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THESES

of the doctoral dissertation

CHRONOLOGY OF THE OPERA
SEASONS AT ESZTERHÁZA
BETWEEN 1776 AND 1790

2016

I. History of the research

It was Carl Ferdinand Pohl, author of the first, exhaustive Haydn monograph who, in the second half of the 19th century, studied the music life at Eszterháza for the first time. Haydn research (and quality popular literature) was mostly satisfied with the bulk of information published by Pohl for three-quarter of a century. In Hungary, it was Klára Zolnai and Anna Zádor who dealt with various facets of the Eszterháza opera productions before WWI; in the years after the war Klára Garas did pioneering work in the field of the art history of Eszterháza, whereas Arisztid Valkó made extracts of the data concerning art and music history included by the Esterházy documents, freshly taken over by the National Archives – diligently, but with a high percentage of error.

Interest in the Haydn sources and in the decades spent by him at Eszterháza started to increase around 1959, the 150th anniversary of his death both in Hungary and abroad. In Hungary, Mátyás Horányi published a book for the general public about the opera productions and the theatrical life at Eszterháza and Eisenstadt; however, it also included new scholarly data. This book was published in German and English as well. Moreover, Dénes Bartha and the young László Somfai discussed in a huge monography (in German) the manuscript sources, now in the National Széchényi Library, of the repertory performed at Eszterháza. The Esterházy archivist János Hárich, who emigrated into Austria in 1958, published two important studies abroad. Although being problematic in many respects, they covered the topic of the Esterházy libretto collection including those printed for the Eszterháza productions, and the approximate (monthly, not daily) program of the fifteen opera seasons arranged between 1776 and 1790.

During the 1960's László Somfai's illustrated documentary of Haydn's life was published in German (and later in Hungarian and in English); in the 1970's the voluminous second volume of Robbins Landon's Haydn monograph came out; then, around 1980, two remarkable studies by Ulrich Tank completed the picture. These treated the historic documents of the Esterházy family, having musical connotations. In the meantime, the Haydn Yearbook, having existed since 1962 and hallmarked by Landon's name, published Hárich's later articles and his transcriptions of archival documents continuously. In the same periodical, Landon himself published a longer study about the marionette repertoire at Eszterháza.

There are, however, two major problems with this mass of publications, so interesting and diverse for the first glance. The first one is that, with the sole exception of Bartha's and Somfai's monograph and Somfai's illustrated Haydn book, no other publication fulfilled the criteria of a high-level scholarly publication. Horányi, in his attractive book, was not always able to decide whether he was writing for the general public or for the specialists; and he, too, was deprived of the opportunity of studying the sources held in Austria. It were Tank's publications which approached scholarly demands at the closest; however, the

value of one of them is limited by his frequent references to Valkó's transcription, whereas the other one abounds in many incorrectnesses, due to obvious shortage of time. Landon's monograph, notwithstanding with his enormous knowledge, is being shadowed by its extremely varying level and his many inconsistencies; and its use is seriously limited by the lack of a bibliography. Moreover, the author is not critical enough of his sources or of his own (often adventurous) hypotheses, and he too often reclines upon Hárích's statements of doubtful value. Last but not least, Hárích himself, however long he had stayed in close contact with the archival material, was an amateur; what is more, the unreliability of his statements and the almost entire lack of source references are aggravated by his inclination to secrecy.

The other basic problem with earlier studies of the musical life at Eszterháza is that they unearthed a great amount of (alas, often not duly documented) details but the researchers often got lost in the jungle of details: asking of the basic questions was often replaced by unreflected transcriptions of another bulk of documents.

A further barrier of stepping forward was represented by the condition of the Esterházy archives in Forchtenstein Castle, a collection which cannot be circumvented. It remained very poorly organized and not open to research up to the beginning of the 21st century. As a consequence of the above-said, even in explicitly high-prestige publications unfounded statements and urban legends emerged, taken over from each other, with respect to Eszterháza.

The possibility for a renewal was brought along by the activity of a first-rank amateur bibliographer, Dr. Josef Pratl, who with his aides re-ordered first the fonds of the enormous archives at Forchtenstein, then the Esterházy documents preserved in the National Széchényi Library, Budapest, in both cases compiling a catalogue of the documents with musical relevance. Following his mission, the Forchtenstein archives was finally opened for researchers by the management of the Esterházy wealth. During this time, first-rank art and garden historians: Ferenc Dávid, Géza Galavics, Stefan Körner and Kristóf Fatsar set an example to music historians how one can examine with exemplary preciseness and scholarly demanding the past of Eszterháza and the Esterházy family by the help of the rich historic sources. The decades-long activity of another outsider, Dr. Karl Pollheimer has also been exemplary and inspiring. The summary of his research into the history of the marionette performances at Eszterháza will be published in the near future.

II. Methods of the research

Having worked in the physical vicinity of Eszterháza for years, I was touched by the extraordinary complexity of the heritage on the one hand, and I got in contact with eminent representatives of other fields on the other hand; mostly with art historians, architects and historians of architecture, landscape architects and historians. The issue of the (second, much better documented) Eszterháza opera house attracted me from the beginning and later, through my contacts with the 18th-century Český Krumlov opera house, I acquired a wide range of further contacts with theatre technicians, theatre historians, stage directors, choreographers, (historical) acousticians, professors and music managers. In the recent years I also have been cooperating with historians of literature. This variety represented a major inspiration for me.

The other kind of inspiration is twofold: the extremely mixed level of the Eszterháza research (from musical aspect), drafted in the previous chapter, represented a challenge, whereas the work done by László Somfai, furthermore the relevant new results achieved by the representatives of the neighbouring fields served as an animating example to me.

After the decisive moment when Ferenc Dávid, my other master beside László Somfai, introduced me to the world of the Forchtenstein archives in 2008, my research method, tailored according to the demands of my theme, evolved quickly. Its keystones are the following.

- Building a database, mostly based on archival material, independently of the topic just being studied.
- The permanent development of this database by adding pieces of information to it, originating in the most different historic and professional sources and contacts (e. g. contemporary press reports, visiting of various remote venues, studying of the everyday life etc. etc.).
- In my publications I keep referring precisely and in a controllable way to my sources, and I keep distinguishing possibility, probableness and certainty (proven statements) from each other strictly.
- I am trying to ask the questions thought to be the most fundamental ones, and I am trying to use my database to answer those questions, also trying to broaden the database in the required direction.

Among those questions which I was asking and trying to answer (alone or in cooperation with some of my colleagues) there were the following ones. What can we find out from the sources about the stage machinery of the opera house, formerly regarded a white spot on the map? Is it true that the majority of the Eszterháza libretto in fact got lost? If not, where are they now? Was the ceremonial

room or the so-called “music room” at Eszterháza an actual concert venue? Where were the academies arranged in effect? The present dissertation is seeking answer to a fourth question: what can we find out, beyond the gappy and rough information found in Hárich’s and Tank’s writings, about the number of the opera performances at Eszterháza and about their chronology?

However, the series of the fundamental questions to be answered is by no means over with these ones. Let me just quote another four points. Such important Haydn venues as the great hall of the Lukawitz mansion house or the ceremonial room of the archbishop’s summer residence in Bratislava (where *La canterina* was performed) are still to be checked and analysed. The itinerary of Nicholas Esterházy “The Magnificent” has to be established in a much more detailed way than it is known today. It would be necessary to clarify, after the ceremonial room at Eszterháza, also the legend of the Eisenstadt “Haydn-Saal”, or, indeed, the entire role, forms and exact venues of music-making during the early Eisenstadt years. Or we should publish, traditionally or digitally, a comparative edition of the libretti of the Eszterháza opera performances along the principles of the libretto volume of the Haydn complete edition.

In the present dissertation I consequently used a method which could be called the method of “repeated distillation”. This means that during the continuous development of the research the same sources can be made use of again and again, so that one “asks” new questions from them.

Another important technique is always useful while we are trying to reconstruct historic events. I am thinking of a procedure when the data provided by the series of documents used as the primary source are not only collided with other, independent sources when they are questionable but during the whole study. The advantage of the procedure is that although the number of doubtful points may increase this way, in the majority of the cases our conclusions will become much more well-established.

III. The results of the research

This work provides entirely new information mostly in relation with the first four opera seasons. The exact chronology of the years 1776 and 1777 cannot be established from the existing sources. However, with the help of the invoices of the services of the two tailors and the hairdresser and of the accounts of the carpenters employed as stage technicians, I succeeded in clearing the quarterly repertoires in 1776, to provide probable performance dates and to establish a lower and an upper limit for the number of the performances of that year. It also became known that during August and September the theatre remained close for a month, and a full renovation of the stage machinery took place.

In 1777, it was possible to state the number of performances for each quarter and for the entire year. Furthermore, it became clear that the opening piece of the whole series of opera seasons, Gluck's *Orfeo, ed Euridice* was being played continuously almost until the end of the second year. Other than that, the dissertation substantiates that, despite Hárch's and Landon's opinion, the 1777 opera titled *Il marchese villano* was not the earlier version or even "title variant" of Paisiello's *La contadina di spirito*, premiered in 1788, but an entirely independent opera whose composer was according to all probability Galuppi rather than Paisiello.

The program of the year 1778 was luckily preserved to us by a document which was already known to Pohl. The rich opera program of the following year, 1779, however, can already be put together, only with a couple of titles missing, from the increasing number of documents belonging to various types. A remarkable fact of this year was that Haydn's most characteristic opera, *L'isola disabitata* was not only performed on the name-day of the prince, on 6 December, but also three days later, at a date which was unknown in earlier literature. The opera program of the later years, described by Hárch without the single dates, is decided in the dissertation in a form on a day-to-day basis. I also referred to a couple of dozens of uncertain dates or titles. In the course of deciding the chronology, more novelties were provided by the sources about the performed operas. It is easy to check that the opera titled *La Didone abbandonata* by Sarti was not identical with the one premiered in Copenhagen in 1762; instead, another opera with the same title but with almost wholly new music material, performed in Padua in 1782, was produced.

At Eszterháza, the Metastasio opera *L'isola di Calipso abbandonata*, set to music by Luigi Bologna, possibly the brother of the Eszterháza soprano Metilde Bologna, was played so successfully from 1784 on that it reached the longest series of a seria after Haydn's *Armida*. No libretto was printed, and the performance material has tracelessly disappeared (possibly Metilde took it with her in 1790). Therefore the libretto of the 1789 performance of the opera in Buda, found by me in the central library of the capital Budapest, is a valuable source of information.

An important part of the dissertation is the section discussing the problem of the last eight performances in 1790; their program is not known to us and it has often been speculated upon. Hárích takes it for granted that during two weeks and a half no less than three premieres took place; and both he and Landon are inclining to the presumption that one of these premieres was that of Mozart's *Figaro* (whose production had indeed been planned). In my dissertation I substantiate, based partly on Bartha's and Somfai's statements and partly on other considerations, that none of these two presumptions can be correct. On the other hand, I succeeded in showing that the premiere of Cimarosa's *Giannina e Bernardone* was very probable.

The details which have emerged in the course of the work can be interesting from various points of view. Let me just mention the example of the three-day balls, closing the carnival seasons right before Ash Wednesday in 1788 and 1789 and starting the opera season at the same time. Or a series of the curious materials, including lead sugar or honey, which were used for special effects on-stage. It belongs to the more serious lessons that during the 15 seasons 90 (or rather 91, with *Giannina e Bernardone*) operas were staged at Eszterháza (all new productions, with two exceptions) in approximately 1270 performances.

But more long-term conclusions can also be drawn from the emerging picture. I am talking about the recognition that the importance of Eszterháza for cultural history is not only due to the presence of Haydn (whose person was obviously a safeguard of an outstanding musical quality). There exist three more reasons for that. The first reason is that the opera repertory was not as provincial and outdated as it has often been thought: instead, it was a characteristic late-18th-century repertoire staging several recent successes (and not only the Viennese ones). The other reason is the extraordinary diversity of the cultural scene from the concerts, over ballet d'action (even *Werther* was being danced at Eszterháza) and Viennese refrom operas to Shakespeare, Beaumarchais and to serious and comic marionette operas. The third, extremely important circumstance is the extreme richness of details of the picture unfolding from our documents about this diversity. Eszterháza is a true treasury of European cultural history.

IV. My writings published in the theme of the dissertation

Ferenc Dávid—Carsten Jung—János Malina—Edward McCue. ‘Haydn operaháza. A második eszterházi operaszínpad az új levéltári kutatások tükrében’ = *BUKSZ*, 22/4 (2010 winter), 330–341.

‘Egy 18. század végi magyarországi kulturális nagyberuházás pénzügyi összesítése’ = *Magyar Zene*, 49/1 (February 2011), 116–122.

‘Az *Armida* díszletei Eszterházában. Első lépések az eszterházi színpadtechnika terra incognitáján Staud Géza és Dávid Ferenc útravalójával’ = *Kő kövön. Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, vol. 1–2, Budapest: Vince, 2013, vol. 2, 155–164.

‘A Haydn korabeli eszterházi *Accademie*-k helyszíneiről és elvirágzásáról’ = *Magyar Zene*, 52/4 (November 2014), 406–431.

‘Inventare und Dekorationsvorschläge für die Opernbühne in Eszterháza’ = *Haydn-Studien*, 11/1 (December 2014), 124–149.

Ferenc Dávid—Carsten Jung—János Malina—Edward McCue. ‘Haydn’s Opera House at Eszterháza: New Archival Sources’ = *Early Music*, 43/1 (February 2015), 111–127.

‘On the Venues for and the Decline of the *Accademie*s at Eszterháza in Haydn’s Time’, *Eighteenth-century Music*, 13/2 (September 2016), 253–282.

‘Egy érdekes összehasonlítás 1783-ból a prózai és az operai színjátszás eltérő kifejezési lehetőségeiről’, in Katalin Czibula—Júlia Demeter—Márta Pintér Zsuzsanna (ed.). *A szövegtől a szcenikáig. Tanulmányok a dráma- és színháztörténet köréből* = Régi magyar színház 6, Eger: Líceum, 2016, 115–122.