

**ARISTOCRACY, CHARITY AND CONCERT LIFE.  
THE ACTIVITY OF THE WOMEN'S CHARITY ASSOCIATIONS  
IN BUDA AND PEST DURING THE 1850S**

**Lili Veronika B é k é s s y**

Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest

The role of the aristocracy have changed dynamically during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout Europe. Aristocrats preserved their roles as patrons, finding new ways to maintain their position as financial supporters of the culture and social life itself, besides helping poverty in new ways altogether with the wealthier bourgeoisie. The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century meant also the formation of associations and several types of societies. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Habsburg Empire, several types of societies existed, such as cultural societies, scientific, merchant, or the charity societies established by women etc.

In my paper, I investigate the operation of two civil charity societies, which were established by the second wife of Palatine Joseph Habsburg, then 20 years old Archduchess Hermina. The Women's Charity Association of Pest and Buda had the main goal of helping poverty through several types of activities, including musical events. The women's associations took important part in the process of institutionalizing musical life in Pest-Buda, from the charity point of view. So, women's associations were active organizers of the cultural life in an institutionalized form. In my paper, I will provide an insight into the operation of the two associations in the music life of Pest and Buda during only one year, based on the research of my dissertation. The chosen year is 1857, since this was the year of Franz Joseph I and Empress Elisabeth Wittelsbach's first joint visit to Hungary.

The research regarding the music life of Pest-Buda after the revolution of 1848/49 has gained new impetus in the recent years. The picture about the Hungarian capital's music life and its structure became clearer. Before their unification in 1873, the cities of Pest and Buda had separate city councils, and separate administrative system. So, investigating the musical life of Pest-Buda means investigating the musical life of twin cities regarding administration. The two cities had similar musical activities, but the city of Pest had more urban features than of Buda.

But how did Pest-Buda look like in the year of 1857? Hungarian statistician Elek Fényes published his work, *Statistics and Geographical Description of the Austrian Empire* in the same year. Regarding the population of Hungary it was almost 7.8 million this year of complex nationality and religion. More than a hundred thousand people lived in Pest, one of the largest cities at that time in the Habsburg Empire. After the revolution of 1848/49, partly due to the centralization efforts, Pest-Buda became the political, economic, social, industrial, infrastructural and cultural center of Hungary based on the works of the city historians (Vera Bácskai, Károly Vörös). The mixed social and ethnic population also had an increased demand for quality cultural life.

The contemporary audience could find information about everyday public musical events through posters, or the press. Except for the playbill material of the Hungarian (later National) Theater in Pest, an insignificant amount of wall posters and leaflets have survived from the examined era. That is why the press research became so significant. The latest press and archival research has shown that concerts, musical theater performances, dance evenings and musical gatherings took place almost every day in Pest-Buda, but there were also musical excursions, promenade concerts and other musical events. We have now a detailed picture about the everyday musical life, however, it required meticulous work. The work was a day-by-day review of the contemporary press and its comparison with archival materials. At first glance, this long process may seem unnecessary, but it is unavoidable for the appropriate research of the topic.

Although my research had antecedents, we had to examine the 1850s as a practically unprocessed period from a music historical point of view. The basis of my research was therefore the systematic, day-by-day processing of contemporary Hungarian and German-language newspapers. This provided an insight into the topic that was not available in other, less time-consuming ways. The database created on this basis aimed to process the music life in Pest-Buda in 1857, and it still expands. So far, I have managed to collect nearly 5,000 news, advertisements, reports, or critics from the Hungarian and German-language newspapers for this single year, exclusively to the music data of Pest-Buda. I have supplemented these with data from the city council minutes held in the Budapest City Archives.

Regarding civil societies in Pest and Buda, Árpád Tóth historian has important publications. Árpád Tóth published several papers about the activity of the Women's Charity Association in Pest in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also important to highlight the connection between the women's roles and charity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in all layers of society. One of the accepted ways for women to enter public life was work in associations. As Anna Fábri states, the women's society was a special space between feminine private life and masculine public life, a semi-public sphere. The first important period of establishing these societies in Hungary were in the so called Hungarian "reform era", the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the revolutions of 1848/49.

Several women's societies existed in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Habsburg Empire, including Hungary. Unfortunately, the detailed work of their operation can only be broadly reconstructed. The archive documents existing are mainly from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Due to archive documents, not only Pest and Buda, but other cities also had women's charity associations, such as Sopron, Kecskemét, or Pressburg, today Bratislava, too. These associations reflected and dealt with different problems of the local needs, but organizing charity balls and concerts seems to be a general activity of all associations. However, examining the musical activity of the charity women's associations is still new in the Hungarian research. It would be beneficial to see, how these associations functioned

in different cities of the former Habsburg Empire. This paper offers only an insight into two of the associations, and their activity in musical life.

The charity associations of Pest and Buda were founded in 1817 by the second wife of Palatine Joseph Habsburg, then 20 years old Archduchess Hermina. As part of the Habsburg Empire, the role of palatine was still important in the Hungarian Kingdom. The palatine was the king's, or emperor's deputy, which also had a kind of psychological role. During the formation of the two women's associations of Pest and Buda, Archduke Joseph Anton Johann of Austria was the palatine. Later on, in the 1850s, Archduke Albrecht Habsburg took over his role. However, Archduke Albrecht was not as popular as his predecessor, Palatine Joseph, who was a beloved figure of the Habsburg family in Hungary. According to the 19<sup>th</sup> century public opinion, due to Palatine Joseph's historic merits for the development of Hungary during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "reform" era, he was referred to as "the most Hungarian Habsburg". Palatine Joseph's second wife, Archduchess Hermina initiated the formation of the two women's associations of Buda and Pest for helping the poverty in several ways. It was necessary, since after the Napoleonic wars the money devaluated by 40%, so poverty rate increased. Archduchess Hermina thus brought the regulations of "Kleine Gesellschaft adeliger Frauen" from Vienna and based on its regulation, she established the two associations: one in Buda, then in Pest.

These two associations were indeed at the forefront of dealing with the problem of poverty in the twin cities. It was a great novelty initiated by Archduchess Hermina, since the societies took over the former ecclesiastical duties regarding helping poverty to a certain point. Besides, she organized a civil society, right in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, she died almost right after their establishment. After the death of Archduchess Hermina in 1817, the Palatine's third wife, Maria Dorothea took over the main patroness' role of the associations. Among the members of the association, mainly the wealthier and more influential ladies, and women of society were expected, who participated in the operation of the association either as working or supporting/honorary members. The members of the Habsburg family donated thousands of forints to the organization as main patrons almost every year, and the local nobility and wealthy citizens followed their example as much as they could. During the 1850s, the wife of Archduke Albrecht, Archduchess Hildegard took over the role of main patroness of the two associations, who was followed by Elisabeth Wittelsbach later on, after her marriage with Emperor Franz Joseph.

Regarding the incomes and financial possibilities of the two associations, they had different strategies. Historian Katalin Pik states that from the two associations of Pest and Buda, the one in Pest seems to be more organized. This statement is relevant regarding their operation in musical life. They also had different strategies in 1857, when Emperor Franz Joseph I and Empress Elisabeth visited Hungary had their first joint visit to Hungary.

In 1857, Emperor Franz Joseph I and Empress Elisabeth Wittelsbach had their first imperial visit together in the former Hungarian Kingdom. For the festive occasion of their imperial visit, celebrations and performances were held nationwide, compositions were created, as well as several art albums were compiled. The festive events and the compositions themselves had double representative function: they were the symbols of both imperial and national loyalty. The majority of these works celebrated especially the figure of Empress Elisabeth, who visited Hungary for the first time. We can interpret this year as a beginning of the cult of Elisabeth in Hungary. As their patroness, the two Women's Charity Associations of Pest and Buda took part in the organization of the festive events on a different level.

Countess Júlia Forray-Brunszvik was then the head of the Women's Charity Association in Buda. The Buda Association published a small book presumably in honor of the imperial couple's visit, in which the list of former and current members, as well as it preserves a detailed annual budget including donations. According to the content of the publication, the members could hold the following positions: Vorsteherin, Ausschussfrauen, Aushilfsfrauen, Ehrendamen, Beratendes Mitglied, Kassier, Vereins-Anwalt, Aktuar, and Vereins-Arzt. The honorary members' list, namely the Ehrendamen of the Women's Charity Association in Buda headed by Júlia Forray-Brunszvik included several aristocratic women in the 1850s from the families of Andrassy, Batthyány, Brunszvik, Csáky, Chotek, Eszterházy, Festetics, Nádasdy, Orczy, Zichy etc. However, it is still unclear that on what level they were active besides financial donations.

The Pest Association published no book, but organized a festive charity concert in honor of the imperial couple. The president of the Women's Charity Association in Pest at the time of the visit and for almost three decades was Antónia Bohus-Szőgyény. A great activity characterized the Pest Association under her presidency. In 1857 they organized charity balls, e.g. in the National Theater in Pest, in the ballroom of the Lloyd Trading Company and the Hotel Tigris, and they also organized a concert in the National Museum's hall. In honor of the imperial visit in 1857, they organized a charity concert at the National Theater in Pest. The association's secretary, a former army captain Péter Búsbach published reports on their activities in the newspapers regularly, also publishing a list of their supporters.

The playbill of the event informs us only about the performers. The program of the morning concert on May 12 can be reconstructed based on the *Budapesti Hirlap*. The program was composed of successful pieces and opera excerpts from the National Theatre's repertoire. The various performance contained arias, overtures and dance. The first piece that opened the concert was the overture of Ferenc Erkel's *Hunyadi László* played by the theater's orchestra. They performed excerpts from two of Károly Thern's operas, an aria from *Képzelt beteg* [The Patient Imagined], and a choral excerpt from the *Tihany ostroma* [Siege of Tihany] was performed by the choir of the National

Theater. Károly Huber's chamber work *Pesti emlék* [Memoire from Pest] was played by the author and the Lemberg-born Doppler brothers, Franz and Karl on two flutes and a violin. In the second part, Jozefa Ernst-Kaiser and Mihály Fűredi sang a duet from the 4th act of Verdi's *Troubadour*, and then the k.k. Kammervirtuosin, Rosa Kastner performed a solo piece on the piano, who arrived in Pest on April 17. At the end of the charity concert on May 12, two leading members of the National Theatre's dance staff, Emília Aranyvári and Frigyes Campilli took the stage with a double dance called the *Velencei Carnevál* [Carneval in Venice], which was probably the most popular dance of the ballet *A jós* [The Fortune Teller]. The music was composed by Franz Doppler and Adolf Ellenbogen. The artists and the works performed were thus all connected to the National Theatre in Pest, so the presence of the k. k. artist Rosa Kastner is impressive, whose contribution is perhaps less surprising at first sight due to her title. However, the circumstances of her performance and stay in Pest may worth a closer look.

Rosa Kastner is a neglected figure in the literature on virtuosos of the 19th century, but she was a recognized artist among her contemporaries. Eduard Hanslick, and Constantin von Wurzbach, the editor of the *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich* also highlighted her talent. The pianist Rosa Kastner, who was born in 1835 presumably in Vienna, mentions Sigimund Thalberg among his teachers. Based on some recollections, we have the image of a purposeful artist who consciously built his career. Giacomo Meyerbeer remembered the young, 19-year-old pianist in his diaries: she first visited Meyerbeer on August 19, 1854, to invite him to one of her concerts. The composer subsequently wrote a less flattering entry in his diary in 1862. Marie Escudier, Kastner's husband, the editor of *La France musical*, was one of Meyerbeer's biggest critics and believed that the unusually warm welcome by Escudier was more about launching Kastner's career in Germany at that time. Ferenc Liszt's assessment was much more supportive; this also reveals the difference in their working relationship with Escudier and the different nature of the two composers (Meyerbeer and Liszt). Liszt's volume on Chopin was published by Escudier in 1852. Liszt heard Rosa Kastner, Escudier's later wife, for the first time in Prague in 1856, whom he considered an excellent pianist and a pleasant personality, as he writes about in his correspondence with Agnes-Street Klindworth, his English friend.

Based on the period's press material, Kastner's repertoire consisted of virtuoso salon pieces from the 1850s, solo, chamber and concert works by J. S. Bach, Mendelssohn, Weber and Beethoven, as well as compositions by Liszt, Chopin and other piano virtuosos. She toured throughout Europe in the 1850s with this repertoire, including Pest-Buda, where she arrived on April 17, 1857, before the arrival of the imperial couple. The international press spoke positively about the already recognized pianist, so the Pest-Buda press, which basically got its information from *Blätter für Musik* and other Viennese papers, also reported on her with curious anticipation. Kastner had a total of four public

performances in April-May 1857 in Pest-Buda, in the theaters and institutions that were the lively spots of the capital's concert life. Archduchess Hildegard was also present at the April 26 matinee held at the German Theater in Pest. Kastner donated the part of her income of her next concert to the Pest Association patroned by Hildegard at that time, and then, she offered herself as a contributor to the Pest Association's concert in honor of the imperial couple.

On 12 May 1857, at the representative morning concert at the National Theatre in Pest organized by the Women's Charity Association of Pest, Rosa Kastner was featured as a k. k. Kammervirtuosin. Before 1848, less than 10 musicians including Niccoló Paganini, Sigismund Thalberg and Clara Wieck-Schumann had this the prestigious award offered by the emperor. He, Franz Joseph I gave this title to Kastner in May 1857. This, the charity concert on May 12 was her first performance as a k. k. Kammervirtuosin. The event of the Association of Pest won the approval of the empress, contributing HUF 200 to its income. The list of supporters of the concert and the amounts of money donated were published in the *Pesth-Ofner Lokalblatt und Landbote*.

\*\*\*

The paper offered an insight into the activity of these two women's charity associations in the musical life of Pest-Buda during the 1850s supported by the aristocratic families. The investigated women's associations were under the auspices of female members of aristocratic families. The female members of the Habsburg family were practically the guarantors of the operation of the charitable women's association in Buda and Pest, which was at the forefront of dealing with the issue of poverty, since their foundation in the 1810s. So, the role of patronage was converted into new forms, including civil societies. The charity associations of Buda and Pest, which was at the forefront of my paper, dealt with the problem of poverty in the twin cities. The role of women and charity as a job was a widespread known practice throughout Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The discussion about female equality arose, but the women's charity associations did not take the role of equality movements, their most important task was to deal with poverty issues. By organizing charity concerts and balls, the women's charity associations of Pest and Buda formed mainly by aristocrats had an important role in the institutionalization of musical life, as societies forming the everyday and representative musical life.