consisted of Christmas songs and other church hymns, the Pathé series contained only Christmas songs.

PATHÉ,
September 1912, Budapest
Choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera

53801	89333 RA	Oh te boldogító	O du Selige...
53802	88105 RA	Pásztorok, pásztorok	Shepherds, shepherds
53803	88106 RA	Csendes éj	Silent Night
[...]			
53805	88219 RA	Oh jöjjetek mind ide kis gyermek	Oh, come ye all, little children
53806	88108 RA	Jövel oh hívő sereg	Adeste fideles [?]

²⁵ About the activity of The Gramophone Company in Hungary see: Kelly, Alan: *The Gramophone Company Limited. His Master's Voice. The Central European Catalogue 1899 to 1929. A Complete Numerical Catalogue of Central European Gramophone Recordings made from 1899 to 1929 in Prague, Budapest, Bucarest, Sofia, Zagreb and elsewhere by The Gramophone Company Ltd.* (CD-ROM, published by the author, 2000).

²⁶ Kelly, op. cit., “70000 – Central Europe.doc”, p. 122.

²⁷ “[...] a jegyzék clouja kétségkívül az a tíz magyar karácsonyi ének, melyet az operaház legjobb négy tagja énekelt. Ezek a szent énekek, melyek templomi orgona és harangjáték kísérettel vétettek fel, teljes mértékben megérdemlik az elismerést.” [Anonymous]: “Új hanglemezekről” [About new records], *Zenekereskedelmi közlöny* 1/10 (1 December, 1911), p. 4.

²⁸ See, for example, the recording of *Himnusz* [National Anthem of Hungary], made in 1906 by Zonophone (X-104009, matr. 3744L).

²⁹ Ms. Leontin Pallády was a concert singer who performed frequently at the Basilica of St Steven in Budapest, we do not have any biographical data of her. Béla Jandl (1886–1915) was an organist, choir conductor, composer and teacher. After his studies in composing and organ playing at the Music Academy in Budapest he was the organist-cantor and sub-conductor of the Basilica of St Steven and conducted several secular choirs as well. He died during the First World War in Russia. See: Molnár, Imre dr. (ed.): *A magyar muzsika könyve* [Book of the Hungarian Music] (Budapest: Havas Ödön, 1936), p. 46.

These discs are in Hungarian private collections, but I did not have the possibility to listen to them. Furthermore, there are some gramophone recordings of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera that were made by other companies (Favorite, Baby Record, see **picture 16**), but they do not form a series such as the above mentioned ones.³⁰ The date and the complete availability of the Diadal and Gramophone Co. series is the primary reason we are looking into these recordings.

If we try to identify the performers of these recordings, we can only have some presumptions. Some excellent members of the Opera choir were assigned to sing minor solo parts in certain operas as well as to make recordings, that time, for example, József Kalmár,³¹ Lóránt Zolnai,³² Ferenc Juhász,³³ Izsó Budai³⁴ or Ede Halász³⁵ who died in November 1911, a few weeks after the recording sessions. It may well be that these men were members of the so called Gramophon Quartett. As opposed to the Gramophon Quartett which was most certainly made up of only four men, on the recordings of the Diadal series we seem to detect a real choir, a larger number of singers per voice. The conductor's name is missing from the record label. In 1912, the head conductor of the choir of the Opera was Karl Nosedá. He was familiar with the performance of church hymns, as he had a second job at the church of Szervita tér as organist and choirmaster.³⁶

It is sure that both of the recording series were made with professionals, one can easily detect the excellent skills of the singers and the quality of their performance is indisputable. In

the Christmas song starting with the line “Oh jöjjetek mind ide kis gyermekek” [Oh come all little children] there are several very finely executed *portamenti*.³⁷ The text is very clear; easy to understand which is not only due to the precise enunciation but proper breathing also helps articulation.

The outstanding training of the choir is best detectable in the recordings of “Csendes éj” [Silent Night] by both companies. The sound is concise and the tempo is surprisingly brisk. On foreign – non-Hungarian – recordings, *Stille Nacht* is performed much closer to the way we would sing it today. The quicker, livelier version may have been a typical Hungarian diction of those times.

The concise male quartet version of Psalm 90 can be heard in a rhythmic performance, unlike its version which can be found in the revised 1877 Calvinist hymnal. Despite all this, the effect of the typical Calvinist congregation singing can be detected when listening to the hymns. It is possible that the recording of the hymn beginning “Ki csak Istenre dögát hagyja” [Who leaves all matters to God] could have served as an example for contemporary Calvinist worship singing. The organist – perhaps Karl Nosedá? –, after playing a simple opening, gives the first note of the hymn, and, when playing between the verses, arrives again to the starting tone of the next opening line.³⁸

In the case of the religious recordings of the Opera choir, we can ask whether there is any kind of interaction between opera and church hymn performances, but also the other way around. In other words, how well these recordings, made at the beginning of the 20th century, imitate church choir scenes in operas which were on the repertoire of the Opera choir? Unfortunately the question cannot be examined in detail because there is only one relevant gramophone record available: the chorus of the church oath scene from the Hungarian opera *Hunyadi László* by Ferenc Erkel (Odeon ITM, No. 35569, matr. Hx 1551-M). All other recordings related to this topic are known as catalogue data only, for example, a recording of the pilgrim choir from *Tannhäuser*, and the “Church Choir” scene from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, which would be even more important, depicting the end of a worship in the church.³⁹ The recording of the church oath scene from *Hunyadi László* has only one relevant piece of information: the diction has a much livelier rhythm than in later performances, similar to “Csendes éj” [Silent Night] I mentioned above. Since this is the only available evidence that reflects similarity – and we have no further recordings of opera choirs to examine – it is not enough to prove my point.

IV. The function of the early religious recordings in Hungary

What was the function and place of these gramophone records in the cultural and everyday life of Hungarian people at the

30 “Dicsőség mennyben az Istennek” [Glory to God in Heaven] and “Csordapásztorok” [Shepherds of cattle], performed by the male choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera with bells and organ, Favorite Record 1-29640 and 1-29641 (without matrix number). “Krisztus születése” [Nativity of Christ] and “In excelsis Deo”, performed by the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera, Baby Record 959–960 (matr. 8517–8518).

31 József Kalmár (tenor) was born in Keszthely, went to the actor school of Szidi Rákosi, and later became a student of Filipp Forstner at the Conservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Vienna. He was a member of the Magyar Színház [Hungarian Theatre] in Budapest then he worked in the countryside as a tenor soloist, and became member of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera in 1908. Schöpflin, Aladár (ed.): *Magyar színművészeti lexikon. A magyar színjátszás története*. [Hungarian Theatrical Lexicon. The History of the Hungarian Theatre Acting] ([Budapest]: Országos Színészegyesület és Nyugdíjintézete, [1929–1931]), Vol. 2, p. 358. – He appeared as a soloist in the Hungarian premiere of Franz Lehár’s *Hercegisasszony* [Fürstenkind] in the Opera.

32 Lóránt Zolnai (baritone) was a member of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera from 1887 to 1925, see: Opera Yearbook 1934 (fn. 21), p. 99. – He sang a few smaller roles at the Opera as soloist, like Dancaire in *Carmen*, Kilian in *Der Freischütz*, Blind in *Die Fledermaus* etc.). He also made several solo recordings, especially from Slovak (in Hungarian: “Tót”) songs.

33 Ferenc Juhász was a member of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera between 1885 and 1931, see: Opera Yearbook 1934 (fn. 21), p. 97. – He appeared in smaller solo parts, for example, in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* and *Le prophète*.

34 Izsó Budai (baritone) was a member of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera until 1911 then became a soloist of the same institution, see: Opera Yearbook 1934 (fn. 21), p. 89 and p. 96.

35 Ede Halász (baritone) was a member of the choir of the Royal Hungarian Opera, see: Opera Yearbook 1934 (fn. 21), p. 97. The date of his death is not clear. The biographical article in Schöpflin’s theatrical lexicon states that he died on 13 November, 1911, while, according to the *Művészeti Almanach* [Almanach of Arts] of 1912, the date of his death is 26 November, 1911, see: Schöpflin, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 182., and Incze, Henrik dr. (ed.): *Magyar Művészeti Almanach* (Budapest: Incze, [1913]), p. 134.

36 Schöpflin, op. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 376–377.

37 We can hear similar portamentos in the “Tebenned bíztunk elejétől fogva” [We believed in you all along], recorded by The Gramophone Company.

38 I would like to thank Balázs Szabó for calling my attention to the fact that this type of practice appears in printed sources as well.

39 *Tannhäuser*: Favorite Record 1-29561, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*: Favorite Record 1-29594. See: *Favorite hanglemekzkatalógus* [Favorite record catalogue], available in the National Széchényi Library, Kny.C 1.379.

beginning of the 20th century? Why was it important to record these songs and hymns? It is absolutely evident that as the holidays were coming, the record companies wanted to increase the number of records sold. The *Zenekereskedelmi Közlöny* offered the “Ten Hungarian Christmas songs” by The Gramophone Company, which means that the non-Christmas songs were also advertised on the occasion of Christmas. In the case of the choir of the Matthias Church or a famous choirmaster it could have been the intention of the record company to preserve an important performance, but in most cases this assumption cannot be proven.

What was the main aim of the performers with these recordings? Did they try to make a performance as authentic as possible or was it more important to be popular and make saleable gramophone discs, perhaps in the hope that they will be invited again to a recording session? This is especially important when examining the cantors and the way they sing: we cannot dismiss the idea that they normally would sing differently but they wanted to add an “artistic touch” to the recordings. Was the declamation in Antal Jánossy’s performance a typical way of singing during worship or does it reflect his artistic talent? I think that the second explanation is more likely.

And why did people buy these gramophone records, why did they want to listen to them? Was it because of Christmas, to make the holidays brighter? Maybe they wanted to create an illusion, for example, the illusion of past holidays or folkways? The Calvinist teacher János Szomorjay revives excerpts from the Hungarian folk-like Nativity play on his Christmas recordings. He begins his “Mennyből az angyal” [Angel from Heaven] with a greeting: “Áldás legyen e házon és a lakóin!” [Bless this house and all who live here!] He begins another one of his recordings with the welcoming words of the host in a similar Nativity play: “Pásztorok, gyertek be” [Come all ye Shepherds]. The organ introduction imitating bagpipes can also be traced to a folk tradition related to Christmas on the

1912 recording of the Opera choir.⁴⁰ The bell chimes at the beginning of the recordings can be a reference to the Midnight Mass tradition⁴¹ or simply a replacement of the atmosphere of the church. It may be the scenery of a family Christmas, something like the way József Majláth starts his article in the 1903 Christmas edition of the daily newspaper *Budapesti Hírlap*: “There is nothing more beautiful than Christmas, the feast of the children. Their little eyes shining when they hear the bells chime in the room next door! How they stand bewildered by the candlelight, how their eyes full of bliss search for the presents they got from “Christ Child”!⁴²

The church hymn recordings made at the beginning of the 20th century are important documents of the secularized urban life.⁴³ This is what Hungarian citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy most probably listened to as they were getting ready for Christmas, as they were celebrating with family members in their homes hoping to get into a festive mood. And these recordings also demonstrate how the use of this new medium, the gramophone record, spread more and more, not only in the entertainment industry or in everyday life, but also in the intimate holidays of a family.

⁴⁰ For the bagpipe playing in the Christmas folk tradition see, for example, Bálint, Sándor: *Népiünk ünnepei. Az egyházi év néprajza* [Holidays of our Folk. The Folklore of the Church Year]. (Budapest: Szent István-Társulat, 1938), p. 128.

⁴¹ Bálint, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴² Majláth, József gróf: “A karácsonyfa alatt” [At the Christmas Tree], *Budapesti Hírlap* 23/354 (25 December, 1903), p. 5. – The Christmas gift was an elemental part of the urban Christmas holidays; in the number of 13 December, 1903 of the daily newspaper *Budapesti Hírlap* there is two pages full of different advertisements with “sensational Christmas prices”.

⁴³ For the secularization see: Kósa, op. cit., pp. 407–414.