

„Brevity is the Courtesy of Ballet Poets”

Ballet – Music – Criticism in Vienna and Budapest, with Particular Reference to Eduard Hanslick’s Critiques

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the critical reception of Josef Bayer’s ballets *Die Puppenfee* [The Fairy Doll] and *Sonne und Erde* [Sun and Earth], focusing on their premieres in Vienna and Budapest. In the late 19th century, the German-language press in Budapest delivered scathing reviews of *Die Puppenfee*, drawing parallels with Handel’s contemporary criticisms, which condemned the prevalence of dull works and fairy-tale productions on the stage. Despite these critiques, the ballet was far from dismissed, as *Die Puppenfee* was performed over 800 times in Vienna until 1999. However, music critics, while not entirely ignoring the ballet, remained distant towards the genre. Eduard Hanslick provided a possible explanation for this, asserting that in the reception of musical works—an idea applicable to ballet as well—the aesthetic aspect is merely one factor, and often not the most significant: the success of a work often lies in how it reflects the spirit of the times. The study further explores the contrasting ballet critiques in the Viennese and Budapest press, highlighting the visual-centric nature of Hungarian ballet and the lack of literary-driven, high aesthetic quality librettos that could inspire more sophisticated ballet music.

KEYWORDS

Ballet, Cultural Transfer, Vienna, Budapest, Eduard Hanslick

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INTRODUCTION

In the late third quarter of the 19th century, in 1888, a German-language newspaper in Budapest published devastating remarks about the premiere of Josef Bayer's ballet *Die Puppenfee*. According to the reviewer, more than 130 years ago, Händel already launched a sharp attack on pantomime performances presented with great pomp and consuming astronomical costs on court stages. Then came Gluck, “who regenerated the music of opera,” and since then, compositions have abounded. However, the present was a throwback to conditions before Händel: dull pieces and fairy tales dominated the stage. This had to be acknowledged, as the stage was not the moral compass of the people, but rather a forum for works that appealed to the most primitive senses, grounded in meaningless fantasizing.¹

However, the critic from *Politisches Volksblatt* was mistaken, as after the Vienna premiere of *Die Puppenfee*, the ballet was performed more than 800 times at the Court Opera (Wiener Hofoper) and its successor institution until 1999. Nevertheless, music critics, while not outright ignoring, often kept their distance from it. Eduard Hanslick offers a possible explanation for this. In his work *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, he references the reception of a musical work—extending the concept to ballet—where the aesthetic aspect is merely one factor, and not necessarily the most important: “The stage signifies the life of the *drama*; the struggle for ownership of the stage signifies the struggle for *drama's existence*. In that struggle, a lesser work quite often prevails over its better ancestors if it provides us with the air of the present, the heartbeat of *our* sentiments and desires.”²

Below, we aim to compare the music criticism of Vienna's daily newspapers, primarily the *Neue Freie Presse*,³ with the ballet music critiques of Hungarian and German-language dailies in Budapest, focusing on Josef Bayer's two works, *Die Puppenfee*, and *Sonne und Erde*.

The Hungarian premiere of the two pieces was the result of cultural transfer between Vienna and Budapest. In the absence of original Hungarian works, the repertoire of the Court Ballet served as a benchmark. Pieces successfully performed there sooner or later also appeared in the Budapest Opera House. Before Jenő Sztojanovits' *Csárdás* (1890),⁴ Hungarian ballet was primarily regarded as a spectacle genre, lacking deeper meaning and consisting, at most, of a series of loosely woven plots. However, the staging and presentation of the pieces were typically very impressive and eye-catching. The heightened visuality and the lack of plot did not have a stimulating effect on writers, who did not feel compelled to write librettos that met literary demands and high aesthetic standards, which could have inspired composers to write sophisticated ballet music.

¹Dr. D.: Die Puppenfee. = Politisches Volksblatt, 14 December 1888.

²Eduard Hanslick's *On The Musically Beautiful. A New Translation*. Lee Rothfarb and Christoph Landerer. New York: Oxford University Press 2018, p. 58.

Original: „Die Bühne bedeutet das Leben des Dramas, der Kampf um ihren Besitz den Kampf um sein Dasein. In diesem Kampf siegt gar häufig ein geringeres Kunstwerk über seine besseren Vorfahren, wenn dasselbe den Atem der Gegenwart, den Pulsschlag unseres Empfindens und Begehrens uns entgegenbringt.” Eduard Hanslick: *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst. 13.-15. Auflage. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1922, p. 84.

³Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904) was the music critic of Vienna's leading political daily from 1864 to 1901.

⁴Sztojanovits Jenő (1864–1919) was a Hungarian composer, music teacher, and conductor.



EDUARD HANSLICK'S ADMONITION TO DELIBES

The problem of libretti was recognized before Hanslick,⁵ who addressed it in the context of opera. During his stay in Paris in the 1870s, he observed that finding a worthy successor to Auber among the young representatives of contemporary French comic opera was difficult. Bizet, Massenet, and Massé were „charming little talents, stage-savvy musicians, often more thorough and conscientious than their famous predecessors,” but they could not match him for originality and creative talent. Since the comic opera genre was unable to innovate, it appeared dull. In his opinion, the most talented member of the younger generation was Léo Delibes, whose *Le roi l'a dit* [The King Has Spoken] brought color to comic opera, which had now faded for the third time in Vienna. His merits included a rich melodic range and his „musical health.” However, his successful initiative was not followed by others. The reviewer attributed this to the lack of good libretti, an unusual phenomenon in French opera life, where a talented composer in Paris could always find a suitable libretto. However, the supply was now faltering, as librettists tended to favor the musical farce, popular in smaller theatres. This shortage of libretti, which was hopefully only a temporary situation, prompted Delibes to compose ballets. In his home country, *Coppélia* was regarded by many as a „minor masterpiece” (‘un petit chef-d'oeuvre’), whose music was so captivating that even opponents of the ballet genre attended its performances. To Delibes' credit, St. Léon⁶ was „not only a witty choreographer” but also a musician. In *Coppélia*, music and stage events are inextricably linked, the ballet has a pleasant melodic quality, a cohesive whole, and a thorough and subtle orchestration. It was a great success in Paris, an opera was presented before it. The third act, loosely connected to the preceding events, was omitted from the performance.⁷

When an act and a half of another of Delibes's ballets, *Sylvia*, had already been completed, he was delighted to show it to Hanslick. Like *Coppélia*, the critic was struck by the work's “lightly flowing, charming, and always dramaturgically distinctive” music, but urged the composer not to write any more ballets, as he would “rather devote so much talent and diligence” to a comic opera.⁸

Hanslick was also aware, however, that while the value of the works could be debated, there was no doubt that theatre management was under great pressure from audiences, who were constantly demanding new works and needed to be satisfied. He recounted a previously unthinkable case in Vienna that had occurred: the Hofopertheater had presented three new works in ten days, all of them impeccable, including *Coppélia*.⁹

⁵The most recent research on Hanslick is summarised in Alexander Wilfing, *Re-Reading Hanslick's Aesthetics: The Reception of Eduard Hanslick in the English-speaking World and its Discursive Foundations*, Vienna: Hollitzer, 2019, mainly pp. 83–115 (= *Wiener Veröffentlichungen zur Musikwissenschaft*, 49).

⁶Born in Paris, Arthur Saint-Léon (1821–1870) was one of the most famous dancers of his time. He toured throughout Europe, most often with his wife, Fanny Cerrito at his side. As a choreographer and ballet master, he visited London, Paris, and St Petersburg, among other cities.

⁷Eduard Hanslick: *Ballets by Leo Délibes (Coppelia, Sylvia, La source)*, in: E. Hanslick: *Musikalische Stationen der Modernen Oper*, II. Theil. Berlin: Hofmann & Comp., 1880, pp. 96–105. Among Hanslick's considerable amount of music criticism, also available in book form, is this one essay on a ballet. In the *Neue Freie Presse*, however, he mostly commented, albeit briefly, on all the current premieres.

⁸Ed. H. *Musikalische Briefe aus Paris*. IV. (Pariser Componisten. – Léon Délibes. – Ambroise Thomas. – Gounod. – Lecocq. – Offenbach.) = *Neue Freie Presse*, 19 May 1875, No. 3853, pp. 1–3.

⁹Ed. H.: *Hofopertheater*. (“Das goldene Kreuz.” – “Coppelia.”) = *Neue Freie Presse*, 6 October 1876, no. 4352, pp. 1–3.



Following the premiere of the new ballet, he stated that Saint-Léon had created impressive dances based on the plot, while Delibes had composed “elegant and characteristic ballet music.” The composer was no stranger to Viennese audiences, and his opera *The King Has Spoken*, “one of the best new works of its genre,” had already been performed in the imperial city,¹⁰ most recently at the Komische Oper. By that time, three of his ballets had been staged at the Grand Opera in Paris, “with music that has captivated and enthralled connoisseurs and laymen alike.”

In Germany, by contrast, it was almost inconceivable to find prominent writers and composers working for ballet, as they preferred instead to write for prose theatre and opera. It was different in Paris; for example, Theophil Gautier wrote six ballet librettos for the Grand Opera, and composers such as Auber, Halévy, Herold, and Adam were happy to write ballet music. German composers were „stingy in their thinking,” which was why they had no good libretti or ballet music. There was no doubt that a ballet composer had to adapt to countless conditions, dictated mainly by ballet technique, and had to take the ideas of the ballet master into account more than a librettist had to do with the composer of an opera. Even in the case of success, the recognition was more pale, since only half the credit for a good ballet score was his. Hertel’s melodic music was the basis for the success of *Satanella*,¹¹ but this was rather an exception, as in Germany and Italy the music of the ballet had become a minor factor.

Paradoxically, however, according to Hanslick, “the role of music in ballet is more important and rewarding than in opera.” Its importance lay in the fact that it was music that gave meaning to the silent act and brought it to life, and its gratitude lay in the fact that the composer did not have to be subject to prosodic and tonal constraints, was free to create, and did not have to fear any misunderstanding. The music of *Coppélia* was a double success, for in addition to its melodic quality, it was not lacking in dramatic colour, its rhythm was „delicately and precisely” matched to the rhythm of the dance, and the instruments precisely conveyed what the dancer’s mimicry could not. He emphasised the “mysteriously whispering” motif of the violins when the shy girl entered the workshop, and the dance of the dolls in the second act, which was a great representation of the automaton structures.

From a purely musical point of view, the orchestral variations in the first act (based on a Polish song) were rare in ballet and could stand on their own. The ingredients for a resounding success were an attractive plot, great dancing, pleasant music, a scenic set, and great soloists.

DIE PUPPENFEE¹²

More than a decade later, the *Coppélia* theme recurred in the one-act “pantomime divertissement” *Die Puppenfee*, with a libretto by Joseph Haßreiter and Franz Xaver Gaul,¹³ choreography

¹⁰The following works by Delibes were performed at the Court Opera: *Sylvia* ou *La nymphe de Diane*, *Coppélia* ou *La Fille aux yeux d’email*, *Jean de Nivelle*, *Le Roi l’a dit*, *Lakmé*, *La Source*, See <https://www.mdw.ac.at/imi/operapolitics/spielplan-wiener-oper/web/person/571> [last download: 26.11.2024]

¹¹Authors: Paul Taglioni - Cesare Pugni - Paul Ludwig Hertel. Soon after its premiere in Berlin in 1852, it was also performed in Vienna, making its debut at the Kärntnertortheater on 11 January 1853.

¹²Libretto: https://libretti.digital-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00058753_00001.html?prox=true&phone=true&ngram=true&fulltext=puppenfee&mode=simple&context=puppenfee [last download: 18.01.2025] You can easily access the work on Youtube or on audio.

¹³Franz Gaul (1837–1906) was an Austrian painter and costume designer, worked for the Vienna Court Theatres from 1868. Joseph Haßreiter / Josef Hassreiter (1845–1940) was a dancer, ballet master, and choreographer.



by Haßbreiter and music by Josef Bayer.¹⁴ The work was first performed in April 1888 at a charity event¹⁵ under the patronage of Princess Pauline Metternich¹⁶ entitled *Im Puppenladen* at the palace of Prince Johannes Liechtenstein.¹⁷ The play was performed exclusively by aristocrats during the evening. Like the *Wiener Walzer*,¹⁸ it was first performed by Viennese art-loving lords, the idea for the text having been given by Princess Metternich Pasqualine (Pauline). From there, the ballet was transferred to the Court Opera,¹⁹ where its premiere took place on 4 October 1888. Two months later, following its success, it was staged in the Budapest Opera House under the musical direction of Gustav Mahler.

The plot of the ballet is set in a toy shop. The shop owner and his assistants are busy working with the dolls, while customers, including a family from the countryside, arrive to treat their daughter to a doll. They examine several toys, including a sensational talking doll that can say the words “daddy” and “mummy.” Unlike her parents, the child likes the toy. Soon, an English family with many children arrives, and although they are treated to a dance performed by all the dolls, they are not satisfied with the figures on display, which are dressed in the costumes representing various nations. As they prepare to leave, the shop owner brings out his most treasured possession: the fairy doll. After some haggling, the prized item goes to the English gentleman’s family instead of the country father. But the story does not end there. At midnight, after the shop closes, the dolls come to life at the beckoning of the fairy doll and perform a spectacular dance. The lively performance is abruptly ended by the shop owner, who gets up in the middle of the night and goes down to the shop to check that everything is in order. When the clock strikes one in the morning, the play concludes.

In Vienna, the daily press reported a great success of the sold-out show. The audience was entertained, the exposition of the piece was pleasing, the dancers performed at their best, and they were rightly confident of a lasting success.²⁰ The ballet’s choice of theme, execution, music, lighting, dancing, sets, and costumes were all superb, guaranteeing a resounding success, not least financially, according to another paper.²¹

¹⁴Josef Bayer (1852–1913) studied at the Vienna Conservatory under Josef Hellmesberger senior, Anton Bruckner, and Otto Dessoff. He began his career as a second violinist at the Court Opera before serving as a ballet conductor there for thirty years. During this time, he composed numerous operettas, one-act ballets, dance scenes, and other works. Bayer consistently wrote authentic Viennese music, which earned him the enduring appreciation of the Viennese public. His most successful pieces were composed early in his career, such as *Wiener Walzer* (1885) and *Die Puppenfee* (1888). The latter became not only the most successful ballet production of its time in Vienna but was also staged in over a hundred theatres across Europe. = A Zene [The Music] 1913, pp. 95–96.

¹⁵In 1867, in Paris, the princess herself took part in a ballet in a toy shop as part of a charity evening, hence the idea.

¹⁶Pauline Princess Metternich-Sándor (1836–1921). See: Theophila Wassilko: Princess Pauline Metternich, Vienna 1958, pp. 179, 191–192. The original libretto was also the result of her literary and theatrical ambitions.

¹⁷The palace was built in several phases between 1691 and 1711. Johann II Liechtenstein (1840–1929) was head of the family at the end of the 19th century.

¹⁸Hedvig Ujvári: The Viennese Waltz: Reception and Social Historical Context in Vienna and Budapest. *Tánc és Nevelés / Dance and Education* 4: 1(2023), 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.46819/TN.4.1.55-68> [last download: 26.11.2024]

¹⁹b.: A „bábatündér.” — Az operaház ballet-ujdonsága. [The Fairy Doll. The ballet novelty of the Opera House.] *Fővárosi Lapok*, 14 December 1888, pp. 2533–2534.

²⁰Neue Freie Presse, No. 8662, 5 October 1888, p. 6.

²¹Wiener Presse, Vol. 7, No. 37, 8 October 1888, p. 3.



The reception of the ballet mirrored the success of Bayer's earlier work, *Wiener Walzer*. While the earlier piece was perhaps more original and dramaturgically inspiring—and not least much more lively—the new ballet was more eye-catching, dazzling with the finest marvels of mechanics and scenery. The setting of the huge toy shop was a paradise for children, filled with countless dolls, toy soldiers, myrtle-covered brides, and board games, where everything was in motion, and the figures danced to Bayer's light, lively, and fresh music.²² The key to the ballet's success was its ability to transport the audience, allowing them to recapture their youth, if only for an hour.²³

The article in Vienna's leading daily newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse*, provided revealing insights into both the piece and the genre of ballet. Eduard Hanslick devoted a large spread to the opera *Alessandro Stradella* and the accompanying production of *Die Puppenfee*, which was staged alongside it. The review began on the front page of the newspaper and spanned eight columns across three pages.

The proportions alone are telling: while Flotow's earlier production in Vienna occupied seven columns devoted to the opera's plot and fresh impressions, Hanslick dedicated just one column to the ballet. After presenting the obligatory basic information, he briefly commented on the ballet's audience success. He considered the basic concept of the dance play—a fairy bringing the figures in a doll shop to life—a good one. The idea was executed in a way that was both enjoyable and, fortunately, not overly lengthy, because, as Hanslick remarked, “to us laymen, brevity is courtesy of ballet poets.”

He compared the new work to Adam's *La poupée de Nuremberg* [The Nuremberg Doll] and Delibes's *Coppélia*, describing it as a „multiplication” of these earlier works, likening its relationship to them as that of „a multi-voiced chorus to the modest solo.” The staging of the piece was excellent, with charming surprises woven throughout, providing entertainment from beginning to end. The ballet dancers' performances were impeccable.

Hanslick praised the contributions of Gaul and Haßreiter, along with Bayer's music, which he described as “skilfully and vividly, at times almost dramatically witty,” perfectly complementing the events on stage. However, he remarked that the score lacked significant originality, nothing that the waltz in the overture—later reprised with the fairy's appearance—seemed familiar to him. “Then, I believe, from Strauss,” he speculated.²⁴

After the success in Vienna, preparations for the Budapest production began immediately. In November, director Kálmán Alszegehy and painter Gyula Hirsch travelled to Vienna to see the piece, as they planned to stage it at the Opera House in Pest in December.²⁵ Haßreiter undertook the task of staging the ballet.²⁶ Confident of success in Budapest, he noted that audiences there

²²W. Fr.: Hofoperntheater [Court Opera Theatre]. = Neues Wiener Tagblatt, Vol. 22, No. 276, 5 October 1888, p. 7. The decoration, the choreography, the staging, and the originality of the music, as well as the performance of the dancers, are praised by other Viennese newspapers. See p.: K. k. Hofoperntheater. = Wiener Abendpost – Beilage [supplement] to the Wiener Zeitung, No 230, 5 October 1888, p. 1.

²³Die Presse reported on the success with a short news item on 5 October following the premiere, and two days later provided a more detailed account of the evening. See Max Kalbeck: Oper und Ballet (“Alessandro Stradella.” - “Die Puppenfee.”) = Die Presse, Vol. 41, No. 277, 6 October 1888, p. 1–2.

²⁴Ed. H.: Hofoperntheater. Neue Freie Presse, No. 8663, 6 October 1888, pp. 1–3.

²⁵Im kön. Opernhause = Pester Lloyd, 16 November 1888, Beilage [supplement].

²⁶Budapester Tagblatt, 21 November 1888, p. 6.



were already familiar with longer and shorter pieces as *Excelsior*, *Sylvia*, *Coppélia*, *Renaissance*, and *Rococo*.²⁷ He conducted the final rehearsals and attended the premiere.²⁸

Cesare Smeraldi²⁹ supervised the rehearsals under Haßreiter's instructions, with costumes crafted by Peter Caffi and sets designed by the opera painters Spannraft and Hirsch.³⁰ At the time, Smeraldi had already announced his intention to leave,³¹ and the vacant ballet master's position was subsequently filled by Lajos Mazzantini,³² former principal dancer at the Court Opera. Mazzantini made his debut on 3 January 1889, performing as Polichinelle in *Die Puppenfee*.³³ He achieved success in the leading role, showcasing his airy dancing and extraordinary leaping technique.³⁴

The press coverage of the launch in Budapest was also positive. With three "thoroughbred Viennese" authors, "it is quite natural that there is something of a specific »weanerisch«, a Viennese »humour«, which combines the iron comedy of Hanswurst and bajazzo with the wit of a sharp-tongued hired hand."³⁵ Although the music of *Die Puppenfee* cannot stand comparison with Delibes's *Coppélia*, with which it „cannot even be a maid,”³⁶ its libretto „in splendour, brilliance, spectacle,” „vastly surpasses its simple, so to speak, rustic effects.” Bayer, the composer, was criticised for „having nothing of Delibes's charm, grace or originality,” while Haßreiter and Gaul „already triumphantly stand up to the competition—in both pomp and absurdity.” The ballet was a great success, particularly among children.³⁷

According to the *Budapester Tagblatt*, the Opera House hosted a succession of performances, though the quality was not always consistent. *Die Puppenfee* was hailed as a remarkable novelty, where the idea and the music were in harmony. While the basic concept bore a notable resemblance to *Coppélia*, it retained its originality, and the charming scenes in the doll's shop captivated children of all ages.

The true magic in the doll's shop unfolded after closing time. When the clock stroke midnight, the doll fairy began to dance a waltz, the lights illuminated at her beckoning, and

²⁷Pester Lloyd, 21 November 1888, Beilage [supplement].

²⁸Pesti Napló, 13 December 1888, p. 3; Pester Lloyd, 13 December 1888, p. 1.

²⁹Cesare Smeraldi (1845–1924) joined the Royal Hungarian Opera House in 1886, as both a dancer and ballet master working alongside Frederico Campilli (1820–1889). His arrival was met with enthusiastic commentary in the newspapers of the time. One of his first assignments was the production of *Excelsior*.

³⁰Fővárosi Lapok, 13 December 1888, p. 2523.

³¹Pesti Napló, 1 December 1888, p. 3.

³²Lajos Mazzantini (1857, Rome – 1921, Budapest) was a dancer, choreographer, and ballet master. From 1876, he was a solo dancer at the Vienna Court Opera for a decade, before coming to Budapest for a few months. He then returned to the Budapest Opera House as choreographer and ballet master from 1889 to 1894. During his time in Budapest, he created eight original ballets, two of which he also wrote the librettos for. From 1906 to 1908, he served as ballet master at the Népszínház-Vígopera, and the Víg Theatre.

³³Fővárosi Lapok, 4 January 1889, p. 15; Pesti Hírlap, 3 January 1889, p. 5. See also Die Direktion des königlichen Opernhauses. = Pester Lloyd, 3 January 1889, Beilage [supplement].

³⁴A. B.: Königlich Opernhaus. = Pester Lloyd, 4 January 1889, 1. Beilage [1. supplement].

³⁵N. N.: Operaszínház. = Pesti Napló, 14 December 1888, pp. 2–3.

³⁶Not everyone shared this view. More than a century later, a Viennese theatre production featuring Bayer's music was described as "Delibesque, catchily melodic and rhythmic." See István Hézső. = Táncművészet, 1999, no. 1, pp. 26–27.

³⁷Pesti Napló, 14 December 1888, pp. 2–3.



all the dolls came to life, joining in the dance. This simple yet enchanting 'plot' was beautifully complemented by the unpretentious but delightful music.

The ballet was preceded by Verdi's *Rigoletto*, an ill-advised pairing that would have been more appropriately matched with a light opera.³⁸

In *Pester Lloyd*, Ágost Beer explained that the ballet in Budapest had gained from *Die Puppenfee*, this "lovable, ornately designed little thing that dazzled young and old alike." However, he refrained from attributing originality to it, instead subtly noting that Bayer had selected the finest Viennese melodies for the music.³⁹

In *Neues Pester Journal*, Viktor Herzfeld⁴⁰ made a similar assessment. He pointed out that the long-established practice in music of orchestral arrangements of solo pieces or choral performances of monophonic songs had been successfully introduced to dance with *Die Puppenfee*. The basic idea was not new, as the charming, slightly awkward movement of puppets had been performed by real people before, the best example being *Coppélia*. What was new, however, was the mobilization of an entire toy shop's supply of puppets, rather than just one or a few. This innovation was entirely to the credit of the creators, the Haßreiter-Gaul duo, who had created a "real masterpiece" with this one-act ballet. Although the plot was simple, the ballet was rich in humorous scenes, the arrangement of the dances and groupings was extremely tasteful, and the costumes and sets were eye-catching. Bayer's accompanying music, while not the most original, was skilfully and tastefully composed. With the help of Haßreiter, the dance production was of high quality. There was no doubt that the Budapest premiere had been a wise decision on the part of the Opera House.⁴¹

The *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* provided an interesting positioning of the piece both in Bayer's oeuvre and in classical ballet literature. While there was no doubt that it was original and entertaining in some parts, overall it was nothing extraordinary and hardly up to the composer's earlier work, the *Wiener Walzer*. Despite bearing some similarities to *Coppélia*, Bayer's piece was more entertaining and varied, and its exposition was highly spectacular. Bayer's music also deserved praise: it was well composed and skilfully orchestrated, "with every beat echoing that of a routine ballet conductor."⁴²

Although *Die Puppenfee* was a great success after its premiere in Hungary, in the spring of 1889, the newspapers reported that it would be taken off the programme, to be replaced by the one-act ballet *Új Rómeó* [New Romeo], written by Jenő Sztojanovits and Lajos Steiger.

³⁸N. N.: Die Puppenfee. Ballet in einem Akt. = Budapesti Tagblatt, 14 December 1888, pp. 5–6. Comedy operas were subsequently associated with *Die Puppenfee*. In contrast, during more serious plays, children have often "chatted and laughed even during the most dramatic scenes." (b.): A babatündér. — Az operaház ballet-ujdonsága. [Die Puppenfee. The ballet novelty of the Opera House]. = Fővárosi Lapok, 14 December 1888, pp. 2533–2534. However, even in January, it was shown together with *Rigoletto*. = Pesti Hírlap, 18 January 1889, p. 6.

³⁹A. B.: Königliches Opernhaus. = Pester Lloyd, 14 December 1888, Beilage [supplement]. After a week and a half, he noted that the ballet was becoming increasingly attractive. = Pester Lloyd, 24 December 1888, p. 3.

⁴⁰Viktor Herzfeld (1856–1919) was a composer, violinist, conductor, and teacher at the Academy of Music in Budapest. He also performed as a member of the Hubay-Popper String Quartet and served as the music critic for the *Neues Pester Journal* from 1888 to 1890.

⁴¹Id. [Herzfeld]: Königliche Oper. = Neues Pester Journal, 14 December 1888.

⁴²Kön. ung. Opernhaus = Neues Politisches Volksblatt, 14 December 1888, pp. 6–7.



However, nothing and no one could stop *Die Puppenfee*. After its premiere on 13 December 1888, it remained on stage without interruption until January 1923.⁴³

SONNE UND ERDE

A year after the premiere of *Die Puppenfee* in Budapest, at the end of 1889, another Bayer ballet was staged almost simultaneously in Vienna and Budapest: a dance potpourri of four scenes entitled *Sonne und Erde*. The piece was once again directed by the successful trio (with choreography by Mazzantini after Haßreiter).

The four scenes represent the four seasons, each corresponding to one of the sun's positions, and showcasing the most characteristic seasonal pleasures. An introductory allegory, glorifying the Sun, ties the piece together, illustrating how the Earth is transformed by the Sun's different influences. The first rays of the sunlight greet spring, summer ripens the fruit, which is then harvested by autumn, and finally, winter descends like a white shroud. Each stage in the cycle is brought to life through dance.

Spring begins with a cheerful May Day celebration in a forest. Children play, young girls admire themselves in the mirror of the lake, while a young poet, inspired by the beauty of spring, delights them with his new poems. Dressed in a green coat, white vest, and pink trousers, he is mistaken for a bug by a nature enthusiast, who throws his butterfly net over the poet's head. The awakening of nature is depicted through group and paired dances, lively, pulsating waltzes and polkas, with young ballerinas in light, airy dresses. The audience responded with great applause.

The second scene evokes summer, with sea bathing as a refuge from the heat. The transformed set, now a sea bath, features a multitude of guests in bathing suits—ladies and gentlemen alike. Children play joyfully, while boys row boats. In front of a restaurant, foreign tourists pass the time, and orderlies pace up and down. Comic figures and Spanish gypsies add to the lively, colourful, and bustling atmosphere of this vibrant tableau.

The transition into autumn, celebrating grapes and wine, is marked by a spirited Lanner waltz. On stage, a harvest festival and fox hunting unfold, with must being carried around and harvesters dancing. However, as rain begins to fall, the autumn festival comes to an end, signaling the dying of nature.

The final scene is the most poetic, depicting winter and Christmas. The bell tolls for midnight mass, and the villagers gather in the small chapel surrounded by a pine forest to the sound of the organ. At the back of the stage, a grand Christmas tree stands in the moonlit winter landscape, encircled by forest fairies and smaller Christmas trees that light up all at once. Music reminiscent of *Die Puppenfee* waltz fills the air as snow begins to fall.⁴⁴ The ballet—and the annual cycle—ends with the entrance of Prince Carnival.

Vienna's leading newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse*, briefly stated that the one-act ballet had fully met the audience's preliminary expectations. The piece was highly spectacular, full of hilarious and comic scenes, delightful, lively dances. Bayer's music was pleasing and melodic. A lasting success was assured.⁴⁵ After the premiere, Eduard Hanslick, in an unusual move for

⁴³It was subsequently renovated in 1932 and was on display until Christmas 1949. It was then restaged in April 1957 and remained on stage until May 1959. See <https://digitar.opera.hu/>.

⁴⁴Detailed description: Fővárosi Lapok, 22 December 1889, p. 2609.

⁴⁵N. N.: Hofopertheater. = Neue Freie Presse, 20 November 1889, p. 5.



him, devoted an entire feuilleton to the ballet novelty, which in itself was significant and attention-grabbing.⁴⁶

The choice of subject was eternal, as the cycle of the seasons had inspired countless works of art and could serve as a rich, pure source of inspiration for “dance poets,” provided it was combined with a keen eye, imagination, and humour. The title of the ballet might have been better suited as “The Four Seasons” rather than the rigid “Sun and Earth.”⁴⁷ The piece consisted of a succession of varied scenes, yet their staging lacked consistency. According to the reviewer, Spring was somewhat lacking, with neither the sentimental thread nor the comic line truly taking off. The characters chosen for the scene—the precise naturalist and the sensitive girl—came across as trite rather than original. In comparison, Summer was much more impressive, with its choice of setting, characters, colourful costumes, and passionate dancing. The Winter scene was described as the most beautiful ballet scene Hanslick had ever witnessed. The spectacle of the Christmas trees lighting up all at once was, in itself, a miracle, “and also the most striking triumph of electric lighting.” Although modern lighting techniques had made it nearly impossible to avert one’s gaze, the impact of the Christmas scene was almost indescribable.

However, he did not consider it fortunate that the allegory running through the entire divertissement appeared, if only for a few seconds, before each image, with almost unchanged content, and the preparations took long minutes each time. Apart from this, the success was overshadowed by the audience’s heightened anticipation and expectations. After the *Wiener Walzer* and *Die Puppenfee*, they had expected an even more bombastic piece but were disappointed. The first piece was described as a “national genre painting” with a unique sense of humour, its music classical, drawing on the dance music of the best (Schubert, Lanner, the two Johann Strausses), while *Die Puppenfee* was called “the most charming little creation of the fantastic-comic dance movement,” with music that was “light, sometimes subtly characterful and, most importantly, never boring.” The new piece did not even come close to this musicality, and comparisons with the two previous works revealed that it was less consistently central, lacked originality as a whole, offered few new details, and was less entertaining. Bayer’s experience as a ballet composer was not in doubt, but his ingenuity seemed to have failed him. This was particularly evident in the aforementioned connecting sections, whose shortening would have greatly benefited the divertissement.

In the remainder of the feuilleton, Hanslick examined the development of the ballet genre, its significance, and its role in shaping the ideal structure of opera. Smaller ballets, such as Bayer’s three pieces, could play an important role in keeping older, somewhat outdated operas alive. These dance potpourries, which trace their origins back to pantomime, tended to predominate over the grand romantic ballets, a shift that Hanslick, unlike the prima ballerinas, did not lament; instead, he attributed it to an improvement in taste. Although he described himself as an untrained, “ungrateful, bored layman” in the field of serious ballet, he would not have made such bold statements if recent experience had not shown that audiences shared his perspective. He considered full-length ballets, which primarily showcased the virtuosity of the soloist, to be tedious—an art form suited only for a narrow circle of dedicated ballet enthusiasts. For laymen like him, a short, entertaining genre painting sufficed. Bayer’s pieces aligned with the

⁴⁶Ed[uarad]. H[anslick].: Hofopertheater. = Neue Freie Presse, 22 November 1889, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁷This statement is echoed in almost every review in the Viennese and Budapest papers.



perspective, replacing the solo dances with lively, often distinctive national group dances, and weaving an entertaining plot into the performance unobtrusively.

At the Court Opera, it was a common practice to follow a multi-act opera with a short ballet. Previously, however, the order had been reversed: the evening would begin with a one-act opera and continued with a longer ballet. The lack of character and interest in these short operas was evident from the fact that they often featured second- and third-rate singers, with audiences largely skipping this part and only arriving in time for the ballet. This practice continued until the Kärntnertor Theatre staged the singspiel *Der Dorfbarbier*.⁴⁸ This timeless and entertaining piece, performed by suitable actors, reversed the situation around in one fell swoop, drawing audiences to the theatre specifically for the short play. Hanslick saw a parallel with short ballets in his time: they acted as a true attraction, ensuring a full house for the grand operas to which they were paired.⁴⁹

In Vienna's another significant daily newspaper, *Die Presse*, Max Kalbeck⁵⁰ first reported on the premiere in a brief news item⁵¹ and later devoted an entire feuilleton to the event. In the former, he explained that the title almost suggested "a scientific treatise on the planetary system in a dance," but this was not the case. Instead, the four seasons were brought to life in beautiful, vivid images, sometimes with ingenious, sometimes with less ingenious solutions. The piece mobilized the entire ballet corps, and with its unprecedented technical elements, it surpassed all previous staging techniques. The standout scenes were the bathing scene and the winter scene. Bayer's music, however, was neither original nor remarkable, its main merit being that it was „not distracting." Like Hanslick, Kalbeck also commented on the mission of the new ballet: the inclusion of Gluck's opera comique *Der betrogene Kadi* [The Cheated Kadi] in the program alongside *Die Puppenfee* and *Sonne und Erde* only reinforced the impression of opera's decline. He also subtly suggested that with *Die Puppenfee*, everything sells—even Bayer's less successful ballet.

The two-page spread dedicated to the ballet is a classic feuilleton,⁵² primarily intended to entertain, with little critical sharpness. It only subtly refers to the polka composed for the autumn scene, praising its musicality despite its strong Straussian elements. The stormy weather in the autumnal scene was accompanied by a striking musical underpinning, with the brass playing drawing attention, and the melodies shifting from one minor key to another, which did not bode well. As autumn turned to winter, Canova's tomb came to life on stage, referencing the Day of the Dead. "I must admit I was scared to death when I saw it," wrote the reviewer. After the risqué seaside costumes and the cheerful hunting scenes, he was least prepared for this, but it was quickly followed by the bright Christmas scene, then the arrival of the New Year, and finally

⁴⁸Composed by Johann Baptist Schenk (1796), based on a libretto by Paul Weidmann.

⁴⁹Ed[uard]. H[anslick].: Hofopertheater. = Neue Freie Presse, 22 November 1889, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁰Julius Max Heinrich Kalbeck (1850–1921) was a music writer, music critic, and translator. On Hanslick's recommendation, he became music editor for the Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung, before moving to *Die Presse* (1883–1890), and later worked for the Neues Wiener Tagblatt until his death. Like Hanslick, he was sharply critical of the work of Wagner, Bruckner, and Hugo Wolf, while supporting Brahms.

⁵¹K[albeck].: Hofopertheater. = *Die Presse*, 20 November 1889, p. 11.

⁵²Max Kalbeck: „Sonne und Erde." = *Die Presse*, 21 November 1889, pp. 1–2.



the portrayal of the carnival season. The end of the piece, however, was not brilliant, at least musically, as the composer penned a “dance to shake up the nerves” at the end of the ballet.⁵³

According to a review in the *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*, Bayer’s work could be seen as a comedy in each of the four pictures: in the first, a comedy of a teenager; in the second, a comedy of a banker family and sailors; in the third, the traditional autumnal pleasures of the aristocracy, while in the fourth, Christmas and carnival themes could also serve as the foundation for a comedy.

As with Hanslick and Kalbeck, this review also deals with the specificities of the ballet genre. In the past, ballet was a distinctly dance-oriented art form, which for both experts and laymen meant the same thing: graceful movements and artistic posture; dance was an art that had enjoyed genuine cult following throughout the ages. Then, the centre of gravity of ballet shifted towards the machine. Dance took a back seat and was replaced by technique. Ballets such as *Satanella*, *Fantasia*, *Ellinor*, *Flick und Flock* came as a surprise, especially to the younger generation.⁵⁴ But that too is a thing of the past; nowadays it is the idea that conquers: “Dance has been replaced by thinking, now they philosophize with their feet.” According to the reviewer, the beginning of this process could be traced back to *Excelsior*, in which the main idea is to reach as high as possible,⁵⁵ followed by the exaltation of love in *L’Amore*. The *Wiener Walzer*, for all its objectivity, is an imprint of a cultural idea, while „*Sonne und Erde* is a study in orography and hydrography. Strictly speaking, therefore, there is no longer any need to study, but to attend ballet performances instead.”⁵⁶

The paper also shares the general opinion of the Viennese press regarding the assessment of the piece, i.e. that although there were some pleasing parts of the ballet, the new work did not match or surpass Bayer’s two earlier works. It was not behind them in terms of spectacle, light, colour, and glamour, but there was little humour, mostly in the swirling summer picture. The scene with Canova’s tomb, which leads from autumn to winter and was suggestive in its imagery, was considered „thoughtful,” and gave a good sense of All Saints’ Day, just as in the winter scene, the time of Epiphany was indicated by the stars shining before them. The Christmas scene, with its illuminated Christmas trees, was an impressive image. Bayer’s music, in the reviewer’s opinion, fits the situations and sometimes showed the influence of Delibes. Overall, the production was praised.⁵⁷

The reviews so far show that the play had been well received, despite the shortcomings of the production. Only the *Wiener Presse* struck a negative, particularly inarticulate note, where the reviewer described the new ballet as a “choreographic bastard,” a “choreographic-musical boredom in four images and countless veils of mist.”⁵⁸

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Peter Ludwig Hertel: *Flick und Flock* (1869), *Fantasia* (1871); Cesare Pugni – P. L. Hertel: *Saltanella, oder Metamorphosen* (1870); Franz Doppler – P. L. Hertel: *Ellinor oder Träumen und Erwachen* (1873).

⁵⁵Luigi Manzotti’s spectacular *Excelsior* (1881), with music by Romualdo Marenco, is a spectacular and impressive performance depicting the rise of human civilization and the development of technology, featuring hundreds of characters. It was successfully performed throughout Europe, including Vienna for 29 years and in Budapest for nine years. See: Hedvig Ujvári: “This Musical Peace is Worse than War:” Cultural History, Musical Banality and Political Context in the Ballet *Excelsior*. *Studia Musicologica* 64 (2023)3–4, pp. 269–286. <https://doi.org/10.1556/6.2023.00017>.

⁵⁶Wilhelm Frey: *Sonne und Erde*. = *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 20 November 1889, p. 7.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Dr. R. K.: *K. k. Hofopertheater*. = *Wiener Presse*, 25 November 1889, p. 3.



The idea of presenting the four seasons in dancing pictures was not a bad one, even if it was not very original, but it would have required more humour and wit than Gaul and Haßreiter put into each picture. The only scene that was considered to have worked well was Christmas, the sight of the Christmas trees lighting up all at once. Apart from this, the „so-called plot of the play is pervaded by spiritual bleakness.”⁵⁹ The scenery, which was said to be new, did not have the same look and quality as at the Court Opera, and the same could be said of the costumes. Bayer’s music was described as “rather monotonous and chewy, a huge step backwards from *Die Puppenfee*.”⁶⁰ However, the dancers’ performance was impeccable. The premiere resembled more of a dress rehearsal, after which the piece was shortened, but this only led to an improvement, as there would be 15 minutes less to be bored in the future.⁶¹

The *Wiener Theaterzeitung* only gave a half-sentence about the play, but stated that the Court Opera had discredited itself.⁶²

The Hungarian press also reported on the Vienna premiere in detail. The *Fővárosi Lapok* highlighted its success: “Its bright presentation, eye-catching dances, comic scenes, and the pretty music of Josef Bayer ensured the novelty a complete success.”⁶³

In *Pester Lloyd*, Theodor Helm⁶⁴ wrote about the Vienna premiere, and in his review he considered the new ballet to be merely mediocre. He expressed his disappointment, as the audience would have expected a different piece from the creators of the great *Die Puppenfee*. The idea itself, a choreographed presentation of the events of the year based on the holidays associated with each season, was in principle appealing, but the practical execution was very poor. Above all, it was incomprehensible to him that the first season was depicted in Vormärz-period costumes from the *Wiener Walzer*, while the other seasons were portrayed in a contemporary and accurate manner. He described the plot and the locations in detail, but in the second picture, he noted that it was unprecedented in ballet for dancers to perform various scenes in swimsuits. The Spanish dance, performed with great enthusiasm, was very popular. However, when the ladies in their swimsuits started their cancan-like performance with jumps, the audience began to worry that their costumes might tear. At this point, the play had reached the level of good taste.

The third part, Autumn, revolved around wine and the harvest, with a more everyday approach. The most amusing moment was the scene when suddenly a storm broke out, and the members of the harvest party ran around the stage with red umbrellas, while the orchestra added to the atmosphere with their powerful playing. The winter episode was the second, but in fact the only, eye-catching highlight of the evening, which could not be matched by the appearance of the Carnival Prince in the closing scene, a poor imitation of *Die Puppenfee*.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Wiener Theaterzeitung, 15 December 1889, p. 66.

⁶³Fővárosi Lapok, 21 November 1889, p. 2374.

⁶⁴Theodor Otto Helm (1843–1920) was a music writer, music critic, worked for several Viennese and German newspapers, including *Pester Lloyd*. In contrast to Hanslick and his circle, he supported the so-called New German School, as well as Bruckner and Wolf, and was able to counter the writings of the *Neue Freie Presse*, particularly in the *Deutsche Zeitung*.



Before the four seasons appeared, the allegory of the Sun was introduced. This tableau appeared between each image, so it quickly became boring. As a transition between the autumn-winter cycle, All Saint's Day, symbolised by a gravestone, was also shown. Like other critics, Helm found this inappropriate for a ballet. Haßreiter was much celebrated by the audience, but it was difficult to find words of praise for the music of the ballet. In fact, Bayer's composition did not rise above mediocrity, the not exactly untalented composer seemed to have become comfortable after the success of *Die Puppenfee* and did not take his task seriously.⁶⁵

Following the premiere in Budapest, *Fővárosi Lapok* [Capital City Papers] reported that Bayer's new ballet was a "resounding success" and was likely to be as attractive as *Die Puppenfee*. Although its music could not compete with the former, "it is not so fresh and sweet," but still "has enough foot- and ear-tickling waltzes and polkas."⁶⁶

The *Pesti Hírlap* [Pester Newspaper] and the *Pesti Napló* [Pester Diary] provided much more detailed and nuanced reviews. According to the critic of *Pesti Hírlap*, even the title required explanation, as the allegorical image with the radiant sun and a female figure at its centre, along with the four subsequent scenes, lacked a connection, or a "connecting idea." „In general, the whole ballet had no unifying idea. The piece was a succession of loosely connected, or rather unrelated, colourful scenes. It would have been better to call it the "Four Seasons," or more correctly, the "Four Seasons of the Year."⁶⁷

The critic had given a devastating verdict on Bayer's work and artistic quality: „Bayer's music can be summarized briefly. This is common dance music, and of the poorer quality. There is nothing original in its melodies, harmonies or orchestration."⁶⁸ To make matters worse, between the first and second scenes, the orchestra played Delibes' waltz from *Naila*, which had been "a veritable refreshing oasis in the bleak musical wasteland."⁶⁹

Similarly, the reviewer for *Pesti Napló* had expressed a comparable opinion of the new ballet, calling its music "the most banal possible" and emphasising the importance of the visuals.⁷⁰ According to him, the "number of ballets with a brilliant exhibition had increased," which, coupled with skilful staging, guaranteed success.⁷¹ He viewed this as a symptom of the times, where, instead of content, deeper poetry, and good taste, „speculation on the exhibition" had been subordinated to everything else.⁷² The plot, with its logical flow and storytelling, had been completely pushed into the background: "We are now completely content with the tables, however madly they follow one after the other, as long as each tableau is magnificently displayed, so that the eye is dazzled. »Sun and Earth« meets this need."⁷³ However, the reviewer had

⁶⁵Dr. Theodor Helm: Sonne und Erde. = Pester Lloyd, (Abendblatt / evening edition), 21 November 1889, pp. 1–2.

⁶⁶Fővárosi Lapok, 22 December 1889, pp. 2609.

⁶⁷N. N.: Sonne und Erde = Pesti Hírlap, 22 December 1889, 4.

⁶⁸Pesti Napló, 22 December 1889, [3.]

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.



praised Mazzantini's artistry as a ballet master and dancer, highlighting his performance in the Spanish scene. He had also commended the orchestra's playing and conductor Benkő's production.⁷⁴

The music editors of German-language newspapers in Budapest shared the opinion of their Hungarian and Viennese counterparts. The *Politisches Volksblatt's* reviewer noted a significant gap between the ballet's visuals and its music. While the former possessed considerable beauty, charm, colour, and humour, the latter fell short by comparison. Whereas Bayer had composed melodious and piquant music for *Die Puppenfee*, the score for the newer ballet was described as even ordinary, bordering on the vulgar in places.⁷⁵

The critic of the *Budapester Tagblatt* was even harsher in his evaluation. In his view, audiences expected a coherent plot from ballet and were not content with mere dance performances lacking a narrative. Since *Excelsior*, ballet had embraced themes showcasing nature, and *Sonne und Erde* fit within this trend. Bayer's music, he argued, was far from original, borrowing heavily from Delibes, Strauss Sr., Millöcker. Despite this, the staging of the piece was significantly more imaginative, which he saw as the primary reason for the ballet's success. The waltz of flowers during scene transitions was credited to Delibes, and a Strauss musical interlude was mistakenly attributed to Bayer by the audience.⁷⁶

The reviewer of the *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* was generally not in favour of anything originating from Germany or Vienna, but Viennese ballets were an exception. For the management of the Budapest Opera House, the fact that the Viennese press had criticised Bayer's latest piece in many respects and ranked it far behind his two previous works did not pose a problem for its presentation. The fact that it had been performed in Vienna proved to be a sufficient argument for the management in Hungary; what had been staged in the imperial capital and suited the audience there was expected to suit the Budapest audience as well. In Budapest, an "enhanced" version of the ballet was presented. The reviewer commended this effort and noted with satisfaction that all the scenes, particularly the final, were exceptionally splendid.⁷⁷

The ballet upgrade was also addressed by Viktor Herzfeld in the *Neues Pester Journal*. At the Opera House, great care had been taken in preparing for the premiere, with a new set and fancy costumes. Innovations were introduced to ensure its success, including elements that had not been present in Vienna.⁷⁸ Mazzantini added new dance inserts and group dances to each parts, and the ballet was thoroughly rehearsed.⁷⁹ The highlight was Katica Müller's⁸⁰ Spanish dance, which served as a powerful reminder that "dance is an art."⁸¹ Her performance possessed a "wild

⁷⁴Ibid. Henrik Benkő (1858–1918) was a violinist, between 1889 and 1910 was a conductor of the Hungarian Opera House.

⁷⁵Dr. D.: Königliche Oper. = *Politisches Volksblatt*, 22 December 1889, p. 7.

⁷⁶N. N.: „Sonne und Erde.” = *Budapester Tagblatt*, 22 December 1889, pp. 6–7.

⁷⁷Ego: Kön. ung. Opernhaus. = *Neues Politisches Volksblatt*, 22 December 1889.

⁷⁸N. N.: Die Vorbereitungen... [Preparations]. = *Neues Pester Journal*, 17 December 1889, p. 6.

⁷⁹N. N.: Der Direktor der Großen Oper von Paris [The Director of the Grand Opera of Paris]. = *Neues Pester Journal*, 18 December 1889, p. 6.

⁸⁰Katica Müller (1860–1929) was a ballerina at the Hungarian Opera from 1879 to 1897.

⁸¹Id. [Herzfeld]: Königliche Oper. = *Neues Pester Journal*, 22 December 1889.



poetry, a captivating swing that is impossible to describe.”⁸² In addition to Müller’s virtuoso performance, everyone involved made significant contributions to the success of the production: the ballet master, the dancers, the set and costume designers, the lighting designers, and not least the theatre management, as staging the piece required a huge financial investment.

There was not much good to say about the music of the ballet, though but it did not warrant criticised either. “Bayer is not an original talent,”⁸³ a fact that was not remarkable, as his contemporaries could similarly be described. Nonetheless, the music of the ballet was pleasing, and its orchestration was described as “very elegant.”⁸⁴ Its weakest points were the waltzes, which were „made more striking by the inclusion of Delibes’ *Naila waltz*.”⁸⁵

In *Pester Lloyd*, Ágost Beer explained that the theme of the four seasons, although present in the arts since antiquity, had not yet been explored in the realm of dance. The Viennese composer trio finally embraced the rewarding subject, and the success of the performance proved its artistic viability. However, the choice of title made it difficult to deduce the subject.

Regarding Bayer’s music, Beer noted that it was not as vibrant or original as in *Die Puppenfee*, but it was melodic and appealing. He also pointed out specific details: in the butterfly scene featuring the old professor, the orchestration aligned well with the onstage action. The delicate zigzagging of the butterflies was effectively accompanied by violins and flutes. By contrast, Bayer’s creativity seemed to falter in the gypsy dance. The music, written in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, evoked neither Spanish nor gypsy character, but rather „smells of new wine.”⁸⁶

SUMMARY – THOUGHTS OF AUGUST BEER

The dilemmas surrounding the genre of ballet were perhaps most succinctly articulated by Ágost Beer. He observed that, among art forms incorporating music, ballet relegated music to the most subordinate role. In opera, while the primacy of the dramatic narrative prevailed for an extended period, the works of Gluck and later Wagner ushered in a more balanced, nearly symbiotic relationship between music and drama. In ballet, while the musical element was essential to the narrative of the plot, its role remained marginal.

The indispensable elements of an opera—such as beautiful, original, elegant melodies, witty details, a unified style, and the deep, dramatic expressiveness of the orchestra, effectively complementing the characters’ performances, and the characteristic use of colour, reflecting the mood of the scenes—were rarely found in a ballet. The reasons were obvious: ballet, as a dance performance, had always been a luxury, a pleasure for the eye. The most sumptuous sets and costumes, astonishing scenes, the richness of colour, the mass effect of groupings, the virtuoso technique of the dancers, and the sensuality of youth and beauty had consistently been the most important components of the ballet genre throughout its history.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶A. B.: Königliches Opernhaus. = Pester Lloyd, 22 December 1889, 1. Beilage [supplement].



The librettist and the composer came after the ballet master, the prima ballerina, the costume and set designer, the engineer and the lighting designer. An interesting story with a logical outline, including exposition, a dramatic development, resolution, would certainly have hindered the unfolding of light and splendour. Meaningful music, Beer concluded, would almost act as a competitor in a genre where the primary focus was a feast for the eyes.

The converse, he argued, was also true: a decent composer would refrain from „composing good music for a muddle of gymnastics and pomp, which is all the more obscure to the ear the more the scenery engages the audience’s attention.” He maintained that “ballet can only rise to a higher sphere if it follows the artistic regularities of opera,” meaning it must possess a dramaturgical centre from which the plot could unfold in a rationally.⁸⁷ The music, in his framework, would complement the scene, effectively replacing the language that is absent in the medium of dance.

This path had already been marked out by Noverre (1727–1810), who was the first to introduce coherent ideas into pantomime and then bring them to life through dramatic action. In the operas of his contemporary Gluck, the ballet interludes were integral to the scenes and of musical quality, and the list continued with Auber and Weber.

In the second half of the 19th century, the music critic of the *Pester Lloyd* highlighted Delibes’s great ballet pieces, whose music was „lively, melodious, witty, artistic in technique, and the orchestral language he developed faithfully follows the events on stage.”⁸⁸ Among his works, *Coppélia*, with its comedy-like story and its comic situation, mixing fantastic and realistic elements, “could serve as a model for future ballet compositions.”⁸⁹ Bayer was fortunate to follow this path with *Die Puppenfee*, while with *Wiener Walzer* he introduced a new element into the ballet genre: the national motif. His ballet was almost “a kind of danced anthology,” with images that presented a stage in the development of dance and the waltz, while the whole work was united by a loose dramaturgical thread.⁹⁰

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⁸⁷ August Beer: Csárdás. = *Pester Lloyd*, 9 December 1890, Beilage [supplement].

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.



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Zene, A

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