

















ZOLTAN ROMAN  
GUSTAV MAHLER AND HUNGARY



STUDIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN  
MUSIC 5

Edited by

Zoltán Falvy

ZOLTAN ROMAN

GUSTAV MAHLER AND HUNGARY



AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ • BUDAPEST 1991



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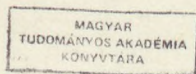
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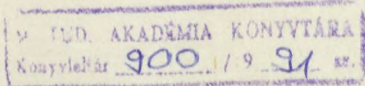
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*For Kurt (75) and Herta (65),  
in token of my gratitude and friendship*





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## INTRODUCTION

Though it is unlikely that Mahler ever learnt to speak more than a few words of Hungarian, his connections with the country were of great significance to him throughout much of his life. After graduating from the Vienna Conservatory, a summer's job in 1879 as piano teacher in Hungary was probably his first gainful employment. Some ten years later, the directorship of the Royal Hungarian Opera presented Mahler with his first opportunity to exercise artistic control over a major institution. Moreover, his influential Hungarian friends cited his achievements in that post in helping him to achieve the pinnacle of his career as director of the Imperial Opera in Vienna. All in all, Mahler's contacts with Hungary spanned no less than a quarter of a century; yet, published accounts (especially of his work in Budapest between 1888 and 1891) are either anecdotal, inaccurate or incomplete. This work, then, is a first attempt at a comprehensive examination of Mahler's connections with Hungary, based entirely on primary sources and documented secondary evidence.

Regrettably, some gaps remain. Most of these are due to the fact that a substantial portion of the Opera's papers, on deposit at the Hungarian National Archives, were destroyed by fire in 1956. Other documents relating to Mahler's tenure as director, known to have remained at the Opera House, unaccountably disappeared from there some years ago. Finally, the scarcity today of letters addressed to Mahler by recipients of his, makes for considerable difficulty in dating and interpreting those from his own pen.

A few comments on the contents of this volume are necessary. As the biographical and personal-valuative literature on Mahler has grown tremendously in recent years, and as it is readily available even to the average reader, I kept such material to a minimum throughout. On the other hand, I considered it essential to a full understanding of Mahler's lot between 1888 and 1891 to provide a socio-cultural framework for that period in Hungary; this is either missing from, or is incomplete in most published studies. Chronologically, it is clearly the function of Chapters II and IV to fill such a role here. But for the sake of those unfamiliar with Hungarian socio-economic and (in the broadest sense) cultural history (and partly also because, in a sense, these tend to transcend considerations of chronology), I wish to flag for special attention three aspects of that framework. These are: the role of nationalism and hyper-patriotism (or chauvinism); the position and power of the aristocracy and minor nobility (including the gentry); and the phenomenon of antisemitism.



Each one of these factors appears in *fin-de-siècle* Hungary in a form which is at times considerably different from that in other (especially Western) nations; yet, singly and collectively, they circumscribe the reasons for Mahler's untimely departure from the directorship of the Hungarian Opera. Within the necessarily limited opportunities provided by a study such as this, I touch upon these factors in Chapters II and III, and elsewhere as appropriate. Those wishing for a more detailed exposition of these and other, related matters, may turn with confidence to Andrew C. Janos's admirably concise and informative book, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary — 1825–1945*.<sup>1</sup>

A number of earlier accounts and documents provided valuable information. Chief among these were the following.

The earliest known report, "Gustav Mahler in Budapest", was written by Béla Diósy (then music critic of the *Neues Pester Journal*) sometime before 1916.<sup>2</sup>

Although written more than forty years after Mahler's departure from Budapest, Alexander Jemnitz's article, "Gustav Mahler als kgl. ung. Hofoperndirektor", stood for nearly thirty years as the most exhaustive published account.<sup>3</sup> It was superseded by the very detailed, though largely journalistic discussion forming part of a book in Hungarian by Tibor Gedeon and Miklós Máthé.<sup>4</sup>

Among book-length works, the relevant sections in Kurt Blaukopf's<sup>5</sup> and Henry-Louis de La Grange's<sup>6</sup> Mahler-biographies proved to be most informative.

Two studies, dealing with specific aspects of Mahler's activities in the Hungarian capital, may be cited. Ferenc Bónis's "Gustav Mahler und Ferenc Erkel. Beiträge zu ihren Beziehungen zueinander im Spiegel vier unbekannter Briefe von Mahler"<sup>7</sup> represents the earliest detailed examination of a critical element in Mahler's relationship with Hungarian music and musicians. My report, "Operatic Staging under Gustav Mahler in Budapest and Vienna",<sup>8</sup> includes a summary consideration and illustration of a little-explored, yet most significant facet of Mahler's all-encompassing approach to music theatre as it developed during the early years of his career.

It remains to mention the two documents without which statistical and personnel information of a reasonable completeness would have been vastly more difficult to attain. The Manuscript Archive of the Hungarian National Library houses a 570-page typescript, "The History of the Royal Hungarian Opera (from 1884 to 1894)", written by Dezső Vidor, Secretary of the Opera between 1908 and 1931.<sup>9</sup> Although it is undated, it undoubtedly served Vidor as the basis for the volume he published in 1909 to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the Royal Opera.<sup>10</sup> Even by today's standards this (in its time unique) document impresses one with the concentration and reliability of the information it contains. (In addition to what Vidor used from it for MKO 1909, DVO contains much valuable statistical and descriptive material.)

In the case of primary sources in German and in Hungarian, the orthography has been brought into line with modern usage, but abbreviations in the original have been retained. Editorial additions or alterations, whether my own or adopted from another source, are given in square brackets. Letters previously published have been excerpted, with a few exceptions: those difficult of access are given whole. Letters published here for the first time appear in their entirety. English translations



of German documents, and the original texts of all letters in Hungarian, are given in the Notes. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are mine.

For assistance rendered through documents, information or advice, I wish to thank the following:

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(Library of Parliament)  
Magyar Országos Levéltár, Budapest  
(Hungarian National Archives)  
Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Budapest  
(Hungarian National Széchényi Library)  
Pierpont Morgan Library, New York  
Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hamburg  
University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia  
University of Western Ontario Music Library, London, Canada

Permission to publish letters and photographs by and of Mahler and his family had been graciously granted by the late Anna Mahler. To those copyright owners I may have inadvertently neglected — or was unable — to contact, I offer my apologies and the undertaking to make appropriate amends upon notification.

My special thanks are rendered with pleasure to Frau Dr. Herta Blaukopf for her untiring assistance, advice and encouragement, and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their financial support during a leave of absence from the University of Calgary.

Calgary, Summer 1986.





## ABBREVIATIONS

- AJ — Alexander Jemnitz, "Gustav Mahler als kgl. ung. Hofoperndirektor", *Der Auftakt* 16 (1936), No. 1–2, pp. 7–11; No. 3–4, pp. 63–67; No. 5–6, pp. 183–188.
- AP — The transcripts of the debates of the Hungarian Parliament are cited as AP, followed by the date designating the convocation of the Parliament in question (e. g., *Az 1884. évi szeptember hó 25-ére hirdetett Országgyűlés Képviselőházának Naplója* [Hansard of the Parliament convoked on September 25, 1884]).
- AU — The documents of the Hungarian Parliament are cited as AU, followed by the date designating the convocation of the Parliament in question (e. g., *Az 1884. évi szeptember hó 25-ére hirdetett Országgyűlés Képviselőházának Irományai*) [Documents of the Parliament convoked on September 25, 1884]).
- AVE — Arisztid Valkó, "Erkel Sándor hivatali működése az ügyiratok tükrében" (Sándor Erkel's official activities in light of the documents)  
 I: *Magyar Zene* 15, No. 4 (1974), pp. 420–436;  
 II: *Magyar Zene* 16, No. 2 (1975), pp. 195–207;  
 III: *Magyar Zene* 16, No. 4 (1975), pp. 414–426.  
 (The fourth and final part of this documentation contains no relevant information for the present study.)
- BD — Béla Diósy, "Gustav Mahler in Budapest" (see Introduction, Note 2).
- BH — *Budapesti Hírlap*
- BME — Ferenc Bónis, "Gustav Mahler und Ferenc Erkel. Beiträge zu ihren Beziehungen zueinander im Spiegel vier unbekannter Briefe von Mahler", *Studia Musicologica* (Budapest) 1, No. 3–4 (1961), pp. 475–485.
- BRM — Kurt Blaukopf (mit Beiträgen von Zoltan Roman), *Mahler — Sein Leben, sein Werk und seine Welt in zeitgenössischen Bildern und Texten*, Wien, Universal Edition, 1976.
- BRM(E) — *Mahler — A Documentary Study*, transl. Paul Baker et al., London, Thames and Hudson, 1976.
- BT — *Budapester Tagblatt*
- Dopisy — Frantisek Bartoš, ed., *Mahler — Dopisy*, Prague, Statni Hudebny Vydavatelství, 1962.



- DSB — Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (GDR).
- DVO — Dezső Vidor, "A M. Kir. Operaház története" (A History of the Royal Hungarian Opera) (see Introduction, Note 9).
- E — *Egyetértés*
- FL — *Fővárosi Lapok*
- FLA — Archives of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music (Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola), Budapest.
- GMB — *Gustav Mahler Briefe*, Herta Blaukopf, ed., Wien, etc., Zsolnay, 1982 (Bibliothek der Internationalen Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft).
- Hamburg — Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg, Literaturarchiv Gustav Mahler.
- HLG — Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Mahler*, vol. I, Garden City (N. J.), Doubleday, 1973;
- HLG(F) — *Gustav Mahler — Chronique d'une vie*, I, Paris, Fayard, 1979 (see Introduction, Note 6).
- HNA — Hungarian National Archives (Országos Levéltár), Budapest.
- JM — Jenő Mohácsi, „Gustav Mahler in Budapest”, *Moderne Welt* 3, No. 7 (1921–1922) (Gustav Mahler Heft), pp. 27ff. Originally published in Hungarian in *Zenei Szemle* 6, No. 3 (July 1922).
- JPH — Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary — 1825–1945*, Princeton (N. J.), Princeton University Press, 1982.
- KBM — Kurt Blaukopf, *Gustav Mahler, oder der Zeitgenosse der Zukunft*, 2. ed., Wien, etc., Fritz Molden, 1969.
- KBM(E) — *Gustav Mahler*, transl. Inge Goodwin, London, Allen Lane, 1973.
- London — Gustav Mahler/Alfred Rosé Room, The Music Library, The University of Western Ontario, London, Canada.
- LTA — *Leipziger Tageblatt und Anzeiger*
- MA–HNL — Manuscript Archive, Hungarian National Széchényi Library (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár), Budapest.
- MKO 1909 — Dezső Vidor, ed., *A Magy.[ar] Kir.[ályi] Operaház 1884–1909. Adatok a színház huszonöt éves történetéhez* (The Royal Hungarian Opera. Facts pertaining to the theatre's 25-year history), Budapest, Markovits & Garai, 1909.
- MKO 1935 — [Directorate of the Royal Hungarian Opera], *A Magyar Királyi Operaház 50 éves fennállása alkalmából* (Yearbook of the Royal Hungarian Opera on the occasion of its 50th anniversary), Budapest, Globus, 1935 (see Introduction, Note 10).
- MOS — Zoltan Roman, "Operatic Staging under Gustav Mahler in Budapest and Vienna", in *International Musicological Society — Report of the Twelfth Congress — Berkeley 1977* (ed. Daniel Heartz and Bonnie Wade), Kassel, etc. Bärenreiter, 1981, pp. 484–492.



- MSL — *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, Knud Martner, ed., transl. Eithne Wilkins *et al.*, London, etc., Faber & Faber, 1979.
- N — *Nemzet*
- NBL — Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler* (ed. J. Killian), Leipzig, etc., E. P. Tal, 1923.
- NBL(E) — *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, ed. and annotated Peter Franklin, transl. Dika Newlin, London, Faber Music/Faber & Faber, 1980.
- NPJ — *Neues Pester Journal*
- NPV — *Neues Politisches Volksblatt*
- O-V — *Ország-Világ*
- PH — *Pesti Hírlap*
- PL — *Pester Lloyd*
- PN — *Pesti Napló*
- RMA — Edward R. Reilly, *Gustav Mahler und Guido Adler*, transl. Herta Blaukopf, Wien, Universal Edition, 1978 (Bibliothek der Internationalen Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft).
- RMA(E) — The original English version forms part of *Gustav Mahler and Guido Adler — Records of a Friendship*, Cambridge, etc., Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- TG-MM — Tibor Gedeon and Miklós Máthé, *Gustav Mahler*, Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1965.
- ThPrag — Theatersammlung, Nationalmuseum, Prague.
- WSt — Wiener Stadtbibliothek
- Z — *Zenelap*





## Chapter I

### MAHLER AND HUNGARY BEFORE 1888

Among Mahler's earliest extant letters are three he wrote in 1879 to Josef Steiner, Emil Freund and Albert Spiegler from Pusztá-Batta (or Batta) outside Nagytétény, a medium-sized village near Budapest.<sup>1</sup> Having graduated from the Vienna Conservatory in 1878, for about two years he eked out a meagre living by giving piano lessons. During the summer of 1879, he was hired as a live-in piano tutor by the family of Moritz Baumgarten; they spent most of the year in Vienna and moved to their land holdings at Batta for part of the summer holidays. Very few details of Mahler's actual employment are known. In all likelihood, he moved in with the Baumgarten family sometime after the beginning of May.<sup>2</sup> Possibly as early as August 10th, but no later than the 12th, his employment came to an end when the family removed to the seaside.<sup>3</sup>

Judging from the letters he sent from Hungary, there is no doubt that his time there, short as it was, represented an intense period of growth and adjustment for Mahler. Far from his accustomed surroundings geographically, culturally and even linguistically (the latter despite the undoubtedly German-speaking Baumgarten household), and probably with a lot of free time on his hands, he was frequently subject to deep introspection. Surrounded by the Hungarian *puszta*,<sup>4</sup> Mahler experienced alternating bouts of joy at its peacefulness, and melancholy and depression because of its unfamiliarity and his consequent loneliness. His long letter to Steiner, written over three days on June 17, 18 and 19, 1879 is an eloquent compendium of his emotional states; through the evocative descriptions it contains of the *puszta*, its sounds and its people, it is also an early testimony to his affinity with Nature. On June 18th he wrote:

[...] Nun lebe ich hier auf einer ungarischen Pußta, bei einer Familie, die mich auf den Sommer gemietet hat; ich habe den Knaben Klavierunterricht zu erteilen und hie und da die Familie in musikalische Begeisterung zu versetzen, da sitze ich nun wie eine Mücke im Spinnennetz, und zapple. Doch der Mohr tut seine Schuldigkeit. Doch wenn ich des Abends hinausgehe auf die Heide und einen Lindenbaum, der dort einsam steht, ersteige, und ich sehe von dem Wipfel meines Freundes in die Welt hinaus: vor meinen Augen zieht die Donau ihren altgewohnten Gang und in ihren Wellen flackert die Glut der untergehenden Sonne; hinter mir im Dorfe klingen die Abendglocken zusammen, die ein freundlicher Lufthauch zu mir hinüber trägt, und die Zweige des Baumes schaukeln im Winde hin und her, wiegen mich ein, wie die Töchter des Erbkönigs und die Blätter und Blüten meines Lieblings schmiegen



sich dann zärtlich an meine Wangen. — Überall Ruhe! Heiligste Ruhe! Nur von fern her tönt der melancholische Ruf der Unke, die traurig im Rohre sitzt. [...]

One day later he continued:

[...] Es ist sechs Uhr früh! Ich war draußen auf der Weide, und bin bei Farkas, dem Hirten, gesessen, und habe dem Klange seiner Schalmei<sup>5</sup> gelauscht. Ach, wie klang sie traurig, und doch so leidenschaftlich verzückt, die Volksweise, die er spielte. Die Blume, die ihm zu Füßen wuchs, erbebt unter der träumerischen Glut seines dunkeln Auges und das braune Haar wehte um seine sonnverbrannten Wangen. [...]

[...] Ich bin so mutterseelenallein, habe weder Menschen, noch Bücher. [...]<sup>6</sup>

In a letter to Emil Freund, written probably a few days later, Mahler's yearning to escape the isolation is coupled with joy at his impending liberation:

Batta, Juni 1879.

[...] Dein Brief hat mich im Zustande der furchtbarsten Sehnsucht getroffen; ich halte es rein nicht mehr aus.

Zu meiner Freude teile ich Dir mit, daß die Familie am 12. August nach Norderney ins Seebad geht, daß ich also dann frei bin wie der Fink. [...]<sup>7</sup>

The last document relating to this, the first Hungarian episode in Mahler's life is a letter written in the middle of July in response to one he received in his "hermitage" at Batta from Albert Spiegler. In it, he reaffirms his yearning for human contact, as well as his inability to fathom his unfamiliar, vaguely hostile surroundings. This letter also contains an interesting, very early indication of the attraction Christian church ceremonies held for Mahler throughout his life (these undoubtedly played a role in his conversion to Catholicism in 1897):

Batta 16 Juli 1879

Lieber Albert!

Vielen Dank für Deine lieben Zeilen; es ist ja ordentlich ein Festtag für mich, wenn sich ein Brief in diese meine Einsiedelei verirrt. Ich erhielt Deine Mahnung, gerade, als schon Alles bei mir beschlossen war: ich will schweigen von meinen Leiden. Wie könnte ich Dir sie auch schildern, der Du die Schmerzen der Einsamkeit noch nicht erduldet, nicht die Qualen, die einem herzlose Menschen bereiten, nicht den Ekel, den dieses schale Durcheinanderleben wie in einem Ameisenhaufen, hervorruft!

Am 10. August (ich schreibe Dir wohl noch bis dorthin) komme ich nach Wien, um von dort aus meine Reise nach Iglau fortzusetzen. ich hoffe *sicher*, Dich dort zu sehen.

Du kannst Dir gar nicht denken, lieber Albert, wie es mir darnach zieht,



wieder einmal Menschen zu sehen; und wie sehne ich mich, wieder einmal den Ton der Orgel und das Brausen das Glocken zu vernehmen. Mit Himmelsflügeln durchweht es mich, wenn ich das Volk geschmückt zur Kirche sehe: Vor dem Altare knien sie und beten, und preisend mischt sich ihr Lied in den Klang der Pauken und Trompeten.

Ach, für mich gibt es schon lange keinen Altar mehr, nur stumm und hoch steht über mir der Tempel Gottes, der weite Himmel. — Ich kann ja nicht hinauf und möchte so gerne beten.

Statt der Choräle und Hymnen brüllen Donner, und statt der Kerzen flattern Blitze. —

Vorbei, vorbei, eure Sprache verstehe ich nicht, ihr Elemente, und wenn ihr zu Gott jauchzet, klingt es in meinem Menschenohr wie Grimm!

Schreibe bald, die Anderen schweigen ja Alle.

Dein

Gustav Mahler<sup>8</sup>

When Mahler left Hungary in August, 1879, virtually penniless and without long-term prospects, he could not have foreseen that he would one day return there in the lofty position of Director of the Royal Hungarian Opera.<sup>9</sup> In the intervening nine years, he lived the traditional, peripatetic existence of a young conductor. A variety of positions in Bad Hall, Laibach (now Ljubljana, Yugoslavia), Vienna, Olmütz (now Olomouc, Czechoslovakia), Kassel and Prague culminated in 1886 when he was hired as second conductor at the Leipzig Stadttheater. It was there that Mahler firmly established his reputation as a conductor and — through his completion of Weber's *Die drei Pintos* — as a highly promising, many-talented man of the music theatre. Although he remained there for two years, Leipzig was in all respects the first station on his road to Budapest. It was also there that his path intersected with those of a number of important personalities who, directly or indirectly, were to come into his orbit of Hungarian connections.

The chief conductor at the Leipzig Opera was the Hungarian-born Arthur Nikisch. (In 1893, some two years after Mahler's departure from Budapest, he was to become director of the Royal Opera.) It was largely because of what he perceived as his subsidiary standing *vis-à-vis* Nikisch that Mahler was ready to leave Leipzig even before the end of 1886. Convinced that Director Max Staegemann was reneging on a tacit agreement that would have allowed him to share the *Ring* with Nikisch, at the end of November Mahler asked Staegemann for his release from the theatre:

Leipzig, 27.11.1886

[...] Ich bitte Sie hiemit um meine Entlassung. — Sobald ich dies ausgesprochen, werden Sie hoffentlich glauben, daß es mir vollkommen Ernst damit ist, und ich erkläre mich meinerseits zu jedem Opfer für diese — ich erkenne es an — gewiß auch von Ihnen teuer erkaufte Gefälligkeit bereit.

Selbstverständlich ist Ihnen die Wahl des Zeitpunkts meines Abganges von hier ganz nach Ihren Bedürfnissen und Bequemlichkeit überlassen. [...] <sup>10</sup>



When he referred to his proffered resignation as a "sacrifice", Mahler was guilty of a certain amount of dissimulation. Though we do not know when he began to negotiate for other positions, it is clear from an undated letter to Friedrich Löhr that by late November or early December he had had a definite offer from Hamburg. He also informed Löhr that Nikisch had received a "brilliant" offer from — Budapest!

[...] Wie Du wahrscheinlich weißt, ist meinem Kollegen Nikisch ein glänzender Antrag gemacht worden.

Geht er, so trete ich als unumschränkter I. Kapellm[eister] an seine Stelle. — Bleibt er, so folge ich einem wirklich geradezu glänzenden Rufe als *Leiter* der Oper nach Hamburg. In letzterem Falle hätte ich eine Gage von 6000 Mk jährlich und 3 Monate Urlaub, das ausschließliche Recht auf "*Die Nibelungen, Meistersinger, Tristan, Fidelio, Don Juan*" und das Recht nach dem ersten Jahre zu kündigen. Daß ich natürlich nur wünschen könnte unter solchen Bedingungen nach Hamburg zu gehen, kannst Du Dir denken — jedoch steht mir die Wahl nicht frei, weil mir Dir. Staegemann, im Falle Nikisch nach Pest gehen sollte, die Entlassung nicht gewähren würde. Die ganze Angelegenheit entscheidet sich längstens bis 15. Jänner. [...]<sup>11</sup>

By Christmas Mahler had had no fewer than three offers; the one from Hamburg was actually at the contract stage:

[Leipzig, 25. Dezember 1886]

[...] Meine eigene Angelegenheit ist seit gestern wieder etwas komplizierter geworden — insofern als ich gestern erhielt: I. Gegenkontrakt v. Pollini (er ist gebunden, *ich* habe mich bis 18. Jänner 87 zu entscheiden) II. einen Antrag an das Hoftheater in Karlsruhe (als Nachfolger Mottls) III. einen famosen Antrag von Neumann in Prag.

Nun steht der Esel zwischen 4 Heubündeln. Was soll ich tun?

In Folge von allen dem habe ich mir vorgenommen, nichts mehr selbst zu tun, sondern zuzusehen, welches Rad mich packen wird. [...]<sup>12</sup>

The reference to Felix Mottl has a premonitory ring today: as will be seen in the following, less than two years later he and Mahler were to succeed each other as director-designates of the Budapest Opera.

As to the position in Hamburg, Mahler's indecision was probably the main reason that he did not go there already in 1887. (He was to do so in 1891.) In another undated letter to Löhr, written probably in early January, 1887, he indicated his awareness of Nikisch's decision to stay in Leipzig; while this cleared the way for Mahler to leave, he now appeared to be leaning towards another position:

[...] Hier ist die Entscheidung für mich nun insofern etwas näher gerückt, als Nikisch sich nun definitiv entschlossen hat zu bleiben, und Staegemann sich bereit erklärt, mir eventuell nichts in den Weg zu legen.



[...] Vorderhand ist es nicht unwahrscheinlich, daß ich vom Herbst ab nach Karlsruhe gehe. [...] <sup>13</sup>

As is seen from a letter to Löhr, written a few weeks later, Mahler's indecision increased in February. Nikisch's sudden illness gave him the opportunity to conduct the *Ring*; he also had had yet another offer:

[Leipzig, 18. Februar 1887]

[...] Meine Angelegenheiten werden immer undurchdringlicher. — Hier habe ich die Walküre dirigiert (infolge der plötzlichen Erkrankung meines Kollegen) und dadurch eine sehr starke Position erobert.

Zu gleicher Zeit habe ich einen Antrag nach *Neuyork* [sic!] an Anton Seidl's Stelle bekommen — den ich vielleicht zuletzt annehmen werde! — [...] <sup>14</sup>

With Seidl, another Hungarian-born conductor entered the scene, one who at this time held the post Mahler was to assume some two decades later as conductor of the German repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

In Leipzig, though, increased opportunities and recognition appear to have decided Mahler in favour of remaining there. In a letter to Löhr, dating from the spring, Mahler wrote this:

[Leipzig, end of April 1887]

... Daß ich seit etwa 3 Monaten in unerhörter Weise angeschmiedet bin — ich habe durch die Erkrankung meines Kollegen das Amt *2er Menschen* zu verwalten — wirst Du wohl wissen. Ich dirigiere beinahe täglich große Opern, und komme buchstäblich kaum aus dem Theater hinaus. [...] Jetzt bin ich daran "Siegfried" "herauszubringen". — In der öffentlichen Meinung bin ich bereits ziemlich gestiegen, werde sehr oft "gerufen" etc.

Mit meinem Chef stehe ich geradezu in freundschaftlichem Verhältnis und in seiner Familie wie das Kind vom Haus. Es ist beinahe der einzige Verkehr, den ich hier habe. [...] Selbstverständlich ist [...] mein Hierbleiben wieder etwas näher gerückt, da ich doch nun eigentlich keinen Grund habe, fortzugehen. [...] <sup>15</sup>

In about a year (during which time he completed his work on the performing version of Weber's *Die drei Pintos*, and on what was to become his First Symphony), Mahler had the grounds for leaving Leipzig. Seemingly unable to avoid personal clashes at crucial periods throughout his life, in May he had an altercation with Albert Goldberg, the Opera's chief stage manager. Judging from the scanty evidence, it was of such a nature that Staegemann felt unable to support Mahler. Consequently, on the 16th Mahler asked Staegemann (apparently not for the first time in connection with this affair) to release him from his contract:

In der bekannten zwischen mir und Herrn Goldberg abschwebenden Differenz muß ich nochmals auf meine von Ihnen erbetene Entlassung zurückkommen. [...] <sup>16</sup>



One day later, he requested to be excused from further duties at the theatre:

Kapellmeister Gustav Mahler bittet ergebenst um Dispensation vom Dienste bis zur Erledigung seines Gesuches.<sup>17</sup>

The request was granted. Mahler's release from the Stadttheater was announced in the press a week later. The following words unmistakably convey the sense of regret many felt at the loss:

Der äußerst talentvolle Musiker, Herr Kapellmeister Gustav Mahler, dessen musikalische Wiedererweckung der "drei Pintos" von C. M. v. Weber die größte Anerkennung verdient und gefunden hat, ist auf sein Ansuchen aus dem Verbande des Leipziger Stadttheaters entlassen worden.<sup>18</sup>

In the event, the loss was as much Mahler's as the institution's. Unlike a year and a half earlier, now he was without genuine prospects for employment. Although he made a few enquiries, and even received offers,<sup>19</sup> an undated letter written from Iglau to Max Steinitzer in Leipzig reflects his growing concern at being unemployed:

[Summer 1888]

[...] Zunächst bin ich wirklich unfähig, über mich zu berichten. Nur so viel, daß sich keine Aussicht zeigt, so bald wieder ein Engagement zu bekommen, und ich gestehe Ihnen aufrichtig, daß mich dies in große Sorgen setzt. [...] <sup>20</sup>

Being without long-term prospects, Mahler was no doubt happy to have had accepted the assignment to prepare the Prague première (and a subsequent tour) of *Pintos*. He left for Prague in June, with the première scheduled for August. Although some details are unknown, it is clear that the first steps to hire Mahler as director of the Budapest Opera were taken during this time. Furthermore, the available evidence shows that his name was initially put and carried forward by private individuals at the same time that those officials charged with the hiring of a director were pursuing other candidates.

Reporting the debate of the Hungarian Parliament's Finance Committee on the Opera's 1888–1889 budget (for details, see Chapter II), the *Budapesti Hírlap* quoted Ferenc Beniczky (government commissioner in charge of the National Theatre and the Royal Opera) on the state of his search for a director. At this time, he was

privately in touch with two very eminent men concerning the directorship, but is unable to take official steps in this regard until the Committee makes its decision on the future of the Opera.<sup>21</sup>

Although the two "very eminent men" were not identified in the report, one of them was certainly Felix Mottl. In fact, he signed a contract with the Hungarian



officials only three days later, on June 5th.<sup>22</sup> As to the identity of the other candidate at this time, no firm information is available. According to at least one newspaper report, it had been Arthur Nikisch.<sup>23</sup> However, the literature on him offers no conclusive evidence for this.

The earliest document connecting Mahler directly with the Budapest Opera originates from early in July, 1888: it is a letter from the 'cellist David Popper (at that time professor at the Academy of Music in Budapest) to the musicologist Guido Adler. It is clear from the letter dated July 4, 1888, that Popper was responding to an initial enquiry made by Adler on behalf of Mahler. Since Adler, Mahler's lifelong friend and supporter,<sup>24</sup> was at that time teaching at the German University in Prague, he must have been made aware of Mahler's situation upon the latter's arrival in that city in June. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Adler first wrote to Popper in late June or early July. In part, Popper's reply reads as follows:

In sofortiger Beantwortung Ihrer liebenswürdigen Zeilen teile ich Ihnen mit, daß ich den Haupt-Inhalt derselben, Herrn G. Mahler betreffend, an die richtige Stelle leiten werde, da, wo die Beschlüsse über die definitive Besetzung der lange schwebenden Pester Stelle, auch sie eine Art ältester Seeschlange, endgiltig gefaßt werden.

[...] Vor 14 Tagen habe ich die Angelegenheit in dem Stadium verlassen, daß man mit einem sehr renommierten ausländischen Dirigenten in ernsthaften Unterhandlungen war, die scheinbar prosperierten. Das kann sich über Nacht geändert haben seither, wie so oft schon in diesem Falle. [...] <sup>25</sup>

It is unlikely that someone as well-placed as Popper could have remained ignorant of Mottl's signing as early as June 5th. Rather, his equivocal reference to the "negotiations" may indicate that there were continuing doubts about Mottl's intentions, in spite of the signed contract. Popper's next letter to Adler appears to support such an assumption. As it also contains interesting comments on, and details about the position in Budapest, the letter is given here in its entirety:

Königswart, 11. Juli 1888

Hochgeehrter Herr Professor,

Anbei die Antwort des Direktors von Mihalovich auf meinen Brief in der Mahler-Angelegenheit. Natürlich wird es dabei nicht bleiben u. wie in dem Briefe ausdrücklich gesagt, wird Herr Mahler Gegenstand eingehendster Erkundigungen in der nächsten Zeit sein, sofern nicht etwa mittlerweile Mottl's Engagement perfect wird.

Ich habe mich für Mahler sehr eingesetzt, aber wie sie aus dem anliegenden Briefe ersehen können, kommt der als selbstverständlich vorausgesetzte geniale Opern- u. Konzert-Dirigent doch erst in zweiter Reihe in Betracht: in erster Linie haben die Herren die organisatorische Begabung u. Betätigung des zukünftigen Opern-Direktors, dem die gründliche Reinigung eines künstlerischen Augias-Stalles zufallen wird, in's Auge gefaßt.

Nun heißt es geduldig zuwarten! Lange kann die Entscheidung nicht auf



sich warten lassen: wenn im Herbst die ersten Blätter fallen, dann fallen dem keineswegs zu beneidenden neuen Pester Opern-Direktor manche Schuppen von den Augen! Die Stelle ist übrigens glänzend dotiert (10 000 fl) und das ist immerhin eine Art Trost!

Mit der Bitte um gef. Retournierung des Mihalovich'schen Briefes u. mit meinen schönsten Grüßen bin ich stets bereitwilligst

Ihr aufrichtig ergebener

D. Popper<sup>26</sup>

In his reply, Adler likely suggested to Popper that Mahler should visit him in Königswart. In his letter of July 17th, Popper (considering himself merely an intermediary) declined the offer; instead, he suggested that Mahler should visit Ödön von Mihalovich (director of the Academy of Music in Budapest, and presumably a key figure in the search for a new opera director) in Bayreuth.<sup>27</sup>

Adler no doubt relayed Popper's suggestion to Mahler, possibly reiterating his own idea of a visit to the 'cellist. For, in an undated letter (probably written towards the end of July), Mahler refers to the possibility of visiting both Königswart and Bayreuth:

[July 21 or 28?, 1888]

Lieber Freund!

Nur schnell meinen herzlichsten Dank und Bestätigung des Empfanges Deines Briefes. Die Sache mit Bayreuth u. Königswart muß ich mich erst noch überlegen — ich habe jetzt hier die Hände voll zu tun — und weiß zunächst nicht, wie ich abkommen kann. Ich bin nun wirklich begierig, was das alles für Erfolg haben wird. —

[...] Prag. Samstag.<sup>28</sup>

Under the circumstances, the tone of this letter is striking: Mahler, unemployed in the long term, is certainly "curious" about the prospects in Budapest, but appears reluctant to take decisive action himself!

Probably because of the contract signed by Mottl, no new developments seem to have taken place until September.<sup>29</sup> When Mottl cancelled his contract on September 15th,<sup>30</sup> however, the earlier efforts to bring Mahler to the attention of the appropriate officials in Budapest quickly bore fruit. In an undated letter to Löhr Mahler wrote thus:

Sonntag abend komme ich nach Wien in sehr wichtigen Angelegenheiten.<sup>31</sup>

As Beniczky would have contacted Mahler only after he had received Mottl's resignation, the "Sunday" mentioned in the above letter probably referred to September 23rd. Three days later Mahler was already in Budapest,<sup>32</sup> undoubtedly negotiating with Beniczky.



For the want of full documentary evidence, the date Mahler signed his contract, and the kind of contract it was, are questions that have yet to be answered conclusively. It is generally believed that he was engaged for ten years, at an annual salary of 10 000 florins. In one source, it is implied that the signing of the contract took place on September 28th.<sup>33</sup> Vidor gives October 1st in one instance as the start of Mahler's tenure as director;<sup>34</sup> in two other places, he has the date as October 8th, and adds in the first one of these that Mahler started work *officially* on this date.<sup>35</sup> Diósy also gives October 8th as the date on which Mahler assumed the position; he also states that the contract (for ten years, at the salary mentioned above) was approved by the responsible ministry.<sup>36</sup> Yet, several indicators cast doubt on at least some of these details.

As late as October 1st, the *Pesti Hírlap* reported that:

The question of directorship at the Royal Hungarian Opera is still unresolved. [...] Negotiations [...] began recently with Mahler, former conductor from Leipzig. Mahler has been in Budapest for several days and frequently meets the government commissioner but — as we hear it — no agreement has been reached as yet. [...] <sup>37</sup>

The next day, citing the *Pester Lloyd*, the *Pesti Hírlap* brought this report:

Mahler, the Leipzig Kapellmeister, yesterday went to Munich from where he also had had a contract offer. However, he will return already on Thursday [October 4th], and it is likely that on that day he will sign the contract which makes him director of the Royal Hungarian Opera. In that case, Mahler would take over the direction of the Opera already during the next couple of weeks. [...] <sup>38</sup>

As Beniczky must have been under great pressure to solve the problem of the artistic directorship of the Opera, it would seem unlikely that Mahler's signing — had it, in fact, taken place earlier — would not have been made known to the press. Finally, the *Pesti Hírlap* reported five days later that:

The new director of the Royal Hungarian Opera, Gustav Mahler, has assumed his duties. [...] Mahler was engaged by the Opera for six [sic!] years. <sup>39</sup>

The weekly music journal *Zenelap* informed its readers on October 10th that

Government Commissioner Ferenc Beniczky has entrusted Gustav Mahler, the former Leipzig Kapellmeister, with the directorial duties at the Opera on an interim basis. [...] <sup>40</sup>

More than a year later, the same journal referred to Mahler as having been "recently confirmed in his position". <sup>41</sup> The time-frame implied by this comment is



similar to that indicated in a diary entry by Zsigmond Justh, dated April 15, 1889, in which the author reflects on the likely longevity of Mahler's popularity in Budapest:

[In spite of his current good relations with the press], I do not think that his popularity here will last as long as his contract, which he is to sign on the first of May.<sup>42</sup>

An even later date of signing may be suggested (and appears to confirm the date indicated in Note 33) by the surviving traces of some documents in the Hungarian National Archives. The correspondence register of the Interior Ministry's Executive Office for 1890 records the receipt on January 3rd of two submissions sent by the intendant of the Opera on December 30, 1889 (Opera registry No. 55; Ministry registry No. 39) and on January 2, 1890 (Nos. 2 and 38, respectively). In both cases, the subject is noted to have been "the contract of Gustav Mahler Opera Director".<sup>43</sup>

Rumours concerning Mahler's position were circulating even abroad. The following sentence occurs in one of the letters from Henry Pierson (writing on behalf of the intendant of the Berlin Opera) to Sándor Erkel (for further details of this correspondence, see Chapter III):

Wenn wird denn Mahler definitiv angestellt?<sup>44</sup>

However, back on December 2, 1889, an apparently unequivocal refutation of the rumours had been published in one of the newspapers:

We were skeptical towards the news received the other day concerning the contract of the opera director. As it turned out, with good reason. Official sources report that there are no differences with respect to the contract. Nor could there be any, as already on the first of October last year a contract for ten years was made with Director Mahler, and it was approved by the Minister.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever the actual status of Mahler's contract may have been at the time, it is clear from the frequent and detailed reports in the press that he had settled in Budapest and was energetically and enthusiastically planning his work by the end of the first week in October. On the 6th, he gave his first major interview; it was published first in the *Budapesti Hirlap*, and was then carried, in part or in whole, in other papers. The article has the title "National Opera — The new Opera director's programme". Following a brief biography,<sup>46</sup> Mahler's statement (concerning his plans, as well as his artistic convictions) was reported verbatim:

I want to work with heart and soul, with zeal and enthusiasm. I have been studying the situation in Budapest for three months now, and have discovered many suprising facts. The most astonishing of these is that Hungary, richer in splendid voices than any other European nation, has made no serious attempt to create a national Opera. In order to be effective, art



needs, above all, pure materials; experiments avenge themselves cruelly. One dare not forget for a moment that the text represents an artistic factor equally as important as the music. I am endlessly astonished that the question of the language of a performance has not been subject for serious concern in Hungary. Aside from the nationalist point of view, I know of nothing more unfitting artistically than when a performance is in two languages. This will also act to the detriment of the musical motives. In such a bilingual performance, where the musical discourse is carried on in Italian by the adored one and in Hungarian by the adorer, it is impossible to really fulfil the intentions of the composer. It would even be more natural (that is, artistically more tolerable) if the opera were to be sung altogether without words; at least the beauty of the music would not be spoilt. I consider it equal nonsense artistically when the singer makes only a pretence of learning the Hungarian text and the foreign accent is evident in every syllable. Such unnatural conditions make the healthy evolution of an artistic institution impossible, and thus I will consider it my first and noblest duty to devote all my energies to making the Opera into a true Hungarian national institution. And I am happy to say that on the basis of what I have already seen, this will be possible. If the public can moderate their adoration for the so-called stars even a little, already in the near future I hope to be able to provide satisfactory evidence to the effect that the ideal of a national Opera in Hungary is not an idle dream.

My confidence in this respect is bolstered to no small extent by the thoughtfulness and warm support which I have received from Herr Mihalovich, Director of the Academy of Music. I can bring this crucial point of my programme to realization only shoulder to shoulder with him.

But guest-engagements must be brought to an end immediately. Under my directorship, no foreign singer will be allowed to appear more than three times, and even then only with a view to permanent engagement.

It would serve no purpose to go into details on this occasion, but I repeat that judging from my experiences so far, native talent has not been sufficiently appreciated. Many a singer who has left the Opera could enter triumphantly on the stages of the largest German opera houses.

The most striking example for this is provided by Fräulein Rothauser, who is adored by the public in Leipzig, and who was not wanted here. I would have retained her forcibly, had I been director then. I hope that she will return.

I think that so much is enough of the generalities. Now I only ask you to advance me a little of your confidence until December. Then — I do not yet know the day — *Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* will be staged on consecutive days, both with all-Hungarian casts. This double première will be my first introduction.<sup>47</sup>

Four days later, on October 10th, Mahler was officially introduced to the staff of the Opera by Beniczky. Both of them spoke to the assembled artists. Beniczky's speech touches on the events leading up to Mahler's engagement; it also reflects some of the key elements in Mahler's programme:



Ladies and Gentlemen!

As you know, when I assumed the duties of the Opera's intendant as government commissioner eight months ago, I gave Sándor Erkel, as artistic director, complete freedom in artistic matters. However, Herr Erkel resigned a few weeks ago, and requested in his letter of resignation that this position be filled as soon as possible. The most important interests of the institution demanded that this important position remain unoccupied for as short a time as possible. I am convinced that I was fortunate to be able to engage Herr Mahler as the Opera's director. In addition to his brief but brilliant artistic career, he is also recommended by his favourable personal characteristics. For, as a practising musician and as a composer he has been honoured abroad several times; recently, as first [sic!] Kapellmeister of the Leipzig Opera, he had held a position of preeminence in the world of music. Despite the fact that he is not Hungarian, he made it his primary task to make our Opera into a Hungarian music theatre. I hope that his efforts in this direction will meet with the most vigorous support by the public and the press. On the occasion of this official introduction, I appeal to the worthy artists of the Opera to support the new director in his artistic aspirations, and I also commend him to the attention of the young generation who will eventually become the Opera's pillars of support under his leadership. Henceforth you, the young generation, will have the opportunity to demonstrate your talent not only in the rehearsal rooms, but also on stage. You are the ones who can make it possible for the director to fulfil his programme, and thus to keep the Hungarian Opera from falling into the hands of temporary operators.<sup>48</sup>

No verbatim record of Mahler's speech has come down to us. The following text, widely assumed to be that of his first address to the staff, was published among his collected letters:

Verehrte Damen und Herren!

Ich habe die Ehre, mit dem heutigen Tage an die Spitze eines Institutes zu treten, welches in jeder Hinsicht dazu berufen ist, die Heimat und der Hort der nationalen Kunst dieses Landes zu sein. — Zunächst danke ich unserem verehrten Chef, dem Herrn Staatssekretär von Beniczky für das Vertrauen, mit welchem er ein so verantwortungsreiches aber auch ehrenvolles Amt in meine Hände gelegt hat, und gebe hiemit das Versprechen ab, mich mit ganzer Seele und allen Kräften der mir übertragenen Aufgabe zu widmen. An Sie, meine Damen und Herren, möchte ich auch einige Worte richten!

Mit Stolz und mit Freude sehe ich um mich eine Künstlerschar versammelt, welche zum Siege zu führen, sich kein Heerführer schämen darf. Es muß jeden von uns mit Stolz erfüllen, einem Institute anzugehören, welches der erhabene Beschützer der Künste, Se. Majestät, der König, in so huldreicher und munifizenter Weise fördert, für welches die oberste Vertretung des Reiches immer offene Hände gehabt hat, welches den Mittelpunkt aller künstlerischen Bestrebungen Ungarns und zugleich den Stolz der Nation



bildet — bilden sollte. — Andererseits aber — mit welchen strengen Anforderungen an uns selbst muß uns das Bewußtsein erfüllen, daß wir diejenigen sind, denen es obliegt, die Bedeutung eines solchen Institutes zu erhalten und zu steigern. —

Meine Damen und Herren — geloben wir es uns zu, mit ganzer Seele und voller Hingebung uns der stolzen Aufgabe zu weihen, welche uns zufällt! Strengste Pflichterfüllung des Einzelnen und vollstes Aufgehen und Hingabe an das Ganze — dies sei der Wahlspruch, welchen wir auf unsere Fahnen schreiben.

Erwarten Sie nun zunächst weder Versprechungen noch Maßnahmen von mir. Auch werde ich Ihnen heute kein Programm aufstellen.

Wir wollen uns zunächst gegenseitig kennen lernen und sammeln zu dem schwierigen Werke, das uns zufällt.

Wenn ich Ihnen heute eines versprechen darf, so ist es das, Ihnen mit gutem Beispiel voranzugehen in der Freudigkeit des Tuns und Redlichkeit des Wollens!

Begeben wir uns an die Arbeit — und tun wir nun das unserige! Dann wird auch das Gelingen unser Werk krönen!

Ich entlasse Sie nun mit der freudigen Hoffnung, daß Sie mir alle als echte Künstler zustimmen und daß Sie mich auch in der schwierigen Aufgabe unterstützen werden.<sup>49</sup>

Although it may have been Mahler's initial intention to use this text, it is clear from newspaper reports of his speech that the two texts differed in a number of particulars. According to one account, Mahler began by expressing his pleasure at assuming the artistic directorship of the Royal Hungarian Opera. He went on to state that he found excellent artistic material among the solo singers, as well as in the chorus and the orchestra; material, furthermore, that may be developed in the most secure hope for success. For the time being, he would not announce a programme. His motto consists of three words: work, work, work! He promises to set a good example in this regard. In closing, he emphasized that he hoped to make the Hungarian language his own within a year or a little more.<sup>50</sup>

Whereas the majority of the newspapers reported Mahler's introduction at the Opera objectively, the most nationalistic press organs (already unhappy over the appointment of a young, German-speaking "foreigner") used it as an opportunity to attack his programme. For example, the *Zenelap* published a long article dealing with Mahler's interview on October 6th, as well as with his introduction by Beniczky. The writer ridiculed Mahler's plan to create a Hungarian Opera, especially from the point of view of his proposed collaboration with the Academy of Music, at this time staffed largely with German-speaking professors. Even his announced intention to learn Hungarian was received with sarcasm and skepticism.<sup>51</sup>

Although it proved to be an influential and troublesome opponent, the nationalistic press was not the only problem Mahler had to face upon taking office. In order to understand his position fully, and before proceeding to a detailed account of his directorial tenure, it is necessary to examine briefly the situation of the Royal Hungarian Opera in 1888, and the factors — artistic, as well as political and economic — which combined to create that situation.



## Chapter II

# MUSIC AND SOCIETY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY HUNGARY — THE ROYAL HUNGARIAN OPERA BEFORE MAHLER

Having already served in four different posts within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during his relatively short career, in 1888 Mahler returned to it after a brief sojourn 'abroad'. Unlike, for example, in his stations in Bad Hall (in Austria itself), or Laibach and Prague (German-language islands in Slavic territories), however, in Budapest he was to occupy an exposed position of power and authority in the stronghold of the nationalistic, nominally independent 'other half' of the Monarchy. A German-speaking Bohemian Jew, Mahler now found himself in the midst of a people who had been characterized thus by one of their own statesmen some fifty years earlier:

Während ein anderes Volk sich einzig durch die Güte der Sache bestimmen läßt, wenig bekümmert, woher und in welcher Gestalt es kommt, will der Ungar alles, vom Kleinsten bis zum Größten, in ein magyarisches Gewand hüllen, und was nicht in diesem erscheint, ist ihm schon verdächtig. Mir wenigstens ist kaum ein wirklicher Ungar bekannt, der, wie sehr auch sein Haar gebleicht sei, wie tief ihm auch Erfahrung und Lebensweisheit die Stirne gefurcht, nicht, gleich einem Verrückten, dessen fixe Idee berührt wird, sich den Regeln der Billigkeit, ja sogar der Gerechtigkeit, mehr oder weniger entzöge, wenn die Angelegenheit unserer Sprache und Nationalität aufs Tapet kommt. Bei solchen Gelegenheiten wird der Kaltblütigste hingerissen, der Scharfsichtigste mit Blindheit geschlagen und der Billigste, Gerechteste ist bereit, die erste von den unveränderlichen Regeln der ewigen Wahrheit, die man bei keiner Gelegenheit aus den Augen verlieren sollte, die Regel: "Was du nicht willst, das man dir tu, das füg' auch keinem andern zu!" zu vergessen, oder er vergißt sie auch wirklich.<sup>1</sup>

If the above statement was a true description of Hungarian character and conduct in 1842 — at a time when Hungary was merely a vassal nation in the Austrian Empire — it would have been no less so in 1888, more than 20 years after the Compromise (*Ausgleich*) of 1867.

Between 1875 and 1890, Hungary was governed by the Liberal Party of Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza. One of the shrewdest political organizers of his time, Tisza came into power by abandoning his earlier principles of opposition to the Compromise. He retained power for a decade and a half by convincing the upper classes that maintaining the *status quo* in the face of rising demands for social and economic reform depended on the continuation of the dualistic administration.



Tisza represented the educated; through him, the Crown maintained its hold on Hungary by appealing to the community of interest among the aristocracy, gentry and the upper industrial and commercial classes in the dual state. He was forced to resign in 1890, chiefly because of strengthening opposition to what was perceived as his pro-Austrian stand on military affairs; but the basic political doctrines he brought into practice outlived him by many years. Nevertheless, the appointment of Count Gyula Szapáry by the King as Tisza's successor brought a definite shift to the right. Next to the role of the press, it unquestionably had the largest share in bringing Mahler's tenure as director of the Opera to a premature end (for details, see Chapter III).

During his long reign, Tisza gained the support of especially the moderate elements in the press by treating them as semiofficial organs of the government. In many cases, though, the same newspapers (sensitive to the prevailing sentiment of the majority of their Hungarian readers) championed the most nationalistic aspirations in those areas of public interest which did not conflict with the policies of the government. The arts — especially theatre and music — presented them with readily available material.

There were more than two dozen daily, weekly and monthly newspapers and journals published in Hungarian or German in Budapest during Mahler's time there. Although most of them published at least reports (if not reviews, in the full sense of the word) of musical events, including performances at the Opera, nearly a dozen of them published such material on a regular basis and often at some length. Accordingly (and regardless of the professional expertise of the writer!) the following publications and writers were in the best position to influence public opinion on music:

*Budapesti Hírlap* — Béla Tóth;  
*Egyetértés* — Dezső Ambrozovits;  
*Fővárosi Lapok* — Móric Vavrincz;  
*Nemzet* — József Keszler;  
*Neues Pester Journal* — Viktor von Herzfeld; Béla Diósy;  
*Pester Lloyd* — August Beer;  
*Pesti Hírlap* — Kornél Ábrányi junior;  
*Pesti Napló* — Kornél Ábrányi senior;  
*Zenelap* — István Kereszty

Some of these writers, such as the elder Ábrányi and Vavrincz, were against Mahler from the start, mostly for nationalistic reasons. (Ironically, it seems that Vavrincz himself spoke Hungarian so poorly that his articles had to be translated from German into Hungarian.<sup>2</sup>) One or two others, such as Beer and Herzfeld (Mahler's erstwhile colleague at the Vienna Conservatory), seldom deviated from their support for Mahler, at least in his capacity as opera director. However, the majority vacillated between praise and condemnation; in general, though, they turned against Mahler more and more towards the end of his tenure.

The attitude of many Hungarian writers and musicians was, in part, a reflection of the struggle for a national identity in music. For the better part of the nineteenth



century, Hungarian art music had been dominated by representatives of German Romanticism. In addition to the influence exerted by the immigrant musicians such as Robert Volkmann (1815–1883), the decisive character of Hungarian musical life in the second half of the century was determined by the ascendancy of three composers: Franz Liszt (1811–1886), Mihály Mosonyi (1814–1870) and Ferenc Erkel (1810–1893). Composer of the national anthem (*Himnusz*), by 1888 Erkel had long been venerated as the father-figure of nationalism in music. This was undoubtedly well-earned by the Hungarian historical subjects of his operas. Stylistically, however, his music seldom rises above an artificiality which is the result of an attempt to graft rhythms and melodic tunes characteristic of Hungarian folk (or, better, popular, 'folkish') music onto a thoroughly Germanic harmonic foundation. Nevertheless, Erkel's influence reached into all walks of musical life. It was strongest, though (and was continued there by his sons), at the Royal Hungarian Opera.

Although the records are incomplete, the first permanent Hungarian opera company in Budapest appears to have been founded in 1837.<sup>3</sup> Then, and for the next 47 years its performances were held on the stage of the National Theatre. With the rapid increase in the popularity of opera, however, facilities soon became intolerably crowded, and began to affect adversely both forms of theatre. Consequently, an architectural competition for an opera house was announced in 1873; the six architects invited to participate included four Hungarians (Ybl, Linzbauer, Steindl and Skalnitzky), one Austrian (Fellner) and one German (Bohnstedt). From among six designs submitted, those by Miklós Ybl were accepted. A commission was established to oversee the construction. It was chaired by Baron Frigyes Podmaniczky, Intendant of the National Theatre who, on June 25, 1875, was also appointed intendant of the yet to be built Opera. The commission also had Sándor Erkel as one of its members.

The actual construction was begun in October, 1875. Because of the restrictions placed by the government on the annual appropriations for this purpose, progress was very slow; four years after breaking ground, only the external structure was ready. Finally, in 1882 a Prime Ministerial decree established the autumn of 1884 as the target date for the completion of the new theatre. The Opera House opened its doors to the public on September 27, 1884.

Built at a cost of 3,298 430 florins (as against the original estimate of 2,110 001) the Royal Hungarian Opera was an architectural masterpiece, as well as perhaps the best-equipped music theatre of its day. Although the original plans called for 1500 seats, at its opening the theatre could accommodate only 1139 patrons.<sup>4</sup> The combined surface area of the main stage and the rear stage (used only for the largest productions, such as the Wagner dramas) amounted to nearly 1000 square meters. The stage foundation was of all-steel construction; it was activated by hydraulic means (based on the so-called *Asphaleia*-system). Steel curtains separated the two stages from each other, and from the auditorium. During Mahler's directorship, the Opera still had partly gas and partly electrical lighting. However, the main chandelier in the auditorium, and the stage lighting had been electrical from the opening day. The entire house was electrified in 1895; major modifications were effected in 1912.<sup>5</sup>



Already in the four short years between the opening and Mahler's appointment as director, the Opera had experienced a succession of serious crises, both financial and artistic. Although the insufficient supply of Hungarian singers and musicians (leading to the establishment of an arbitrary and unstable system of guest-performers) undoubtedly played an important role in it, the course of the theatre's history was essentially determined by the Hungarian social system of the day, as it was reflected in the Opera's audience and its political-administrative governance.

The vast majority of opera-goers came from the ranks of the aristocracy, the landed gentry and the leading financiers, together with a proportionately small sprinkling of intellectuals.<sup>6</sup> The quality of the performances — other than for the obligatory presence of a famous guest-singer — was of less importance than the glitter of the social occasion. Administratively, the Opera came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Its day-to-day management was entrusted to an intendant; he was responsible only to the Minister who appointed him. However, it will be seen later that, since a sizeable portion of the Opera's annual operating budget came from the public purse (the remainder, a fixed sum, was donated by the King), the Hungarian Parliament took an active interest in the affairs of the Opera.

In light of what was already said about the social and political conditions at the time, it is not surprising that intendants were chosen more for rank than for ability. Even so, the first intendant, Baron Podmaniczky, appears in retrospect to have been a hardworking and conscientious administrator. As he knew himself to be a dilettante in artistic matters, he relied heavily on the Opera's *de facto* music director, Sándor Erkel, and on its *éminence grise*, the titular chief music director, Ferenc Erkel.<sup>7</sup>

Considering later developments, it is ironic that the hegemony of the Erkel-family at the Opera did not enjoy undivided support. For instance, reporting the postponement of the première of Mihalovich's *Hagbart und Signe* because of inadequate preparation, the *Pesti Hirlap* sarcastically commented that if only the composer belonged to the "Erkel-dynasty", his work would receive more attention.<sup>8</sup> The elder Erkel's intolerance towards Wagner's music (especially the works after *Lohengrin*) was well-known,<sup>9</sup> and was probably shared by his son. Commenting on the Prague première of *Rheingold* (on December 19, 1885, under Mahler), one reporter demanded to know whether Sándor would need another royal decoration in order to bring one or another of the *Ring*-dramas to performance at the Hungarian Opera.<sup>10</sup> Probably not accidentally, the plans of the Opera for 1886, announced about a week later, included the première of *Die Walküre*. The new plans were all very well, commented the *Hirlap*, assuming that the directorate intended to keep all its promises, something "not to be taken for granted on the basis of past experience."<sup>11</sup>

Under attack from the press, and faced with the difficulty of convincing Parliament to approve a large budget for 1886, Podmaniczky resigned some 15 months after the opening of the new Opera. Although the official date of his departure was February 1, 1886, he said farewell to the staff of the institute already on January 5th.<sup>12</sup> In his retrospective evaluation of the Podmaniczky-era, Vidor faulted the first intendant only for attempting too much too soon (especially as



concerned the immediate introduction of the expensive 'star system' of guest-singers), and thus raising expectations too high in relation to the small capacity and consequent low revenue-producing ability of the house.<sup>13</sup> Vidor's summary of the fundamental problems was a particularly perceptive one; as is clear from the following excerpt, the foundering of the Beniczky-Mahler regime a few years later was an almost foregone conclusion, while their initial successes appear even more striking in this light:

These two extremes (that is to say, a limited income from a relatively inexpensively priced auditorium, in contrast with the increasingly expensive, but less than perfectly organized artistic ensemble, creating excessive expectations from the start) constituted the fundamental reason for the clashes — at times mildér, at others more serious — which recurred during the entire existence of the Royal Opera. Even the most strenuous efforts over the decades did not succeed in eradicating them. Intendants, directors came and went, and discharged their responsibilities with varying degrees of success; all of them, however, ended either by attempting to raise artistic standards (in which case they ended in bankruptcy) or by trying to effect savings within a reduced budget (inevitably causing an artistic decline).<sup>14</sup>

The performance statistics given by Vidor for the first 15 months of the new Opera's operation are interesting, especially in comparison with the repertoire of the Mahler-era and of the periods immediately before and after him (see end of Chapter III).

During the Podmaniczky-regime, there had been a total of 286 performances; counting evenings with more than one work on the programme, 43 operas and 8 'dance works' were given 366 times. Of these, the works of French composers were heard 152 times, Italians 102, Germans and Austrians 67, and Hungarians 45 times. From among the top 13 composers most often performed, Verdi is best represented with 6 works given 44 times; he is followed by Ferenc Erkel (3/37), Meyerbeer (5/36), Bayer (1/29), Wagner (2/18), Gounod (1/18), Rossini (2/15), Donizetti (3/14), Delibes (2/14), Halévy (1/12), Ponchielli (1/11), Mozart (2/6) and Goldmark (1/6).<sup>15</sup> Besides Mozart's astonishingly low position, the meager statistical presence of Hungarian composers is striking: only the music of Erkel occupies a reasonable position. Of the 51 works performed during this period, only 5 were by Hungarian composers;<sup>16</sup> their position on (or actual absence from) the list of the leading 13 composers (Goldmark was reckoned as a Hungarian composer) reflects the low public interest shown towards these works. Although some others were already in rehearsal, there were only two new productions during Podmaniczky's intendantship: Erkel's *István király* (King Stephan), (composed for the opening of the new house) and Bayer's ballet *Wiener Walz*; for the rest, productions had been taken over from the pre-1884 repertoire of the National Theatre's opera company.

Following the first reports of Podmaniczky's impending resignation, the press engaged in speculation concerning the person of the new intendant. Among several prominent personalities mentioned, the most interesting ones were Mihalovich and



Count Géza Zichy. Eventually, another magnate, Count István Keglevich was appointed to take office on February 1, 1886.

Unlike Podmaniczky, Keglevich was an impulsive, arrogant administrator, who interfered willfully in the artistic affairs of the Opera. Consequently, the difficulties noted above continued unabated under him. The budgetary deficit kept growing, primarily because of the unceasing influx of expensive foreign singers. In spite of the abundant supply of 'stars', attendance at the Opera was on the decline. Not surprisingly, the press took up the affairs of the Opera in earnest a mere weeks after the arrival of the new intendant.

On April 4 the *Budapester Tagblatt* published a satirical *feuilleton* in the form of a small skit. In it, the frequent cancellations of announced performances, as well as the intendant's lack of expertise were lampooned.<sup>17</sup> About a month later, another newspaper devoted an editorial to an analysis of the Opera's difficulties, under the title "Concerning one of the Opera's chief problems (Judging the public)". The glut of foreign singers, and the consequent fiscal deficit is due to the public's insatiable appetite for, and fickle treatment of guest stars. Ever since the days of opera performances at the National Theatre, the public has been spoiled; their expectations now surpass those of the audiences in Paris, Berlin or Milan. Following a plea for rational reforms, the writer ended by sounding a warning which, in the course of the next few years, was to be echoed increasingly not only in artistic and journalistic circles, but also in the political arena: excessive demands must sooner or later bring into question the feasibility of a permanent opera house in Hungary.<sup>18</sup>

For the time being, however, Keglevich appeared to seek solutions in expansion, both of the repertoire and of the number of performances. During the summer he went to Bayreuth; his presumed purpose was to negotiate the performance of the *Ring* in the course of the following season.<sup>19</sup> Beginning on October 6th, a weekly performance was given at the Várszínház (Castle Theatre) in Buda on evenings when the main Opera house was dark.<sup>20</sup> While this was aimed at attracting a wider audience (thus reducing the deficit), the small capacity of this theatre, as well as additional expenses made it an impractical venture.<sup>21</sup>

By the beginning of his first full season as intendant, Keglevich had determined that conditions at the Opera could not be improved without radical changes in the administrative and artistic personnel. On October 5, 1886 he wrote to the Interior Minister with reference to the two Erkels (Sándor and Gyula), as well as to the Opera's business manager and secretary:

[...] the ill-will, incompetence and laziness of the artistic leadership make it impossible to rectify the disorderly situation.

It is primarily Technical [sic!] Director Sándor Erkel who, through his incurable laziness, defeats all efforts at organized and orderly functioning; since he ceased being all-powerful and no longer has the final say in all matters, he does absolutely nothing, and postpones all decisions indefinitely with his amazingly skillful recourse to *vis inertiae*.

I have come to the conclusion that not only is he unable to advance in any direction the Opera's development and the administration of its artistic



component, but his presence and his aversion to any serious work set the worst possible example for the orchestra as well as for the stage management. His brother, conductor Gyula Erkel, loaths work quite as much as he. Since Gyula functions exclusively as a second conductor, however, it may be possible to retain him [...] I intend to use him mostly in Buda.

On the other hand, I believe that Sándor Erkel should be suspended both as technical director and as chief conductor.

[...]

In addition to the director, the business manager should also be dismissed [...]; also the secretary, who is completely unfit for his position; his handwriting is illegible, and he cannot compose in any language, not even in Hungarian; furthermore, he is a slovenly person, incapable of serious work. [...]<sup>22</sup>

Sándor Erkel's fortunes had fallen very low, indeed, in some eleven years. On October 23, 1875, proposing his joint appointment as chief conductor and director of the opera division of the National Theatre, Podmaniczky had praised him to the Minister as someone who

had not only fulfilled all expectations in his musical responsibilities in leading the orchestra, educating and rehearsing, as well as the temporary artistic head in directing the opera division, but had also earned everyone's appreciation with his honesty, prudence, skill, impartiality and diligence.<sup>23</sup>

In any case, in light of Keglevich's letter to the Minister there is clearly no question of Erkel's "resignation" as director in the autumn of 1886 (see Note 11, Chapter I); rather, he was stripped of this position by the intendant.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Keglevich did not succeed in dismissing Erkel altogether. Further correspondence shows that the Minister, while prepared to accede to the intendant's wishes, desired him to proceed with tact and circumspection.<sup>25</sup> But as he was apparently satisfied with the Minister's qualified agreement, already on October 24th Keglevich advised him that he had notified Erkel of his pending dismissal. At the same time, he took the necessary steps

to fill the vacancies thus arising, by opening negotiations with several Hungarian conductors living abroad; from among these, A. Nikisch of the Leipzig Stadttheater is willing to assume both positions for a salary of 9000 florins.<sup>26</sup>

However, within a few days of Keglevich's letter, Erkel himself wrote directly to the Minister, asking him to set aside the intendant's decision. After 27 years in the service of the Opera, and having given no cause for this action either as artistic director or as chief conductor, where — he asked — should he "find new employment in two months when there is only one opera house in the whole of Hungary?"<sup>27</sup> No doubt, in part moved by Erkel's petition, and also because of the unclear contractual situation, the Minister instructed Keglevich to take no further



steps in the matter until they have had a chance to discuss it in person.<sup>28</sup> Whether or not such a discussion ever took place, Erkel remained at the Opera; but his situation remained unresolved until Keglevich was obliged to resign as intendant more than a year later.

In addition to his attempts at alleviating the Opera's problems through official channels, Keglevich also sought to generate public support for his efforts. At a press conference held on October 17, he spoke eloquently of the Opera's difficulties. As a direct result of this, the Writers' and Artists' Club (Írók és Művészek Köre) addressed a petition to Prime Minister Tisza, asking him to intervene on behalf of the Opera. The following excerpt shows that the ills of the institution were ascribed chiefly to the lack of a strong Hungarian presence on the artistic staff:

[...] The chief source of the difficulties heretofore has been that the opera house, instead of developing as a national institution, had become a gathering place for itinerant singers [...] The deprecation of the national viewpoint, the cult of foreign singers, the injudicious fascination with special voices (to the detriment of an artistic ensemble) — these factors have brought about the Royal Hungarian Opera's decline [...] To lease the Opera would be a mistake; private speculation would only worsen the situation [...] the state should continue to operate the theatre [...] Furthermore, greater sacrifices should be made to train native singers; the institutions serving this purpose should have closer ties with the Opera [...].<sup>29</sup>

In connection with the proposal to 'Hungarianize' the Opera, it is characteristic of the half-hearted, meaningless efforts in this direction prior to the Beniczky-era that several months before his press conference, Keglevich decreed that members of the *chorus* must speak Hungarian while on the premises of the Opera!<sup>30</sup>

The ominous reference to the future of the Opera in the Writers' Club petition concerns its "leasing". The petition reached Tisza at the beginning of December, just as Parliament was preparing to debate the budget for 1887. At a sitting on December 2, 1886, Kornél Ábrányi junior (the critic, who was also a Member of Parliament) addressed the Minister of the Interior, requesting that prior to the budget debate the House be given detailed information on the financial and personnel situation at the Opera. This was intended to enable the members to decide on the future of the Opera, including the option to lease it.<sup>31</sup> This 'option' was framed into a resolution already during the general debate on the budget on January 25, 1887. Following various other suggestions on cutting the deficit, a Member presented the following resolution to the House:

And finally, I request that the Government be instructed as soon as possible to lease the Opera house — maintained at great cost, and serving only to amuse the public of the capital — at the earliest opportunity, before we spend yet more on it, or it burns down.<sup>32</sup>

The detailed budget of the Ministry of the Interior for 1887 was debated over two days, on February 3rd and 4th (312th and 313th Sitzings); much of this time was



devoted to the affairs of the Opera. The debate was based on the report of the House's Finance Committee. The budget proposed for 1887 (nearly 11 million florins) was more than 275 000 florins in excess of the 1886 budget; nearly half of this sum was represented by the excess in the Opera's budget over 1886. The total budget for the National Theatre and the Opera was set at 386 600 florins; more than 300 000 of this was for the Opera (to which sum was added the annual royal grant of 160 000!). The Committee found that the main reason for the Opera's growing deficit was declining attendance. While they did not wish to criticize the institute's artistic and administrative leadership, the Committee made it very clear that the situation called for drastic corrective measures. The Opera's budget had grown beyond the means of the country, especially when compared to the cost of the National Theatre, an institution of "greater educational and national role". It also reminded the Prime Minister (at this time also acting as Interior Minister) of an earlier promise to call an official enquiry into the affairs of the Opera as soon as the necessary reports and data have been collected.<sup>33</sup>

The first day of the debate was devoted almost exclusively to two long speeches. Opposition Member of Parliament Béla Komjáthy focussed his attack on the position of the intendant in general, and on Keglevich in particular. Citing comparative financial and repertoire figures from Podmaniczky's time, he reasoned that the sharp decline in the fortunes of the Opera in about a year was due entirely to the intendant's highhandedness and incompetence. In his response the intendant, while agreeing that the cost of maintaining the Opera was too high, attempted to prove that he had inherited a situation which (due chiefly to already existing contracts and other commitments) allowed him little flexibility during his first year in office. He hoped to reduce the Opera's budget in 1888, and even more in 1889. Since this could be achieved only by replacing expensive (mostly, though not exclusively, foreign) singers with new, untried native talent, and possibly by foregoing new productions for a year, he needed the support of the press as well as the understanding of the public.<sup>34</sup>

On the second day of the debate, six Opposition Members spoke on a variety of topics relating to the Opera. For example, one dealt at length with personnel problems (especially in connection with Sándor Erkel, and the threatened orchestra strike). Kornél Ábrányi, decrying the low artistic standards (especially the "cult of the ballet"), perceived two main reasons for the problems: the power of the intendant (with the concomitantly low prestige of the artistic director), and the control exercised by people of little or no cultural awareness and interest in the Ministry of the Interior (the transferring of theatre administration to the Ministry of Education had been proposed as early as 1867). In addition to Keglevich, Tisza also spoke for the Government. He defended the Opera's current deficit budgeting, both as a new institution, and in comparison with similar institutions abroad (*e. g.*, the Paris Opera). He also reiterated his undertaking to call a public enquiry as soon as possible. In the end, the House approved the Ministry's estimates.<sup>35</sup>

The public enquiry into the affairs of the Opera opened on July 7, 1887. It was chaired by Baron Béla Orczy who had taken over as Minister of the Interior.<sup>36</sup> It was composed of Members of Parliament, representatives of the Ministry, a delegation from the theatres, and prominent members of the public and the press.



The theatre delegation was led by Keglevich, and included Sándor Erkel, Ede Paulay (artistic director of the National Theatre), Béla Várady and Lajos Szilágyi (respectively, legal counsel and technical advisor of the Opera). Other notable members were Podmaniczky, Beniczky, and the critics Ábrányi junior, Keszler and Miksa Schütz (Beer's predecessor at the *Pester Lloyd*). After only one day, it became necessary to adjourn the enquiry, pending the submission of a complete financial report by Keglevich.

The enquiry reconvened on October 17th and 18th. There were two interesting new faces among the members: Count Gyula Szapáry (to become Prime Minister in 1890) and Miksa Falk (journalist and publisher, for many years prominent in the affairs of the Opera and the Philharmonic). A comprehensive document of some 80 pages had been prepared for the information of the enquiry. Indicating clearly the fact that the leasing of the Opera was under serious consideration, the first section of the document constituted a report on the financial and artistic management of a number of leased foreign theatres. For the rest, it included financial accounts for the Opera from 1884 to the first half of 1887, as well as a proposed budget for 1888.<sup>37</sup>

Although there were rumours already in the autumn, in December it was made known officially that Keglevich had offered to resign during the summer. On December 3rd, Orczy announced in Parliament that he was acceding to the intendant's renewed request for his release, but was asking him to stay on until the end of the budget year.<sup>38</sup> Rumours and 'proposals' for his successor began to circulate immediately; among others, the names of Géza Zichy and Beniczky were once again prominent.<sup>39</sup> Speculation concerning the leasing of the Opera gained renewed vigour. According to one report, the government had received offers from Julius Perotti, and from Pollini.<sup>40</sup> Three days later, citing a Viennese source, the *Tagblatt* reported that Pollini had spent a few days in Budapest and that his offer may well be accepted.<sup>41</sup>

Attacks on the intendant's post in general, heretofore sporadic, were on the increase in the press and in Parliament. In a long, unsigned editorial entitled "Keinen Intendanten mehr!", the *Pester Lloyd* came out unequivocally in favour of abolishing the position. Since the theatres in Budapest were not Court theatres (as in Vienna), the intendant was not a Court functionary, but was answerable to Parliament through the Minister of the Interior. In this, he served only to hinder what could and should have been direct communication between the Minister and the artistic directors of the theatres. The National Theatre already had a good artistic director; such a person had to be found forthwith for the Opera.<sup>42</sup>

On January 5, 1888 Keglevich was relieved, and State Secretary Ferenc von Beniczky was appointed government commissioner to oversee the theatres. Keglevich took leave of the staff on January 12th; Beniczky took up his post next day.<sup>43</sup> But during the Parliamentary debate of the 1888 budget of the Interior Ministry on January 26th, the opposition continued to press for the abolition of the intendant's post. The leasing of the Opera House also continued to receive support, while Member Dénes Pázmándy went so far as to suggest closing the Opera altogether; the unsatisfactory personnel would, in any case, discourage potential renters. Most Members appreciated the Finance Committee's recommendation to reduce the Ministry's estimates for the Opera by 39 000 florins; the remaining total



of 210 000 florins was nearly 30% lower than the subvention for 1887. Moreover, the Committee suggested that the House only approve this budget subject to the following resolution:

The state subsidy of 210 000 florins for the Royal Hungarian Opera is approved subject to the condition that the Government brings into effect such measures as will make it possible to keep strictly within this budget following an ordering of the Opera's financial affairs, and that the Government report to the House during the first half of 1888 on how they propose to accomplish this.<sup>44</sup>

In his speech Minister Orczy defended the tight budget proposed for the Opera, and undertook to present a ministerial report later in the session. Like Keglevich during the previous Parliament, he also called on the public to be prepared to lower its expectations for the near future.<sup>45</sup>

One of Beniczky's first actions after he took over the theatres was to restore Sándor Erkel to the position of artistic director of the Opera. Having learned from the mistakes of his predecessor (and also being of a completely different personality than Keglevich), Beniczky only wished to exercise an overall administrative control, giving the director a free hand in artistic matters. Despite this, the situation at the Opera failed to improve. Attendance continued to decline, chiefly because the performance schedule remained as unreliable as before. Although at first he supported him staunchly, later Beniczky realized that Erkel himself had been the main cause of the Opera's problems. By the time he wrote to the Minister in the autumn of 1889 to oppose Erkel's release as conductor (see Chapter III), Beniczky had come to concur fully with the views expressed by Keglevich some three years earlier:

[...] Sándor Erkel could not fulfil expectations as director. The indifference and frivolity with which he acted as director are astonishing. He did not propose a single reform, a single plan or practical measure; furthermore, he never gave a straightforward answer to any question, saying instead: it doesn't matter. I sent him abroad to look for new and usable artistic forces:<sup>46</sup> he did not bring back anyone, and after his return could not even report verbally as to who would come, when and for how much money.

[...]

He himself made his position impossible. What is more, it is also his fault that the affairs of the Opera had reached such a state since [1884], for if he had gone about organizing systematically and wisely, the institute would never have come to such a crisis. [...]<sup>47</sup>

Encouraged by the Opera's apparently unending difficulties, public speculation on possible choices for administrator and artistic director was rekindled even before the end of the season. A combination much-discussed in April favoured another aristocrat, Baron Géza Radvánszky, as intendant, and Mihalovich as director.<sup>48</sup> However, Beniczky was hard at work on a long-range plan to get the finances and



the operation of the Opera on an even keel. He had been instructed by Orczy to redraft the 1888 budget within the constraints imposed by the Parliamentary resolution adopted in January, and to prepare an advance budget for 1889 on the same basis.

Beniczky's submissions to the Minister were completed on April 15th (for 1888) and April 23rd (for 1889). The documentation to support the two proposals was of staggering proportions: together with more than 130 supplementary documents, they fill more than 150 foolscap pages.<sup>49</sup> All facets of the Opera's operation are covered; the budgeted and actual expenditures for 1887 are also given for comparison with the 1888 estimates. Salaries and honoraria, from the artistic director to the most humble employee, are listed by name; maintenance and operating costs are calculated to the nearest *krajcár* (penny). The documentation includes detailed costuming estimates for three works (the estimates for the male costumes for *Der fliegende Holländer* alone, for example, take up some six pages).

The purpose of this seemingly excessive documentation becomes clear from Beniczky's detailed discussion of the revised budget for 1888. After presenting the projected reductions for 1889 in the personnel (*e. g.*, directorate and administration: from 44 in 1887 to 31; solo singers from 38 to 27; paid apprentices in the *corps de ballet* from 51 to 14) and in materials (*e. g.*, from the 48 789 florins spent on scenery in 1887, to 17 000 florins), together with a proposal to reduce the season from 10 months in 1887 to 9 in 1888 and to 8 in 1889, Beniczky felt obliged to conclude that the 'maximum' state subvention of 210 000 florins would not support the Opera adequately in either of the two years of the projection. He asked, therefore, that these be regarded by Parliament as "transitional years", with the consequent approval of supplemental support of some 90 000 florins for 1888 and 35 000 for 1889.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Beniczky's estimates for 1889 is his calculation of the relative costs of leasing the Opera as compared to keeping it under governmental control. He based his calculations on the assumption (one that had been voiced already by Pázmándy on January 26th) that no one would wish to rent the theatre unless they were free to replace a substantial number of the artistic staff. This would include those whose contracts would not be renewed, and a further 50 singers, dancers, instrumentalists and members of the production staff (all are listed by name) would have to be dismissed with compensation by January 1, 1889. The total cost of severance pay would amount to more than 287 000 florins. If the Opera were to remain under state control, on the other hand, only eight continuing contracts would have to be bought out (as of July 1, 1888) at a total cost of some 93 000 florins.

Minister Orczy's report — based on Beniczky's submission, and including the two management alternatives — was tabled in Parliament on May 25th. On his motion, the report was sent to the House's Finance Committee for detailed study.<sup>50</sup>

The Finance Committee's report was presented to the House at the 111th Sitting on June 4th. From its brief report, it is clear that the Committee was impressed by Beniczky's efforts to rationalize the operation of the Opera, as well as by the comparative cost figures relating to the alternative management models. Accordingly, the Committee recommended to the House that the Opera remain under full



government control; it also requested that the Opera's estimates for 1889 be resubmitted at the proper time as part of the Interior Ministry's budget for that year.<sup>51</sup>

Of the eight members of the Opera's artistic staff proposed for dismissal by Beniczky, six were let go on various dates in 1888. However, one of these unexpectedly turned out to be a case of dismissal through disciplinary action, rather than with compensation; its echoes were to trouble the Opera's administration for a long time to come. Gyula Káldy had held the position of chief stage manager since August, 1881;<sup>52</sup> his latest contract was to run until 1891.<sup>53</sup> During the summer, Káldy was reported to have permitted the use of his apartment for the auditioning of Hungarian singers by foreign artists' agents. As this was against the regulations (and was viewed as an action particularly injurious to the Opera at a time when good Hungarian singers were scarce), he was brought before the Disciplinary Committee of the institution, judged to have acted "in contravention of the statutes" of the Opera, and dismissed.<sup>54</sup> The yearbooks of the Opera give July 1st as the effective date of Káldy's dismissal.<sup>55</sup> However, it is clear from a letter in the National Archives that the Committee's decision was rendered on July 7th, and it was submitted for the Minister's approval a week later (thus allowing Káldy the prescribed time to lodge an appeal).<sup>56</sup> The matter was raised in Parliament nearly a year later, during the debate of the 1889 budget. It was then implied that since the dismissal was an unwarranted and excessive penalty for what was nothing more than "a breach of discipline", the Minister felt obliged to pay compensation of some 14 000 florins — precisely the amount Beniczky had calculated as necessary to buy out Káldy's contract.<sup>57</sup> It is interesting to note that, in any case, Káldy gained vindication of a kind some seven years later: in 1895 he succeeded Nikisch as director of the Opera, remaining in that position until 1900.<sup>58</sup>

Before we take a look at the staff and repertoire Mahler found in Budapest upon his arrival in the autumn, another one of Beniczky's significant measures must be mentioned. Before the start of the 1888–1889 season, he decreed that singing at the Opera would be permitted in future only in Hungarian; short-term guests would be exempted from this rule.<sup>59</sup> Thus, it seems that Mahler's pronouncements in this regard (see Chapter I) may have merely echoed his chief's already established policy.

When the Opera opened its doors to the public in 1884, it had a total full-time staff of 475.<sup>60</sup> This included 34 solo singers (18 male, 16 female), a chorus of 36 women and 45 men, 7 solo dancers (1 male, 6 female), a *corps de ballet* of 60, and an orchestra of 75. The rest (218 people) comprised the administrative, artistic, technical and service staff. The stringent measures introduced by Beniczky in 1888 to control the Opera's budget resulted in the reduction of the staff by more than 90 members between the end of April and the beginning of October.<sup>61</sup> In the majority of cases, this was achieved by not renewing contracts. 69 singers, dancers and orchestral players were affected, with the remainder coming from various categories of the support staff.

When Mahler assumed the directorship, the personnel of the Opera numbered 384. This included 29 solo singers (17 male, 12 female), a chorus of 70 (comprised of an equal number of men and women), 6 solo dancers (1 man, 5 women), a *corps de*



*ballet* of 66, and an orchestra of 68. The administrative, artistic, technical and service staff totalled 145. When he left Budapest in the middle of March, 1891, the Opera had a full-time staff of 381. It would seem, then, that the staff reductions carried out by Beniczky in 1888 were of the type which could be made permanent without impairing the operational efficiency and artistic standards of the institution.

The repertoire Mahler inherited was basically that taken over by Beniczky from Keglevich in January, 1888. During Keglevich's 2-year reign 56 operas and 9 ballets were performed some 520 times (including performances at the Castle Theatre in Buda). The works of eight Italian composers had a total of 191 performances (this included 54 of the phenomenally successful ballet *Excelsior* by Romualdo Marenco); 13 French composers 190; 8 Germans and Austrians 94; while five Hungarian composers accounted for 46 performances. As had been the case during Podmaniczky's regime, the most frequently performed composer was Verdi; seven of his works were given 57 times. Ferenc Erkel, on the other hand, slipped to fourteenth place: only 2 of his works had been performed, a total of only 8 times. Even Goldmark (2 works in 11 performances) had overtaken him on the list of leading composers. Thus, the Keglevich-era showed an even further decline in the popularity of Hungarian composers.<sup>62</sup>



### Chapter III

## MAHLER AS DIRECTOR OF THE ROYAL HUNGARIAN OPERA

This chapter is devoted to Mahler's activities in Budapest between October, 1888 and March, 1891. Since details of his life during the summer holidays are recounted in other sources in as much detail as the available evidence allows,<sup>1</sup> these periods will be referred to here mostly in instances where the information has a direct bearing on his duties in Budapest. As his life during these years revolved almost exclusively around the Royal Hungarian Opera, the material of this chapter may be conveniently divided into three sections corresponding to Mahler's three seasons in the Hungarian capital.

### SEASON I (OCTOBER, 1888 TO MAY, 1889)

Having no doubt appraised conditions at the Opera thoroughly prior to assuming his post, Mahler had determined his initial tasks as director even before his official introduction to the staff on October 10th. Showing admirable restraint in foregoing what could have been an easy means of winning public and critical acclaim, he had decided to postpone his first appearance as conductor until the première of *Rheingold* (then still planned for December). It is clear from three letters he wrote shortly after returning to Budapest on October 4th after a quick trip to Munich that he perceived the strengthening of the artistic staff as his first priority.

The first of these letters was addressed to the impresario Gustav Lewy whom Mahler had known since 1880.

Pest, 5 Ok[tober] [18]88

Lieber Freund!

In höchster Eile folgendes:

Frau Braga bietet der Intendant einen 3jährigen Kontrakt a 12,000 fl: *Winterurlaub unmöglich*. Im Sommer wie bedungen 4 Monate Urlaub. — Debut sofort oder nach Wunsch! Leider sind wir außer Stande mehr zu zahlen! Sagen Sie Frau Braga, wie sehr es mir freuen würde, sie baldigst hier begrüßen zu dürfen. — Wenn Frau Braga nicht zusagt, bitte *sofort um andere Anbietungen*. —

*Lara* werde ich noch einmal in's Auge fassen. — Würde sie um ganz billige Gage einwilligen?

*Lederer* werde ich in nächster Zeit eine Offerte machen — im Prinzip sind



wir mit seinen Forderungen einverstanden. — Ich bitte ihn ausdrücklich zu fragen, ob *er für große Opern* — speziell *Wagner* — in Frankfurt tätig war!

Korrepetitoren müssen wohl der ungarischen Sprache mächtig sein. — Wissen Sie keinen Ungarn?

Nun aber das Wichtigste: *Heldentenor* — *hoch dramatische Sängerin* (Brünnhilde)!

Diese 2 Faktoren sind für mich eine brennende Frage! Um jeden Preis (nur keinen zu hohen!) muß ich diese Frage in nächster Zeit lösen.

Wie steht es mit *Szigelli*[?]?

Machen Sie Vorschläge!

Wegen Braga bitte um umgehende Antwort, um für Ersatz Zeit zu haben.

Besten Gruß  
von  
Mahler<sup>2</sup>

A second letter to Lewy, written two days later, raises similar questions; it also reflects Mahler's perception of the need to act with circumspection in the beginning:

Pest 7. Okt[ober] [18]88

Werter Freund!

Gewiß möchte ich sehr gerne auf Frau Braga reflektieren — aber ich kann doch die hiesigen Verhältnisse nicht umgestalten — ich kann bloß innerhalb der mir gegebenen Sachlage disponieren, und muß daher auf meinen Propositionen stehen bleiben. Da auch ich mich baldigst entscheiden muß — mir liegen für dieses Fach einige Offerten vor — bitte ich Sie, mir *sofort* mitzuteilen, ob auf Grund meiner Offerte eine Einigung erzielt werden kann.

Ferner bitte mir also, sofort, wo möglich telegrafisch, die Bedingungen des Herrn Sigilli[?] mitzuteilen. —

Gastspiel bitte für November — Walküre müßte er eventuell schon als engagiertes Mitglied singen — circa 2. Hälfte Dezember od. Anfang Jänner.

Bezüglich [word missing] kann ich mich ja nicht so schnell entscheiden, als Sie denken. I. sind hier die Verhältnisse noch zu ungeordnet — auch muß ich noch lavieren (nach dieser Richtung) um nicht hier sofort die Beteiligten zu brusquieren. —

Bitte jedenfalls sofort auch bei *Kreibig* anzufragen, ob er der ungarischen Sprache mächtig ist, um zu erfahren, warum er nach den 1. Jahr Hamburg abgegangen ist.

Bitte endlich noch Bestimmtes über *Ernst* und *de Grach* mitzuteilen. — Auf letzteren würde ich am *allerehesten* reflektieren. Lieber Freund — *verschaffen Sie mir den* — eventuell bin ich auch bereit, nach Frankfurt zu fahren.

Frau Braga bitte jedenfalls aufmerksam zu machen, daß *Winterurlaube* besonders im Anfang *absolut nicht* erteilt werden können — und sind dießbezüglich alle Unterhandlungen überflüssig. Warum ihr die Kündigung im ersten Jahr nicht einleuchtet, begreife ich nicht, da doch alle Theater-



kontrakte diesen Punkt haben. — Warum soll sie nicht das bisschen ungarisch lernen riskieren (da es ihr als Ungarin unmöglich schwer fallen kann) — wenn wir uns wieder unsererseits damit zufrieden stellen, und ihr von Partie zu Partie immer Zeit lassen müssen und in Folgendessen für das Repertoire an ihr noch keine Stütze finden können.

Jedenfalls muß diese Angelegenheit bald zu einem Resultate führen, da ich unmöglich mehr lang warten kann.

Bitte um sofortige Antwort

Ihr ganz ergebenster  
Mahler<sup>3</sup>

The third letter went to the impresario I. Wild:

Lieber Herr Wilt[sic]!

Mein[en] herzlichsten Dank für Ihre große Aufmerksamkeit! Sehen Sie nur, daß jetzt auch Brünn, Graz — etc. herankommen. —

Bezüglich der Frau Kupfer-Berger muß ich decidirt erklären, daß ich über die Summe von 14,000 fl *nicht* hinausgehen [kann], und bitte auch keinen Versuch mehr zu machen. — Ich bin, unserem gegenwärtigen Etatsstand nach — einfach nicht im Stande, mehr zu bieten.

Nunmehr bitte ich auch um *schnellste* Entscheidung, da ich dann eventuell nach andere Seite hin disponieren müßte.

Als Debut sind mir Senta, Elsa, Gioconda ganz recht. — Die anderen Rollen können wir ja dann mündlich mit Frau K. verabreden.

Wegen Frau Papier werde ich Ihnen in der nächsten Zeit schreiben.

Besten Gruß vom ergebensten

Gustav Mahler<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from these letters that Mahler was most concerned with the need for *experienced* singers, especially to fill the leading roles in the projected Wagner dramas. The annual salary of 14 000 florins offered to Kupfer-Berger was higher than that of any female singer in the first part of 1888. Irma Reich, a dramatic soprano, had been paid 13 500 florins — but her contract was terminated in July as part of Beniczky's austerity measures.<sup>5</sup>

The two letters to Lewy also provide further evidence of the determination with which Mahler (and, undoubtedly, Beniczky) were pursuing their policy of Hungarianizing the performances and the coaching of the singers. It may be recalled that Mahler's first major interview, with his emphatic denunciation of bilingual performances, was given on October 6th, the day between the two letters to Lewy. The same sentiments are echoed in another letter; presumably, it was written to a singer in Hamburg who was offering her services to the Opera in Budapest. Although the letter is undated, it is reasonable to assume that it originated around the same time as those to Lewy:



Liebes Fräulein!

Sie wissen, wie gerne ich auf Sie reflektieren würde — aber es geht ja doch nicht; mit dem italienischen habe ich hier gebrochen, denn das geht doch nicht, daß der eine ungarisch und der andere italienisch singt.

Sie können nicht ungarisch — das ist jammerschade!

Ich schreibe in großer Eile, um Sie nicht auf Antwort warten zu lassen.

Mit der Versicherung meiner großen Wertschätzung Ihrer Talente bin ich Ihr stets ergebenster

Gustav Mahler<sup>6</sup>

It is evident from his letter of October 5th to Lewy that Mahler knew that, in order to achieve his goal of uniform Hungarian-language performances, he had to have people around him who could work with Hungarian singers in their native tongue, and could teach the language to singers hired from abroad. To this end, on October 16th he appointed the composer Ernő Lányi as the Opera's first official coach.<sup>7</sup> Even more significant in this respect was the appointment of Ede Újházy as playmaster on October 8th. A celebrated actor at the National Theatre, Újházy's official introduction to the staff of the Opera on November 14th was reported thus in the press:

[...] The government commissioner told the assembled artists how glad he was to have won Újházy for the position of playmaster. In his extended speech he emphasized that by engaging the playmaster, he wanted to ensure that every member of the Royal Hungarian Opera could act as well as sing, and could correctly pronounce and stress Hungarian; furthermore, that the chorus and extras on stage should comport themselves with verve, endowing the performances with a pleasing polish. He appealed to the assembly to support the three pillars of the Opera — the director, the stage director and the playmaster — in their important mission to the best of their abilities.<sup>8</sup>

Ever since Káldy's dismissal in July, the Opera had been without an official stage director. Especially in view of Mahler's plans to produce *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* by December, engaging someone with the necessary experience was of primary importance. This is also implied by Mahler's question to Lewy concerning Lederer's experience in Frankfurt. In fact, judging from Mahler's phrasing it seems likely that Lederer's availability for engagement in Budapest had already been communicated to him earlier. From a comment in the *Pesti Hírlap* on October 1st, it may be surmised that the press had also picked up rumours about the planned engagement of a foreign stage director:

[...] We think it is imperative that if the [artistic] director is to be a foreigner, at least the chief stage director must be a Hungarian; otherwise, very strange happenings would occur if its two artistic heads could not understand the language of the institution, and could make neither head nor tail of the texts of the operas to be produced.<sup>9</sup>



In part no doubt due to such considerations, in the end a long-time employee of the Opera, Kálmán Alszezhgy was promoted to stage director.<sup>10</sup> He was officially introduced to the staff by Beniczky at the same time as Újházy.

In addition to seeking solutions for the problems of the artistic personnel of the Opera himself, Mahler received unsolicited offers from, or on behalf of, singers desiring to appear in Budapest. Some of these offers show that his growing reputation was attracting the attention of even the leading singers of his day. For example, in October he was offered the services of Rosa Papier. His reply to the impresario Wild reads as follows:

S. Wohlgeboren  
Herrn I. Wild  
Wien

In Beantwortung Ihrer Anfrage vom 30. d. muß ich Ihnen bedauernd  
erklären, daß wir auf das Gastspiel der k. k. Kammersängerin Rosa Papier  
für die nächste Zeit nicht reflektieren können.

Mit Hochachtung

Budapest, am 31. Oktober 1888.

Mahler  
Direktor  
des k. ung. Opernhauses<sup>11</sup>

From another set of documents originating a few days later, it appears that while Mahler dealt with the hiring of new singers, problems concerning staff already under contract were handled by Beniczky. On November 3rd he wrote to Counsellor Várady, seeking his opinion on available legal sanctions against the tenor Julius Perotti; his resignation, apparently unexpected, "upset the programme and casting determined for this week, and placed obstacles in the way of determining next week's programme." From Várady's reply, dated November 6th, as well as from the record of guest singers between 1884 and 1909, it is clear that Perotti had been a sort of "permanent guest" since 1883, contractually obligated to sing in Budapest between October 1st and December 15th of each year.<sup>12</sup> As Perotti had left Budapest without permission, and even though he had promised to return on November 10th, Várady gave the opinion that the Opera was entitled to sue him for the 10,000 florins agreed upon in case of a breach of contract.<sup>13</sup> The Perotti-affair was only resolved several months later.

Towards the end of November, personnel problems of a different kind were threatening to bring Mahler into conflict with the director of the Prague National Opera. Having in good faith considered engaging an orchestral player already under contract in Prague, Mahler hastened to explain his position to Director Šubert:



Budapest, am 21. November 1888.

Sr. Hochwohlgeboren  
Herrn I. A. Šubert  
Direktor der kgl. böhmischer  
Nationaloper zu Prag

Sehr geehrter Herr!

Mir wurde auf eine private Anfrage ein Herr Mann als I. Trompeter empfohlen: — daß derselbe ein Mitglied Ihres Orchesters ist erfuhr ich gestern. — Sonst ist mir von einem Antrag an Ihre Mitglieder nichts bekannt. — Selbstverständlich würde ich Engagements bloß auf legalem Wege abschließen, und bin ich in der Lage Ihnen diesbezüglich jede Beruhigung zu gewähren. — Ich kann es aber nicht verhindern, daß der oder jener sich mit einer Anfrage an mich wendet, und muß ich es vorkommenden Falles dem Betreffenden überlassen, zu urteilen inwieweit sich solche Verhandlungen mit seinen kontraktlichen Verpflichtungen vereinbaren lassen.

Indem ich übrigens bitte, stets meiner Loyalität sicher zu sein bin ich

Hochachtungsvoll  
ergebener  
Gustav Mahler<sup>14</sup>

While Mahler was occupied with staffing problems, the opera season was well under way. As he had decided not to conduct until the Wagner-premières, he allowed most of the load to be carried by Sándor Erkel, with occasional assistance from the latter's brother, Gyula. The first première of the season, Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* (in Hungarian: *A gyöngyhalászok*) on October 25th was conducted by Sándor. Although the opera was not well received by the public,<sup>15</sup> it is obvious from the critical reaction that Alszegehy's appointment as stage director had been earned largely by his excellent work in preparing this opera. The lighting effects he designed were accorded special praise:

[Alszegehy] was first to succeed in putting an end to the lighting miseries of the Opera House and, aided by the achievements of modern stagecraft, in replacing the perennial, annoying staging defects with the magic of brilliant sunlight, glimmering twilight, a glowing horizon, moonlight reflected in water, and a genuine night.<sup>16</sup>

Only five days later, Sándor Erkel conducted the première in the Opera (it had been performed some 30 years earlier at the National Theatre) of Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* (in Hungarian: *Mari, az ezred leánya*). The success of this work was attributed to the fact that Marie's role was sung by Bianca Bianchi.<sup>17</sup>

Two more premières followed in November. On the 22nd, Kreutzer's opera *Das Nachtlager von Granada* (in Hungarian: *A granadai éjjeli szállás*) was paired on the same programme with Corradi's ballet, *The four suitors* (in Hungarian: *A négy*



kérő). The opera, conducted by Sándor Erkel, was well received; the ballet, conducted by Károly Szabados, quickly disappeared from the programme of the Opera.

The last première of 1888 took place on December 13th. Josef Bayer's ballet *Die Puppenfee* (in Hungarian: *A babatündér*) created an instant sensation, and quickly became one of the most popular items in the Opera's repertoire. In this season alone, it was performed 36 more times.

A few days later, the Opera was the scene of a memorable event in the history of Hungarian music. On December 16th Ferenc Erkel's 50th anniversary as conductor was celebrated with a gala performance of his *Hunyadi László*. The ageing composer conducted the first two acts, while the third and fourth acts were shared by his two sons, Gyula and Sándor. Between the first and second acts, a ceremony was held on stage. The first laurel wreath was handed to Erkel by Mahler on behalf of the administration; the greeting, however, was delivered by Alszeghy.<sup>18</sup>

Already prior to the jubilee concert, Mahler had started to plan the revival of some of Erkel's long-neglected operas. Thus, he wrote to him at the end of November:

Most Esteemed Sir!

As your opera *Brankovics György* is scheduled for revival at the Royal Hungarian Opera, I turn to you, sir, with the respectful request that you advise me at your earliest convenience of your intentions with respect to the casting.

With assurances of my deepest esteem  
Budapest, November 29, 1888.

Gustav Mahler  
Artistic Director of  
the Royal Hungarian Opera.<sup>19</sup>

*Brankovics György* had been staged first in 1874 at the National Theatre, where it lasted for 20 performances.<sup>20</sup> It was now revived by Mahler at the Opera; following several weeks of rehearsals, the première was conducted by Sándor Erkel on February 23, 1889. This work of the elder Erkel's could clearly not retain the public's interest: it was performed twice more this season, twice in 1890, and not at all in 1891.

Even if not all new productions were successful, the popularity of the Opera was on the rise, the long-deserted house sold out night after night. By the end of the calendar year, even the consistently antagonistic critics had to acknowledge a turn for the better in the affairs of the Opera. Even if somewhat begrudgingly, István Kereszty expressed the general sentiment:

[...] though our Opera may not be in good health, it appears that the patient is convalescing. [...] The fact that since October already three [sic!] new works have been presented, and that the directorate holds out the



promise for more in the near future, are most promising signs. [...] We are convinced that the new intendant [sic!], so successful financially, will discover a not unworthy artistic leader in the person of the new director.<sup>21</sup>

The "promise for more new works" referred to the eagerly awaited premières of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*. Having promised them for December as vehicles for his own introduction,<sup>22</sup> Mahler had been sparing no energy — his own or anyone else's — in order to get them ready. As early as October, he took the necessary steps to ensure that an early start could be made on the orchestral rehearsals for both works. Apparently assured of Staegemann's assistance in his new position when he left Leipzig, Mahler now wrote to him with the following request:

Hochverehrter Herr Direktor!

Ich mache schnell von Ihrer gütigen Erlaubnis Gebrauch und bitte Sie mir die *Harmoniestimmen* (Holz u. Blechbläser) aus *Rheingold* und wenn möglich auch von der *Walküre*, auf 3 Wochen zu leihen, damit ich sie hier schnell ausziehen kann. Für prompte Zurücksendung werde ich selbstverständlich Sorge tragen.

Im Voraus herzlichst dankend  
bin ich dankbarst ergebener

Gustav Mahler

Budapest, am 22.-ten Oktober 888.  
Herrn Direktor Max Staegemann  
in Leipzig  
Stadttheater<sup>23</sup>

Even though *Die Walküre* had been in preparation already during the previous season, Mahler was determined to produce the two works in the 'correct' order and on consecutive days. Consequently, some 80 rehearsals were needed, lasting from 10 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon.<sup>24</sup> Together with readying the earlier premières and rehearsing the standard repertoire, Mahler's work-tempo was practically insupportable for a staff accustomed to the *laissez faire* attitude of the previous regime. The orchestra — in any case the most heavily worked unit of the Opera's artistic personnel — appears to have given Mahler the most trouble. Rumours of feuds with various orchestral players circulated widely, and the following outburst attributed to him was published as early as November:

In the event that the orchestra should demonstrate the slightest disobedience for any reason, I will immediately dismiss them all and use a military band until I can hire a complete orchestra from Berlin.<sup>25</sup>



The heavy workload, the director's fanatic quest for perfection, and the unfamiliarity with (even scorn for) Wagner's later music all contributed to the difficulties Mahler encountered in preparing the two premières. Typical of the widely held attitude (shared by the Erkels, as was seen earlier) was the following excerpt from an unsigned *feuilleton* which also included a review of the *Rheingold*-première:

The unending adulation which surrounds Wagner's works and artistic theories is disgusting. There is no artistic development in history which was involved in its evolution with so many bare-faced lies, so much shameless cheating, so many impertinent pretensions than Wagnerism. [...] Nobody on this earth had ever understood the technical aspects of the art of music to such an extent as [Wagner]; and among those in the forefront of musical practice, no one had been as poverty-stricken, as desperately sterile in the basic prerequisites of musical creativity: feeling and imagination.<sup>26</sup>

The unfamiliarity with Wagner's later music was understandable, even if the complete *Ring* had already been given in Budapest nearly six years earlier. Angelo Neumann's travelling Wagner-ensemble, complete with soloists, chorus (24 members) and orchestra (60), performed the tetralogy under Anton Seidl on May 23, 24, 26 and 27 (followed by a repeat performance of *Die Walküre*) in 1883. These performances, however, were staged at the German Theatre, and were sung in German.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the broader musical public of the Hungarian capital had had no experience with Wagner's mature music dramas until 1889.

Because of the lack of Wagnerian experience even among the singers, and obligated by his own announced determination to succeed with native forces, Mahler was also faced with the problems associated with the selection and training of the casts. His 'discovery' and rapid preparation of the young Arabella Szilágyi as Brünnhilde soon became the talk of the town.<sup>28</sup> Yet, close to the end of December Mahler was still experiencing difficulties, not the least of which had to do with casting. His letter of December 20th to Max Staegemann alludes to these; it also illustrates his efforts to maintain good relations with his former employer:

Budapest, 20.12.1888

Hochverehrter Herr Direktor!

Beifolgende Briefe klären Sie über die Situation auf; ich bitte, dieselben wieder diskret zu behandeln.

Können Sie sich schon entscheiden? Und wie soll ich mich in der Angelegenheit verhalten. — Ich bin in entsetzlicher "Soubrettennot!"

Zu gleicher Zeit wünsche ich Ihnen und Ihrer lieben Familie glückliche Feiertage und bitte mitfolgende "echt magyarischen" Spezialitäten zu versuchen.

[...]

Ich werde wohl den heurigen Weihnachtsabend recht einsam verbringen — da kein Theater ist — und ich noch absolut keinen Privatverkehr habe.



Jetzt bin ich fest in den "Nibelungen"-Proben, habe aber rechte Tenornot und die absurdesten Schwierigkeiten an allen Ecken und Enden. — Ich lasse aber nicht eher locker!

[...]

Ihr ganz ergebenster  
Gustav Mahler

[...]

Zum Spaß sende ich beide Artner Briefe zugleich, damit Sie sie recht genießen können.<sup>29</sup>

As is implied by the first few lines and the postscript, Mahler also continued on the lookout for singers for non-Wagnerian roles. In this case — although lack of other evidence allows only conjecture — he probably had been approached by the soprano Josephine von Artner without Staegemann's knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the foregoing letter is its illumination of Mahler's state of mind as he was approaching his first Christmas in a foreign land. Never one to make friends easily in any case, he had been too busy since his arrival in Budapest to devote time or effort to social intercourse. The fact that he had been working 'behind the scene', as it were, no doubt contributed to his now regretfully perceived want of a friendly circle. It is conceivable that Mahler's social life improved only after his first public appearances — and triumphs — in January, 1889. By February, he was conspicuous on the guestlist of a *soirée* given by the Hubays in honour of Joachim.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime, however, the forced work-tempo also took its toll of Mahler's health. Early in the New Year he was laid low for several days by what was reported as a 'massive cold', causing an interruption in the preparation for the Wagner-premières.<sup>32</sup>

At last, the days of the public dress rehearsals arrived. Apparently to make it easier on the exhausted personnel, the order of the dress rehearsals was reversed: that of *Die Walküre* was held on January 23rd, *Das Rheingold's* followed the next day.<sup>33</sup> Nearly all newspapers sent correspondents to report on the first of the dress rehearsals; they reacted to different aspects of what they saw and heard. For example, the reporter of the *Budapesti Hirlap* praised the effect of the lowered orchestra pit.<sup>34</sup> Others recognized Mahler's role in the achievement:

[...] It is a fact that one very seldom has the opportunity to hear performances prepared with so much expert knowledge and artistic care even in well-directed artistic institutions; Herr Direktor Mahler, who led this major undertaking with such persistent dedication and devotion, earned our respect and appreciation for his daring initiative and untiring efforts. [...] <sup>35</sup>

Mahler wasted no time in notifying his family about his great success. Too impatient even to wait for the official premières, he sent them this hastily written, undated note:



Liebe Eltern!

Die beiden Generalproben haben **glänzenden** Erfolg gehabt — ganz Pest ist auf —

Beiliegende als Auszug von vielen unzähligen Artikeln und Briefen, die mir schon zugekommen sind. — Der Intendant ist ganz glücklich. Bald schreibe ich mehr.

Das war wieder ein großartiger Erfolg! **Wie geht es Euch?** Schreib doch öfter!

Herzliche Grüße vom Eurer  
Gustav.<sup>36</sup>

Because of its unfamiliarity with the music dramas, steps were taken to 'educate' the general public. Long introductory essays were published in several papers (e. g., *Nemzet*, January 23, 1889). Advance tickets were sold only in pairs for the two evenings; remaining single tickets for each evening were sold only on the day of the performance.<sup>37</sup> In a special communiqué issued by the directorate, the audience was exhorted to read the libretti in advance, rather than during the performances.<sup>38</sup>

The premières of *Das Rheingold* (in Hungarian: *A Rajna kincse*) and *Die Walküre* (in Hungarian: *A walkür*) took place on January 26th and 27th, respectively. Although the start of the first was held up by a small fire on the stage, in the end the combined effect of the two premières turned this time into a veritable celebration of Mahler. These were unique occasions during his tenure in Budapest (and were, in fact, seldom equalled in his career): the entire press was unified in its praise of the productions. The more nationalistic elements placed great emphasis on the results Mahler was able to achieve with the all-Hungarian casts:

Thanks to the determination of the directorate [...], the first half of Richard Wagner's tetralogy found a new home on January 26: we heard *Das Rheingold* in Hungarian for the first time, performed entirely by the permanent members of our Opera. Not too long ago, we had hardly dared even to hope for this circumstance, so praiseworthy from the national point of view. To be sure, this cast could not duplicate the standards of a performance in Bayreuth, Vienna, Dresden or Leipzig, but it is our accomplishment, our artistry [...]. At the end of the uninterrupted performance of the „Vorabend” Director Mahler, who is personally conducting these works, had to appear for two curtain calls [...]. Next day, *Die Walküre* was equally successful [...]. We must especially mention Arabella Szilágyi, whose Brünnhilde was a great and equally pleasant surprise [...]. Director Mahler received not one but two laurel wreaths, and had to take two bows after each act. [...]<sup>39</sup>

Other writers were impressed with the Bayreuthian 'correctness' of the productions (e. g., *Nemzet*, January 23, 1889, Morning edition); in addition to the lowered orchestra pit, this also included the first use at the Royal Opera of the



curtain parted in the middle.<sup>40</sup> The scenic design, the costuming,<sup>41</sup> and the directing received detailed praise in most reviews. For example:

The beautiful first scene [of *Rheingold*], at the bottom of the Rhine, was out and out imposing [...] the way the mass of gold blazed up was sensational [...] The scene of the Rhine uplands is quite as effective as the subterranean Nibelungenheim [...] Also very attractive, in the background of the second scene, is the fortress of Valhalla [...], entered by the Gods over a beautiful rainbow bridge in the fourth scene.

We are voicing the general consensus when we say that it is to the credit of the Opera to mount such a performance with the forces it has at its disposal. Today's great success is the glittering result of the untiring diligence, honest effort and great expertise with which Director Mahler had prepared the performance. [...] In addition to the artistic director's merits, we must not forget about those of stage director Alszeghy and playmaster Újházy, both of whom supported the director effectively in his large and lengthy task.<sup>42</sup>

Even now, though, the lingering anti-Wagner sentiment surfaced in some reviews. While praising Mahler and the cast of *Das Rheingold*, the critic of the *Pesti Napló* wrote:

[...] The continuous declamation and polyphonic music — lasting for more than three hours [!], and interrupted only occasionally by livelier action and music — severely tested the nerves of the audience, not yet used to such things here. [...] Only the two roles [of Loge and Alberich] provide opportunities for actual acting and more effective singing. The other roles are unrewarding even in the hands of the best artists. [...] The whole of *Rheingold* fits its description as “prelude and Vorabend” very well; [...] in fact, Wagner did not need to divide it into four long scenes: all the action would have fit into a short hour's declamation and music, after which he could have started immediately on *Die Walküre*. [...] <sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, at the end of his review of the *Walküre* première next day, Keszler, summing up his praise of Mahler's achievement, put it in a broader context, and looked to the future:

[...] And now a last hearty, sincere bow to Herr Direktor Mahler for his brave planning, untiring effort and great artistic enthusiasm! The Director reaped great success. None could fail to acknowledge it. [...] The Hungarian public is not ungrateful in the face of genuine merit, and is able to value those who seriously and enthusiastically fulfil their obligations to a common cause. The Director will be convinced of this. [...] Already now, though, he may be sure of one thing: the road is open to *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.<sup>44</sup>

As if to echo Keszler's sentiments, Beniczky — who saw his judgement in appointing Mahler vindicated by the overwhelming success — wasted no time in



voicing his gratitude publicly. The following open letter to Mahler also mentions Alszeqhy's contribution; it was published two days after the *Walküre* première:

Honoured Mr. Director — It gives me great pleasure to be able to express my appreciation and sincere gratitude to you on the occasion of the first performance of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, for producing these gigantic works in a relatively short time and with a musical and scenic perfection which would have been to the credit of any opera house.

With the performance of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* you, sir, have fulfilled brilliantly two points of your artistic programme. For, on the one hand, you gave proof of what can be achieved through unflagging industry and, on the other hand, you also demonstrated that even the most difficult tasks may be carried out with the so often and so unjustly maligned native forces. You showed that the greatest contemporary art works can be produced without outside assistance, and completely in Hungarian.

This situation undoubtedly fills every patriot with genuine joy and satisfaction. In addition to your Honour's brilliancy, self-sacrificing work and unflagging industry, and the stage director's expert and dedicated work, this fine success is due to the contributions of all those artists who — through their enthusiasm for the sublime beauty of these works — helped to fulfil your Honour's aspirations. For the staging achieved the pinnacle of perfection, every singer attained to the highest level of his task in singing as well as in acting, while the orchestra performed in a truly first class, masterful manner.

In repeatedly expressing my appreciation for your Honour's work and my pleasure over the achievement, I ask that your Honour convey my appreciation and thanks to the stage director, the soloists, and to all the participants — not forgetting even the last stage-hand — for the persistent diligence and enthusiastic dedication with which they achieved this splendid success.<sup>45</sup>

Although *Rheingold* was repeated immediately on January 29th, the second performance of *Die Walküre* had to be postponed until February 7th because of the tragic death of Crown Prince Rudolf on January 30th. It appears that Mahler took advantage of the week-long closing of the Opera to go abroad;<sup>46</sup> he was back on February 7th to conduct *Die Walküre*.

Keszler's allusion to the "open road" leading to the remaining two dramas of the *Ring* appears to have been taken up by the Opera's administration. On February 18th it was announced that the two works were to comprise the following season's "very first major operatic novelties."<sup>47</sup>

The euphoria of the Wagner-premières did not last long, at least for Mahler. On February 20th it was reported in the press that Mahler had left the capital "on family business"; two days later it was announced with great regret that his father had died in Iglau.<sup>48</sup>

Mahler returned to Budapest in time to witness the first performance of Ferenc Erkel's *Brankovics György* on the 23rd, under Sándor Erkel. Even the *Zenelap* heaped lavish praise on the Opera's direction for this "service to Erkel and



Hungarian music".<sup>49</sup> Five days later, the elder Erkel himself took the baton, again conducting the first two acts of his *Hunyadi László*; the occasion was his long-delayed investiture with the Order of the Iron Crown.<sup>50</sup>

Aside from two pairs of *Rheingold-Walküre* performances, the month of March was uneventful until the last day. On the 31st took place the première of Maillart's *Das Glöckchen des Eremiten* (in Hungarian: *Villárs dragonyosai*), under Mahler's baton. The favourable press reviews laid great emphasis on Mahler's ability to deal as expertly with a work in the lighter vein as with Wagner's monumental music dramas. Some of the reviews also contained the first concrete evidence for what had been rumoured for some time — Mahler's involvement in all aspects of the operas under him, including stage directing; Újházy also shared in the praise:

[Herr Direktor Mahler] planned the production down to its smallest details, extending his care to everything: to musical fidelity as much as to the decoration and lighting of the stage, and to the placement of groups and solo singers. In this he was assisted very ably by playmaster Újházy who prepared the singers in enunciation and acting.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of March, Gyula Erkel's career at the Opera — under a cloud ever since Keglevich's negative evaluation in 1886 (see Chapter II) — came to an end. His departure had been rumoured since the beginning of the month;<sup>52</sup> according to Vidor, he was dismissed by Beniczky with a full pension, although he was only 47 years old.<sup>53</sup> Possibly in preparation for Gyula's dismissal, Henrik Benkő, a second violinist in the orchestra since 1882, had been appointed conductor on January 1st.<sup>54</sup> A perusal of reviews shows that until Gyula's departure Benkő had been utilized exclusively as a ballet conductor. It appears that he quickly proved to be less than adequate as a conductor, although he remained on the staff until the end of 1910.<sup>55</sup> As Sándor Erkel's renewed attempts to leave Budapest for Berlin were also under way at this time,<sup>56</sup> it is possible that Mahler's brief trip abroad at the beginning of April had as one of its aims the hiring of a new conductor, in order to solve what was a crisis of conductors.<sup>57</sup>

The next première at the Opera was clearly aimed at catering to audience taste and to the nationalists. On April 16th, the one-act ballet *Új Rómeo* (The new Romeo) by the two Hungarian music critics Jenő Sztojanovits and Lajos Steiger was given for the first time. It was enormously successful with the public, and brought Mahler generous praise for this service to Hungarian music.

The day after the première, Mahler's good friend Friedrich Löhr arrived in Budapest for a few days' visit. His extensive annotations to an undated letter received from Mahler in anticipation of the visit provide valuable insight into Mahler's life and circumstances in Budapest at the time.

Löhr spent five days with Mahler, leaving Budapest on Easter Monday (April 22). They went for long walks in the environs of Buda and on Margaret Island in the Danube, and Mahler played for Löhr from his evolving Second Symphony. Socially, Löhr met several members of Mahler's circle of friends and colleagues; he also recalled with approval a dinner which showed Mahler's 'political' acumen:



Von den Leuten, mit denen er dort damals regen Verkehr unterhielt, hab' ich in erfreundlicher Erinnerung behalten Herrn v. Mihalovich, den trefflichen ersten Musiker Professor Kößler vom Pester Konservatorium, den ich später noch in Salzburg und Berchtesgaden wieder bei Mahler traf, Sängerin Bianchi, den Schauspieler Ujhazy, Familie Dr. Ebner. Wie gründlich zielbewußt es Mahler anfaßte, im fremden Lande seinen Absichten den Boden zu bereiten, bezeugte, daß er am Karsamstag für einen kleinen Kreis von Künstlern und Zugehörigen so recht nach magyarischem Wohlgefallen ein ganz üppiges Diner gab, das animiertest verlief, lebhaftesten Beifall fand, aber auch für seine ernsten Pläne die erwünschten guten Früchte trug.<sup>58</sup>

Soon after Löhr's departure, Mahler achieved a triumph which was, in many ways, comparable to those he experienced with the Wagner-dramas. On April 27th he conducted his own production of the *Marriage of Figaro* (in Hungarian: *Figaro házassága*). Although it was not, strictly speaking, a première or a revival, the work had not been heard at the Opera since June, 1887. The following excerpt from one of the reviews indicates clearly the warm reception accorded Mahler's production:

[...] hardly anyone in the theatre could have recognized in today's impressive opera the old, shabby piece which had usually been listened to only out of reverence. What Herr Direktor Mahler made out of this opera through the careful and strict rehearsals, led by him personally down to the smallest details, can hardly be recounted. Even recalling the Wagner works, we can rightfully claim that this revival has been the director's most eminent accomplishment heretofore both dramatically and musically. [...] Whoever heard the *Marriage of Figaro* today was convinced that the work had to have had just this effect when it had been performed under the composer's supervision. [...] A remarkable aspect of the performance was the manner in which the emphasis alternated between the stage and the orchestra. [...] In this way every small nuance stands out appropriately, and the character of the whole is splendidly realized. It was wonderful. No other word can adequately express the grand impression.<sup>59</sup>

The Austrian composer and writer Wilhelm Kienzl met Mahler in Budapest at this time. He was invited to hear one of the rehearsals for *Figaro*, led by Mahler in his "peculiar manner". Kienzl recalled that during a meal following the rehearsal, Mahler complained bitterly about his longing to hear German singing, a longing which was making his resplendent and wholly independent position harder and harder to bear. Kienzl's recollections also provide an outsider's view of Mahler's standing *vis-à-vis* the Hungarian musical 'establishment'. He thought to discern two warring factions, with the one against Mahler grouped around the Erkel family. Asked about Mahler's work at the Opera, the elder Erkel reportedly replied that "er ihn als Künstler nicht näher kenne[!], ihn aber für einen Germanisator halte, der für die ungarischen Musikverhältnisse keinen Segen bedeute."<sup>60</sup>



In spite of the evident success of the opera season, Mahler's (and Beniczky's) benefit to Hungarian musical life was also being questioned in the political arena. On May 10th and 11th, the detailed estimates of the Ministry of the Interior were debated during the 239th and 240th Sittings of Parliament. The Opera's proposed subvention was 245 300 florins. This included the supplementary amount above the 'normal' subvention of 210 000 florins that had been requested by Beniczky a year earlier at the 111th Sitting (see Chapter II). The House's Finance Committee supported this request in its report on the Ministry's estimates, but reiterated its position to the effect that the excess was to be viewed as an exceptional "development" and "stabilization" grant.<sup>61</sup>

In many respects, the debate was similar to that of the previous year. Opposition speakers renewed their attacks on the position of the intendant (or, under the circumstances, the government commissioner), and continued their demand for the leasing of the Opera House. Two motions were made to transfer the supervision of the theatres from the Interior Ministry to the Ministry of Education. The defence was conducted by Gábor Baross, Minister of Public Works and Transportation as interim Interior Minister; by Beniczky; and by Member of Parliament Ferenc Fenyvessy. Beniczky, in addition to presenting detailed comparative statistics for three years to demonstrate an already significant improvement in the Opera's fiscal situation, praised Mahler's achievements eloquently and at length. He emphasized the universal respect and admiration Mahler had already earned, even from those who initially resented him as a non-Hungarian. Especially appreciated should be the fact that the "training and education of young Hungarian artists, neglected by Hungarian directors, was recognized precisely by this foreign director", in order that a Hungarian national Opera may be created.

With one notable exception, Mahler's abilities and achievements were acknowledged even by those speakers who had nothing good to say about any other aspect of the Opera. The exception was Member of Parliament Ferenc Komlóssy, a Roman Catholic priest. His interpellation, totally devoid of substantive issues, represented an overtly antisemitic diatribe against Mahler and the "Jewish rule" at the Opera. For example:

[...] the Messiah has arrived in the person of the Jewish director [...] I only fear that he will make our Opera into a Jewish, rather than into a Hungarian national one. [...] Regrettably, with our Jewish thinking today we have come to believe that a Hungarian cannot even be an artist. [...] Praise be to God that the aristocracy continues to attend the National Theatre, but stays away from the Opera: it shows that the aristocracy has a sense for Hungarian art, and does not wish to breathe the Jewish atmosphere in the Opera.

I considered it my duty to make these comments from my antisemitic point of view.

Having received a strong rebuke for his comments from Baross, Komlóssy, claiming the traditional parliamentary right to respond to a "personal attack" [!], continued:



If the Minister can reproach me for defending my point of view, I have the right to reproach him for being a Jew-lover; even though he is a Hungarian and a Christian. [...] I can assure the honoured Minister that the Opera has 150 Jews in its employ at the present time [...] In any case, the Minister, a Catholic individual, should cast no aspersions on me, the Catholic priest, as long as the role of *his* Holy Ghost is played by Wahrmann.

It was only after the above statement that Komlóssy was at last reprimanded by the Speaker of the House. Even then, though, the substance of the reprimand concerned Komlóssy's reference to the Holy Ghost, and his un-parliamentary "levity"! In the end, motions to lease the Opera, and to transfer the theatres to the Ministry of Education were defeated, and the estimates of the Ministry of the Interior were approved.<sup>62</sup>

The entire incident — whether seen from the point of view of Komlóssy's position in society, his openly flaunted antisemitism, or the Speaker's inadequate response — throws a revealing light on the prejudicial atmosphere in which Mahler had to work in Budapest; his conversion to Catholicism some eight years later was undoubtedly motivated by an anticipation of similar conditions in Vienna.

Before leaving Budapest for the summer, Mahler had one more obligation to discharge. Having had Mihalovich's staunch support ever since his appointment, and having announced a close cooperation with the Academy of Music as one of the cornerstones of his long-range programme, he now acquitted his debt on both accounts by participating in the graduating production of the opera-vocal class of the Academy, held at the Opera annually in May. He conducted the main segment of the production, a student performance of Schubert's *Die Verschworenen, oder Der häusliche Krieg* (in Hungarian: *Cselre csel*) on May 20th. Mihalovich expressed his appreciation in this open letter:

Most Honoured Herr Director! The gratifying results of yesterday's operatic graduation recital were decidedly influenced by the fact (significant in the history of our institution, and difficult to acknowledge adequately) that his Excellency the Government Commissioner and you, honoured Herr Director, in the full realization of the purpose of our institution, not only followed the development of our pupils with constant and sincere interest, but have also appeared at the rehearsals several times, while you were kind enough even to conduct personally its most outstanding segment. Your professional expertise and active support bore their fruit; although I know that the achievement itself stands as the greatest praise for you, I consider it a very pleasant obligation to convey to you officially the deep gratitude we feel for this great favour of a hitherto unprecedented generosity on the part of the Directorate of the Royal Hungarian Opera. Please accept our sincere thanks, and our plea that you maintain this invaluable interest and sympathy, as we



will continue to be grateful and appreciative towards you, deeply respected Herr Director. Greeting you also on behalf of the teaching faculty,  
Yours sincerely,  
Ödön Mihalovich,  
Director of the National Academy of Music and Performing Arts.<sup>63</sup>

One day after the graduation recital, Mahler left Budapest for Iglau;<sup>64</sup> he was to return only at the end of August.

Before I close this account of Mahler's first season at the helm of the Royal Opera in Budapest, it is worthwhile to recall an event which is not only related to the Opera, but was probably the first occasion on which Mahler and Géza Zichy crossed paths. This event was the first performance of Zichy's *Dolores*, an oratorio-like work for solo voice, mixed chorus and orchestra. It took place on May 3, 1889, during a charitable concert given by the Amateur Musicians' Society of Budapest.

Zichy wrote *Dolores* at the request of the Society in 1888; the première had been planned for March 18, 1889, with the Society's chorus and the Opera's orchestra. It appears from a letter of enquiry Zichy wrote to Tivadar Wenzel on January 8th that the Opera had refused to allow the orchestra to participate.<sup>65</sup> Two months later the matter was still not resolved; on March 9th Zichy wrote to Wenzel:

[...] You would oblige me very much by keeping an eye on *Dolores* [...]  
Please ensure the participation of the orchestra — I can tell you in advance that we will get the orchestra only *with great difficulty*, mark my words [...]<sup>66</sup>

These difficulties probably contributed materially to at least two postponements of the concert. It was next announced for April 24th, still with the participation of the Opera orchestra.<sup>67</sup> When the work was finally played on May 3rd, the orchestra was described as the "Philharmonic" — which, of course, consisted of members of the Opera orchestra. Zichy himself conducted, and even the critic of the conservative *Zenelap* found it difficult to praise this work, one "obviously so dilettantish in many sections, and displaying a mosaic-like lack of unity"; the "charitable nature of the concert and the reasonable audience reaction", however, made the writer disinclined to be more critical.<sup>68</sup>

Writing in his personal diary rather than for publication, no such charitable attitude restrained Zsigmond Justh (a personal friend of Zichy's!). *Dolores* is described as having a "few pretty places, although the whole is strongly under the influence of *Die Walküre*"; "otherwise, it is the same as Géza's other works: dull and spineless." The hall was empty, "except for the social coterie"; there were "big problems with the orchestra, it seems that Géza doesn't really know how to conduct."<sup>69</sup>

While it would be fascinating to know whether Mahler heard this performance, it is reasonable to surmise that the difficulties over the Opera orchestra in 1889 did not contribute positively to his relationship with Zichy in 1891.



## INTERMEZZO

Although the contemporary press, as well as later, historical sources contain frequent references to "conflicts" between Mahler and Sándor Erkel, it is virtually impossible to determine the precise nature of these conflicts. It is likely, though, that they were aggravated by Mahler's refusal to allow Erkel to break his contract with the Royal Hungarian Opera when he was offered a position at the Berlin Court Opera in 1889. While it seems that this may not have been the first time that Erkel had wanted to leave the Opera, as Mahler's relationship with the Erkel family had a significant influence on his fortunes in Budapest, a detailed examination of the "Erkel affair" is appropriate at this point.

For the want of full documentary evidence, it is impossible to determine precisely when Sándor Erkel first considered resigning from the Opera. His humiliation by Keglevich during the autumn of 1886 (see Chapter II) may well have provided the initial impetus. This assumption is supported by a letter from Richter to Johann Nepomuk Dunkl (a partner in the famous Rózsavölgyi music publishing house in Budapest), dated December 4, 1886. In it, Richter indicates his willingness to provide a letter of reference sought by Erkel, but expresses the hope that he will find it possible to remain in Budapest.<sup>70</sup> Press rumours concerning Erkel's departure around the same time (see Note 11, Chapter I) also point in this direction.

The first documentary evidence which brings Mahler into the picture is a letter to Erkel, dated April 27, 1889:

Sehr geehrter Herr!

Zu meinem größten Bedauern muß ich Ihnen mitteilen, daß der Herr Regierungskommissär von Benitzky [sic] Ihr Gesuch trotz meiner Verwendung abschlägig beschieden hat, und bin ich bereit Ihnen das Nähere mündlich auseinanderzusetzen. Was den ersten Teil Ihres Gesuches betrifft, glaube ich übrigens, daß es sachlich ja für Sie ganz gleichgültig sein kann; Ich kann Ihnen jedenfalls zusagen, daß Sie mindestens ein Jahr von Ablauf Ihres gegenwärtigen Vertrages die eventuelle Verlängerung desselben entgegen nehmen können werden.

Ihr hochachtungsvoll ergebenster  
Gustav Mahler

Herrn A. Erkel<sup>71</sup>

Unless Mahler was dissimulating, it appears from the first paragraph of this letter that he had initially supported Erkel's request to be released. The second part of the letter implies that Erkel may have attempted to support his request by assuming that his contract would not be renewed in 1892, thus leaving him unemployed and destitute.

Up to this point, there is no documented indication of the reason for Erkel's determination to leave the Royal Opera at this time. It first becomes clear from the extant copy of a contract he was offered by the Berlin Court Opera.<sup>72</sup> As this



contract is dated July 4, 1889, it must be assumed that negotiations had been under way for some time. At first sight, the urgency of Erkel's quest for his release from Budapest is puzzling: the Berlin contract was to run for two years, *following* the expiry of his contract with the Budapest Opera. This puzzle will be answered by one of a series of letters from Henry Pierson (acting on behalf of the Intendant of the Berlin Opera, Count Hochberg) to Erkel which, written over a span of nearly two years, not only illustrate the saga (eventually unsuccessful) of Erkel's attempts to leave Budapest, but also provide glimpses into Mahler's circumstances.

The first one of these letters, written from Marienbad on July 15 and 19, 1889, clearly shows that Erkel had been making repeated attempts to win his release from Budapest. Pierson's letter reads in part as follows:

Sehr verehrter Herr Kapellmeister!

Ihre Briefe vom 7. u. 8. d. Mts. habe ich erhalten. Daß Excellenz abermals ablehnen [?], habe ich erwartet. [...] Wenn Sie Nichts unversucht lassen, werden Sie auch zum Ziel kommen, das letzte Mittel, eine Eingabe an S. Majestät muß meiner Ansicht nach Erfolg haben. [...] Ich habe die Überzeugung, daß Ihrer eine glänzende Stellung harrt und Sie sich niemals schönere Verhältnisse wünschen werden. [...]

Pierson continued on the 19th:

Ihren Brief vom 13. d. aus Csaba habe ich auch erhalten. Daraus geht hervor, daß Mahler den Standpunkt hat, Ihr Entlassungsgesuch müße schliesslich doch bewilligt werden. Dies scheint mir ein *wichtiges Moment*. Auf seine schönen Reden ist nichts zu geben, das habe ich Ihnen ja vorhergesagt. Daß der Minister den Intendanten befragen muß, haben wir auch bereits vorausgesehen. [...] <sup>73</sup>

The reference in Erkel's letter to a communication with Mahler may have been to the following letter, the longest and most detailed one we have from Mahler to Erkel on this subject; it also provides good insight into the relationship of the two men:

Sehr geehrter Herr!

Ihr werthes Schreiben trifft mich auf den Krankenlager. — Die Wichtigkeit der Angelegenheit läßt mich den Widerstand besiegen den mir meine Schwäche verursacht, ich muß mich kurz fassen.

Ich bitte mir vor Allem zu glauben, daß ich Ihrem Gesuche die Objectivität und das Interesse entgegenbringe, zu welchem mich die Achtung vor Ihnen, und das Gewicht der von Ihnen vorgebrachten Gründe verpflichtet. —

Abgesehen davon, daß ich mir nicht leicht denken [kann], daß Sie eine materiell vorteilhaftere Stellung finden können (Bedenken zu einem Gehalte von 4500 fl 4 Monate Ferien), sind *Sie dem Institute so notwendig und unentbehrlich*, daß ich es für eine große Gewißenlosigkeit meinerseits ansehen würde, wenn ich dieselben auf so leichtsinnige Weise verlieren wollte. — Ich



gebe zu, daß in moralischer Hinsicht Ihre Stellung jetzt eine schwierige und peinliche ist, — ich habe auch in Hinsicht dessen schon bewiesen, daß ich zu jeder Concession bereit, welche Sie der Unannehmlichkeiten der gegenwärtigen Lage der Dinge enthebt.

— Ich stelle jedoch geradezu in Abrede, daß Sie bei uns die Stellung eines 2. Kapellmeisters einnehmen. Sie sind vor allem in Ausübung Ihrer Verpflichtungen *unabhängig* — ich rede Ihnen nichts hinein — Sie dirigieren beinahe alles —<sup>74</sup> ich werde nach wie vor meinen Wirkungskreis auf sehr wenige Opern beschränken müssen — und bin auch, wie Sie wissen bestrebt, Ihre große Arbeitslast durch Gewinnung eines 2. Kapellmeisters zu erleichtern. — Wie alles durch die Zeit gemildert wird — so wird auch endlich über die Vorgänge der letzten Zeit Gras wachsen, und Sie werden Sich dann ebenso heimisch und zufrieden fühlen, wie Ihnen dies nach Ihrem Naturell nur möglich ist.

Wir können bei meiner Rückkunft nach Budapest ausführlicher über alles sprechen —

nur bitte ich Sie dringendst: Ziehen Sie Ihr Gesuch zurück und bleiben Sie Ihrem Wirkungskreis erhalten; was in meinen Kräften liegt, denselben aufs Ehrenvollste und Angenehmste, zu gestalten, wird geschehen.

Mit dem Ausdruck meiner vorzüglichsten Hochachtung ganz ergeben [?]

Gustav Mahler<sup>75</sup>

Although this letter is undated, from its reference to the "sickbed", and with the help of a number of other (in some instances directly related) letters, it is safe to assign it to July, 1889. Around the middle of July, Mahler wrote to Löhr (in all likelihood from Munich):

Endlich bin ich aus dem Krankenhaus entlassen. [ . . . ] Ich gehe heute auf 5 Tage nach Bayreuth, von dort aus auf 3 Wochen nach Marienbad. — Mitte August hoffe ich in Wien zu sein.

[ . . . ]<sup>76</sup>

On July 19th, Max Falk wrote to Erkel from Bad Gastein:

Most Esteemed Herr Kapellmeister!

I received your kind words precisely a week ago in Vienna, right before my departure. I had postponed my reply because first I wanted to enquire about Mahler's condition. Today I received the answer that the poor man is in bad shape, indeed, and that his recovery cannot be expected before a few weeks. It is evident that under these circumstances your leaving is more than ever out of the question. Accordingly, I shall not even write to Beniczky because his negative response can be anticipated with complete assurance.

[ . . . ]<sup>77</sup>



It is reasonable to assume that the answer Falk received about Mahler's condition came from Mihalovich in Bayreuth. His letter of July 22nd to Erkel places Mahler in that city; it also shows that Erkel left no stone unturned in his determination to gain his release from the Royal Opera in Budapest:

Esteemed Herr Kapellmeister!

I spoke with Herr Beniczky and Mahler who are spending time here at the moment, but — in vain. At no cost can they be persuaded to release you from your contract.

[...] <sup>78</sup>

By the time Pierson wrote to Erkel from Marienbad on July 31st, Mahler had been there "for a few days".

This letter also provides an explanation for Erkel's desire to be released immediately from Budapest. In part, the letter reads as follows:

Verehrter Herr Kapellmeister,

Ein gestern eingegangenes Schreiben des Herrn Grafen [Hochbergs] setzt mich in den Besitz der Contracte. Ich bitte Sie nun dringend, Ihre Entlassung derart zu betreiben, daß Sie vom 9.–16. August in Wien unterschreiben können u. gleichzeitig den gefertigten Gegencontract aus meinen Händen erhalten. [...] Ihr Contract ist auf 5 Jahre [...] Eintritt 1. Sept. d. J. Gehalt M. 9000.

Indem ich hoffe, daß Sie mit der jetzigen Fassung zufrieden sein werden, bitte ich nochmals unter allen Verhältnissen um *strengste Discretion*. [...] <sup>79</sup>

It is evident that Erkel had rejected the original contract offered from Berlin, and had been negotiating for one which would have allowed him to leave the Royal Opera in Budapest immediately. Pierson's request "for the strictest confidence" was understandable: offering Erkel a contract which was to start *before* the expiry of his valid contract in Budapest would have been considered illegal tampering, and could have led to a lawsuit against the Berlin Opera.

Having failed to obtain his release by appealing to Beniczky, Mahler, and their influential friends, Erkel decided to turn directly to the Minister of the Interior. His petition is lost but the note from the Ministry with which it was sent down to Beniczky on August 30th for his "earliest evaluation and report" is extant.<sup>80</sup> Beniczky's very long report of September 5th to the Minister, containing a detailed history of Erkel's activities at the Opera, was mentioned earlier (see Note 47, Chapter II); it ends with the following declaration:

I hereby state that I will not agree to a termination of Sándor Erkel's contract; what is more, I intend to renew it six months before it expires, should he wish this, and provided that he continues to perform his duties to the satisfaction of the director.



On October 17th the Minister, in keeping with Beniczky's request, returned Erkel's petition to the Opera without taking action on it himself, and instructed Beniczky to "dispose of it in the best interests of the institution".<sup>81</sup> How he did this may be inferred from Pierson's letter of November 3rd to Erkel; this letter, written from Berlin, also shows that Pierson was losing patience with Erkel's habitually slow and listless ways — precisely the qualities which had caused his fortunes to decline in Budapest:

Verehrter Herr Kapellmeister,

Ihr Brief vom 28. v. Mts. hat mich sehr erbaut, übrigens habe ich Ihnen ja immer zum Gnadengesuch geraten. Nun machen Sie aber endlich Ernst, damit wir zu Ende kommen. Warum haben Sie sich denn dem Grafen nicht in Wien vorgestellt? [...] Es wäre sehr gut wenn Sie noch vor Ende d. J. womöglich in einigen Wochen Ihr hiesiges Amt antreten könnten, also tuen Sie schleunigst u. mit Energie die nötigen Schritten. [...]

Auf Herrn Mahler würde ich an Ihrer Stelle pfeifen nach den jüngsten Proben seines Verhaltens gegen Sie. [...] Der Minister des Innern wird auch von Wien aus für Sie bearbeitet. [...]<sup>82</sup>

Whatever Erkel may have cited as the "latest proof of Mahler's attitude toward him", he now took Pierson's repeated advice and appealed to the King. It is clear from the subsequent exchange of correspondence between Beniczky and the Minister of the Interior that Erkel's appeal to Franz Josef was in all essentials identical with his earlier petition to the Minister.<sup>83</sup>

The appeal to the King travelled the customary route. On December 17th the Minister sent it to Beniczky for his report "at this newest stage of the affair."<sup>84</sup> Beniczky's report is dated December 23rd; in addition to repeating his conclusions of September 5th, he added the following revealing comments on the points Erkel must have considered most important in his appeal:

[...] With respect to his complaint that the bigger operas which he had brought to the stage with great effort are gradually being taken away from him — my comment is that from among the old grand operas Mahler conducts only Lohengrin, newly produced by him, while the rest are still conducted by Sándor Erkel.

Thus, Sándor Erkel fulfils a function which cannot be entrusted either to his brother [Gyula] or to such conductors as are "in plentiful supply in the country..."

(Incidentally, it is characteristic of Sándor Erkel's patriotism and of his love for the institution that he recommends such people for this function.) But it is only in this respect that he is indispensable; for if I wanted to, I could replace him with a foreign and perhaps even better force, but I do not wish to do this, considering the hostility with which a foreigner is always received. [...]<sup>85</sup>



The Minister's report to the King, recommending that Erkel's petition be denied, is undated; the King's annotation on it, approving the recommendation, is dated January 21, 1890.<sup>86</sup> Six days later, the Minister instructed Beniczky to convey the King's decision to Erkel.<sup>87</sup>

Pierson's next letter to Erkel, written from Berlin on February 25, 1890, reflects his recognition of the finality of the situation:

Verehrter Herr Kapellmeister,

Nach Rücksprache mit den Grafen habe ich Ihnen also nochmals brieflich zu bestätigen, daß das mit Ihnen abgeschlossene Contract vollkommen rechtsgiltig und bereits von Sr. Majestät genehmigt ist, gleichviel ob Sie jetzt oder erst am 1. April 1892 kommen. Daß Sie Ihre Entlassung trotz aller Kraftanstrengungen nicht erreichen können, bedauere ich ungemein, weiß aber nunmehr auch keinen Rat. [...]<sup>88</sup>

In light of the foregoing it is surprising to find that, evidently, Erkel himself did not share Pierson's perception, but made further attempts to win his release. At the beginning of May, Mahler wrote to him as follows:

Auf Ihr Schreiben vom 5. d., worin Sie neuerding um Ihre Entlassung aus dem Verbande des kgl. Opernhauses ersuchen, muß ich Ihnen abermals eine abschlägige Antwort geben, da das Interesse des Institutes Ihr Mitwirken auch weiterhin erheischt. [...] wohl aber bin [ich] bereit Ihren Vertrag auf mehrere Jahre zu verlängern.

Budapest, den 6. Mai, 1890.

[...] <sup>89</sup>

In the end, Mahler did not get the chance to renew Erkel's contract. The final letter pertaining to this affair was written from Berlin by Pierson on March 16, 1891, just two days after Mahler's resignation in Budapest. Not surprisingly, it reflects Pierson's frustration at the implications of this new turn of events; on the other hand, the unqualified high regard for Erkel which it conveys is quite astonishing in light of his reputation in Hungary:

Verehrter Herr Kapellmeister!

Wie ich aus den Zeitungen ersehe, ist Dir. Mahler zurückgetreten. Damit wäre das status quo ante etabliert und Sie wieder in Ihre alten Rechte eingesetzt. Nehmen Sie meine herzlichsten Glückwünsche zu der mutatio rerum, die allerdings für uns in Berlin und speziell mich gar nicht erfreulich ist. Wenn ich denke, wieviel Zeit und Mühe es mich gekostet, Sie zu gewinnen und loszumachen, dann wird mir der Gedanke sehr bitter, daß Sie nunmehr überhaupt nicht kommen werden. [...] Lassen Sie mich [...] sofort wissen, ob meine Vermutungen eingetroffen sind und Sie wiederum in Budapest das Scepter führen. [...]



Sollten Sie doch kommen, können Sie versichert sein, hier mit offenen Armen aufgenommen zu werden und einen glänzenden Wirkungskreis zu finden. Das Engagement der Kapellmeister [Felix] Weingartner aus Mannheim hat gar keinen Bezug auf Sie u. wären Sie ebenfalls ausersehen, mit [Josef] Sucher & Weingartner an erster Stelle zu figurieren. Graf Hochberg setzt große Hoffnungen auf Sie. [...]<sup>90</sup>

As it turned out, Erkel did not regain his "old jurisdiction", nor was he given the opportunity to assume "command" again. After Mahler's departure, the intendant, Count Zichy "directed" the Opera for about two years, until Arthur Nikisch was engaged as artistic director (see Chapter IV). Although Erkel, increasingly debilitated by heart trouble, was given the honorary title of "chief music director" in 1896, in effect he remained simply one of the conductors at the Opera until his death in 1900.<sup>91</sup>

## SEASON II (SEPTEMBER, 1889 TO MAY, 1890)

Mahler returned to Budapest towards the end of August. On the 27th, he was present at a gala performance of ballets for the visiting Shah of Persia.<sup>92</sup>

Before the season officially got under way, the Opera was the scene of a celebration. The government and its official and unofficial advisors must have been satisfied with the results of the first full season under Beniczky and, by implication, under the artistic director chosen by him. Prior to the opening of the new season, Beniczky was officially appointed intendant. In this capacity, he was enthusiastically greeted by the staff on September 14th. According to the reports, Mahler delivered this short speech in Hungarian:

It is my pleasure to greet your Excellency on behalf of the entire staff. I can speak only briefly on this occasion, to express our joy upon your appointment, and to ask God to grant your Excellency a long life.

In his reply, Beniczky stressed the need for continued cooperation and support for the already successful artistic programme of the director:

[...] In our circumstances [...] we must count on the fact that the permanent staff — which includes many talents — will always discharge its duties punctually and just as precisely as possible. In that case, it may retain the public's interest permanently, just as the signs of such interest have already become evident during the tenure of the present director. The great artistic ambition and love of work of the new director, coupled with your talent and diligence, will undoubtedly result in significant achievements.

At the end of the ceremony, Mahler was also noisily cheered by the staff.<sup>93</sup>

By the time these celebrations were held, Mahler was ready to open the season with a new, uncut production of *Lohengrin*. Because of family worries (his mother



was on her deathbed) and physical problems (the lingering after-effects of the summer operation), the preparations caused Mahler particular hardships. A few days before the opening on the 15th, he wrote to Uda Löhr, Fritz Löhr's wife:

[...] Ich bin mitten in der Arbeit — Sonntag Lohengrin!  
Vom Hause sehr schlechte Nachrichten — die Katastrophe wird stündlich erwartet. [...]

In meinem Zustande ist bisher keine Verbesserung eingetraten — um die Proben zu ermöglichen, esse ich Morphium. [...]<sup>94</sup>

However, the quality of the production was evidently not affected by Mahler's personal difficulties. At the dress rehearsal, the writer of the *Pesti Napló* found much new to report: the orchestra pit was in the lowered position (as for the *Ring* dramas), the curtain opened in the middle, and "the scenery and costumes were made according to the designs by King Ludwig II; at the appearance of the swan, the scene was also arranged according to the Bavarian King's ideas and personal drawings."<sup>95</sup>

The first and subsequent performances of the new *Lohengrin* were received with praise even by such critics as Kereszty. In what was to be one of his last positive columns, he wrote as follows:

The Royal Hungarian Opera opened its doors on September 15th, and if the first performance was any indication, we may look forward to a winter season with great expectations. [...] The performance passed for a veritable première. [...] All singers deserve praise. [...]; as for his Telramund, we can only congratulate Takáts, but also Mahler, who had literally rediscovered this great talent. But the chief merit of the production lay in its unity rather than in the success of the solo singers. All of the many performers acted well, each nuance was appropriately emphasized, and the overall effect was successful to such an extent as to be virtually unprecedented in our Opera. [...] *Lohengrin* was given again on October 9th. The performance was excellent [...] The orchestra was conducted by Mahler who had, in a sense, recreated this opera.<sup>96</sup>

A good idea about the quality (especially the 'modernity') of this production may be gleaned from Ludwig Karpath's account of a conversation with Mahler following a *Lohengrin* performance in Bayreuth in 1894. To Karpath's remarks concerning the apparently striking similarities between the productions in Bayreuth and Budapest, Mahler replied:

Ich gebe ohneweiteres zu, daß manches in meiner Inszenierung mit der hiesigen übereinstimmt, aber das ist ja gar nicht so verwunderlich, Frau Wagner sowohl wie ich haben den Geist des Werkes erkannt und aus diesem Geist geschöpft.<sup>97</sup>



Two days after the opening performance of *Lohengrin*, more or less as a continuation of the celebrations on the 14th, the personnel of the National Theatre and the Opera gave a banquet in honour of Beniczky. Mahler and Mihalovich were prominent among the more than 100 guests.<sup>98</sup>

In the midst of professional success, personally this was a sorrowful time for Mahler. Upon his return from a five-day trip to the bedside of his mother in Iglau, on September 27th he learnt that his sister Leopoldine ("Poldi") had died in Vienna following a brief but devastating illness.<sup>99</sup> Two weeks later, on October 11th, his mother died in Iglau. Now Mahler, strongly family-oriented throughout his life, was also faced with the responsibility for his brother and sisters who were still living at home. Around the middle of October he wrote to Löhr:

[...] Wie ich höre, geht die Justi auf kurze Zeit zu Euch; wohin stecken wir die Emma?

[...] es kommt mir jetzt alles darauf an, daß die kurze Übergangszeit bis zu dem Moment, wo ich die beiden Schwestern zu mir nehme, für diese einigermaßen erträglich wird. [...]

By the time he wrote to Löhr approximately two weeks later, Otto and Emma had been settled under the care of the Löhrs in Vienna, while Justine had moved to Budapest to live with her brother. It is also clear from this letter that the new responsibilities were becoming a strain on Mahler's finances:

[...] Ich bitte Dich, mir zur Übersicht genau mitzuteilen [...] wie viel ich für beide Kinder monatlich *regelmäßig* einzusenden haben werde — wobei ich freilich einen kleinen Stoßseufzer nicht ganz unterdrücken kann. [...] hier scheinen sich die Ausgaben infolge der ungemein empfindlichen und geschwächten Konstitution der Justi [...] beträchtlich höher zu stellen, als ich anfänglich gehofft habe. [...]

Morgen nehme ich einen *Vorschuß* auf!

[...] <sup>100</sup>

The season progressed needless of Mahler's personal problems. On October 20th, an evening of ballet included the première of a work with the title *The Parisian painters* (in Hungarian: *A párizsi festők*). Choreographed by Luigi Mazzantini, the Opera's ballet master, and clearly intended to feed the public's seemingly insatiable appetite for dance productions, this work attracted minimal critical attention and quickly disappeared from the repertoire. Today, even the precise origin of the music cannot be ascertained.<sup>101</sup>

The next 'première' brought dramatically different results. On October 24th Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (in Hungarian: *A windsori vig nők*) was performed under Mahler. As it had been in the repertoire in the days of the National Theatre, the production was listed as a 'revival'; however, this was the work's first performance in the new Opera house, and it was a resounding success. The critic of the *Budapester Tagblatt* recalled the earlier dearth of light (especially German) operas; their successful performance would not have been possible during the



regime of multilingual guest stars. After *Das Glöckchen des Eremiten*, Mahler had now produced his second success in this genre:

[...] Das Geheimnis, welches Direktor Mahler besitzt [...] besteht in seinem zielbewußten Eifer, ein allen Opern gerechtfertigendes ungarisches Ensemble zu schaffen und in dem sorgfältigsten, jedes Detail berücksichtigenden Studium, welches er den von ihm geleiteten Werken angedeihen läßt. [...]

The liveliness of the whole cast, the excellence of Bianchi as Frau Fluth, and the excellence of the orchestra were singled out for special praise:

[...] Wir haben unsere Sänger und Sängerinnen noch niemals mit solcher Verve und in so flottem Tempo spielen sehen und namentlich Fräulein Bianchi war der gute Genius dieser Vorstellung. [...] Unter der Leitung Direktor Mahler's erglänzte das diesmal nicht versenkte Orchester in seiner ganzen Pracht. Schon die meisterhaft gespielte Ouvertüre entfesselte rauschenden Beifall und im Verlauf der ganzen Oper stand das Orchester auf der Höhe seiner Aufgabe.<sup>102</sup>

The critic of the *Egyetértés* (most frequently anti-Mahler in his attitude) emphasized the ensemble work, and acknowledged the contribution of Mahler's assistants:

[...] [Mahler] is not satisfied if only the music goes well but also takes the greatest care in ensuring that the ensemble work stands at an appropriately high level. [...] Mahler is able to infuse the performers with a certain spirit, one which ennobles their performance. Heretofore, it has been mostly this healthy spirit which has been missing from opera performances. The ensemble work in today's performance could have satisfied even the most exacting expectations. [...] The production was to the equal credit of Director Mahler, stage manager Alszeghy and Újházy.<sup>103</sup>

It was around this time that rumours of an imminent marriage between the "Opera's preeminent singer and a famous musician" began to circulate in Budapest. Already on his arrival there a year earlier, Mahler's bachelorhood gave rise to snide comment in the press. The gossip columnist of the *Neues Politisches Volksblatt*, for instance, had no doubt that Mahler would have the support of the "native [female] singers" in his efforts to create a Hungarian Opera. As well, the "mothers of marriageable daughters, well-represented in Opera audiences, are counting on the bachelor Mahler."<sup>104</sup> On this occasion, it was believed in certain quarters that the two "principals" involved were Bianchi and Mahler. However, a personal acquaintance of Arabella Szilágyi later recalled that Mahler had been, in fact, all set to marry Szilágyi; in the end, though, she decided to remain with her aristocratic patron.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to such 'personal problems', personnel problems also continued to



plague Mahler during his second season in Budapest. The difficulties began early in the season. In a review of a performance of the operetta *Bonsoir, Monsieur Pantalon* (in Hungarian: *Jó éjt Pantalon úr*) by Grisar, Mahler was attacked for having given the star of the evening, Mariska Kordin, her notice. The writer wondered about what he considered the director's cavalier approach to building a permanent ensemble:

Is it because he has had such a lucky touch with new engagements that he can so easily let go a proven member of the institution? We fear that this will not lead to anything good and wish to raise a timely warning voice. It has been said more than once that it is easy to demolish a good ensemble, but much more difficult to organize a new one.<sup>106</sup>

In December a lawsuit was launched by the singer Bianca Bellini against Beniczky in his capacity as "government commissioner [sic!] of the Royal Hungarian Opera". Although the single surviving document does not allow for a definite conclusion, both Beniczky's and Béla Várady's (the Opera's legal counsel) involvement, and the sum of money sought (36 000 florins), allow one to surmise that the suit concerned a cancelled or terminated contract.<sup>107</sup>

Between September and December, Mahler also attempted to build up the ensemble by permanently engaging successful guest singers. Thus, István Deszkasev sang as a guest on September 24th, October 5th and November 1st, and was put under contract on November 15th.<sup>108</sup> But during this period Mahler devoted most of his energies to recruiting a singer he had known since his days in Prague in 1885–1886: the mezzo-soprano Laura Hilgermann. Several letters — most of them addressed to Hilgermann's husband, the actor Siegfried Rosenberg — show the determination with which Mahler was prepared to pursue (even in the face of frustrating delays) a singer he really wanted to have in his ensemble. Although some of the letters are undated, most of them can be ordered with assurance on the basis of their contents or — if they show it — the Opera's correspondence registry number.

The earliest relevant letter was likely written around the beginning of the season:

Lieber Herr Rosenberg!

Hiemit frage ich Ihnen an, wann ich auf ein Debut Ihrer Frau rechnen kann. — Die Zeit drängt und ich muß meine Dispositionen treffen.

Wenn Ihre Frau November bei uns eintreffen könnte, hätte ich ein famoses Debut für Sie [sic].

Ich bitte Sie um möglichst umgehende Mitteilung.

[...] <sup>109</sup>

The next letter, written about a month later, reflects Mahler's anxiety about convincing the Rosenbergs to move to Budapest:



Lieber Herr Rosenberg!

Natürlich bin ich noch immer sehr gerne bereit, unsern Vertrag in Kraft treten zu lassen, nur glaubte ich aus dem letzten Brief Ihrer Frau entnehmen zu müssen, daß Sie sich die Sache anders überlegt haben. *Also wann können Sie mit Ihrer Frau herkommen, und wann kann ich das Gastspiel derselben ansetzen?*

Die Verhältnisse hier sind die Ihnen schon bekannten, und für Ihre Frau der Spielraum zur schönsten weitesten künstlerischen Tätigkeit. —

Ich hoffe sogar, den Contract Ihrer Frau *sofort nach Beendigung ihres Gastspiels* in Kraft treten lassen zu können.

Also nur her! Es wird Ihnen Beiden hier sehr gut gefallen!

[...] <sup>110</sup>

It appears from the above that at one time Mahler had been so confident of Hilgermann's success in Budapest that he had drawn up a contract with her *in advance* of her guest appearance.

It becomes evident from the next letter (dated November 27, 1889) that Rosenberg was also hoping to get a position at the Opera. However, Mahler was impatient, and interested only in settling the details of Hilgermann's guest appearances:

Lieber Herr Rosenberg!

Was Ihre Angelegenheit betrifft, habe ich ja schon in Prag ausführlich mit Ihnen gesprochen! — Was ich Ihnen darüber gesagt, steht auch heute fest. — Ich kann Ihnen nichts zusichern, ich werde aber bemüht sein, eine Ihren Fähigkeiten entsprechende Stellung, wo möglich an unserer Oper zu finden. — Schnell geht das natürlich nicht. — Da meine Zeit sehr gemessen ist, und mir überdies, wie Sie schon bemerkt haben werden, alles Correspondieren sehr beschwärllich ist — ich bin, wie Sie sehen, mein eigener "Rosenhain" — so berühre ich in meinen Briefen immer nur das Vorliegende — Tatsächliche — u. Bindende. —

Also schnell zur Sache:

Ich erwarte Sie bestimmt Ende Dezember und setze Ihr [sic] Gastspiel auf Mitte Jänner fest. —

Was die Rollen selbst betrifft so ist mir als I. Mignon sehr recht. —

*Orpheus* haben wir jedoch noch nicht am Repertoire, daher bitte ich davon abzusehen, und wie wir es anfänglich intendiert haben, die "Amneris" dafür zu wählen.

Als 3. ist mir Cherubin ganz recht, und hoffe ich diese Oper für Jänner ansetzen zu können.

Bei der Natur unseres Verhältnisses, und bei der Tendenz, an das Gastspiel gleich ein Engagement oder (wenn dies *vor* der contractlich bedungenen Zeit nicht möglich ist) ein anderweitiges *dauerndes* Verhältnis anzuknüpfen welches Ihre Frau sofort zu den Unsrigen macht, haben wir ja Zeit, alles Nähere bei Ihrer Ankunft in Budapest zu besprechen. — Sollte Ihre Frau mit



der Amneris noch nicht fertig sein, so werden wir vielleicht die Mignon 1 oder 2 Mal wiederholen können, und indessen wird dann das Versäumte nachholen. — Die Partie der Mignon sende ich Ihnen, wie sie hier gesungen wird, *natürlich mit Recitativen*.

Wünscht Ihre Frau einen Strich oder eine sonstige Änderung so steht es ihr ganz nach Belieben vollkommen frei. — Desgleichen sende ich Ihnen nochmals die *Amneris* — obwohl ich mich dunkel erinnere, beide Partieen bereits in Ihrem Besitze gesehen zu haben.

(The end of the letter is missing.)<sup>111</sup>

Mahler must have received a reply to the above letter immediately, for only three days later he was writing to Rosenberg again. It appears from this letter that the choice of Hilgermann's guest roles continued to be a contentious issue:

Orpheus kann ja später kommen.

Budapest am 30. Nov. 889.

Lieber Herr Rosenberg!

Sie verlangen ja unmögliches — *Rienzi ist nicht am Repertoire!* und kann ebensowenig als Orpheus in kurzer Zeit geleistet werden. Wenn Ihre Frau *aus mir unbegreiflichen* Gründen etwas gegen die Amneris hat, so soll sie sich ein beliebige Partie aus unserem Repertoire aussuchen — mir ist alles ganz gleich!

Senden Sie also eine Auswahl der von Ihrer Frau gern gesungenen Rollen, und ich werde ihr dann diejenigen bezeichnen, die möglich sind.

[...] <sup>112</sup>

The last one in this series of letters, written on December 16th, shows Mahler on the verge of despair. It also contains an allusion to what had probably been the main reason for the long delay in Hilgermann's appearance in Budapest: she was being sued for breaking her contract in Prague:

Lieber Herr Rosenberg!

Muß ich armer Mensch denn in einem fort Briefe an Sie schreiben?

Also: Von mir aus können Sie [sic] vom Bühnenschiedsgericht als was immer erklärt werden, so ändert dies gar nichts an unseren Plänen. In *jedem Falle* erwarte ich Sie Ende Dezember hier und habe Mignon und Frl. Bianchi als Philine für Mitte Jänner bereits angesagt.

Aber jetzt, ich bitte Sie um Himmels willen, lassen Sie die Zweifel schon und teilen Sie mir den Tag Ihrer Ankunft hier mit. Welche Partieen will Ihre Frau hier italienisch singen?

Besten Gruß Sie Sappermenter

von Ihrem  
bedauernswürdigen  
Mahler<sup>113</sup>



Although new problems with the Rosenberg-couple would arise later on, for now this was the end of the "Hilgermann-affair". She sang in Budapest for the first time in *Mignon* on January 19, 1890. She repeated the same role ten days later; appeared in *Aida* on February 8th; and was permanently engaged on the next day, to remain in Budapest for 10 years.<sup>114</sup>

By the time Mahler completed his long quest to engage Hilgermann for the Royal Opera, he had been introduced to Budapest as a creative artist in his own right. On October 1st, the press reported that shortly after his return to Budapest for the opening of the operatic season, Mahler had been approached by a delegation from the Budapest Philharmonic for permission to perform "one of his symphonic works" at the beginning of their season in November. Mahler "readily obliged them", handing over the score of "one of his large symphonic poems".<sup>115</sup> Eventually, the "symphonic poem" (in effect, the First Symphony in the original five-movement form) was included on the second concert of the Philharmonic season on November 20th. Before presenting a detailed history of this concert, and of its 'prelude' on November 13th, a brief examination of the somewhat puzzling questions surrounding Mahler's compositional activity during his directorship of the Budapest Opera is in order.

Even if he was quite inconsistent in the matter of dating his compositions (especially the songs) throughout his life, from the evidence of the extant dated manuscripts and other documents the period between 1888 and 1891 appears to have been an astonishingly unproductive one for Mahler, the composer. This impression seems readily confirmed by a remark he made many years later to Natalie Bauer-Lechner. She reports that in a conversation in 1900 Mahler referred to the *Wunderhorn*-song that eventually became the fourth movement of the Fourth Symphony as

dieses "Himmlische Leben", das nach der Pester Stagnation als das erste in Hamburg dem lang verhaltenen Schaffensquell entsprang.<sup>116</sup>

Although Mahler's memory deceived him slightly as to the precise position of this song among those composed during his first season in Hamburg,<sup>117</sup> what is significant is that even from a distance of a decade or more, he recalled his Hungarian years as creatively arid ones. Was Mahler simply too debilitated by the physical and mental strains of his directorship in Budapest to give time or thought to creative endeavour? Perhaps so; yet, though he seemed to attract conflict and turmoil wherever he worked, he had managed to compose in Kassel, Leipzig and Prague, and was to do so again during his Hamburg, Viennese and American years. One may also wonder: did he not compose during the summer holidays of 1889 and 1890, as he was wont to do so often in the course of his peripatetic existence? In point of fact, while available evidence does not allow for definitive conclusions, there are a number of works Mahler could conceivably have composed, or at least worked on, in the period falling between his assumption of the directorship of the Royal Hungarian Opera in October, 1888, and his departure for Hamburg in March, 1891.

As concerns his symphonic music, Mahler had completed the First in March of



1888, while still in Leipzig.<sup>118</sup> The first version of a symphonic piece titled "Todtenfeier" (to become the first movement of the Second Symphony) was also finished before Mahler arrived in Budapest; the full score is dated "Prag, am 10. September 1888."<sup>119</sup> However, the finale of the Second Symphony was written only in 1894, in Hamburg. While it is known that the inner movements of this work were completed during the intervening years, the precise chronology of their composition, and the process of revision of the first movement, are far from clear. We know from Natalie Bauer-Lechner, for instance, that Mahler *completed* the Andante at Steinbach in the summer of 1893, from *sketches* dating back as far as the Leipzig period.<sup>120</sup> The chronology implicit in this information acquires especial significance in light of Löhr's recollection of his visit with Mahler in Budapest in the spring of 1889, discussed earlier. In addition to the socially-oriented material, Löhr's recollections include the following, intriguing sentence:

[...] daheim bei sich saß er [...] für mich am Klavier und spielte mir aus der ihm werdenden zweiten Symphonie.<sup>121</sup>

Evidently, Mahler's preoccupation with the evolving Second Symphony continued while he was in Budapest. It is conceivable, then, that he may have worked on the revision of the first movement and, possibly, on the composition of the Andante, during this time.

From the point of view of possible creative endeavours between 1888 and 1891, an even more interesting — because more uncertain — area for speculation is represented by the compositional history of Mahler's early *Wunderhorn*-songs.<sup>122</sup> The time span during which these nine songs could have been written is delimited by, on the one hand, the date of Mahler's 'discovery' of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and, on the other hand, their publication in early 1892. The former date, however, presents its own set of problems, and can only be assumed to have fallen sometime before 1888.<sup>123</sup> One of Mahler's conversations with Natalie Bauer-Lechner in the summer of 1893 appears to suggest that he may have composed at least some of the nine songs for the Weber-children in Leipzig.<sup>124</sup> Taking this assumption as his starting point, one writer advances the theory that the "last songs" in this group were written at Hinterbrühl during the summer of 1890.<sup>125</sup> If, however, the "last songs" include "Scheiden und Meiden" (as they surely must, as it is third from the end, both in the single extant — undated — manuscript, and in the first edition), then this theory is incorrect. As will be seen in the following, this song was performed in Budapest already during the previous season. Although this must also remain conjecture for now, it seems more feasible to suggest that Mahler may have composed "Scheiden und Meiden" especially for the concert on November 13th, 1889, perhaps in order to complement the two older (and previously performed?<sup>126</sup>) works with a new song. If so, then the last two of the early *Wunderhorn*-songs, "Nicht wiedersehen!" and "Selbstgefühl", may also have been written during Mahler's time in Hungary.

As if the intention had been to prepare the public for the performance of Mahler's major symphonic work on November 20th, the programme of the second subscription concert of the popular Krancsevics-Quartet (Dragomir Krancsevics



was one of the three concert masters at the Opera) on November 13th included a group of songs sung by Bianca Bianchi, with Mahler's accompaniment. Three of the songs were by Mahler: "Frühlingsmorgen", "Erinnerung" and "Scheiden und Meiden".<sup>127</sup>

Both performers, as well as the composer received a liberal amount of praise from the critics. The writer of the *Zenelap* was especially struck by Mahler's artistry as a pianist:

[...] On this occasion, Mahler entered the lists as a composer — it appears that he is destined to forever leave battlefields victorious.

For, indeed, the director of the Opera proved victorious again; his beautiful songs won over music lover and expert alike. But for the latter the zenith of enjoyment lay in Mahler's masterful accompanying of the Loewe-songs. His piano playing has great significance because it goes far beyond the so-called Kapellmeister style. We had never before heard the accompaniment of Loewe's "The Fisherman" recreated with such artistic perfection. [...] If we claim that Mahler was the hero of the evening, we are merely reporting the dominant mood. [...] <sup>128</sup>

Other critics dealt with the songs themselves in somewhat more detail. For example:

[...] Mahler's songs are written in the style of the newest German song literature. The first song has a melancholy mood; its effect was lessened, however, by a certain degree of artificiality and coldness. The second song is the complaint of a disappointed heart and, although it shows the influence of Richard Wagner, it spoke to the heart more directly. Its dissonances reflect the aching heart. This was the shortest one of the songs but it displayed the most colour and imagination. The third song had a degree of lightness, and Mahler was quite successful in capturing musically the frivolity of the parting. The second song was the most enjoyable. [...] Mahler showed himself to be an excellent accompanist. His abilities to accompany with discretion, yet at the same time to lead the singer with such expressiveness; to project song and accompaniment with such refinement — these are traits absent from our concert halls today. [...]

And elsewhere:

[...] From among Mahler's songs, the ones on Leander's texts appealed especially with their beautiful craftsmanship, while the folk song "Scheiden und Meiden" overstepped the bounds of the folk song, as such, with its overly pretentious and ballad-like conception. [...] <sup>129</sup>

The critic of the *Pesti Napló* was especially struck by "Erinnerung", and discerned in the young Mahler a worthy successor to the great masters of the Lied:



[...] We can state without exaggeration that the songs enjoyed undivided success, as much for their content and genuine poetic verve as for their performance. [...] Regardless of whether the emphasis had to be on naive emotions, or on a poetic mood, or on the illustration of swelling passion, [Mahler's] rich power of imagination, his harmonic language and his varied accompaniment invariably supplied the right solution. Still, if one of the three songs had to be favoured, it would be the second one which depicts love and song with equally original and expressive strokes. German song literature is so rich, and has had such an overabundance of genius, that only exceptional talents can still make an intense impression. The composer is one of their number. [...] <sup>130</sup>

On the same day, several papers published the programme for the approaching Philharmonic concert, including this second item:

Gustav Mahler — symphonic poem in two parts. Part I: a) introduction and Allegro con moto. b) Andante. c) Scherzo. Part II: d) la pompe funèbre, attacca. e) Molto appassionata. (Manuscript, first performance under the direction of the composer.) <sup>131</sup>

Reminiscent of the expectant atmosphere which preceded the premières of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, some papers issued daily bulletins in anticipation of the concert. For example:

Director Gustav Mahler's large-scale and brilliantly orchestrated "Symphonic Poem" [...] is generating extraordinary interest among the music loving public of the capital. Judging from the volume of advance reservations, the large concert hall will be completely sold out by the day of the performance. [...] <sup>132</sup>

A number of newspapers even published reviews of the dress rehearsal on November 19th. Thus, one critic wrote:

[...] The rehearsal was heard by a large invited audience which applauded noisily several sections of the work, one that is as grandiose as it is rich in ideas and distinguished in orchestration [...] The work was interpreted with appropriate artistry by the orchestra. <sup>133</sup>

Evidently, Mahler was also pleased with the performance of the orchestra. Wasting no time, he wrote a profuse letter of thanks to the musicians of the Philharmonic on the same day:

Meinen sehr verehrten Herrn!

Noch unter dem Eindrucke der heutigen Generalprobe fühle ich mich gedrängt, Ihnen und allen Mitwirkenden für die aufopferungsvolle und von



echtem künstlerischen Geiste getragene Leistung zu danken, durch welche Sie mein bescheidenes Werk zu verwirklichen geholfen haben.

Schon die heutige Generalprobe hat mir die Gewißheit gegeben, daß ich mein Werk in solcher Vollendung nie mehr zu hören bekommen werde.

Ich fühle mich stolz, an der Spitze einer solchen Körperschaft zu stehen, welche sich mit solcher Hingebung und Hintansetzung aller persönlichen Interessen in den Dienst der Kunst stellt, und bitte Sie, mir fernerhin so gut zu bleiben, als ich Ihnen dankbar und verpflichtet bin.

Ihr aufrichtig ergebenster

Gustav Mahler<sup>134</sup>

On November 20th the rest of the programme,<sup>135</sup> conducted by the orchestra's music director, Sándor Erkel, was very well received by audience and critics alike. As to the "Symphonic Poem", there is room for at least some doubt that the orchestra again played it with "genuinely artistically spirited effort" (in fact, rumours of a "sabotage" against Mahler made the rounds after the concert). At any rate, the audience's reaction, as well as the majority of critiques were very negative, ranging from hostile to patronizing. After upbraiding Mahler for not distributing an "explanatory programme" prior to the concert, and faulting him for obscuring in the work his "known" lineage of musical taste and conception (from Gluck and Weber to Wagner!), Kereszty dismissed him as a beginner insufficiently schooled in traditional musical practice:

[...] all the effects achieved by Mahler's work remind one not of a great master, but of a daring pupil who is as yet unable to control the multitude of his ideas and feelings. [...] Mahler wants to make a break with form, yet if he would study deeply the art forms of overture and symphony, and use them in a few of his works, he would reach the threshold of world fame — otherwise, he will not. [...] <sup>136</sup>

The only positive reaction found in the Hungarian-language press came from the pen of József Keszler:

It was only recently that we came to know and respect our young Opera director as a composer of songs. [...] The work heard today fully confirmed the correctness of the motto 'le styl c'est l'homme'. This symphonic poem is the work of a young, unrestrained and irascible talent, one which has to hold back forcibly the flood of melodic motives it pours forth, one that breaks through all conventions of form in its desire to create something new. [...] The correctness of the title of the work is unimportant when we speak of a genuine talent, of an enjoyable artistic product. And Mahler's work is a true artistic creation. [...] The Opera director can be satisfied with his success. He had been applauded not only in advance (as an acknowledgement of his activities at the Opera to date) when he had appeared on the podium, but a storm of applause also broke out at the end of each movement. <sup>137</sup>



The reference above to Mahler's "activities at the Opera" is significant. It shows that by the end of November in his second season even articles devoted to his own music could not omit at least an allusion to his increasingly controversial role at the Opera. Partly because it is an outstanding example for the apparent inseparability of these issues, the younger Kornél Ábrányi's review follows in its entirety:

Gustav Mahler's "symphonic poem" was undoubtedly the most interesting work on the programme of the Philharmonic concert. The exposed position occupied by the composer as director of the Royal Hungarian Opera, the conflicting opinions held by the public of the capital about his abilities, the adulation with which he is celebrated as the "Messiah" of our Opera on the one side, and on the other side the scepticism with which he is viewed not as a reformer, but as the destructive spirit that is steering our institution into shipwreck instead of a safe harbour; all this explains the extraordinary interest which was evinced in the widest circles. As Mahler is now known to audiences as a director and a conductor with all his merits and all his faults, it is quite natural that they were curious to make his acquaintance as a composer, especially since his songs heard the other day elicited general appreciation.

One of our colleagues wrote about Gustav Mahler that he is an individual whose character asserts itself in all areas with decisive plasticity. We wish to add that his personality is characterized in all areas by the same attributes. His symphonic work showed the same traits of knowledge and genius mixed with nervous restlessness, impulsiveness and immaturity as are apparent in his directorial activities. The composer called it a "symphonic poem". We do not argue about the suitability of the title. It is a fact that what we heard was not a symphony in the strict sense, thus we accept the composer's choice of designation which can account for a great many things. We can state immediately that so far as the "symphony" goes, the work is a very noteworthy one; but where the "poem" begins, there follows an aesthetic travesty.

The work is divided into two parts, the first of which consists of three quite symphonically conceived movements. The first one of these is a country-idyll, with forest murmurs, the whistling of birds, cuckoo-calls and in order to complete the assembly of birds, even the crowing of roosters is not absent; the latter one is perhaps intended to wake up the hunters whose horn mingles merrily into the polyphony of sounds, mounted over an endless pedal-point. The second movement is an Andante in noble style, throughout which sounds a nice, sentimental melody. The third movement is a jovial Scherzo, somewhat thickly orchestrated, but otherwise very successful. Now follows the second part. It begins with a sort of funeral march, but we do not know whether to take this 'funeral march' seriously or whether to regard it as a parody. We are more inclined to suspect the latter, as the main theme of the funeral march is a familiar German student-song ("Bruder Martin steh schon auf") we have often sung ourselves, but during merry drinking rather than at funerals. The sound of the funeral having died away, it is followed by



a grand pause. Then suddenly there is an enormous cymbal crash, the clarinets and violins squeal in agony, the kettledrum thunders, the trombones roar; in a word, all the instruments swirl in a mad witches' dance. Then, one by one, certain themes and motives of the first part return, in order finally to drown once again in a wild bacchanalia.

In one of the commentaries we read that in the funeral march the composer was laying his illusions to rest: we can add that he also buried the illusions of the audience. And the last movement — according to the same commentary — represents the downfall. The word was chosen by the commentator, we can merely affirm it. However, we mean to apply "downfall" only to the second half of the work; the first part deserves to be saved from the downfall. If the composer were to add to the first three movements a suitable finale of a type for which his qualifications are amply evident from the attractive thematic development and the brilliant orchestration, he could present a symphony which would rise well above the every-day, dime-a-dozen works.<sup>138</sup>

Among the German-speaking critics Herzfeld, Mahler's erstwhile conservatory colleague and his staunch supporter as Opera director, clearly found it necessary to dwell on Mahler's eminence as a conductor, in order to dismiss the symphonist in good conscience:

[...] Wir bedauern, sagen zu müssen, daß die Erwartungen, die man an die Komposition geknüpft hatte, nicht in Erfüllung gegangen sind. Wenn man nicht aus Mahler's glänzenden Leistungen als Dirigent wüßte, daß er ein mit den Meisterwerken aller Kunststile aufs Innigste vertrauter, mit vielseitigem Geschmack begabter, feinfühligter Musiker ist, aus seiner Symphonie würde das man nicht erfahren haben. Man durfte nach dem Titel "symphonische Dichtung" und bei der bekannten Hinneigung unseres genialen Direktors zu der allerfortgeschrittensten Neuromantik sich auf Extravaganzen aller Art gefaßt machen, dabei aber doch wenigstens nach dieser Richtung hin Interessantes und Bedeutendes erwarten. Statt dessen hörten wir eine Musik, welche, abgesehen von einigen Bizarrerien, in jeder Beziehung, in Melodik, Harmonik und Instrumentation, im besten Falle sich nicht über das Niveau des Gewöhnlichen erhebt.

[...] Fassen wir alles [...] in einen Gesamteindruck zusammen, so können wir nicht anders sagen, als daß Mahler, nicht nur was seine eminente Dirigentenbefähigung anbelangt, sich würdig den Ersten dieses Faches anreihet, sondern ihnen auch dadurch ähnelt, daß er kein Symphoniker ist. [...]

Der Erfolg der neuen Symphonie, welche vom Komponisten selbst einstudiert und dirigiert wurde, war schwach, am Schlusse machte sich sogar eine kleine Opposition bemerkbar. Hingegen wurde Herr Alexander Erkel bei seinem Wiederauftreten fast demonstrativ applaudiert: so dankbar ist das Publikum einem Kapellmeister, der nicht komponiert.<sup>139</sup>



It is easy to imagine how Mahler would have been affected by such critiques. Impressions left by the aftermath of the première of the First Symphony reverberated in him for many years. Thus, more than a decade later he recalled the occasion for Natalie Bauer-Lechner:

In Pest, wo ich sie zuerst aufführte, wichen mir danach die Freunde scheu aus; keiner wagte, mit mir über die Aufführung und mein Werk zu sprechen, und ich ging wie ein Kranker oder Geächteter umher. Wie aber erst die Kritiken aussahen, kannst du Dir unter solchen Umständen wohl denken.<sup>140</sup>

From a letter written to Mihalovich after yet another four years, it appears that there had been at least one person who did not "avoid" Mahler following the première of the First:

Verehrter Freund!

Herzlichen Dank für Ihre lieben Zeilen. Ich freue mich sehr, daß Ihnen mein Werk gefällt, und erinnere mich mit Rührung der Zeiten, da Sie beinahe der Einzige waren, der mich nach jener unglücklichen Aufführung meiner I. nicht "rücksichtsvoll" mied. Daß ich Dienstag nicht kommen konnte, tat mir sehr leid — und ärgert mich um so mehr, als Abends die Vorstellung abgesagt wurde. — Versäumen Sie es, bitte, ja nicht, mich wieder zu benachrichtigen, wenn der Toldi angesetzt ist. Einmal wird es mir ja doch gelingen dazu hier abzukommen, und ich freue mich schon jetzt darauf, mit Ihnen, alter Freund, wieder ein paar Stunden zu verbringen — am liebsten wäre es mir, wenn sonst gar Niemand etwas davon erführe.

Mit allerherzlichsten Grüßen  
Ihr alter Mahler<sup>141</sup>

An equally personal and revealing, but more immediate and detailed impression of the Symphony's reception and its effect on Mahler was recorded by Friedrich Löhr, who was especially incensed by Herzfeld's review. Löhr went to Budapest in time to hear both the dress rehearsal and the public performance, and later wrote the following annotation to a letter received from Mahler around that time:

"... jetzt eben nach erstem Anhören, sehr tief mitnehmenden Anhören der Symphonie — ich bin sehr froh, sie morgen nochmals zu hören..." schrieb ich meiner Frau [nach dem Generalprobe]. [...] Daß dies unser Zusammensein ganz unter dem Zeichen des Erlebnisses dieser Aufführung stand, bedarf keines Zusatzes. Hatte ja Mahler beim Einstudieren selbst zum ersten Male sein Werk erklingen gehört, vielleicht die Hauptsache im ganzen und bleibende Förderung. Aber auch die Aufnahme, die das Werk fand, war innerlich zu verarbeiten. Der Pester Kreis nah um Mahler war tief bewegt, ein erheblicher Teil des Publikums hier wie sonst formal Neuartigem gegenüber lieblos unverstehend, besonders durch die dynamische Heftigkeit tragischen



Ausdrucks, wie sie hier sich austobte, aus gedankenloser Gewöhnung unliebsam aufgescheucht. Einer eleganten Dame neben mir entfielen bei der in den letzten Satz überleitenden Attacca sämtliche Gegenstände, die sie in den Händen hielt, zu Boden, so wahr ihr der Schreck in die Glieder gefahren. Am nächsten Tage die obligaten Kritiken in den Tagesblättern: neben einer erfreulich warmgefühlten Besprechung im Pester Lloyd von A[ugust] B[eer] eine vernichtende Kritik im Feuilleton des Neues Pester Journals, deren abstoßend häßliche Selbstsicherheit in gleicher Weise wie die Größe des Fehlgriffes solchen Urteils den Skribenten V[iktor] v. Herzfeld richtet. So hat damals für Mahler als Schaffenden die lange Zeit des Leidens und der einsamen, oft schmerzlichen, unbeirrt zuversichtlichen Erhebung über den Tageserfolg ihren Anfang genommen.<sup>142</sup>

The "long period of suffering" was, in fact, beginning then not only for the composer, but also for the Opera director. For reasons which are not entirely clear, his popularity suffered a spectacular decline during the few weeks between the unstinting praise of the *Lohengrin* and *Die lustige Weiber* reviews in September and October, and the end of the year. Was this due chiefly to the "Erkel-affair"? Had it to do with staffing problems at the Opera? Was it influenced by the changing political climate which was to culminate in the downfall of the moderate Tisza-government in March, 1890? Or was it simply the operation of that seemingly universal and timeless process in the arts: the onset of public and critical satiety (inevitably growing into petty antagonism) with a charismatically unusual personality? Whatever the reason, the fact is that expressions of praise were becoming increasingly scarce; by the end of the year, most members of the press adopted a peevishly critical attitude towards the Opera. Staff problems were aired at length; attacks on the programme and on the quality of the performances became more frequent and nasty. As the complement of this trend, we find the conductor identified increasingly rarely for performances presumably led by Mahler. Thus, it becomes even more difficult than is usual for that period to determine which performances were conducted by Mahler himself — in effect, "er wurde totgeschwiegen", as it appears to the historical observer.<sup>143</sup>

Although the letters and later recollections frequently reflect the turmoil he felt at the attacks, only in the rarest instances did Mahler resort to responding through the press. One of these instances occurred in connection with a performance of *Die Hugenotten* on November 28th at which the entire fifth act was omitted. What became known as the "Hugenotten-affair" began with the release of the following bulletin by the Opera:

Anläßlich der morgigen Aufführung der "Hugenotten" im k. Opernhause bringt der Direktion zur Darnachrichtung für das theaterbesuchende Publikum zur Kenntnis, daß sie die Schlußszene, welche einen Straßenkampf darstellt, aus künstlerischen Gesichtspunkte wegläßt, so daß die genannte Oper von nun an immer mit dem großen Duett (Raoul und Valentine) zu Ende sein wird.<sup>144</sup>



August Beer, normally Mahler's most loyal supporter, took exception to this "innovation" in his review:

[...] Die heutige "Hugenotten"-Aufführung brachte uns übrigens eine wenig stylvolle Neuerung: die Oper schloß nämlich mit dem großen Duett [...] Der fünfte Akt [...] entfiel und dabei soll es auch fernerhin sein Bewenden haben — "aus künstlerischen Rücksichten", wie ein Communiqué besagt, welches heute in allen Blättern zu lesen war.

Beer then proceeded to present his own "artistic reasons" and criticized the omission on dramatic grounds; in the end, he invited the directorate of the Opera to state its case.<sup>145</sup> Mahler's response provides interesting insight into his dramaturgical thinking:

[...] Im Verlaufe dieses Referats wird die Ansicht ausgesprochen, "daß eine Oper kein willkürliches Nacheinander oder Durcheinander von Arien, Duetten usw., sondern ein in Musik gesetztes Drama ist, welches denselben Gesetzen folgt, wie jedes rezitierte". [...]

Gerade im Gegenteil sind beinahe alle Opern, die der Zeit vor Richard Wagner angehören, mit sehr wenigen Ausnahmen wirklich nur ein "willkürliches Durcheinander" von Musikstücken, [...] und von allen Opern sind es [...] gerade die "Hugenotten", welche ganz besonders an diesem Mangel leiden.

Die "Hugenotten" [...] dauern sechs Stunden; und in Paris [...] mußte man zu dem Auskunftsmittel greifen, sie in zwei Theater-Abende auseinanderzulegen.

Eine Bühne, welche den Parisern dieses Experiment nicht nachmachen will, muß sich dazu verstehen, mindestens drei Stunden Musik aus diesem Werke hinauszustreichen, um es repertoirefähig zu machen [...] In [der] usuell gewordenen Einrichtung ist vom letzten Akt nichts als die im Theaterjargon sogenannte "Schießerei" übriggeblieben [...]

Ich will nun davon nicht reden, daß in den geistreichsten und anerkanntesten) Bühnenwerken unserer Zeit der materielle Schluß des Dramas [...] hinter die Coullissen verlegt wird, um die Hörer, sozusagen zum Mitdichten angeregt, sich die Sache, jeder nach seiner Art, zu Ende denken.

[...]

Es fragt sich nun: Ist es möglich, dem Publikum diese peinliche Minute zu ersparen, ohne daß dadurch der Sinn des Ganzen leidet?

Sehen wir uns einmal den Schluß des vierten Aktes an: Die beiden Liebenden haben [...] sich mit der ganzen Fessellosigkeit, welche das Gefühl des nahen Todes bringt, gegenseitig ausgesprochen. Raoul [...] eilt [...] zu seinen Brüdern [...] Wir wissen, daß kein Hugenotte diese Nacht überleben wird [...]

Valentine liegt am Boden in einer tiefen Ohnmacht, von der wir ahnen, daß sie daraus nicht mehr aufwachen wird.



Ist es nun hübsch oder notwendig, daß wir, [...] im Tiefsten erschüttert, [...] den Vorhang auf einen kurzen Moment wieder aufgehen sehen, [...] um [...] diese beiden Liebenden lautlos und wehrlos — wie Hasen auf der Treibjagd — fallen zu sehen!

[...] eben dieses Duett, welches [...] die Perle [...] der ganzen musikalisch-dramatischen Literatur überhaupt ist, [war] ursprünglich weder vom Dichter noch vom Komponisten intendiert, sondern [wurde] erst nachträglich von Meyerbeer auf Wunsch eines in der Oper beschäftigten Tenoristen auf Worte ebendesselben nachkomponiert und eingelegt.

Ist es nun z. B. wünschenswert, daß die ursprüngliche Absicht der Autoren restituiert und das Duett wegbleiben soll?

In einem der unsterblichsten Meisterwerke, nämlich Mozarts "Don Juan" wird bereits seit vielen Jahrzehnten — und dies ist von den bedeutendsten Musikkritikern gutgeheißen — die Original-Schlußszene weggelassen, und die Oper ganz einfach "aus künstlerischen Rücksichten" mit der vorletzten Szene beschlossen! — Würde es Jemand wagen, das Verlangen zu stellen, nun wieder zum ursprünglichen Schluß zurückzukehren, so wie ihn der große Mozart gewollt?

[...] <sup>146</sup>

Not surprisingly, Beer had the last word. Although his counterreply took the form of a letter to the editor, it was printed in the theatre column. While lavishing profuse praise on Mahler's expertise in theatrical matters, Beer systematically dissected and rejected every one of his arguments.<sup>147</sup>

Before the end of the year, there were two more new productions at the Opera. Although it had been performed at the National Theatre, on December 7th Auber's *La part du diable* (in Hungarian: *Az ördög része*) was given for the first time at the Opera, conducted by Sándor Erkel. It was a complete failure, and was played only once more before vanishing from the repertoire.<sup>148</sup> Two weeks later Josef Bayer's new ballet *Sonne und Erde* (in Hungarian: *Nap és föld*), introduced in Vienna not long before, had its Budapest première under Henrik Benkő. Like almost all dance productions, it was an instant success with Hungarian audiences (if not with the critics!), and remained an often repeated repertoire work.

Between the two premières, Mahler took part in a "festival" performance on December 11th for the benefit of the Hungarian journalists' pension fund. It was held at the Népszínház (Folk Theatre) with the participation of performers from all three theatres, and featured the popular play *A szökött katona* (The Deserter) by Ede Szigligeti. A "concert", organized and led by Mahler, was incorporated between the first and second acts. In addition to several other pieces with either piano or orchestral accompaniment, it included an interesting number: an aria from Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied*, sung by Ney.<sup>149</sup> The complete opera was to have its Budapest première only in January, 1891 (see Season III).

This year, Mahler spent Christmas in Vienna at the Löhrs with his brothers and sisters. In an undated letter he wrote to Löhr:



Ich komme Montag Mittag mit der Justi in Wien an [...] Justi bleibt dann bei Euch und ich gehe weiter nach Iglau, um die Angelegenheiten zu ordnen.  
[...] <sup>150</sup>

The "affair" which necessitated Mahler's trip to Iglau was the final disposition of his father's business; Löhr recalled later that Mahler arrived back from Iglau just "as the candles were lit on the Christmas tree".

Mahler had probably returned to Budapest before the New Year, for on January 1st he wrote the following, enigmatic letter to Beniczky:

Budapest, 1. Jänner 90

Euerer Excellenz!

Hiemit mache ich die ergebenste Anzeige, daß ich von dem mir kontraktlich zustehenden Rechte meinen Vertrag zum 1. September dieses Jahres zu kündigen, Gebrauch machen muß. Zugleich erkläre ich mich bereit, wenn S. Excellenz der Herr Minister des Innern das Euerer Excellenz eben unterbreitete Gesuch bewilligt, diese meine Kündigung wieder zurückzunehmen.

Euerer Excellenz

gehorsamster  
Gustav Mahler  
Direktor <sup>151</sup>

Here I must recall from Chapter I my discussion of Mahler's rumoured contract problems in December, 1889. For the two registry numbers on this letter are the ones under which Beniczky made two submissions to the Interior Ministry "concerning the contract of Gustav Mahler Opera director." The correspondence ledger of the Ministry indicates that Beniczky's submission of January 2nd was accompanied by one enclosure — no doubt Mahler's above letter. A solution for the mystery is suggested by four subsequent entries in the Ministry's ledger. Under Registry No. 183 a submission, with two enclosures, was received from the intendant on January 14th; no date of sending or Opera registry number are given, but the subject is noted as "concerning Director Gustav Mahler's pension", this entry being followed by the reference "cum 320". Registry No. 320 refers to a submission sent by Beniczky on January 21st (without Opera registry number), received on the 22nd, "concerning the matter of Gustav Mahler opera director"; the submission was sent on to the Ministry of Finance on February 16th. The next entry in the ledger is under No. 910. It refers to a document sent by the Ministry of Finance on March 1st, received on March 5th. With reference to No. 320 as a related document, the summary of No. 910 reads: "Gustav Mahler opera director is not eligible for a pension"; it was sent on to the intendant on March 25th. The next and last relevant document is listed in the Interior Ministry's ledger under No. 1388. It was sent, with two enclosures, under the Opera's registry No. 32 on April 3rd, and



was received the next day. Its subject is noted as "in the matter of Gustav Mahler artistic director's contract", with reference to the related document No. 910. As far as can be determined from the ledger, this submission was disposed of by returning it to the intendant on April 13th.

While it is impossible to reach a definite conclusion without the original documents, the annotations in the Interior Ministry's correspondence ledger strongly suggest that Mahler's problems late in 1889 and early in 1890 had to do with his pension, rather than with his contract *per se*. References to "contractual rights" and "contract" in his letter of January 1st to Beniczky also point in this direction. Possibly, Mahler's original contract made no provision for a pension; it is conceivable that having discovered this — or having had it called to his attention (see Note 152) — he decided in 1889 to request its rectification. The "just submitted petition" mentioned in his letter may refer to such a request; this was probably one of the two enclosures sent to the Ministry with Beniczky's submission of December 30th. Since this submission was received in the Ministry only on January 3rd, it seems likely that Mahler's tentative letter of resignation on January 1st was written (possibly even on Beniczky's advice!) with a view to exerting tactical pressure. Although from Document No. 910 it appears that the Ministry of Finance ruled against Mahler's request, it must be assumed that the correspondence under Ledger No. 1388 contained either an overruling of that Ministry by the Minister of the Interior, or a proposal for some other, mutually acceptable solution. After all, Mahler *did* remain in Budapest. Also, his reference to "the sums I have contributed to the planned pension fund of the Royal Opera during my term of office" in a presumed sketch for a new contract with Zichy in March, 1891 (for further details, see Season III) indicates that the pension problem had been resolved.<sup>152</sup>

In whatever manner the "pension affair" may have been cleared up in the end, it must have caused Mahler a great deal of anxiety and annoyance. Considering his probable state of mind just then, it is likely that an undated note to Laura Hilgermann, who had arrived in Budapest for her first guest appearance in January, was written around that time:

Liebe Frau Hilgermann!

Bitte, nehmen Sie es nicht übel, daß ich Sie habe so lange warten lassen. Ich hatte so furchtbare Unannehmlichkeiten. Morgen bitte ich um 10 Uhr, damit wir das Versäumte nachholen, um 12 ist Arrangierprobe I.

Mahler<sup>153</sup>

Aside from Hilgermann's long-awaited arrival, the month of January, 1890 witnessed several other events, some more propitious than others. On New Year's Day the company, led by Alszeghy, greeted Mahler in his office. Later Mahler led them to Beniczky, and delivered the following greeting speech himself, reportedly in faultless Hungarian:

Your Excellency! Following the grand old custom, we appear before you on this day to convey our sincere good wishes for the New Year, and at the



same time to thank you for the kindness and benevolence which you had bestowed upon us in the past. On our part, we will strive to deserve it also in the future by devoting all our strength to working together on behalf of the institution. May God grant your Excellency a long life! Viva!<sup>154</sup>

On January 3rd Mahler conducted the Leonore Overture No. 3 during a benefit evening held at the Opera for the employees of the German Theatre that had been destroyed by fire. His handling of the orchestra drew this enthusiastic response from one of the critics:

The orchestra played with such verve and noble passion that it is difficult to believe that this was produced by the same artists who, on other occasions, so often sin against their own consciences. This is yet another reason why we would like to see Mahler on the podium more frequently.<sup>155</sup>

About a week later, Mahler himself fell victim to the influenza-epidemic which had been playing havoc with programme scheduling.<sup>156</sup> On January 26th, H. Schmidt's ballet *Robert und Bertram* was performed for the first time at the Opera. Interestingly, though, the focus of attention was claimed by the evening's companion piece, Adolphe Adam's opera *La poupée de Nuremberg* (in Hungarian: *A nürnbergi baba*). Although it had been performed once before Mahler's tenure (on December 19, 1888), it was now being hailed as a "revival". In all likelihood, this was due to the personal attraction of Bianca Bianchi. Then, on January 30th the *Zenelap* inaugurated a series of attacks against Mahler and the Opera, the sustained nature and impact of which far exceeded the kinds of "annoyances" Mahler may have had cause to complain about earlier in the month.

Inevitably, nationalistic considerations were a readily available, as well as a popular source of criticism. The long article published in the *Zenelap* under the title "The Royal Hungarian Opera, Hungarian opera and other matters" was typical of this approach:

A year and a half have gone by without a performance of a Hungarian operatic work at the Royal Hungarian Opera. Is this proper? We think not. [...] Or can it be the sole purpose of the Opera House to perform foreign works in Hungarian? This could be answered by saying that there are no new Hungarian operas, and Erkel's, being out of date, do not draw audiences. To the latter, we can reply immediately that this is not so; we cannot remember that "Hunyadi László" or "Bánk bán" would ever have been performed in an empty house. And even if this were so, a season should not pass at the Royal Hungarian Opera without the performance of a Hungarian operatic work.

After this out and out falsification of the facts, followed by a discussion of a lengthy list of obscure Hungarian operas, the writer came to his real purpose:

With the publication of these lines we intend to ensure that Hungarian music will always be upheld in the Royal Hungarian Opera, and to obstruct



all attempts to the contrary, regardless of who is behind them. Our purpose is not to create propaganda for the Erkel, but rather to ensure that any unjustified attempt to crowd works by Hungarian composers off the programme of the Opera will be thwarted by the loud veto of the Hungarian public. We believe that the educated Hungarian public can only approve of our protest.

Claiming that Mahler's actions have been contrary to the announced cornerstone of his programme (the Hungarianization of the Opera), the writer warned him:

Please believe, Mr. Mahler, that the Hungarian public is not so naive as to be taken in by an occasional address to the intendant in a few parroted words of Hungarian. They know that you cannot yet speak Hungarian; you should not think that the public will call you to account because of this, although they hope that you will finally learn the language for your own sake. You will be called to account, however, on your promise to promote Hungarian music and art. — It seems that the Director fell into the hands of bad advisors; he should take care that his otherwise honest intentions do not suffer shipwreck on his animosity towards Hungarian music and Hungarian composers, dragging him down with them.<sup>157</sup>

Following a brief absence from Budapest between the 9th and 11th of February (noted in the *Fővárosi Lapok*), Mahler participated in the variety gala evening held at the Opera on the 24th for the benefit of the Polyclinic. His contribution consisted of a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, with the orchestra functioning as the Philharmonic. Mahler's interpretation was received with uniformly high praise. For example:

[...] It was with extraordinary pleasure that [the audience] listened to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, conducted by the Opera's eminent director, Gustav Mahler. He led the Philharmonic Society's orchestra today, and it is safe to say that this group, so used to great and well-deserved praise, has seldom achieved a success equal to this evening's. Under Mr. Mahler's intelligent, fiery, yet correct direction this magnificent music took on the traits of an oration. It spoke with an eloquence practically never heard in a piece of music. The sweeping beauties of the master's grand work, and the conductor's individual conception, exceptionally lively artistic sense and secure good taste were equally evident in this performance. Besides achieving a fully unified projection of this work so rich in musical ideas, Mr. Mahler's conducting imbued every single section with such magnificent colour that they enraptured the audience one by one. At the end of the work, tumultuous applause broke out; on this occasion, the lion's share of the general acclaim rightfully belonged to the conductor.<sup>158</sup>



The programme of the evening also included a minor operatic première of sorts. The one-act Singspiel *Fanchon szerelme* (*Fanchon's love*) by the Hungarian Andor Merkler (1862–1922) had its one and only performance at the Opera.

On March 1st, the *Zenelap* resumed its offensive, this time aimed squarely at the directorate of the Opera:

Our pen is guided by an unblemished devotion to the cause and by a most sincere goodwill. [...]

It is not our intention to pry into official secrets, or to be difficult at any cost. We are simply presenting facts [...] and content ourselves with examining them from the point of view of the artistic direction. We will not follow the officious reporters of some of the daily papers who dissect the director's peculiar personality with unnecessary rudeness [...] — is it important for the reading public to know that the director has a nervous disposition? [...]

We are writing these lines after the eleventh performance of *Die Walküre*. In one place in the first act a trumpet entered incorrectly, in another place a violin; in the third act, the billowing steam preceded the Fire Magic by 40 minutes (and was detected and stopped only accidentally); but these were exceptions, this was not why a good portion of the boxes and of the ground floor were empty. Eleven performances in 13 months, and the house is already half empty! [...] To be sure, such treasures should be displayed only rarely [...] Vienna, even though her musical intelligentsia is far greater, gets to see *Die Walküre* only once or twice a year. But this is not where we must look for the root of the problem. [...]

We see the root of the problem [...] in that, instead of the attractive, the desired, the announced work, the public is so often given (especially lately) something else of substantially less value. [...] The public does not want to appear at the Opera all dressed up, just to be disappointed in their expectations [...] They would rather stay away.

The secret of double (or even triple) casting every work on the programme is not so deeply hidden that the directorate could not easily find it. The danger of the constant experimentation with the dramatic, supporting and soubrette roles is not so small that the directorate could not have become convinced of its disadvantages. The departure (through whatever means) of useful and not replaced members (orchestral and vocal, first or second rate) has been more injurious than that it could have gone unnoticed in the administrative circles who certainly must be experts in their profession.[...]

Various discourtesies [...] have been far too crude to be easily forgiven, especially a director about whom the public does not even know: for how many years will their artistic enjoyment depend on his power?

[...] <sup>159</sup>

The final première of the season one week later did nothing to improve the Opera director's standing. Marschner's *Der Templer und die Jüdin* (in Hungarian: *Templomos és zsidónő*), conducted by Mahler, was received coldly by a full house on



March 8th. One critic wondered why the 61-year old, “deadly dull” work had to be produced? Another one professed astonishment that a score of such “unrelieved grey” could have been “excavated” by such an experienced conductor.<sup>160</sup> It is fittingly ironic that the one critic who hailed the première of *Der Templer* as a “long-overdue filling of an inexplicable lacuna in the Opera’s repertoire” was — Kereszty! What is more, following the fourth performance of the work on March 22nd he complained that the already shortened opera had been cut yet further, “almost beyond recognition”, just to accommodate a ballet on the evening’s programme.<sup>161</sup>

In light of his artistic and public trials, practically unceasing by now, it is not surprising that around this time Mahler wrote to Löhr with great agitation:

[...] Ich bin so erregt beschäftigt — muß so viel Ärger schlucken, daß ich zur Korrespondenz nicht fähig bin!

[...]

Schreibe bald Deinem sehr sorgenvollen

Gustav<sup>162</sup>

At about the same time, there were signs that the constant attacks were beginning to undermine Mahler’s independent and secure judgement in matters of programming and staging. It appears in most cases as if he had been anxious to please and pacify the public and the critics. As was seen above, to please the public he made excessive cuts in *Der Templer*, an unsuccessful opera. Far more surprisingly (could Mahler have been reacting to the poor attendance mentioned in Kereszty’s column on March 1st?), on March 11th it was announced in the press that in order to have to raise the curtain only at 7, *Die Walküre* would henceforth include the cuts “usual in other theatres.”<sup>163</sup> While this displeased some critics (see Note 161), others were not yet satisfied. In his review of the performance of March 15th, the elder Ábrányi claimed that the “excessively long” scenes of especially the second act could be shortened further “without short-changing either the beauties of the work or Wagner’s intentions.” He recalled the 1876 Bayreuth performance which, even though it had been under Wagner’s personal influence, had been “far from the dragging tempo of our production.”<sup>164</sup>

No doubt chiefly to placate the nationalists (among whose attacks Kereszty’s column of January 30th featured prominently), Mahler began to plan the revival of two of Ferenc Erkel’s operas. He wrote to Erkel on March 10th:

Most Esteemed Sir!

Having decided to perform the operas *Bánk bán* and *Hunyadi László*, composed by you, I turn to you, sir, with the respectful request that you lend the Institution the vocal scores of these two operas in your possession (as the Institution does not own vocal scores of the above named operas, and as the learning and coaching of the parts from the full score would be problematic, as well as time consuming) for the purpose of having them copied.



After they have been copied, the original vocal scores will be returned to you, sir, immediately.

Commending my request to your kind attention, I remain, with assurances of my deep and sincere esteem,

Your obedient servant

Mahler Gusztáv  
artistic director<sup>165</sup>

A few days later, a portentous political event took place in Hungary. On March 13, 1890, Prime Minister Tisza resigned after 15 years in office. The King appointed Count Gyula Szapáry as Prime Minister; Szapáry also kept the Interior portfolio to himself for the time being. It was likely that the coming into power of a more nationalistic (and thus, in some respects, more conservative) government would lead to Beniczky's downfall as intendant; this, in turn, almost inevitably had to bring with it Mahler's untimely departure.<sup>166</sup>

During the last third of March, Mahler left Budapest at least once, and possibly twice. On March 20th, it was announced that he went away for a few days on "official business";<sup>167</sup> he returned to Budapest in time to conduct *Die Walküre* on the 26th. At the beginning of April, he was apparently in Iglau to sign some documents concerning family business.<sup>168</sup>

On April 13th the Opera was to stage a gala evening to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the death of King Matthias Corvinus. As Mahler well realized, such a thoroughly Hungarian occasion could be appropriately marked only with the music of that most Hungarian of composers, Ferenc Erkel. On the 8th Mahler wrote to him:

Most Esteemed Sir!

As the programme of the gala performance, to be held on the 13th of this month at the Royal Hungarian Opera in commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the death of King Matthias Corvinus, consists of excerpts selected from your works, I have the honour of turning to you, sir, with the request that you kindly consent to conduct a part of the programme, thus enhancing the brilliance of the festivities.

Awaiting kind notification of your decision, I remain, with assurances of my deepest esteem,

Budapest, April 8, 1890.

Your most obedient servant,

Mahler Gusztáv  
artistic director<sup>169</sup>

The ageing Erkel acceded to Mahler's request, and conducted the overture to *Hunyadi László* and excerpts from *Bánk bán*. It is interesting to note that Mahler did not participate personally in this intensely nationalistic event. The rest of the



programme (excerpts from *István király* and *Brankovics György*) were conducted by Sándor Erkel.

Mahler did participate in a charity evening held at the Opera on April 16th for the benefit of the pension fund of the Hungarian Actors' Association. It was an evening of varied entertainment, and included a concert. Mahler provided the accompaniment — in part on the piano and in part with the orchestra — for Lieder and arias sung by Hilgermann, Ney, Countess Vasquez and Prevost. In most of the reviews, he was praised especially for his "artistically perfect" piano playing.<sup>170</sup>

The season was slowly drawing to a close. At the end, Mahler showed that he was still able to produce performances which were received with appreciation and praise. It may be recalled here that at the end of his first season in Budapest, he made one of his last appearances on the podium with a performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* which was then hailed as a triumphant revival. Curiously in light of that convincing success, *Figaro* did not appear earlier on the programme of the second season. Intentionally or not, but with a showman's flair for a dramatic exit, it was only at the end of the season that Mahler returned to *Figaro*. On April 26th he conducted an outstanding performance. One critic wrote:

[...] The performance was heard and enjoyed by a well-disposed, very large audience, who rewarded each effective scene with loud applause. The lion's share of their appreciation, however, went to the orchestra which played truly beautifully. The musical parts of Mozart's masterpiece have rarely been heard in Budapest so conscientiously, correctly and effectively interpreted, multiplying the beauties of the work a hundredfold. It is superfluous to mention that the orchestra, as well as the preparations were conducted by Herr Director Mahler. Only his outstanding expertise and unflagging efforts can achieve such results.<sup>171</sup>

Mahler was demonstrating his special affinity for Mozart's music already in Budapest; this affinity was to make his Mozart performances into memorable occasions even at the peak of his career in Vienna and New York. His patron and good friend, Count Albert Apponyi, later recalled Mahler's Mozart productions as the key to his own understanding of Mozart. Reminiscing about the high points of musical life in Hungary during his lifetime, Apponyi singled out the concerts of the Hubay-Popper Quartet, and

[...] that glittering age of our Opera, when Gustav Mahler was director. What results that genius achieved with the often unjustly neglected native forces! What a festive occasion was every performance prepared and conducted by him! Most especially I can thank him for understanding Mozart's significance, an understanding I achieved curiously only later and through the excellent performances of "The Marriage of Figaro" and "Don Juan", prepared and conducted by him. The key that he handed me then opened all of Mozart's treasures for me. [...] <sup>172</sup>



Although most of the material relating to the production of Alberto Franchetti's opera *Asrael* more properly belongs to the next section on Season III, one pertinent letter may be mentioned here. For, contrary to such implications in the literature,<sup>173</sup> Mahler did not discover this opera only during his upcoming Italian journey (although he may well have seen it then), but was already actively engaged in negotiating for the performance rights for Budapest towards the end of the second season. The first known document relating to the subject leaves no doubt about this. At the end of April, Mahler wrote to the music dealers Bote und Bock in Berlin:

Ihr geehrtes Schreiben vom 21. d. bezüglich der Oper Asraël habe ich erhalten.

Gelegentlich dieser Angelegenheit kann ich nicht umhin, gegen die [...] übertriebenen Forderungen des Herrn Dr. O. F. Eirich Einsprache zu tun. [...]

[Er verlangt] für das Material der Oper Asraël einen [...] Kaufpreis von 4000 fl., darum habe ich direkt bei der Firma Ricordi angefragt.

Nun beehre ich mich [...] Sie zu ersuchen, Herrn Dr. Eirich die Anweisung erteilen zu wollen, daß er mir einen normalen und annehmbaren Preis bestimmen möge, sonst müßte ich auf die Aufführung dieser Oper [...] verzichten.

In the lower left hand corner of this letter (for the rest written by a clerk), Mahler added in his own hand:

Da unsere Oper bereits am 15. Mai geschlossen wird und ich bereits bis zu diesem Zeitpunkte die Dispositionen für die nächste Saison beschliessen muß, so würde ich um möglichst tunliche Beschleunigung der Unterhandlungen bitten.

Mr<sup>174</sup>

Before 'closing' the Opera House and leaving for his holidays, Mahler spent his second May Day in the Hungarian capital. Although throughout his life he was ready to assist the needy and the underprivileged, we have little concrete evidence that would shed light on Mahler's political beliefs. Around 1880 he had been a member briefly of a mildly socialist vegetarian society in Vienna. Some fifteen years later, also in Vienna, he was to react with sympathetic excitement to a May Day encounter with a workers' parade. Was Mahler aware in 1890, one wonders, that the first ever May Day demonstrations were then taking place in Budapest? Did he, perhaps, follow the throng of some thirty or forty thousand, as he was to do in Vienna (referring to them as "his brothers", according to Alma Mahler)? Although we have no answers to these questions, we know that the Opera was also affected by the wave of workers' demands which followed the first May Day celebrations. From a summary of their petition published in the newspapers, one gets a glimpse of the lot of the labourers employed by the Opera:



Die Arbeiter der königlichen Oper überreichten gestern durch eine Deputation dem Intendanten Beniczky eine Petition um Erhöhung der Gage, Bewilligung von Quartiergeld und von zwei Anzügen jährlich; ferner um definitive Ernennung, Pensionsfähigkeit und endlich um Stellung vor ein Theatergericht bei Straffälligkeit. Abkürzung der Arbeitszeit wird nicht verlangt.

Although Beniczky promised the workers' delegation that he would intercede on their behalf with the Minister of the Interior, he voiced his pessimism because of the Opera's reduced budget.<sup>175</sup>

Around the same time (almost certainly on May 6th), Mahler left Budapest for the summer.<sup>176</sup> Following a trip to Italy, he was to settle in Hinterbrühl at the end of May. In an undated letter, received there on May 23rd, Mahler wrote to Fritz Löhr, with whose family he was to share a villa for the summer: "Wir kommen Dienstag [May 27] abends in der Hinterbrühl an [...]".<sup>177</sup> Although the next three months represented his annual vacation, he was occupied with the Opera's business from time to time. As these matters relate to the upcoming season, however, they will be discussed in the next section.

### SEASON III (SEPTEMBER, 1890 TO MARCH, 1891)

The earliest surviving letter Mahler wrote from his holidays concerning the Opera went to his secretary, István Gamauf. It implies that he was obliged to obtain Beniczky's approval before engaging guest singers:

Lieber Herr Gamauf!

Bei meiner letzter Anwesenheit vergaß ich etwas sehr wichtiges: Ich bitte Sie Frl. *Barberini*

in Florenz

unter bekannter Adresse zu benachrichtigen, daß der Herr Intendant ihr Engagement genehmigt hat, und wir sie daher am 15. Sept. sicher erwarten. Zugleich ersuche ich um Antwort auf diese Mitteilung.

Ihre ganz ergebenster  
Gustav Mahler<sup>178</sup>

The following, undated letter to Siegfried Rosenberg was probably written around the same time. It shows Mahler being absent from Budapest; it also contains the first hint of Laura Hilgermann's illness, to be confirmed in later letters.

Lieber Herr Rosenberg!

Entgegen meiner sonstigen Gewohnheit will ich Ihren letzten Brief dießmal sofort beantworten, denn es ist mir unerträglich daß Sie und hauptsächlich Ihre Frau sich wegen solchen *albernen* Notizen das Leben



sauer machen. Sehen Sie, das haben Sie von Ihren verfluchten Notizen-sucherei. —

Glauben Sie mir, daß ich es weder mit meinem Gewissen noch mit meinem künstlerischen Pflichtgefühl vereinigen könnte, Ihre Frau, deren Opfer um unser Theater ich hoch anerkenne, zur 2ten Sängerin herabzudrücken oder sonst ihre materiellen Interessen irgendwo zu gefährden: — Was an der Sache Stein ist sage ich Ihnen in Pest. —

An der Notiz ist *ein* Prozent Wahres. Alles andere lächerliche Lüge. — Ihre Frau soll sich schön ausruhen, und recht gesund werden, und Sie auch und machen *Sie sich doch keine Sorgen!* Sie fürchten sich ja vor Ihrem eigenen Schatten. Was machen Sie übrigens für Dummheiten? Gehört sich das, krank zu sein? Sie der gesündeste immer von uns Allen? Daß Sie schön gesund sind, wenn ich nach Pest zurückkomme, sonst — !

Herzlichsten Gruß an Sie und Ihre liebe Frau

von Ihrem ergebenen  
Gustav Mahler

Jetzt da unten in Ungarn hätte Ihre Frau die schönste Gelegenheit *ungarisch* zu lernen! Versäumen Sie das nicht!<sup>179</sup>

The rumours in Budapest, which apparently upset the Rosenbergs, may have had to do with the known fact that Mahler's summer trip to Italy had as one of its purposes the engaging of a dramatic soprano.

The next undated letter to Rosenberg was, in all likelihood, also written in June from Hinterbrühl. It implies that the Rosenbergs had gone to Prague for the rest of the summer; it also shows Mahler in the process of preparing for the upcoming season (with Rosenberg acting as his scout in Prague), and provides a glimpse of his difficult position in Budapest:

Lieber Herr Rosenberg!

Vor allem: *Cammaroth*[?] ist *nichts*. Also der bleibt aus dem Spiel.

Pawlikow ist weiter zu verfolgen — jedenfalls muß ich sie *hören*, bevor ich sie zu einem Gastspiel engagieren — mir darf einfach jetzt kein Gast mehr durchfallen. Ihre Bedingungen sind mir ganz recht — ist sie was ordentlich, kann man auch weiter gehen. —

Für jeden Fall gebe ich Asraël im *Oktober*: die Übersetzung wird bereits gemacht. Morgen gehe ich zu Eirich, um was zu erzielen. Ihre Frau muß unbedingt beim Eintreffen die *Nancy* [in Flotow's *Martha*] ungarisch da dies wahrscheinlich ihre erste Partie sein wird! Hierauf unbedingt Asraël. — Ich bitte Sie, wirken Sie bei Ihrer Frau in diesem Sinn — es ist für beide Teile unbedingt nötig, warum, sage ich Ihnen später, wenn Sie bei mir hier sind. — Mit Benitzky [sic!] habe ich gesprochen; er ist jetzt ganz untraintabel; ich habe aber meinen Plan — auch davon mündlich.

Wenn Floriansky nicht auf loyale Weise zu gewinnen ist, so, bitte, lassen Sie ihn aus dem Spiel. Sonntag ist, wie mir Schubert telegraphiert Asraël. Dazu



werden sich Alszeghy und Christofani einfinden. — Ich bitte, wirken Sie bei Schubert dahin, daß er ihnen alles gut zeigt, und von Allem den Kostenüberschlag — und wie zu sparen ist.

Wann kommen Sie hierher?

Besten Gruß von Ihrem

Gustav Mahler<sup>180</sup>

The mention of the publishers' agent Eirich provides a link to Mahler's previously cited letter to the music dealers Bote und Bock. Possibly, Mahler was planning to see Eirich during the summer, no doubt with the aim of persuading him to lower the performance fee for *Asrael*. It is also clear from the above letter that the need for Hilgermann to learn Hungarian (especially as a member of the permanent ensemble) was being taken seriously — especially by Beniczky.

On June 27th, Mahler wrote to Director Šubert to thank him for the hospitality he had shown Alszeghy and Christofani:

Hinterbrühl 27. Juni

Sehr verehrter Herr Direktor!

Nehmen Sie meinen besten für Ihre freundliche Mitteilungen und für die überaus gütige Aufnahme unseres Regisseurs und Maschinenmeister.

Ich werde mich erst im August einfinden können und hoffentlich auch zu dieser Zeit den Asraël bei Ihnen am [?] Repertoire finden.

[...] <sup>181</sup>

In one of his long annotations to a letter from Mahler, Fritz Löhr's reminiscences of the summer of 1890 contain a few references to Mahler and Budapest:

[...] Zu dieser Zeit [ca. June] ist Mahler oft zur [Wien] gefahren, einmal auch dienstlich kurz nach Pest verreist. [...] Pester Theaterbeamte erschienen bei Mahler zur Berichterstattung und schon auch befaßte er sich mit der Vorbereitung des kommenden Spieljahres, nahm in Betracht kommende Partituren durch, darunter mit wachsendem Erstaunen die soeben eingetroffene von Mascagnis *Cavalleria rusticana*, für deren Aufführung er sich rasch entschied. [...] <sup>182</sup>

One of Mahler's "frequent" trips to Vienna may have been the visit to Eirich, mentioned in his letter to Rosenberg, while the "employees of the Pest theatre" who reported to him in Hinterbrühl probably included Alszeghy and Christofani. Löhr also recalled — mistakenly — that Mahler returned to Budapest "in the middle of August". In fact, his next letter to Director Šubert establishes the date of his return precisely:



Hinterbühl. 20. Aug 90.

Sehr geehrter Herr Direktor!

Nehmen Sie meinen herzlichsten Dank für Ihre große Freundlichkeit.

Leider war es mir nicht mehr vergönnt, Ihrer gütigen Einladung Folge zu leisten, da ich bereits am Samstag [August 23] wieder nach Pest zurückkehren muß.

Sollte sich Baron Franchetti noch in Prag befinden, so bitte ich, mich demselben unbekanntermaßen zu empfehlen.<sup>183</sup>

For a while after his return to Budapest, Mahler's life continued in a fairly leisurely manner. In an undated letter, he wrote to Uda Löhr:

[...] Ich lebe hier noch ganz behaglich, da die Nachmittage für mich noch frei sind.

So mache ich noch schöne einsame Spaziergänge.

[...] <sup>184</sup>

Nevertheless, the business of preparing for the impending season was also claiming Mahler's attention. His next letter to Director Šubert was written a few days after his return to Budapest; in it, Mahler takes up the problem of the performance fee for *Asrael*:

Sehr geehrter Herr Direktor!

Ihr geehrtes Schreiben vom 26. d. M., worin Sie mir mitteilen daß Herr Dr. Eirich beauftragt worden ist, sein ursprüngliche Forderung bezüglich "Asraël" zu reduzieren, — habe ich erhalten.

[...] [Ich bitte,] Ihre Gefälligkeit in dieser Angelegenheit nochmals in Anspruch nehmen zu dürfen. Da nämlich Herr Dr. Eirich *anfangs* die unglaublich hohe Summe von 4000 fl. für das Material von "Asraël" verlangt hat, so entsteht hier die Frage, ob nicht vielleicht *seine jetzige Forderung* von 1500 fl. die "ursprüngliche" hätte sein sollen. Wenn Sie daher in die Lage sein würden, darüber Auskunft geben zu können, erlaube ich mir um Ihre diesbezügliche Mitteilung höflichst zu ersuchen.

[...] <sup>185</sup>

Although it is no longer possible to determine the precise performance fee eventually paid for *Asrael*, it may be surmised that Eirich's original demand of 4000 florins was reduced considerably. The records of the Opera show that *total* royalties paid to foreign composers in the calendar year 1890 amounted to some 3400 florins.<sup>186</sup>

The following, undated letter to Rosenberg must have been written around the same time. In addition to confirming Hilgermann's illness, it provides us with further insight into Mahler's planning of the season:



L.S.R.

In großer Eile!

Ihre Frau soll möglichst bald hieher *kommen!* Hier sind doch auch gute Ärzte! Natürlich nur *Martha* fertig machen! Als Auftritt [one word illegible] Mignon — und dann gleich *Martha* darauf! *Wenn nur Asraël sich nicht hinausschiebt!* Das wäre *sehr* empfindlich!

In *Cavalleria*, die gleich nach Asraël kommen soll, hat Ihre Frau eine reizende Partie!

Wenn Sie nur schon wieder da wären!

Bitte um baldigste Nachrichten und vor Allem *baldige Ankunft!*

[...] <sup>187</sup>

Early in September Mahler wrote an 'official' letter to Rosenberg, stipulating the need for Hilgermann's immediate return to Budapest. Dated September 3, 1890, it is addressed to "Lucziana-fürdő" ("fürdő" means spa in Hungarian); clearly, the Rosenbergs were planning on a period of recuperation for the singer after her illness:

Geehrter Herr!

Mit Teilnahme vernehme ich aus Ihrem Schreiben, daß Ihre Frau Gemahlin eine schwere Krankheit zu überstehen gehabt hat. Doch freut es mir sehr, daß sie nun wieder hergestellt ist. [...]

Was den angesuchten Nachurlaub anbetrifft, muß ich bedauernd erklären, ihrem Wunsche nicht entsprechen zu können.

Ganz abgesehen davon, daß ihre Abwesenheit zur Zeit unangenehme Störung im Repertoire verursachen würde, da bereits für den 20. d. M. Mignon als Antrittspartie Ihre Frau angesetzt ist, bin ich auch nicht ermächtigt ihr den gewünschten Urlaub zu bewilligen. —

Wenn sie daher in Folge der Krankheit verhindert sein würde, ihre künstlerische Tätigkeit rechtzeitig wieder aufzunehmen, so bitte ich nicht zu vergessen, daß sie den Vorschriften entsprechend ein ärztliches Zeugnis einzusenden hat. —

[...] <sup>188</sup>

Given its formal tone, it is probable that the letter was written under pressure from Beniczky. The intendant had to be more than ordinarily sensitive to the developing crisis in public relations caused by frequent programme changes. There is little doubt that Hilgermann's delayed return to the Opera at least contributed to the various problems with the schedule. *Martha* was not to be staged at all during the autumn, while the first *Mignon* of the season was given on October 4th. The première of *Asrael*, originally planned for October, took place only in November, and that of *Cavalleria rusticana* only in late December.



By this time, preparations were well under way for the opening of the season with a new production of *Don Juan*. However, just prior to it, the Opera was rocked by some unexpected news: on September 16th, most papers announced the dismissal of Playmaster Újházy. The *Pesti Hírlap* commented:

[...] For reasons of economy, Intendant Beniczky terminated [Újházy's] position, which had been established only on a temporary basis. Neither a need for it nor its usefulness were substantiated by experience. [...] <sup>189</sup>

The debate about Újházy's dismissal continued for the better part of a month. Some commentators agreed with the *Pesti Hírlap*, while others regretted the loss of the playmaster.<sup>190</sup> A few days after the announcement, the *Pesti Napló* began a series of articles on this and related matters. Partly through documentary evidence, and in part through innuendo, it revealed the full extent of the "Újházy-affair", which, apparently, even reached Parliamentary circles.

On September 19th Újházy, fearing that stories about his dismissal from the Opera might damage his professional reputation, released the five letters he had exchanged with Beniczky to the *Pesti Napló*. These make it clear that the intendant had notified Újházy of his termination as playmaster on June 15th, 1890, with effect from July 1st. According to Beniczky, the position had been created on a temporary basis, chiefly to ensure that the new stage director Alszeghy could cope with his job, and secondarily to provide foreign singers with elocution lessons. Alszeghy having proved himself, the position of playmaster was now superfluous; Beniczky did, however, wish to see Újházy continue with the language lessons. In his reply of July 2nd, Újházy claimed that, even though the original letter of appointment had referred to the position of playmaster as a "temporary" one, he had understood this to be a formality necessitated by budgetary reasons. This appeared to be the more so, as it had been Mahler, who originally persuaded him to join the Opera, in order to assist him in realizing his artistic programme. Újházy also found the short notice of dismissal demeaning, given his reputation and his achievements in the 20 months since his appointment. Beniczky's reply was delayed until September 11th, at which time he offered Újházy a compensation of 3 months' salary, but failed to respond to the playmaster's substantive arguments. On September 12th Újházy rejected the intendant's "handout", and demanded a reply to his earlier questions and arguments. Two days later Beniczky curtly informed Újházy of the finality of the decision, and of his refusal to enter into polemical argument.<sup>191</sup>

On September 21st the *Pesti Napló* (p. [1]) used the above material for a wholesale attack on the intendant. Mahler is mentioned only briefly in this editorial *cum* satirical *feuilleton*; however, it includes a snide reference to the "unemployed" Rosenberg who is waiting in the wings, hoping to be hired by the Opera as stage manager, or possibly as playmaster. Although the *feuilleton* next in the series was published only two weeks later, in addition to continuing its critique of Beniczky, it also contained an attack on Mahler. Some parts of the relevant section went beyond mere innuendo; for example:



[...] The entire orchestra had been in sympathy with Sándor Erkel, and continue to be so to this day. At Philharmonic concerts there were demonstrations for Erkel and against Mahler. Also, at the Opera the audience constantly demonstrates for Erkel and against Mahler. [...]

This article includes references to ongoing quarrels between Beniczky on the one hand, and Interior Minister Teleki and State Secretary Tibád on the other.<sup>192</sup>

On October 8th, the matter of Újházy's dismissal was also raised in the Finance Committee of Parliament. The *Pesti Napló* again used this as a basis for attacking the intendant's "feudal, highhanded" treatment of his staff. It claimed that Újházy's was not the first such case at the Opera. Although Mahler is not mentioned in this article, the programming of the Opera also came under fire.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, the last in this series of articles in the *Pesti Napló* drew a balance of Mahler's two years in office. Although the tone of the article is quite negative, the writer put the blame for Mahler's problems squarely on the shoulders of the intendant. In the course of further references to Beniczky's feuds with government circles, it is also claimed that at one time "Teleki refused to ratify Mahler's contract!"<sup>194</sup>

On the basis of his retrospective, detailed examination of the "Újházy-affair", Vidor came to the conclusion that Beniczky (to whom he attributed it) made the right decision. The position *had been* created on a temporary basis; Újházy did not really have the time to do the job properly; as little as he had been able to do, could be done just as well by Alszeghy.<sup>195</sup> Whether or not Vidor, and those who had agreed with the dismissal at the time, had been correct, it is a fact that at the beginning of the 1891–1892 season (*i. e.*, a few months after Mahler's departure from Budapest) Zichy hired not one, but *two* playmasters who remained with the Opera for two years. Then, early in 1894, Újházy was rehired, and retained his position for four years.<sup>196</sup>

In keeping with the growing antagonism towards the Opera, staff-problems — rapidly becoming a matter of daily conflict — were generously aired in the press. From one such report, published in the issue of the *Pesti Hírlap* cited above, it appears that even preparations for the season-opening performance were fraught with difficulty for Mahler. For the role of Donna Elvira he had cast Countess Italia Vasquez-Molina. Only 20 years old, she had been discovered by Mahler late in 1889. She had been a raw beginner then, with a good voice, but absolutely no operatic experience. In a short time Mahler had developed her into one of the preeminent members of the permanent ensemble.<sup>197</sup> Now, in September, 1890, she refused to appear in *Don Juan* because the directorate had rejected her demand for a new costume. Virtually at the last moment, the role of Donna Elvira was taken over by Jozefa Maleczky, one of the true and tried, older members of the Opera.

Judging from the reviews of the opening performance on September 16th, Mahler's casting difficulties with Donna Elvira were not his only ones. At the same time, it seems likely that at least some of the problems arose from his own misjudgements in reassigning the leading roles in opposition to past practice. The stylishness and overall musicality of the new production, however, received high praise. The review published in the *Budapesti Hírlap* was, in most respects, typical:



The new production of *Don Juan* opened [yesterday] at the Opera under Director Mahler. The new casting was interesting, but it did not meet expectations in every respect. Takáts sang the title role, thus giving rise to justifiably higher expectations. Studiousness and diligence were evident in his acting, as were a consciousness of style and a correct vocal economy in his singing. He was precise throughout and his pleasing voice lasted for the entire tiring role. It was the main ingredient we missed from his *Don Juan*: the bravado and conviviality of the young nobleman. [...] Takáts was unequal to a deeper understanding and working out of the role. [...] Arabella Szilágyi rendered Donna Anna inconsequential; because of her, the role also had to be reduced: she omitted the Letter-aria, without which the opera is like a winter garden without palm trees. Ney, with his thick voice and thin humour as Leporello, Szendrőy as Masetto and Miss Bárdosi as Zerlina, made every effort to vindicate the casting. But we remember Ney as a one-time excellent Gonzalo; it was a pity to guest him in a buffo role if he is not comfortable with it. And Miss Bárdosi inadvertently made Zerlina's soubrette role into a new figure: an opera-ingénue, which is hardly compatible with Mozart's conception. [...]

But, whatever objections we may raise against the soloists, the new production of the opera left the public indebted, nevertheless: we heard Mozart's music in the absolute purity of its style, with the absolute discipline of the chorus, with a freshness of tempi, and with all refinements of its nuances. Mahler understands how to wipe off the dust of anachronism from such a masterpiece, how to restore it. [...] Praise is due to the direction for the group scenes and for the ensemble performance, but most of all for the quick scene changes. [...]<sup>198</sup>

This writer also praised Mahler's initiative in using a pianino to accompany the recitatives. It was characteristic of the times that the *Zenelap*, while praising the overall musicality of the production, dismissed the very same 'invention' with the scornful remark: "it is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous."<sup>199</sup> As will be seen below, the quality of his *Don Juan* was to bring Mahler into contact with Brahms later in the season.

The last of Mahler's four extant letters to Ferenc Erkel was written on September 24th. For the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Hungarian theatre in October, Mahler was planning to give a festival concert in the Opera House.

Most Esteemed Mr. Chief Music Director!

In anticipation of the one hundredth anniversary of Hungarian theatre on October 27th of this year, the theatrical institutions and the theatre associations active throughout the country are making preparations to celebrate this, for Hungarian national culture so significant a day, in a fitting manner.

Naturally, the only lyric theatre in our land will also not exclude itself from this exercise; on the contrary, it takes pleasure in grasping the opportunity to



contribute, in keeping with its standing, to a heightening of the festivities. Accordingly, on the aforementioned day I intend to organize a concert.

In part for this reason, and in part because I wish to enhance the brilliance of said concert, I respectfully ask you, sir, that you kindly let us have for performance such concert works composed by you as may be unperformed heretofore.

Allow me to hope, sir, that my request will receive due consideration, for it would greatly reduce the moral value of the concert if the audience were forced to forego the works of none other than the creator and tireless, diligent champion of the Hungarian lyric theatre.

You would oblige me endlessly, sir, if you would kindly let me know, as soon as possible, the titles of the works to be performed and the list of performers, so that I may have the works rehearsed in a manner befitting them.

With assurances of my deepest respect and esteem  
Budapest, September 24, 1890.

Mahler Gusztáv  
Artistic Director of the  
Royal Hungarian Opera<sup>200</sup>

Before this concert took place at the end of October, however, there were several other interesting, as well as significant developments in the affairs of the Opera, and in Mahler's career.

On October 3rd the *Egyetértés* published the news that the King had decided to release Count István Szapáry (Prime Minister Gyula Szapáry's cousin) as Chief Magistrate of Pest County and of the City of Kecskemét. In "liberal circles" it was told that his successor would be Ferenc Beniczky.<sup>201</sup> Inevitably, rumours began to circulate concerning Beniczky's successor as intendant of the theatres. Each partizan group or newspaper had their own favourite gallery of candidates. The *Budapester Tagblatt*, for instance, "heard" that the leading candidates were Baron Géza Radvánszky (himself a Chief Magistrate), Mihalovich, and Members of Parliament Géza Rakovszky and Károly Vadnay (who had figured prominently in Parliamentary debates on the Opera).<sup>202</sup>

On October 5th the long-planned première of the new production of *Bánk bán* took place (it had been planned originally for September 21st). In light of the nationalistic turmoil raging around the Opera, it is ironic that although the production, conducted by Sándor Erkel, featured Prevost singing the title role in Hungarian, the opera was received coolly, almost with indifference. It was given only once more two weeks later before it disappeared from the repertoire until March.

Although he had a position in Budapest which eminently suited his talents as well as his ambition, it was inevitable that under the pressure of the mounting antagonism (and possibly in anticipation of the consequences of the change of government in March — see Note 166) Mahler should decide to leave the Royal



Hungarian Opera. The first evidence that he was looking for a new position as early as the autumn of 1890 is provided by a letter to Pollini, dated October 11th, 1890. Mahler wrote:

Leider ist es mir nicht möglich, meine Forderung Ihrem Antrage gemäß zu modifizieren, und drücke ich hiemit mein Bedauern aus, falls unsere Unterhandlungen daran scheitern sollten, um so mehr, als ich bereits die einleitenden Schritte getan. [...]<sup>203</sup>

It is evident from the tone and content of this letter that the "negotiations" with Pollini had been under way for some time by the date it was sent.<sup>204</sup> Although it is not known what "preliminary steps" Mahler could have taken in preparing to leave Budapest, they may have involved Beniczky whose position as intendant was widely perceived as insecure by the beginning of October.

A letter from Pollini must have crossed with the one above, for three days later Mahler was again writing to him:

Antwortlich Ihres geehrten Schreibens vom 9. d. M. erkläre ich mich nunmehr bereit, Ihren Vorschlag zu akzeptieren, wenn Sie mir meine Gage ohne jeden Abzug bewilligen. [...]

[Ich sehe] Ihrer endgültigen Entscheidung in dieser Angelegenheit entgegen.

[...]<sup>205</sup>

In the meantime, Mahler continued to prepare for the première of Franchetti's *Asrael*. On October 12th, he again wrote to Director Šubert in Prague:

Sehr geehrter Herr Direktor!

In Erfahrung der Beweise von freundschaftlichen Gefälligkeiten, die ich von Ihnen erhalten habe, nehme ich mir die Freiheit, Ihre Güte abermals in Anspruch zu nehmen, indem ich einen Clavierauszug zur Oper "Asraël" mit dem höflichen Ersuche zusende, denselben mit den an Ihrem Theater üblichen Strichen versehen umgehend mir gefälligst zurücksenden zu wollen.

[...]<sup>206</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine the conditions under which Mahler had to prepare new works like *Asrael* when one realizes that even the routine rehearsals necessary to maintain the daily repertoire were made problematic by the attitude of certain members of the ensemble. Confrontations with the staff reached a sensational climax in the middle of October during the dress rehearsal for a performance of *Un ballo in maschera* (in Hungarian: *Álarcosbál*), which was to be conducted by Mahler for the first time on October 16th. The singers Lajos Szendrői and Mihály Takáts behaved in a disruptive way (apparently not for the first time), causing Mahler to reprimand them in his customarily brusque manner. Considering themselves insulted in their honour, the two singers demanded a public apology through the



intendant. When this was refused, they challenged Mahler to a duel. Inevitably, the incident was reported in great detail in the daily press. One of the accounts ended with the following, illuminating remarks:

[...] Von anderer Seite geht uns die Mitteilung zu, daß unter gewissen Mitgliedern der Oper seit einiger Zeit gegen Direktor Mahler intriguiert wird und daß es darauf angelegt zu sein scheint, ihn zu reizen. Auch dem Anlaße, aus welchem die jüngste Affaire stammt, kann eine gewisse Absichtlichkeit nicht abgesprochen werden [...] der Intendant muß Ordnung schaffen, will er nicht, daß in unserer Oper zum Schaden des Instituts ein Chaos eintrete.<sup>207</sup>

Next day, several papers carried these statements by Mahler and Beniczky:

[...] With reference to the news contained in this morning's issue of your respected newspaper concerning the events which transpired on the stage of the Royal Hungarian Opera during the rehearsal the day before yesterday, I respectfully request that you publish the following statement: With their behaviour during the rehearsal, Messrs. Szendrői and Takáts, members of the Royal Hungarian Opera, gave me an eminently justifiable reason to reprimand them forcefully in order to ensure the undisturbed and orderly conduct of the rehearsal. To do so was not only my right but also my obligation since, as director, it is my duty to maintain discipline in the theatre, especially during rehearsals and performances. The afore mentioned gentlemen thought it advisable to lay a complaint with His Excellency the Intendant, and upon being turned away by him, sent their seconds to me. I made it unmistakably clear to these gentlemen [*i. e.*, the seconds] when they came to me that I was not prepared in this case to provide satisfaction according to the rules of chivalry, as I had been acting in the fulfilment of my official duties in a manner I considered appropriate and necessary. In this point of view I know myself to be in complete accord with my official superior the Herr Intendant, who is, like I am, of the opinion that discipline in the theatre would soon reach a sad state if the undisciplined conduct of certain members were to be settled in this manner. Therefore, I now declare publicly that not only was I unable to admit to the slightest chivalric obligation in this instance, but that I am also determined to follow the same conduct in the future if any member of the institution led by me would conceive of the notion to call me to account in this manner for the exercising of my official duties. I will not engage in any further debate on the matter. Respectfully, Gustav Mahler, Director of the Royal Hungarian Opera. Budapest, October 17, 1890.

\*

[...] With respect to the matter which arose between the director of the Royal Hungarian Opera, and Szendrői and Takáts Opera-members, various reports have appeared which do not exactly represent the truth. Therefore, it is my pleasure to request of you, Mr. Editor, that in the interests of the truth, my present statement be published in your esteemed newspaper.



Herr Director Gustav Mahler appeared before me in the forenoon on the 15th of this month, and advised me that already during the two previous rehearsals Messrs. Szendrői and Takáts sang certain words of the text distorted, in order to amuse the chorus; in addition, Herr Szendrői made unprintable comments to the prompter; and, finally, both of them disturbed yesterday's orchestral rehearsal, with especially Herr Szendrői speaking so loudly to Manager Alszeghy that the singers were disturbed. Consequently, the director reprimanded them with the following words: "Gentlemen, I must request dignified and proper conduct on stage, as befits artists rather than schoolboys," — at which point both singers left the rehearsal.

I received the two artists, who had also appeared by then, in the presence of the director, and I listened to their complaint. They labelled the director's statement insulting, and demanded that he apologize to them in front of the same people who witnessed the incident, otherwise they would challenge him to a duel.

Wishing to settle the matter between the director and the artists, as is my duty, I attempted to convince the two artists that the remarks referred to above were not an insult, but only a reprimand.

It is worthy of note in this matter that Herr Szendrői himself admitted that had the director voiced his remark during the previous rehearsal, they would not have been offended, because on that occasion they deserved it; he also admits to having addressed indelicate remarks to the prompter.

The artists also conceded later that they consider the insult to lie not in the words themselves, but in the tone in which they were spoken.

After this I also asked the director for a statement. He stated that he reprimanded them as an obligation of his official capacity, to preserve the seriousness and decorum of rehearsals, and therefore there could be no question of a personal matter.

Observing the disturbed emotional state of the two artists, and believing that I would be unable to settle the matter by convincing them through reasoning on that day, I requested them to talk the matter over with a wise, calm and objective person, and not with such as would make a *cause celebre* out of everything.

"Let us all three sleep on it — I said — please come to see me again tomorrow, and I believe and hope that it will be possible to settle the matter."

Next day, that is to say on the 16th, the two artists appeared before me once again. When I asked them for their decision, they stated that they have not changed their earlier attitude. Upon this, I advised them that the director will not apologize, and that I will prevent the duel, if necessary, because I cannot permit a precedent for the terrorizing by members of a superior who acts dutifully in the line of his office. If the artists feel that their honour has been insulted, the only redress possible is through the normal channels of the law; if the director really insulted them in their honour, the courts will convict him; if not, then they will be able to convince themselves of the wrongness of their position.



Finally, as concerns Herr Prevost, I wish to state that he came to see me on the same day, the 16th, preceding the artists, in an entirely different matter, and raised no complaint either against the person of the director, or against his conducting.

These are the bare facts and the simple truth.

Budapest, October 17, 1890.

Respectfully,  
Beniczky, intendant.<sup>208</sup>

Incidentally, Mahler's *Masked Ball* (with both Szendrői and Takáts in the cast!) was received entirely according to partizan lines. His supporters praised the performance, while his opponents complained that he took the opera away from Sándor Erkel, and compared his performance quite unfavourably with one conducted by Erkel (with a different cast) a week earlier.<sup>209</sup>

Some time after the *duel-cum-Masked Ball* incident, Mahler was visited in Budapest by Natalie Bauer-Lechner. He had written a long letter to her on October 19th, apparently in response to her announcement of a planned visit. This letter, with its unconcealed longing for contact with someone from his own background, is a touching witness to Mahler's psychological state at this time. The letter reads as follows:

Verehrte Freundin!

Sie eröffnen mir da eine reizende Aussicht und ich werde die nächsten Tage in heiterster Erwartung verleben. Kommen Sie doch nur gewiß [. . .]; mir ist es gar nicht, als hätten wir erst anzuknüpfen. Es ist uns so viel in unseren Freunden gemeinsam, und unser Lebenspfad hätte uns schon lange zusammen führen sollen wenn ich nicht ein solcher Pechvogel wäre. — Das wünsche ich mir nicht, daß Sie zu einer Aufführung unter meine Leitung kommen, denn dann hätte ich zu wenig von Ihnen. — Ich bin an solchen Tagen für Gesellschaft untauglich. Viel hübscher ist es, wir setzen dann zusammen in meiner Loge und hören zu.

Die Vormittage muß ich meinen Amtsgeschäften widmen; doch Nachmittag und Abend hätten wir für uns.

Jeder Tag ist mir gleich lieb, wenn ich es nur zeitig genug weiß, um mich danach einzurichten.

Daß Sie mit meinen Schwester zusammen waren freut mich für sie; das muß ein recht freundlicher Sonnenstrahl in ihr umwölktes Dasein gewesen sein. Daß Sie an dem einfachen, gewiß recht unbehülflichen Wesen Gefallen finden, ist lieb von Ihnen und ich wollt ich könnt es Ihnen danken.

Schreiben Sie mir rechtzeitig, wann Sie kommen, damit ich Sie am Bahnhof erwarten kann. Haben Sie wegen Logis einen bestimmte Absicht, oder soll ich Ihnen eines versorgen? Sie sind ja eine eifrige Fußgängerin? Ich habe schon mein Programm für Stadt und Land. Ich will Ihnen Pest von den besten Seite zeigen (da muß man nämlich weite Weg davon sein.). Ich schreibe dieß in allen



Eilen an meinen Bureau — um mich herum geschäftigsten Trubel — und lasse Alle warten — Sie vergelten mir es aber und stören mich so gut sie können.

Ich werde also schnell schließen — Alles was ich noch sagen möchte, ist ja doch nur *kommen Sie!* Aber gewiß! Bekannt sind wir ja schon recht gut mit einander — jetzt bin ich nur neugierig ob wir einander viel schweigen, oder viel sprechen werden!

Sind Sie schön begrüßt von

Ihrem herzlich ergebenen  
Gustav Mahler

Budapest 19. Okt. 90.<sup>210</sup>

Partly because of Mahler's overwhelming need for a sympathetic listener, and partly due to natural affinity and shared tastes and convictions, it was during this visit in Budapest that the close friendship between Mahler and Bauer-Lechner began (although they had already met at the Vienna Conservatory). Out of an unbounded admiration (and, eventually, probably love) for him, she remained his faithful diarist and companion for more than ten years, that is, until his marriage with Alma. In fact, the excerpts from her memoirs published after her death begin with a recall of her visit in Budapest in 1890. Although some of the details here — as throughout her memoirs — are incorrect, her evocation of Mahler's increasing sense of frustration and isolation — even of being hunted, as it were — matches perfectly the tone of his letter quoted above:

Mahler lebte äußerst einsam in Pest. "Ich habe, außer in meinem widerwärtigen Berufe, fast zu sprechen verlernt," sagte er mir. "[...] was ich hier treibe ist Kleinkram [...]"

[...]

Auf der Straße konnte man keine fünf Schritte mit ihm gehen, ohne daß alles stehen blieb und die Häse nach ihm reckte, so berühmt war er. Das machte ihn so wild, daß er mit dem Fuße stampfend, schrie: "Bin ich denn ein wildes Tier, daß jeder vor mir stehen bleiben und mich angaffen kann wie in einer Menagerie?"<sup>211</sup>

The concert to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Hungarian theatre took place at the Opera House on October 29th. The conducting was shared by Mahler and Sándor Erkel. The former conducted Liszt's *Festklänge*, the prelude to Mihalovich's *Toldis Liebe* and his *Königshymnus* (both heard for the first time). Erkel led the orchestra in Ferenc X. Szabó's *Dramatic Symphony*, Berlioz's *Rákóczi-Marsch*, Károly Huber's *Festmarsch*, and his father's *Festouverture*. It seems that Mahler's letter to Ferenc Erkel in September had not brought the desired result. Even the one work by the ageing composer was not new: it had been composed for and performed during the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the National Theater's opening in 1887.

On the same day, citing an "unimpeachable source", the *Pesti Hírlap* published the news that several other candidates having been considered (those named six days earlier in the *Budapester Tagblatt*, plus Baron Elek Nopcsa), Count Géza



Zichy was to take over as intendant of the theatres "after the New Year". As could be expected from the younger Ábrányi, the report is followed by a favourable commentary, extolling Zichy's virtues as a patriot, a "gentleman", and a patron-practitioner of the arts.<sup>212</sup> Since heretofore there had been only rumours concerning Beniczky's impending departure, the true reliability of Ábrányi's source (in all likelihood a Parliamentary contact) did not become clear for another week. It was only on November 6th that the official gazette announced Beniczky's appointment as chief magistrate, together with the simultaneous change in his position from intendant to government commissioner of the two theatres; the order, however, had been signed by Prime Minister Szapáry (and initialled by Franz Josef) already on October 16th.<sup>213</sup> Clearly, though, this was now merely a formality. The news of Zichy's pending appointment on October 29th, and the increasingly common knowledge of Mahler's negotiations with other theatres, started a wave of polemical articles in the press. On November 4th and 5th, for example, the *Budapester Tagblatt* (under the title "Direktor Mahler — regierungsmüde") and the *Pesti Hírlap* ("Gustav Mahler's resignation") published long articles concerned with Mahler's anticipated resignation. The contrast between the tones of the following excerpts from the two articles is symptomatic of the times, and reflected the polarization of public opinion:

Von verschiedenen Seiten wird uns mitgeteilt, daß der Direktor des Opernhauses Gustav Mahler in den letzten Tagen einen Entengagementsantrag aus dem Auslande erhalten habe und daß er mit mehreren seiner Freunde Rücksprache pflog, ob er diesen Antrag annehmen und Budapest verlassen solle? Zu einem Resultate haben diese Besprechungen bisher nicht geführt, da die Freunde des Direktors ihm den Rat erteilten, vorläufig die Entwicklung der Verhältnisse unter dem neuen Intendanten abzuwarten und erst nachher einen Entschluß zu fassen. [...]

Trotzdem wäre es ein arger Irrtum, anzunehmen, daß Direktor Mahler in Budapest bleiben wird. Selbst Personen, die ihm nicht nahestehen, wissen, daß er sehr verstimmt ist und in der letzten Zeit oft [...] vom Katzenjammer geplagt wird. Er klagt über Feindschaften und Cliquewesen, behauptet, daß man seine Intentionen verkenne und daß er im Opernhaue mit einem ihm gegnerischen Geiste zu kämpfen habe. Hier sei übrigens noch erwähnt, daß es Leute gibt, welche steif und fest behaupten, ein großer Teil jener Gegnerschaften, welche dem Direktor Mahler den Aufenthalt in Budapest verleiden, sei nicht auf künstlerische, sondern auf nationale und konfessionelle Motive zurückzuführen.

Indem wir all das verzeichnen, [...] den Ausschlag gibt einzig und allein das Publikum. Dieses läßt sich nicht von persönlichen Sympathien oder Antipathien leiten, sondern beurteilt die Leistungen. In der vergangenen Saison bot die Oper ein Bild des freudigen Schaffens und Werdens. Eine Reihe von Novitäten wurde vorgeführt, man sah die Ansätze zu einem guten Ensemble und das Publikum kam deshalb dem Direktor wohlwollend entgegen. In dieser Saison [...] macht die Oper leider Rückschritte. [...] Unter solchen Umständen ist es nur selbstverständlich, daß die Stimmung



zum Nachteile des Direktors umschlug und die Unlust des Publikums auch im Opernhause fühlbar werden mußte.

Noch hat Direktor Mahler seine Partie nicht verloren. Kann er das Publikum wiedergewinnen und das Vertrauen, welches man ihm entgegenbrachte, rechtfertigen [...] dann werden die Feinde ihm ungefährlich sein. [...] Zu bedauern wäre es allerdings, wenn Budapest einen der tüchtigsten Musiker verlieren möchte, der in so viel verheissender Weise seine Tätigkeit begann.<sup>214</sup>

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It is cause for general astonishment in theatrical circles that Director Gustav Mahler has gone abroad now, when the season is already under way [...] Well informed sources connect this trip with the intention Mahler had long ago imparted to his confidantes, namely, that he would resign the directorship of the Royal Hungarian Opera upon Intendant Ferenc Beniczky's departure. [...]

What brought him to this decision is not too difficult to guess. [...] The public which had received him with trust and sympathy has turned against him; the press no longer supports him and, in fact, often opposes him, because it turned out that he is not the man to lead our opera theatre, even in normal times, let alone in a crisis such as the one our Opera is forced to suffer through these days. The policy which he so proudly and confidently announced on his appointment has not been put into practice. He has not even come close to attaining it during his two years working here; so far from bringing order into the artistic arrangements of our Opera house, he has confused them even further. Under his leadership the artistic level of our Opera has not risen but has been decisively lowered. [...]

If Herr Mahler still possesses any self-respect — and we have no right to assume otherwise — then under these circumstances he can do nothing other than to renounce his position for which — as his two-year occupation of it has shown — he has not the necessary qualifications. [...] We would gladly go on seeing him work at our Opera as a conductor and coach [...] but we do not believe that his ambition would allow him to settle for a subordinate position in a place where he had been an unfettered tyrant. And thus he will have no other choice but to leave together with the intendant who had brought him here. [...] <sup>215</sup>

Although he probably read them later, Mahler was away from Budapest at the time the above articles were published. Sometime after November 1st (he conducted *Lohengrin* that evening), he went abroad; Ambrozovits, in the last-quoted issue of the *Pesti Hirlap*, passed on the rumour that Mahler had gone to Karlsruhe to negotiate for a position (Mottl, the incumbent, was said to be moving to Dresden). With what was by now characteristic sarcasm, the *Fővárosi Lapok* reported on November 7th that "Mahler had returned from Germany — a fact that we do not exactly consider welcome news."<sup>216</sup> While he was away, his contract had arrived from Pollini. Mahler wrote to him on November 7th and expressed his willingness



to accept, provided that Pollini agreed to the conditions concerning deductions (something Mahler had already stipulated in his letter of October 14th). This letter, giving Mahler's salary in Hamburg, also shows how much his 'market value' had risen in the short time since October, 1888, when his 10 000-florin Hungarian salary was considered outrageously high. Mahler's letter to Pollini reads, in part, as follows:

[...] Eben von einer Reise zurückgekehrt, finde ich Ihr Geehrtes vom 2. November mit inliegendem Vertrag. Nach Einsicht in denselben muß ich noch einmal auf einen Punkt zurückkommen [...] auf den ich [...], wie Sie aus dem betreffenden Briefe ersehen werden, ein großes Gewicht legte.

Ich hätte Ihr Angebot von 12 000 Mk Jahresgage unter der Bedingung akzeptiert, wenn Sie die üblichen Angaben, Steuer- und Pensionsbeitrag auf Sich nehmen wollten.

Nachdem ich nunmehr meine Bereitwilligkeit Ihnen gegenüber nach allen Seiten bewiesen habe, bitte ich, daß Sie mir in diesem Punkte entgegenkommen und mir erlauben, diesen Zusatz in den mir zugesandten Vertrag einzufügen.

Meinem Eintritt in den Verband Ihres Instituts wird dann nichts mehr im Wege stehen.

[...] <sup>217</sup>

On the same day the *Budapesti Hírlap*, reacting to the announced changes in Beniczky's position, published a long and thoughtful *feuilleton* under the title "The crisis of the Opera". It is pointed out that the change in Beniczky's title does not change the fact that he is continuing as the chief administrator of the theatres. The writer speculates that those elements who were disappointed by this fact, those who wanted to see a "crisis" at the Opera at any cost, will now turn all their energies and anger against Mahler in order to get rid of him. Following a detailed analysis of the Opera's gains under Mahler, the conclusion is that the Opera's main problem lies in the fact that Mahler's zeal, energy and desire to work hard are lacking in his staff. "This is the key to the crisis of the Hungarian Opera: this crisis has been lasting for decades already, destroying that slender artistic tradition which came down to us from the days when idealism, enthusiasm and a great sense of duty were the governing principles of an artistic career."<sup>218</sup>

In the midst of intrigue and turmoil, Mahler was preparing for the première of *Asrael*. It is clear that, especially in late 1890, his rather baffling choice of this insipid opera did nothing to improve his already uncertain standing. Even prior to the first performance, anti-Mahler critics pointed out with particular relish that Franchetti was a Rothschild-relation. Izor Béldi recalled that an unnamed critic punned that *Asrael* made its way into the Opera over a "bridge of gold", to which Mahler responded that "the Herr critic was probably thinking of the donkeyladder which got him into the job of a music critic".<sup>219</sup> The première on November 20th<sup>220</sup> — in spite of a lavish production and Mahler's conducting — justified the worst fears. The opera was a failure, and after the fourth performance on the 29th disappeared from the repertoire forever.



Mahler's personal problems notwithstanding, a glittering period at the Opera began on November 25th when Lilli Lehmann, who had not sung in Budapest since 1887, made her first guest appearance of the season in *Fidelio*. Her visit on this occasion had been preceded by extensive correspondence with Mahler, negotiating her fee and the operas in which she was to appear. It is evident from some of the letters that Mahler was very much set on Lehmann's singing in one of the Wagner operas ("a guest-appearance by Lehmann without a Wagner role is unthinkable", he wrote to her on October 12, 1890). When she apparently refused, Mahler relented; as is clear even from the earlier letters, his chief goal was to establish a good and lasting relationship with Lehmann. Thus, his letter of September 28th includes this sentence: "Zugleich möchte ich die Hoffnung aussprechen, daß Ihre Anwesenheit in Budapest die Anknüpfung zu recht oft wiederholten Besuchen an unserem Institute sein wird."<sup>221</sup> As things turned out, the 1890 guest appearance by Lehmann in Budapest did not lead to "many return visits"; it was, however, the beginning of a life-long friendship between them.

Lilli Lehmann remained in Budapest for nearly a month, and sang in six different operas.<sup>222</sup> She also sang an aria from *Mignon* at a gala evening on December 5th, held at the Opera for the benefit of the pension funds of the National Theatre and the Journalists' Guild, and of the Children's Shelter League. The concert conducted by Mahler included, in addition to Lehmann's aria, the overtures to *Oberon* and *Die Meistersinger*, and Mozart's Symphony in G-minor. The second half of the evening witnessed a première of sorts. The Hungarian Rezső Raimann's operetta, *Sinan basa* (Sinan pasha) had its one and only performance under the composer.

Although the other operatic performances were under Erkel, Lehmann also sang under Mahler's baton in two performances of *Don Juan*. She recalled some aspects of these performances in her memoirs; they show Mahler in the process of learning, of finding his own approach to Mozart's masterpiece, an interpretation which did not always fit the traditional mold. In addition to putting down her impressions of Mahler and his circle in Budapest, she also remembered how determined he was to have her sing in Budapest — even at the cost of the occasional multilingual performance!

Gleich darauf [concerts in Berlin and Hamburg under Hans von Bülow] trat Gustav Mahler als Direktor der Nationaloper in Budapest in mein Künstlerleben. Ein Neuer mit starkem Willen und Verständnis. Er hatte mir brieflich mitgeteilt, daß meine Honoraransprüche zwar über sein Budget gingen, daß er mein Gastspiel aber als durchaus notwendig erachte, um seinen Mitgliedern ein künstlerisches Vorbild zu geben, nach dem sie ringen sollten. Es war eine reizende Zeit, die wir dort im kleinen Kreise Auserlesener verlebten. Mahler, in seiner ganzen gläubigen Frische, seinem Ziele zustuernd; die großartige ungarische Tragödin Marie Jaszai [...], Graf Albert Apponyi, Professor Mihalowich [...]. Überall fanden wir uns zusammen. Alle Rollen sang ich italienisch, und nur die Recha ("Jüdin") — da man mir die Wahl gelassen — französisch, ohne eine Ahnung zu haben, daß Perotti den Juden italienisch singen würde. Alles andre sang ungarisch dazu, und man kann sich nun einen Begriff machen von dem kosmopolitischen



Sprachenwirrwarr dieser Opernaufführungen, in der jeder Fremde, der ohne Souffleur sang, Not hatte, seiner Sprache treu zu bleiben. Im "Don Juan" nahm der damals noch feurige, junge Mahler das kleine Männerterzett des ersten Aktes im schnellsten Allegro weil *alla breve* vorgeschrieben steht, das hier ja kein beschleunigstes, sondern nur ein beruhigtes Tempo anzeigt. Denselben Fehler machte Mahler im Maskenterzett ohne *alla breve*-Vorzeichnung, doch legte ich hier sofort mein Veto ein, und nie mehr — glaube ich — fiel er in seinen Allegrowahn darin zurück. Als ich es mit Bülow besprach, war er entsetzt und sagte genau über das *alla breve*, was ich bereits niederschrieb.

[...] Spazieren rasten und sprangen wir oft über Stock und Stein mit ihm in der herrlichen Umgebung Budapests und amüsierten uns köstlich.<sup>223</sup>

Even if Lehmann (and Bülow) questioned some details of Mahler's interpretation of *Don Juan*, another great musician was — unexpectedly and against his will, one might say — swept off his feet by Mahler's performance. The general outline of the story is well-known. On December 16th (the first one of two performances with Lehmann) Brahms, visiting Budapest at the time, was enticed to the Opera by his companions of the evening, Koessler and Herzfeld, to "rest" in a box following a long walk to the amusement park.<sup>224</sup> As a result of this performance, Brahms (who, apparently, could never be satisfied by a performance of this opera under any conductor) became a staunch admirer and supporter of Mahler, telling all and sundry that to hear *Don Juan* performed as it had been intended to, one had to travel to Budapest and hear it under Mahler. Mahler, on his side, was flattered and pleased by the venerable old master's praise. He is known to have written a number of letters to relatives, friends and colleagues in which his elation over Brahms's attention is an important topic. As may be seen from a letter to Löhr, this subject was still uppermost in his mind more than a month later (even though in the meantime he had conducted the première of *Cavalleria rusticana*); this letter is also interesting for a passage which shows that by the end of January, 1891 Mahler must have had few — if any — illusions with respect to his future in Budapest:

[...] Ich führe ein gänzlich nach außen gerichtetes Dasein. In dieser Hinsicht habe ich auch vieles Ersprießliche zuwege gebracht, sogar manche Freude erlebt. Was Dir interessant sein wird, ist, daß Brahms hier unter mir den Don Juan gehört hat und seitdem mein enragiertester Freund und Gönner ist. Er hat mich in einer für ihn unerhörten Weise ausgezeichnet und ein wirklich freundschaftliches Verhältnis zu mir angebahnt. —

[...] Es ist [...] gar nicht so unmöglich, daß [...] [ich] Dir plötzlich anpacke!

Es geht jetzt alles mögliche vor — weiß der Kuckuck, welcher Wind mich plötzlich aus Pest hinausweht.

[...] <sup>225</sup>



It is also through the Brahms-connection, so to speak, that we have another eye-witness account and personal impression of Mahler's personality, work habits and accomplishments in Budapest, and of his eventual departure from there:

Als Mahler Direktor der Budapester Oper war kam er oft zu uns und schickte uns häufig eine Loge. Meine Mutter war ganz begeistert von seinen erstaunlichen Leistungen. In kurzer Zeit hatte er die Oper auf ein viel höheres Niveau erhoben: das Orchester war großartig und aus den Sängern hat er ernste Künstler geformt. Er hat den "Fehler" begangen, zu fleißig zu sein und von den anderen ebensoviel Fleiß zu verlangen. Es kam vor, daß er viele Stunden hindurch probte und zu speisen vergaß. Das war zu viel des Guten; die Musiker intrigierten gegen ihn und das Ende davon war, daß er Budapest verließ. Das Publikum und alle ernstesten Musiker trauerten ihm nach, besonders aber meine Mutter.

Er besuchte uns auch in der Oed, genoß die schönen Spaziergänge und kletterte wie eine Gemse. [...] <sup>226</sup>

The month of December, 1890 also saw a number of premières at the Opera. Two days after the charity evening on December 5th, Jenő Sztojanovits's new ballet *Csárdás* was given for the first time, conducted by Henrik Benkő. The lavish production — with choreography by Mazzantini, scenery by Spannraft and Hirsch, and costumes by Caffi — <sup>227</sup> was a huge success. Given the mood of the times, it could hardly have been otherwise. Not only was this a work by a native composer, but the subject itself — and thus the style of the music, costumes, and so on — was also Hungarian. In December alone, *Csárdás* had eight more performances. The evening's companion work, although it was not actually restaged, was, in a certain sense, a revival. Victor Massé's one-act opera *Les noces de Jeannette* (in Hungarian: *Jeanette menyegzője*) had not been seen at the Opera since October, 1887, and at the Várszínház since December of that year.

Only five days after *Csárdás*, another première was held on December 12th. This time it was an operetta, Offenbach's *Le mariage aux lanternes* (in Hungarian: *Eljegyzés lámpafénynél*). This early work of Offenbach's had been introduced at the National Theatre in 1860. Now, upon its introduction at the Opera, most critics praised the directorate for diversifying the repertoire through a sprightly operetta.

However, not all critics could be pleased. It was precisely the première of *Le mariage* which gave the *Pesti Hírlap* the opportunity to launch a sarcastic attack on Mahler's programming:

This evening provided new evidence for the way in which Herr Gustav Mahler's grandiose programme has shrunk into insignificance in the course of his two-year stint as director. To the greater glory of the artistic niveau of the Royal Hungarian Opera, we have gradually descended from Wagner's great music dramas to Offenbach's operettas. The Royal Hungarian Opera is beginning to compete with the — *Népszínház*. Two years ago we got the Vorabend and first part of the Nibelungen-trilogy [...] today's continuation turned out to be an operetta entitled "Le mariage aux lanternes." [...] When



the total result of two years of directorial activity is reducible to three failed operas ("La part du diable", "Der Templer" and "Asrâel") and only one successful renewal ("Die lustige Weiber von Windsor"), then the directorate provides positive proof of its poverty when it cannot come out with anything other than an old, one-act operetta which never had real artistic value, and had long disappeared from theatre programmes. [...] <sup>228</sup>

While this attitude may seem to be an unreasonable one, and was certainly motivated by non-artistic considerations, later impartial (and even pro-Mahler) observers appear to have shared the opinion that there had been a real decline in the standard of programming during the later stages of Mahler's tenure as director. For example Diósy, writing nearly a quarter of a century later, had this to say about the matter, and about Mahler's relations with the public, certain segments of the press, and some of his colleagues:

Das Publikum leistete Mahler begeisterungsvolle Gefolgschaft, aber ein Teil der chauvinistischen Presse stand Mahler, der allerdings nicht das Talent besaß, sich persönliche Anhänger zu erwerben, in offenen Feindseligkeit gegenüber. Man machte ihm auch manchen künstlerisch gerechten Vorwurf, so eben, daß er rasch dem triumphalen Erfolg der ersten Teile des Ringes es unterliest, in den nächsten Jahren das Werk auszubauen und seine Kraft an Offenbach'sche und andere Nichtigkeiten verschwendete. — Es gab aber auch sonst Verhetzungen persönlicher Natur; die [?] Disciplin, die Mahler hielt, gefiel dem Künstlervolk nicht, das ja ein sanftem Regiment gewöhnt war, und die fahnige [?] Art Mahlers, der sich durch schroffe Entschiedenheit durchsetzen zu müssen glaubte, halte für ihn manche Unannehmlichkeiten [...] zur Folge [...] <sup>229</sup>

Although it was a success initially, the public, too, tired quickly of *Le mariage*; it was given only five more times before the end of the season, and very rarely in subsequent years.

On the same day as the *Pesti Hírlap*'s above-quoted attack on Mahler's programming, the *Egyetértés* reported that Zichy had accepted the appointment as intendant, and would take up the post on February 1st. In spite of the welcome financial stabilization of the Opera under the "old" (!) regime, commented the writer, "we are glad that the institution will be headed by a man who will create the long-desired order and right direction in artistic matters." <sup>230</sup>

Before their now inevitable departure, Beniczky and Mahler had one more genuine, unquestionable artistic triumph to savour. In the course of his Italian trip during May, Mahler had acquired the performing rights for Pietro Mascagni's instantly and phenomenally successful opera *Cavalleria rusticana*. As was seen earlier, Mahler had already studied the score during his holidays in Hinterbrühl, and began to prepare for the première shortly after the opening of the operatic season. After a number of delays <sup>231</sup> caused by various reasons, the Royal Hungarian Opera introduced *Cavalleria rusticana* (in Hungarian: *Parasztbecsület*) on December 26, 1890, one of the first houses outside Italy to do so. <sup>232</sup>



As was seen from one of his letters to Rosenberg, Mahler's original plan had been to cast Hilgermann in the role of Santuzza. In the end, though (possibly because of Hilgermann's delayed return to Budapest in the autumn), the role was sung by Szilágyi. It shows the care taken over the preparations (and also belies the claims to the effect that Újházy's position had been superfluous) that Szilágyi received intensive dramatic coaching from Mari Jászai.<sup>233</sup> Mahler gave the role of Turiddu to a young singer who was even more of a newcomer to the Opera than Szilágyi. The tenor Károly Szirovatka was at this time not even a member of the permanent ensemble. No doubt as a result of his début in *Cavalleria*, he was put under contract on January 1, 1891; he remained with the Opera until 1894, and rejoined it again between 1909 and 1913.<sup>234</sup>

No doubt due to the auspicious nature of the event, some of the most antagonistic critics declared a temporary truce in their campaign against Mahler. Others even made use of this occasion to emphasize their perceptions of the negative aspects of the production. The latter attitude clearly dominates in the *Pesti Hírlap's* critique. Following a brief biography of Mascagni, the compositional history of the opera, and a detailed discussion of Mascagni's musical style, the actual review is quite short, with much of it consisting of an attack on Mahler's casting:

The public received this novelty with reserve in the beginning, only Santuzza's and Alfio's duet elicited loud applause, which became even more intense after the intermezzo. By the end of the opera, however, the enthusiasm was general, and the performers were treated to several curtain calls. Undoubtedly, the opera would have been even more successful with better casting. But, once again, Mahler had acted on whim — not to say from whimsical sympathies and antipathies — rather than on the basis of artistic considerations. Santuzza is a soprano role, he had Fräulein Bella Szilágyi sing it; Lola — a mezzo-soprano role — he gave to Frau Ábrányi. But even more out of place in Turiddu's role was Szirovatka. With time, this young singer may become a good lyrical tenor — especially if he learns to act better. He has a very pleasant voice but — at least for now — it does not possess enough penetrating power to allow him to sing the more heroic roles. Fräulein Szilágyi lavished great care on her part. In her acting she followed Mari Jászai's instructions, and this was plainly evident in her playing. She created Santuzza with considerable artistry. Musically, however, she was unable to reach equal heights. Although her portrayal had the necessary dramatic force and passion, her voice is not soft and malleable enough for a broad cantabile. Veress was good as Alfio; he is best suited for such rough-hewn characters. Frau Ábrányi sang Lola's small role prettily, but her characterization lacked the demoniacal. Frau Helen Henszler was passable as Lucia. The performance, conducted by Director Mahler, was a proper, well-fashioned one. The staging was flawless. [...]<sup>235</sup>

Likely much to Mahler's surprise, the critic of the *Zenelap* struck a tone that was almost uniformly positive and praiseful. This review of the performance itself followed upon the opera's history and a brief summary of the plot:



The first performance achieved artistic heights under Mahler's baton. The performers also did their best to give the work a fitting introduction. Arabella Szilágyi (Santuzza) sang with great dramatic gusto, occasionally even exaggerating the dramaticism of a simple peasant girl. Lola was created by Frau Ábrányi with fetching flirtatiousness; while H. Henszler's Lucia portrayed the worrying mother to perfection. — Turiddu was sung by the new tenor of the Opera, Szirovatka, at times with a beautifully ringing lyrical voice, but always securely and clearly; his acting still leaves a lot to be desired. Also very well-suited to his role was Veress, who portrayed and sang the jealous Alfio with great fidelity. The choral numbers, full of piquancy and many original ideas, were well projected by the chorus. The public received the work with unanimous approval, and the orchestra and performers received many rounds of lively applause. — The addition of this work can only be to the advantage of the Opera's repertoire.<sup>236</sup>

The true measure of Mahler's achievement can be best gauged, though, from a critique published outside Hungary. Richard Heuberger, Mahler's senior by some ten years, was already well established in 1890 as one of the leading critics in the Austrian capital. As the tone of the following letter, dated December 23rd, indicates, his intention to travel to Budapest expressly for the première of *Cavalleria* was welcomed by Mahler with unconcealed excitement:

[...] Ich freue mich riesig, daß Sie uns das Vergnügen machen wollen. Das Billett liegt für Sie bereit, bitte es in der Kanzlei holen zu lassen — oder teilen Sie mir das Hotel mit, in dem Sie absteigen, dann lasse ich es dorthin schicken. Jedenfalls bitte ich, daß wir nach der Oper zusammen sind. Vielleicht kommen Sie auf die Bühne? Daß Brahms so anerkennend, macht mich ganz glücklich — ich halte dies für den größten Erfolg, der mir bis jetzt zuteil wurde. Ich hoffe den Termin der Aufführung einzuhalten. [...] Auf Wiedersehen hier! [...] <sup>237</sup>

As is evident from the pertinent sentence, Brahms had not spared any effort to propagate his new-found enthusiasm for Mahler. It is entirely possible that it was this recommendation that had induced Heuberger to travel to Budapest to hear *Cavalleria* under Mahler. Following the première, he reported thus to his readers in Vienna:

Gustav Mahler, der energische und intelligente Direktor der königlichen Oper in Budapest, hat allen nicht-italienischen Bühnen in der Vorführung des hervorragendsten neuen Opernproduktes Italiens den Rang abgelaufen, indem er des rasch berühmt gewordenen Mascagni Oper im Pester Opernhause zur Aufführung brachte. Bald werden wir in Wien das eigentümliche Werk zu hören bekommen, und daher darf ein genauerer Bericht über das neueste musikalische Ereignis der ungarischen Hauptstadt auf besonderes Interesse rechnen. [...]

Die Aufführung unter Direktor Mahlers Leitung darf man — unter den



bestehenden Verhältnissen — für ganz außerordentlich erklären. Nur ein Dirigent und Regisseur von der ungewöhnlichen Begabung und dem beispiellosen Arbeitseifer Mahlers vermag mit — Anfängern derartiges fertigzubringen. Von den wenigen handelnden Personen waren zwei, Turiddu (Herr Szirovatka) und Alfio (Herr Veress), entschiedene Anfänger, und nur nach genauester Unterweisung war es möglich, sie in den beiden wichtigen Rollen auf die Bühne zu stellen. Mahlers Taktstab ist aber von unbeschränkter Gewalt, und sein Verständnis der Sache hat Mahler allen Mitspielenden einzuflößen gewußt. Dies zu sehen, bietet einen eigentümlichen, leider recht seltenen Reiz. Eine ausgezeichnete dramatische Sängerin lernten wir in Frl. Szilágyi kennen, welche die Santuzza ergreifend sang und spielte. [...] Das Orchester hielt sich vorzüglich. [...] <sup>238</sup>

Mascagni wrote a profuse letter of thanks to Mahler already on December 31st. Apparently, Mahler had invited him to attend the première, but the composer was unable to accept because of an illness in his family. Now, having learnt to his “immense satisfaction” of the “great success” of his opera, he was expressing his “very sincere gratitude” to Mahler, and asked him to also convey his thanks to the performers. <sup>239</sup>

Following three consecutive performances of *Cavalleria* (on each occasion it was paired with one of the popular ballets), Mahler left Budapest on the 29th for a brief trip, on “official business”, according to the press; he returned already on New Year’s Day. <sup>240</sup>

On January 14th Mahler had an opportunity to hear a symphonic work by Richard Strauss for the first time in Budapest. The symphonic poem *Aus Italien* (1887) was included on the season’s fourth Philharmonic subscription concert, along with works by Gade, Wieniawski, Grieg and Paganini. As the entire concert was conducted by Sándor Erkel, it is likely that Mahler attended it especially to hear the work by Strauss, whom he had met some three years earlier in Leipzig. Probably sometime during the second half of January Mahler needed to write to Strauss concerning a question of personnel at the Opera; in this, only his second extant letter to the younger man who was to become a life-long friend-*cum*-rival, he also wrote about the symphonic poem:

Lieber Freund!

Erlauben Sie mir ein vertrauliche Anfrage. Ich habe Hr. Grützmacher, dessen Vertrag Sie so gütig waren, als Zeuge zu unterfertigen, als Solocellisten engagiert — in der Meinung, daß er der mir bekannte Weimarer Cellist sei. — Ich ersehe aber aus den schriftlichen Unterhandlung[en], daß es ein 3.ter Grützmacher ist, von dem ich demnach nichts Anderes weiß, als daß er plötzlich von Sondershausen abgegangen ist. — Ich bitte Sie nun, mir ganz vertraulich mitzuteilen, ob Sie Hr. G. als Musiker und Instrumentalisten kennen, und welche Meinung Sie von ihm haben. —

Im letzten philharmonischen Concert hatte ich hier die Freude Ihre symph. Dcht. “Aus Italien” kennen zu lernen, und bin ganz besonders von den



letzten 2 Sätzen ganz entzückt. Die Wirkung auf das Publikum war leider nicht so intensiv, als ich es gewünscht hätte, da die Concertleitung den mir unbegreiflichen Einfall hatte, Ihre Composition an das Ende eines überlangen Concerts zu stellen.

[...] <sup>241</sup>

Three days after the Philharmonic concert, the last major operatic première under Mahler in Budapest took place. Prior to the first performance of Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied* (in Hungarian: *A fegyverkovács*) on January 17, 1891, a few writers had raised the spectre of failure, claiming that the opera was out-of-date. However, the performance earned a fair measure of public, and in some cases even a critical, success. Even the *Pesti Hírlap* — although describing the opera as an “old-fashioned, not very exciting” work — admitted that Mahler “did everything to ensure the success of the work. He prepared the première with loving care and with attention to even the smallest details”. This critic was especially impressed with the staging which “made use of all the achievements of modern stage craft.” <sup>242</sup> Diósy's review of the première actually appears to throw all critical restraint to the wind, praising Mahler and the production in terms reminiscent of the *Ring* dramas:

[...] Die Aufführung [...] war eine so vorzügliche, wie wir eine ähnliche an unserer Bühne noch nicht gesehen haben. [...] die Leistungen aller Mitwirkenden, Chor, Orchester und Dirigenten inbegriffen, [sind] nur mit dem höchsten Lobe zu nennen. [...] Direktor Mahler, der das Werk einstudiert und dirigiert hat, hat sich mit der heutigen Oper abermals ein großes Verdienst um die Hebung unserer Bühne erworben; es dürfte “draußen im Reich” kaum ein Hoftheater geben, welches ein so vorzügliches Ensemble bieten könnte, wie es das unserer heutigen Vorstellung war. <sup>243</sup>

No amount of success and praise could now turn the tide, it seemed. On January 22nd, Zichy was officially appointed intendant of the National Theatre and the Royal Hungarian Opera. Two days later Beniczky released a long statement to the press. Although, understandably, part of it was devoted to his own achievements while in office, it also included a very substantial defence of Mahler:

[...] Ich habe die Theater inmitten eine Krise übernommen, die schier einer Katastrophe gleichkam, mit reduzierten materiellen Mitteln, mit beschränkenden Beschlüssen und Weisungen des Reichstages und der Regierung; ich übernahm sie in einem Augenblicke, da die wichtigste Frage die war, ob es möglich, ob es überhaupt rätlich sei, die Oper aufrechtzuerhalten — und ich übergebe meinem Nachfolger beide Kunstinstitute in einem konsolidierten materiellen und künstlerischen Zustande. [...]

Als ich die Leitung der Theater übernahm, habe ich erklärt, daß ich die artistische Leitung nicht unmittelbar zu führen, sondern mitsamt der Verantwortlichkeit den artistischen Direktoren zu überlassen wünsche. Diesem Programm bin ich auch bis ans Ende treu geblieben und daß dies richtig war, dafür zeugen die Resultate.



[...] Die artistische Leitung des königl. ungar. Opernhauses, insbesondere die Verfügungen des neuen Direktors, wurden [...] wiederholt heftig angegriffen. Diese Angriffe können auf persönliche Motive zurückgeführt werden; man griff den neuen Direktor an, weil er sein Programm: "Arbeit, Arbeit, Arbeit und nach Möglichkeit Verwendung der heimischen Kräfte" eingehalten hat.<sup>244</sup>

Following this, Beniczky listed the premières and revivals that had taken place under Mahler up until the date of the statement (the list is not entirely correct — for a complete list of the repertoire under Mahler, see the end of this chapter). Then he continued:

Das Einstudieren und die Aufführung von 31 Werken in der zwanzigmonatlichen Spielzeit [...] ist ein Zeugnis für das Wirken der Direktion und der Mitglieder, dem gegenüber jeder Angriff nur als böser Wille erscheint. Wenn hierbei berücksichtigt wird, daß bei Beginn dieser Tätigkeit das ganze Personal reorganisiert, ein Teil der alten Mitglieder in neue Rollenfächer einstudiert werden mußte, — mit Rücksicht ferner auf die riesige auch auf die kleinsten Details sich erstreckende Arbeit, von welcher der der Bühne Fernstehende natürlich keine Ahnung haben kann, — mit Rücksicht schließlich darauf, daß die vom Direktor Mahler einstudierten und dirigierten Opern, die schwersten Wagner'schen sowohl, als auch die leichtesten italienischen, mit tadelloser Präzision und mit künstlerischer Vollkommenheit aufgeführt wurden: kann selbst der Feind die Anerkennung nicht versagen [...]

Having presented summary budget figures in support of his claim of successful fiscal management between 1888 and 1890, Beniczky concluded thus:

Das sind die von mir erzielten Resultate. Es versteht sich übrigens von selbst, daß die Verantwortung für alle Mängel, welche wahrgenommen werden können, mich trifft und ich übernehme sie auch. Dagegen muß ich das Verdienst der günstigen Resultate den Fachleitern der Institute zuschreiben, oder höchstens kann ich sie mit ihnen teilen, da ich keine einzige Angelegenheit — weder eine sachliche noch eine persönliche — gegen ihren Rat und ohne ihren Vorschlag erledigte.<sup>245</sup>

On February 2nd, during consecutive ceremonies at the National Theatre and the Opera, Beniczky said his farewells to the assembled staffs, and at the same time introduced Zichy as the new intendant. At the Opera, stage manager Alszeghy gave a short greeting speech, pledging his own and the staff's support to the new intendant. Zichy's somewhat longer reply included several characteristic and portentous statements:

[...] Ladies and Gentlemen, do not expect a programme from me. You know my past; although it is poor in achievement, *in its direction and*



*endeavours* it has always been consistently *Hungarian*. Here, too, I can only say:

*I desire Hungarian art of a European standard, for now with foreign help, eventually exclusively from native resources.* In order to reach this goal, we must count on the support of the press and the public. I am happy to say that the press has championed the national cause for years, with pure patriotism and unabating vigour. Now it is the public's turn: they must not cripple the native forces with excessive expectations; rather, they must support them, keeping their works on the Opera's programme. The opera composer needs a stage, that is where he learns and develops; he needs a patient and appreciative audience, who do not immediately demand masterpieces of international calibre. Even so, if the public does not want to support Hungarian operatic literature, I do not want this to be my fault. His Majesty's highest trust and command placed me in this post, so that I may develop and consolidate the artistic, moral and material capital of this institution. I do not know whether I will succeed, but I will make the attempt with honest intentions. I count on your support, and especially on that of your eminently qualified director. I intend to be just, and well-disposed towards every member of the institution, only do not demand of me that I place the interest of an individual ahead of that of the institution. Let us be grateful for the shining, generous support of King and nation, let us be proud of being deserving members of the institution. We must present to the public only the fruits of our labours, never our occasional small internal problems. I will not speak about discipline; woe is to any artistic institution where every one merely fulfils his duty. I ask more of you, I ask for your enthusiasm, and that can neither be contracted, nor ordered — it has to be nurtured, awakened and kept awake. The artist is always true and spontaneous in his feelings, but is at times also passionate and changeable. At times you will appreciate me, at others you will be angry with me. I only ask that your resentment be fleeting, your trust constant, and your work successful and fruitful. I shall devote all my energies to the successful realization of this equally noble and difficult task.<sup>246</sup>

The report of the ceremony does not mention whether Mahler was present (whereas at the National Theatre the director, Ede Paulay greeted Zichy). In its account of the events following the ceremony, however, the *Egyetértés* stated that Zichy "conferred for an hour with Director Mahler." The same article also includes mention of a number of other important and interesting topics. For example, it was reported that Zichy planned to introduce new statutes for the Opera. The writer also went to great length to refute the allegation "voiced in certain quarters" that the new intendant "harboured antisemitic sentiments, and will act accordingly". Finally, the lengthy report concluded:

We greet the new intendant with real pleasure, and express the hope that he will be able to employ his excellent taste, expertise and extensive artistic experience to the advantage of the two institutions for a long time to come.



In point of fact, in the eyes of many people in those days Count Géza Zichy appeared to possess all of the necessary qualifications for the position of intendant. He was born in 1849 into one of the oldest, richest and most powerful aristocratic families of Hungary. Having lost his right arm in an accident as a youngster, he developed himself into a reasonably proficient left-handed pianist. He was a poet (although an indifferent one), as well as a prolific — if mediocre — composer. He numbered amongst his friends and tutors such luminaries of the contemporary artistic world as Franz Liszt. When he was offered the intendantship, he negotiated at great length and very cleverly before accepting the post. In addition to being given the opportunity to rewrite the statutes, he also won a major concession on the financial operation of the Opera: he was to be responsible only for staying within the subvention, but not for the size of the income generated from performances.<sup>247</sup>

As a person, Zichy appears to have possessed in excess the worst traits of his class: he was vain, arrogant and intolerant. As Diósy recalled it, the developing of a workable relationship between Zichy and Mahler was doomed from the start:

[...] [Zichy war] ein hochfahrender Magnat, der fast unterwürfige Fügsamkeit vom ganzen Personal forderte, und der M[ahler] schon aus confessionellen Momenten mit offen zur Schau getragenen Aversion entgegentrat. Zichy ließ sich vom Ministerium eine Änderung des Theaterstatutes bestätigen, welche ihm das Recht verlieh: die Directionsagenden ganz oder zum Teile an sich zu nehmen. Da wusste bereits Mahler, daß seines Bleibens in Budapest nicht sein könne. Die offenen und heimlichen Gegner Mahlers waren sofort am Werk, noch vor dem Amtsantritt Zichys eine Gegensätzlichkeit zwischen diesem und dem "untraitablen jüdischen Direktor" herzustellen. Schon bei der ersten Begegnung sah M[ahler] daß ein persönlicher Verkehr unmöglich sei und an ein ersprießliches künstlerisches Wirken nicht mehr gedacht werden könne. [...] <sup>248</sup>

The full text of the new opera statutes, devised by Zichy to suit his own conception of his position, was made public for the first time on February 18th.<sup>249</sup> In its detailed report on the differences between the old and new statutes, the *Neues Pester Journal* interpreted or printed verbatim the most significant clauses:

[...] Nach wie vor bleibt dem Intendanten die endgültige Entscheidung in allen wichtigen Angelegenheiten vorbehalten, doch ist seinem unmittelbaren Eingreifen nach dem neuen Statut ein viel weiterer Spielraum eröffnet. So entfällt im neuen Statut die Bestimmung des alten § 13, nach welchem der Intendant auf Feststellung des Repertoires und die Rollenverteilung keine unmittelbare Ingerenz ausüben habe; so bestimmt § 16 des neuen Statutes, daß bei den wöchentlich stattfindenden Beratungen unter dem Vorsitz des Intendanten lediglich der letztere entscheidet; desgleichen bestimmt ein ganz neuer § 20, daß dem Intendanten das Recht zustehe, auf eigene Verantwortung auch ohne Anhören des artistischen Direktors Engagements abzuschließen. In der Opern-Beurteilungskommission tritt an Stelle des Direktors der Intendant als Vorsitzender, dem ersteren bleibt nur das Recht,



Vorschläge zu erstatten. Als die wichtigste Bestimmung des neuen Statutes erscheint jedenfalls der auf die Stellung des artistischen Direktors Bezug habende § 40, in welchem es heißt: Einzelne oder sämtliche in diesem Statut oder in den Theatergesetzen aufgezählte Rechte des artistischen Direktors kann der Intendant aus entsprechenden Gründen und in durch dieselben hervorgerufenen Notfällen auf eigene Verantwortung persönlich ausüben, insofern er in Bezug auf einzelne Rechte die nachträgliche, in Bezug auf alle die vorhergehende Zustimmung des Ministers des Innern erwirkt. [...] <sup>250</sup>

It is likely that Mahler learnt of the precise nature of the new statutes — and especially of Clause 40 — only on February 1st. Given their implications, and Mahler's volatile temper, his immediate reaction is easy to imagine. In fact, a document exists which shows that Mahler had a confrontation with Zichy already on February 1st. Dated February 2nd, the document is a memorandum of instruction to Ministerial Councillor József Stesser, and is initialled by Szapáry himself. It reads as follows:

Having learnt of yesterday's improper behaviour by Gustav Mahler, the Opera house's artistic director, towards the intendant and towards the directives of the Interior Ministry with respect to modifying the regulations governing the Opera House, I request that Your Excellency summon Gustav Mahler artistic director, and inform him

1. that I was shocked to learn of his improper behaviour and disapprove of it [and]
2. that should such behaviour recur, he will be placed on immediate leave, and further disciplinary measures will be instituted against him. <sup>251</sup>

This ominous reprimand explains the otherwise baffling docility of Mahler's statements in an interview published on February 7th. Among other things, Mahler had this to say:

[...] The intendant-crisis does not interest me very much. I know that Count Zichy is an artist, thus he will undoubtedly acquit himself well in his position. As heretofore, I shall perform the duties I had taken upon myself. I will make my recommendations in artistic matters, and the intendant will either accept them or not. Our respective areas of responsibility are so clearly outlined in the Opera's statutes and in my contract, that there can be no question on this account. <sup>252</sup>

Mahler may well have believed that, in light of the Minister's instant and uncompromising reaction to his first brush with Zichy, he ran the risk of being dismissed, and probably losing the substantial severance settlement on which he could otherwise count. At any rate, Mahler could have had no doubt about Zichy's intentions concerning himself. Apparently, even before Zichy officially took office, he attempted to replace Mahler as director. In his arrogance, though, he left out of account the solidarity which often exists among people of like mind and pursuits.



When Zichy approached Mottl (who already had more than a passing familiarity with the situation in Budapest, in any case) with an offer of the directorship in Budapest, Mottl (in Karlsruhe at the time), who knew that Mahler had a long-term contract there, sent Zichy's letter on to him.<sup>253</sup>

The question of Mahler's leaving began to occupy the press in earnest. Among Mahler's "public and secret enemies" the *Zenelap* had long occupied a leading position. In a seeming about-face, it now published an editorial in which it is sarcastically assumed that Zichy's arrival would *guarantee* Mahler's remaining in Budapest!

[...] It is being whispered (why should we deny it?) that the Zichy-era means his "Götterdämmerung", the setting of his sun for the director who to this day cannot speak our language. We are quite unable to believe this; not only because Director Mahler's multi-year contract holds him captive here, but quite simply because if nothing good would be expected from him in higher circles (and also in lower ones, among professional people) they would have no doubt relieved him of his very responsible position already. We see precisely a guarantee for his remaining, in that he is getting an *artistic expert* as a superior, a leader, in the person of the new intendant, someone who — being much more familiar with Hungarian expectations and local conditions — will be able to bridge the abyss which still yawns today between Director Mahler's — otherwise respectable — theoretical opinions acquired in Germany, and the Hungarian public, thirsty for art and having already tasted much. [...] <sup>254</sup>

The Hungarian public was about to "taste" more, thanks to the new intendant who was so "familiar with Hungarian expectations and local conditions." On February 13th, the Opera was the scene of a glittering gala event, held for the joint benefit of the White Cross Society and the pension fund of the National Theatre. The evening of mixed musical and dramatic entertainment opened with the King himself in attendance. Following the overture to *Hunyadi László* (all music this evening was conducted by Sándor Erkel) and a brief poetic prologue, the main work in the first half was the one-act comic opera *A víg cimborák* (The merry companions) by Károly Huber. This crude, anachronistic little work had had its beginnings at the National Theatre nearly 30 years before; this was its first performance at the Opera (and its last one, at least up to 1935). Now, especially in light of the occasion, it offended nearly everyone with its tasteless and blatant antisemitic 'jokes'. Franz Josef left the Opera immediately after the curtain came down, and did not return for the second half of the evening. During the next few days, all but the most openly antisemitic representatives of the press registered their protest. The *Egyenlőség* (the Hungarian Jewish newspaper), for example, opened its article with the exclamation "Ave Zichy, judei te salutant!" Following a detailed examination of Huber's work in the context of the occasion, the critic posed the question: who is responsible for this insult to those Jewish members of the audience who supported the charitable purpose of the evening? "None other than the Opera's infant intendant, Count Géza Zichy!" Inevitably, the writer also concluded



that such a thing could not have happened but for the newly placed restrictions on Mahler's authority at the Opera.<sup>255</sup>

Even if his début as intendant turned out to be less than fortunate, frequent reports in the daily press (at least in the organs sympathetic to him) make it clear that Zichy was hard at work in his function as *de facto* 'artistic director'. The *Pesti Napló*, for example, reported on preparations for a new ballet, *Vióra* (for details, see below), "at which Count Géza Zichy intendant is not only present, but himself takes an active part in the directing and rehearsing of not only the musical, but also of the movement aspects."<sup>256</sup> Six days later, a *Tannhäuser* performance (conducted by Erkel) provided the same critic with an opportunity to praise Zichy's beneficial influence:

[...] The performance was one of the best, and we note it as a commendable virtue of the new regime that it had the courage to shorten the lengthy and tiring dialogues [!], and thereby raise the enjoyability of the opera to the highest level even for the non-professional Wagnerites. [...] <sup>257</sup>

Of course, moderate newspapers were more concerned with the situation at the Opera which was widely known to be worsening daily. In a long article, the *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* commented on the animosities between the intendant and the director who had been rendered totally ineffectual:

[...] Die Ausstattung des Intendanten mit der Machtvollkommenheit eines Direktors hat selbstverständlich nicht verfehlt, auf das persönliche Verhältnis zwischen dem Grafen Géza Zichy und dem Direktor Mahler seine Rückwirkung fühlbar zu machen [...] Ein Verhältnis, wie es derzeit zwischen Intendant und Direktor herrscht, kann nicht fortbestehen, ohne das Ansehen des Institutes erheblich zu schädigen [...] Der Einzug des Intendanten bedeutete tatsächlich den Austritt des Direktors. Dieser bereitet sich vor, ist jedoch noch nicht vollzogen. [...] Direktor Mahler nimmt nun eine zuwartende Stellung ein. Eine Ingerenz auf die Leitung in der Oper besitzt er derzeit nicht mehr. [...] die zur Aufführung bereits angenommene Oper "Toldi szerelme" [Toldis Liebe] von Mihalovich wurde ad acta gelegt, ohne daß der Direktor befragt worden wäre. Das Repertoire erfährt der Herr Direktor aus der Zeitung wie jeder andere Sterbliche. [...] <sup>258</sup>

The next day, an article in the *Budapester Tagblatt* dealt with the relative influence of Mahler's friends and enemies, and weighed the chances of his remaining in Budapest:

#### Budapester Leben.

Geht er oder bleibt er? Das ist die Frage, die jene Kreise der Budapester Gesellschaft heute beschäftigt, welche sich für Theater und Musik interessieren.

Nun denn, Gustav Mahler [...] weiß zur Stunde selbst noch nicht, ob er



Direktor der Budapester Oper bleiben wird oder nicht. Er hat offenbar nicht den Wunsch, Budapest zu verlassen. [...]

Direktor Mahler besitzt viele Feinde und seltsamerweise erbitterte Feinde. Viele bekämpfen ihn — und wissen vielleicht gar nicht warum. [...] Sind Nervosität, Sparsamkeit, Launenhaftigkeit und — tüchtiges Wissen Grund genug, um diese Fülle von Haß zurechtfertigen? [...]

Diese Feinde verbreiten nun schon vor längerer Zeit die Nachricht, daß Direktor Mahler unmöglich mit oder neben dem neuen Intendanten [...] wirken könne, und diese Nachricht, daß Direktor Mahler andererseits so oft und von so vielen Seiten zugetragen, daß schließlich Beide daran glaubten. [...]

Doch im Publikum besitzt Mahler nicht nur Feinde, sondern auch Freunde und wenn die Ersteren heftig werden, kommen auch die Letzteren in Hitze. So hört man denn, daß zahlreiche Sorgen-Abonnenten beschlossen hätten, für den Fall, als Direktor Mahler scheiden müßte, ihr Abonnement aufzugeben. [...] Als Tatsache können wir bloß melden, daß Direktor Mahler gleichzeitig mit dem Intendanten Beniczky seine Demission anbot und daß diese Frage seither in Schwebe ist. Wir vernehmen weiters [...] daß Intendant Graf Zichy von den Fähigkeiten des Direktor Mahler die beste Meinung hat und daß Direktor Mahler den Wunsch hegt, in Budapest zu verbleiben. Aus diesen Tatsachen muß man logischerweise die Konklusion ableiten, daß Direktor Mahler [...] nicht gehen, sondern bleiben wird. Leider geschieht aber in Budapest nicht immer dasjenige, was logischerweise geschehen sollte.<sup>259</sup>

In point of fact, while there is practically no documentary evidence, and the contemporary accounts often conflict, it is safe to assume that Mahler had already tendered his resignation at this time, and was engaged in negotiating the financial terms of his release. However, these negotiations were to take the better part of three weeks, and in the meantime the season at the Opera progressed through premières, staff problems and royal visits.

The première of Mendelssohn's opera fragment *Die Loreley* on March 1st, although more modest in scale, was somewhat reminiscent of Mahler's presentation of his reconstruction of Weber's *Die drei Pintos* some three years earlier. In the case of *Loreley*, two choral numbers (an Ave Maria and the so-called Winzerchor) and the finale of the original first act were pulled together into one act, connected with segments from Geibel's text. The whole was preceded by the "Hebrides"-Overture. Although the public reception was cool (except for the overture), the critic of the *Neues Pester Journal* reacted enthusiastically (the evening also included performances of *Cavalleria rusticana* and of the ballet *Sonne und Erde*):

Die heutige Vorstellung im königlichen Opernhause bot uns einen der genußreichsten Abende, welche wir in dem prächtigem Musenheime seit Langem erlebt haben. [...] Die Aufführung des [Loreley] Fragmentes lieferte aufs Neue den oft geführten Beweis Mahler's hohem künstlerischen Verständnis, wie von seiner genialen Begabung als Dirigent und Lehrer. Die wenigen Szenen waren mit einer Feinheit, mit einer Präzision einstudiert, die



des höchsten Lobes und Dankes würdig ist. [...] die tadellosen Chöre ließen wieder den hohen Fortschritt erkennen, welchen sie unter Mahler's Leitung gewonnen haben. [...] Nach dem letzten Akkorde [der "Hebriden-Ouvertüre"] brach ein Sturm von Beifall los, der dem Dirigenten Mahler ein beredtes Zeichen von der hohen Wertschätzung gab, welche ihm von allen wahren Freunden der Kunst entgegengebracht wird.<sup>260</sup>

Using as its starting point the "storm of applause" noted above (one which undoubtedly recurred on March 3rd, when the programme was repeated), the same paper published a long *feuilleton* on March 8th, under the title "Der neue Intendant". It concerned itself primarily with Mahler's rumoured departure plans, and with the role in this that was more and more widely attributed to Zichy:

[...] Jedermann hatte das Gefühl, daß dieser Applaus ein demonstrativer war. Er galt dem Musiker und Dirigenten Mahler, von dem es heißt, daß sein Verbleiben bei unserer Oper seit dem Regierungsantritt des Herrn Grafen Géza Zichy fraglich geworden sei. Der neue Intendant hat allerdings sein Regime mit einem Verbote inaugurirt, welches andeuten soll, daß er es nicht liebt, die internen Verhältnisse der Oper in den Spalten der Zeitungen diskutiert zu sehen. Er hat es den Mitgliedern des Instituts untersagt, Mitteilungen, die sich auf die Vorgänge im Theater beziehen, an Journale gelangen zu lassen — und er hat recht daran getan. Wir haben auch demzufolge keine Information darüber erhalten, ob sich das Theater wirklich gleich zu Beginn der Zichy'schen Aera im Zustande einer Direktions-Krise befinde. [...]

Es wäre ungerecht und unklug, eine Rivalität zwischen Intendanten und Direktor zu schaffen. [...] Zwei Stellen, von denen die eine die höhere Instanz der anderen vorstellt, nach Qualität und Quantität ihrer Kompetenzen einander nicht gegensätzlich gegenüberstehen können. [...] [Herr Mahler hat], so viel uns bekannt ist, denselben Beruf und dieselben Kompetenzen am Operntheater, wie sie Herr Paulay an der Schauspielbühne hat; und dem Grafen Zichy muß die Oper und ihre künstlerische wie geschäftliche Leitung gerade so nahe oder fern stehen wie das dramatische Institut. [...]

Wir können [...] nicht glauben, daß Graf Zichy in seiner persönlichen Stellung zu den beiden Instituten einen Unterschied machen wolle. Der Graf ist ein ausübender Musiker und Komponist; aber er ist ja auch Literat und Dichter. [...] Eine eigentliche Oper und ein eigentliches Drama hat Graf Zichy aber nie geschrieben; es steht ihm also das Drama so nahe wie die Oper und die Oper so fern wie das Drama.

[...] [Wir würden es] für ein Unglück halten, wenn der Intendant [...] in die Gestion des einen Instituts tiefer und frequenter [eingreife], als es seine Stellung von Hause aus mit sich bringt. [...] Ein Direktor soll und kann der Intendant nicht sein, besonders so lange beide Institute ihre Direktoren haben. [...]

Direktor Mahler hat [...] entschieden das Glück oder das Verdienst



gehabt, die früher gemiedene, ja gefürchtete Oper dem Gefallen des Publikums näher zu bringen. Er hat Feinde und Tadler [...] jedenfalls hat er das Institut gehoben und es dem Publikum recht gemacht. [...]

The article continues with an examination of the successes of the Beniczky-era, of the universal difficulty of finding qualified directors for public performing institutions and, in some detail, of the problems caused by the new statutes. It concludes with a repeated warning for the intendant:

[...] Nur vor einem Irrtum möchten wir den Grafen Zichy in aller Offenheit warnen. Er möge sich ja nicht von dem Wahne bestimmen lassen, daß er, weil in der Musik zuhause, im Notfalle auch selber Operndirektor sein könne. Er hat erst zu beweisen (und wird es hoffentlich), daß er ein guter Intendant ist; aber daß er einen Direktor ersetzen könne, wird ihm schwerlich Jemand glauben. Man kann ein Hexenmeister auf dem Klavier sein, ohne deshalb alles zu können. [...] <sup>261</sup>

It is clear from a report published two days later that confrontations between Zichy and Mahler's supporters among the artistic staff of the Opera were escalating. During a rehearsal Mahler reprimanded two choristers for not singing. When they retorted rudely, threatening to complain to Zichy, Ney became involved in the argument and made a crude remark about the intendant. Zichy summoned Ney (who was Jewish) and informed him curtly that repetition of such behaviour would result in his immediate dismissal. Ostensibly because of this incident, Ney cancelled his scheduled appearances in *Don Juan* on March 7th and *Bánk bán* on March 8th. <sup>262</sup>

On March 10th, Franz Josef attended the Opera. The mixed programme was clearly put together to impress the King: Mahler conducted *Cavalleria rusticana*, the "Hebrides"-overture and an aria from *Die lustigen Weiber* with Bianchi; at the end, the third act of *Csárdás* was also performed. Next day's reviews mentioned that the King joined the audience in applauding Mahler. <sup>263</sup> However, a report published in Vienna in the *Fremdenblatt* to the effect that the King personally commended Mahler proved to be false. Mahler immediately telegraphed his denial to the Viennese paper; the text of his telegramme was also published in Budapest on March 14th. <sup>264</sup>

Everyone in Budapest knew by this time that Mahler's departure was imminent, his long drawn out negotiations with Zichy having been concluded. As may be pieced together from a number of sources, the negotiations went through several stages. The published draft of a letter seems to indicate that at one time Mahler was even ready to stay on in Budapest, under a contract rewritten on the basis of the new statutes. Part of this undated sketch (already mentioned in connection with Mahler's presumed pension problems some 15 months earlier — see Note 152) reads as follows:



Hochgeehrter Herr Graf!

Mit Bezugnahme auf unsere heutige Unterredung und im Sinne derselben erkläre ich mich — unter voller Wahrung meiner kontraktlichen Ansprüche — bereit, auf meinen alten bisherigen Vertrag zu verzichten und mit Hochgeboren einen neuen, auf der Grundlage der neuen Statuten zu schließen.

Die Bedingungen dieses neuen Vertrages müßten folgende sein:

I. Dauer des Vertrages vom Tage des Abschlusses bis zum 1. Oktober 1892.

II. Die Bedingungen wären durchaus die alten bis auf jene Spezialbestimmungen, welche im Widerspruch mit dem neuen Statuten stehen und welche mit denselben in Übereinstimmung zu setzen wären.

III. Am 15. Mai 1892 erhalte ich, falls nicht unterdessen ein neuer Vertrag mit mir geschlossen wurde, eine Abfindungssumme von 25 000 fl. [...] welche mir an der Kassa der Kgl. Oper ohne jeden Abzug in Barem auszuzahlen wären.

[...] <sup>265</sup>

Whether or not such a letter was ever sent, it is totally unlikely that Mahler, especially with a contract from Hamburg in his pocket, would have wished to stay on in Budapest under any conditions. Thus, this letter probably reflects one of the stages of the negotiations with respect to the sum of the severance pay; it is possible (although not very likely) that at one point Zichy made the paying out of such a sum conditional on Mahler serving for at least another season. The size of the final settlement demanded by, and offered to, Mahler over the weeks of negotiations covered a wide range of figures. On March 8th, the *Neues Pester Journal* reported (quoting "Viennese papers") that Mahler had demanded 40 000 florins; the same figure was also cited in the *Zenevilág*.<sup>266</sup> In its detailed report on the financial negotiations, the *Fővárosi Lapok* claimed that Mahler's initial demand had been 30 000 florins. The Minister rejected this, suggested in a letter of February 24th(!) that Mahler be offered 10 000 florins, but left the final amount of the settlement to the intendant's discretion.<sup>267</sup> In a letter to Kienzl (presumably written in response to an enquiry from the Austrian writer and composer whom he met in Budapest in 1889) Mahler described the situation as quite uncertain as late as March 9th. On that day he wrote:

Vorläufig ist die Lage noch in einen Stadium, welche[s] weder ein Erörterung noch irgendeine Aussicht auf baldige Entscheidung zuläßt.<sup>268</sup>

In the end, Mahler and Zichy agreed on a sum of 25 000 florins; according to the above-cited article in the *Fővárosi Lapok*, the agreement was signed on March 14th at 13:30. From other, similar reports it appears that of the total amount, 20 000 represented the actual settlement, while 5000 was made up of Mahler's salary to the middle of July, and the refund of pension and other contributions made by him over the two and a half years.

Hoping to forestall a potentially embarrassing, public outbreak of the strong



pro-Mahler sentiments he knew existed among the opera-going public, Zichy denied Mahler the traditional right to conduct a farewell performance. In its stead, Mahler used the newspapers to take his leave from the public, his colleagues, and the press. In the light of the personal and professional harassment he has had to endure from many of those he was now addressing, the letter to the press appears as a masterful amalgam of heartfelt sentiment and subtle sarcasm:

Geehrter Herr Redakteur! Mit dem heutigen Tage bin ich von dem Posten eines artistischen Direktors der königl. ung. Oper zurückgetreten und habe das mir bisher anvertraute Amt in die Hände meiner vorgesetzten zurückgelegt. Es ist mir leider die Gelegenheit nicht gegeben, mich von dem Platze aus, an welchem ich nahezu 3 Jahre gestrebt und gearbeitet habe, von dem Budapester Publikum, welches so überaus liebenswürdig meine Bemühungen gewürdigt, von dem Personale der königl. Oper, welches mir treu und werktätig zur Seite gestanden, zu verabschieden. Ich tue es hiemit auf diesem Wege und verbinde damit meinen tiefgefühlten Dank an die hauptstädtische Presse für die vielfache Förderung und Anerkennung, die mein Wirken bei derselben gefunden. Ich scheide von meinem Posten in dem Bewußtsein treu und redlich erfüllter Pflicht und mit dem aufrichtigen Wunsche, daß die königliche ungarische Oper blühe und gedeihe. Budapest, 14. März 1891.

Hochachtungsvoll  
Gustav Mahler<sup>269</sup>

As may be expected, the press was divided sharply (if unevenly) between those who greeted Mahler's departure with approval, and those who lamented it as the passing of an era of artistic excellence. The former, at this time majority view may be represented here by the comments of the *Pesti Hírlap*; they were based on the argument that a good musician cannot also be a good director. Moreover, they also show that Zichy had had no intention of heeding the admonition delivered by the *Neues Pester Journal* a week earlier:

[...] It is not intended to fill the director's position at the Opera again; rather, as is customary in most opera houses in Germany, the intendant himself will carry on the artistic administration, consulting in more important questions the directorial council composed of the Opera's higher officials, the conductors and stage director. [...] We have long been convinced that if the Opera is headed by an intendant who, besides having other virtues, is also an expert in artistic matters (that is, someone who not only has the desire to administer artistically, but also possesses the necessary qualifications), then there is no need for a separate Opera director. [...] Experience (not only here but also abroad) has shown that the more gifted a musician someone is, the less likely they are to possess the qualifications needed for directing a theatre. Above all else, a good director has to possess broad vision, appropriate practical sense and exceptional tact in dealing with people; as it happens, these are just the characteristics which are so seldom



found together in professional musicians. [...] Only here does the misconception exist in some circles that if someone is an eminent musician and conductor then he is *eo ipso* an excellent opera director. Perhaps the experience gained will dispel that misconception once and for all.<sup>270</sup>

In representing the opposite point of view, the *Neues Pester Journal* sarcastically commented on the "low cost" of getting rid of Mahler; also, it analyzed in detail the probable consequences of this event:

[...] Direktor Mahler hat heute Mittags seinen Abschied erhalten. Man denke sich die Freude der "leitenden Kreise"! Es ist gelungen, Herrn Mahler loszuwerden [...] und diese Errungenschaft ist spottbillig, um eine Abfindungssumme von 25,000 fl. erreicht worden. Die Aufbringung des Geldes verursachte nicht die geringsten Schwierigkeiten, nachdem eine viel größere Summe während der Epoche Beniczky-Mahler erspart worden war und nun getrost zu diesem guten Zwecke benützt werden konnte. [...] Eine neue Ära bricht mit dem heutigen Tage an, der Stein des Anstoßes für so manche Ambitionen ist aus dem Wege geräumt, die Bahn ist frei für die kommenden und die gekommenen Männer. Zwar verlautet bis zur Stunde wenig über die Art und Weise, wie und durch wen Direktor Mahler ersetzt werden soll. Das ist aber auch gar nicht wichtig. Die Hauptsache ist, das der Mann fort ist, der eine so unbequeme, scharf ausgeprägte künstlerische Individualität besaß, seine Sache so verteuftelt ernst nahm, ein Dirigent ersten Ranges war, und mit unnachsichtiger Schneidigkeit an Alle, über die er zu befehlen hatte, dieselben Anforderungen stellte, die er selber gewissenhaft erfüllte. [...] So ist uns denn das Opernstatut glücklich geblieben und Mahler ist gegangen. Ob wir übrigens zu dem geretteten Opernstatut leicht einen neuen Direktor bekommen werden, bezweifeln wir. [...] Es wird wohl so sein, daß weder der neue Intendant, noch das neue Statut einen Direktor in wahren Sinne des Wortes neben sich dulden werden. Graf Zichy fühlt in sich den Wunsch und die Kraft, Intendant beider Theater und außerdem Direktor der Oper zu sein. Das ist ein kühnes Experiment, ein gewagtes Unternehmen, zu dessen Erfolg wir vorläufig nicht viel Vertrauen hegen können. [...] Wenn nun Graf Zichy zum Intendanten ernannt wurde, so ging man offenbar von der Ansicht aus, daß der in Musik und Dichtkunst dilettierend versierte Mann, der als ausübender Künstler sogar bedeutend ist, für die Erfüllung jener Aufgaben geeignet wäre, die der Intendantur künstlerische Bedeutung verleihen: für die oberste künstlerische Leitung und Kontrolle beider großen Theater. Das war die Meinung nicht [...], daß Graf Zichy Direktor und Intendant sein solle [...]. Von welchem Standpunkte man auch das Debut des neuen Intendanten betrachte, es ist über die Massen sonderbar und befremdend. Er muß bedeutende Erfolge erringen, um dieses Debut vergessen zu machen.<sup>271</sup>

As things stood, Mahler was no longer director when the curtain rose on March 14th on the last première performance to have been scheduled under his guidance.



In any case, it is likely that the ballet *Vióra* was brought to the stage primarily at Zichy's insistence. Composed by Károly Szabados, the Opera's assistant conductor and singing teacher *cum* correpetitor since 1880, the score of the ballet had been submitted for performance quite some time before. Apparently, though, Mahler had not found it worthy of performance. Now this première was being hailed as Zichy's great service to Hungarian music, and as a rectification of an injustice. The latter aspect was ripe for exploitation due to the tragic coincidence that the young composer, long ill, was at this time lying on his deathbed, and died shortly afterwards.

In the end, Zichy proved unable to prevent the opera-going public from expressing its true feelings about Mahler's departure. On March 16th, during a performance of *Lohengrin* — one of Mahler's most memorable productions in Budapest — conducted by Erkel, the audience staged a tumultuous demonstration, with cries of "Viva Mahler" and "Down with Zichy".<sup>272</sup>

A belated commentary by Kereszty, while full of praise for Zichy, and in agreement with Mahler's release, nevertheless appears to sound a faint echo of regret: "We must concede that there was no other solution than to relieve the director of his duties." In retrospect, the irony of Kereszty's final sentence is striking: "We look into the future with tranquility and confidence."<sup>273</sup> As will be seen in Chapter IV, within a year of Beniczky's and Mahler's departures, the affairs — artistic as well as financial — of the Royal Hungarian Opera returned to a state as impoverished as they had found them some three years earlier.

Following the weeks of uncertainty, Mahler wasted little time in Budapest once the situation had become finalized. He left on March 22nd or 23rd on his way to take up his new post in Hamburg.<sup>274</sup> His friends and admirers not only saw him off at the railway station, but also presented him with a silver baton and a silver fruit dish. The accompanying letter of presentation praised especially Mahler's efforts in the service of creating a Hungarian Opera.<sup>275</sup>

I believe that the foregoing, detailed and documented account of Mahler's three seasons in Budapest, especially when read in the framework of the Opera's pre- and post-Mahler eras (Chapters II and IV), largely obviates the need for the customary evaluation and conclusions. It is clear that Mahler, only 28 when he took on a task shunned by those more experienced than he ("the thorough cleansing of an artistic Aугean stable", in Popper's words), did not accomplish everything he had set out to do. This was due partly to the circumstances — whether social, political or economic — and partly to his youth and uncompromising, often abrasive and intolerant personality. It is equally clear, however, that it was under Mahler that the Budapest Opera experienced its first brilliant period, that it attained an international reputation. Mahler did not manage to eliminate the need for the expensive and (in the long term) uncommitted guest singers altogether during his two and a half years in Budapest (for statistics, see below), as he had pledged to do. Nevertheless, his pioneering efforts to reform the system bore fruit later on, not only in Budapest, but far beyond it. Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, in a perceptive analysis



of the threat to operatic life in the late 1950's because of the "jet-star" syndrome, paid homage to Mahler's legacy:

Als vor siebzig Jahren der junge Gustav Mahler Operndirektor in Budapest wurde, drohte der Oper in Mitteleuropa, wenn auch viel weniger drastisch, eine ähnliche Gefahr. Er brachte die Energie auf, sich gegen den Betrieb, gegen den Starwahn, gegen die Gewinnsucht der Sänger zu stellen. Nach wenigen Jahren hat sein Beispiel überall gewirkt.<sup>276</sup>

Before proceeding to a brief examination of the state of affairs at the Royal Hungarian Opera during the years immediately following Mahler's departure, the summary statistical information relating to his directorship may be presented here. Tables 1 and 3 show the total repertoire and the number of guest artists, respectively, in comparison with an approximately equal length of time (*i. e.*, 24 performance months) during the pre- and post-Mahler eras. Table 2 details his conducting in Budapest, in comparison with that of his fellow conductors under his directorship. Table 4 contains information on the staging costs of selected premières and new productions between 1889 and 1893.

TABLE 1. Repertoire of the Royal Hungarian Opera, April 1886–December 1893

Composer	Title; genre (if other than opera or operetta)	Apr. '86 —Sept. '88	Oct. '88 —March '91	March '91 —Dec. '93	Remarks
Adam, Adolphe	La poupée de Nuremberg	x	x	x	
Auber, Daniel François	Le concert à la cour	x			* March, 1888
Auber, Daniel François	Le domino noir	x	x		
Auber, Daniel François	Le maçon			x	# October, 1892
Auber, Daniel François	La muette de Portici	x		x	
Auber, Daniel François	La part du diable		x		# December, 1889
Bayer, Joseph	Die Puppenfee (ballet)		x	x	* December, 1888
Bayer, Joseph	Sonne und Erde (ballet)		x	x	* December, 1889
Bayer, Joseph	Wiener Walzer (ballet)	x	x	x	
Beethoven, Ludwig van	Fidelio	x	x	x	
Bellini, Vincenzo	Norma	x	x		
Bellini, Vincenzo	La sonnambula	x	x	x	
Bizet, Georges	Carmen	x	x	x	# November, 1893
Bizet, Georges	Les pêcheurs de perles		x		* October, 1888
Boito, Arrigo	Mefistofele	x	x		
Cornelius, Peter	Der Barbier von Bagdad			x	* December, 1891
Corradi, K.	A négy kőrő (ballet)		x		* November, 1888
David, Félicien	Lalla Roukh	x	x	x	
Delibes, Léo	Coppelia (ballet)	x	x	x	
Delibes, Léo	Lakmé	x	x	x	* November, 1887
Delibes, Léo & Minkus, Léon	Naila (La source) (ballet)	x	x	x	
Delibes, Léo	Sylvia (ballet)	x		x	# May, 1891

\* première

# new production



Composer	Title; genre (if other than opera or operetta)	Apr. '86 —Sept. '88	Oct. '88 —March '91	March '91 —Dec. '93	Remarks
Donizetti, Gaetano	La favorita	x			# October, 1886
Donizetti, Gaetano	La fille du régiment		x	x	* October, 1888
Donizetti, Gaetano	Lucia di Lammermoor	x	x	x	
Donizetti, Gaetano	Lucrezia Borgia	x	x	x	
Donizetti, Gaetano	Don Pasquale	x			
Doppler, Ferenc	Ilka és a huszártoborzó			x	# December, 1892
Erkel, Ferenc	Bánk bán	x	x	x	# October, 1890
Erkel, Ferenc	Brankovics György		x		* February, 1889
Erkel, Ferenc	Hunyadi László	x	x	x	
Erkel, Ferenc	István király		x	x	
Flotow, Friedrich F. von	Martha	x	x	x	
Franchetti, Alberto	Asrael		x		* November, 1890
Gluck, Christoph Willibald	Le cadu dupé	x	x		
Goldmark, Karl	Die Königin von Saba	x	x	x	
Goldmark, Karl	Merlin	x	x		* September, 1887
Gounod, Charles François	Faust	x	x	x	
Gounod, Charles François	Romeo et Juliette	x			# November, 1886
Grisar, Albert	Bonsoir, Monsieur Pantalon	x	x		* September, 1887
Halévy, Jacques Fromental	La juive	x	x	x	
Hubay, Jenő	Alienor			x	* December, 1891
Huber, Károly	A vig cimborák		x		* February, 1891
Kreutzer, Conradin	Das Nachtlager von Granada		x	x	* November, 1888
Kreutzer, Conradin	Der Verschwender (Märchenspiel)	x			
Leoncavallo, Ruggiero	I Pagliacci			x	* March, 1893
Liszt, Franz	St. Elisabeth (oratorio)			x	* September, 1891
Lortzing, Albert	Der Waffenschmied		x	x	* January, 1891
Maillart, Louis Aimé	Les dragons de Villars		x	x	* March, 1889
Marenco, Romualdo	Excelsior (ballet)	x	x	x	* January, 1887
Marschner, Heinrich	Der Templer und die Jüdin		x		* March, 1890
Mascagni, Pietro	L'amico Fritz			x	* January, 1892
Mascagni, Pietro	Cavalleria rusticana		x	x	* December, 1890
Mascagni, Pietro	Danza esotica (ballet)			x	* December, 1891
Massé, Victor	Les noces de Jeannette	x	x	x	
Massenet, Jules Émile	Hérodiade	x		x	
Massenet, Jules Émile	Le roi de Lahore	x			
Mendelssohn, Felix	Loreley		x		* March, 1891
Merkler, Andor	Fanchon szerelme (Sing-spiel)		x		* February, 1890
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	L'Africaine	x	x	x	
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	L'étoile du Nord	x	x	x	
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	Les Huguenots	x	x	x	
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	Le pardon de Ploërmel (Dinorah)	x	x		
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	Le prophète	x	x	x	
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	Robert le diable	x		x	

\* première

# new production



Composer	Title; genre (if other than opera or operetta)	Apr. '86 —Sept. '88	Oct. '88 —March '91	March '91 —Dec. '93	Remarks
Mihalovich, Ödön von	Hagbarth und Signe	x			
Mihalovich, Ödön von	Toldi szerelme			x	* March, 1893
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus	Bastien und Bastienne			x	* November, 1892
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus	Don Juan	x	x	x	# September, 1890
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus	Le nozze di Figaro	x	x	x	# November, 1893
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus	Die Zauberflöte	x		x	# October, 1891
Nessler, Viktor	Der Trompeter von Säckingen	x	x		* November, 1886
Nicolai, Otto	Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor		x	x	* October, 1889
Offenbach, Jacques	Le mariage aux lanternes		x	x	* December, 1890
Ponchielli, Amilcare	La Gioconda	x	x	x	
Pugni, Cesare & Hertel, P. L.	Satanella (ballet)	x	x		
Raimann, Rezső	Sinan basa		x		* December, 1890
Rieger, Alfred	Nivita (ballet)			x	* November, 1891
Rossini, Gioacchino	Il barbiere di Siviglia	x	x	x	
Rossini, Gioacchino	Guillaume Tell	x	x	x	# October, 1891
Sárosi, Ferenc	Az abencerage	x			* December, 1886
Schmidt, H.	Robert und Bertram		x	x	* January, 1890
Schubert, Franz	Die Verschworenen (Der häusliche Krieg) (Singspiel)	x	x		# April, 1893
Smetana, Bedřich	Die verkaufte Braut			x	* September, 1893
Szabados, Károly	Vióra (ballet)		x	x	* March, 1891
Szabó, Ferenc X.	Dárius kincse (ballet)			x	* October, 1893
Sztojanovits, Jenő	Csárdás (ballet)		x	x	* December, 1890
Sztojanovits, Jenő	Tous les trois (ballet)			x	* October, 1892
Sztojanovits, Jenő & Steiger, Lajos	Új Romeo (ballet)		x		* April, 1889
Thomas, Ambroise	Hamlet	x	x	x	
Thomas, Ambroise	Mignon	x	x	x	# October, 1886
Verdi, Giuseppe	Aida	x	x	x	
Verdi, Giuseppe	Ernani	x	x		
Verdi, Giuseppe	Otello	x	x	x	* December, 1887
Verdi, Giuseppe	Rigoletto	x	x	x	
Verdi, Giuseppe	La traviata	x	x	x	
Verdi, Giuseppe	Il trovatore	x	x	x	
Verdi, Giuseppe	Un ballo in maschera	x	x	x	
Wagner, Richard	Der fliegende Holländer	x	x	x	
Wagner, Richard	Götterdämmerung			x	* December, 1892
Wagner, Richard	Lohengrin	x	x	x	# September, 1889
Wagner, Richard	Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg	x			
Wagner, Richard	Das Rheingold		x	x	* January, 1889
Wagner, Richard	Siegfried			x	* April, 1892
Wagner, Richard	Tannhäuser	x	x	x	

\* première

# new production



Composer	Title; genre (if other than opera or operetta)	Apr. '86 —Sept. '88	Oct. '88 —March '91	March '91 —Dec. '93	Remarks
Wagner, Richard	Die Walküre		x	x	* January, 1889
Weber, Carl Maria von	Der Freischütz	x	x	x	
Widor, Charles-Marie	La Korrigane (ballet)			x	* January, 1893
Zichy, Géza	Hazánk (theatre paré)			x	* June, 1892
Zichy, Géza	Egy vár története (melodrama)	x	x		* May, 1888
Various or unknown	Almeák méhtánca			x	* March, 1892
Various or unknown	A párizsi festők (ballet)		x	x	* October, 1889
Various or unknown	Renaissance (ballet)	x	x		
Various or unknown	Rococo (ballet)	x	x	x	

\* première

Table 1 testifies to the substantial increase in the repertoire during Mahler's directorship in comparison with the preceding 24 "performance months". The total number of works performed rose from 68 (57 operas and operettas; 11 other works) to 82 (64 and 18), while premières and new productions more than doubled from 12 to 29. A total of 14 works, performed during the period prior to his arrival, were dropped from the repertoire by Mahler.

The period following Mahler's departure from Budapest shows no significant differences in total numbers: 81 works (63 and 18) were performed; these included 25 premières and new productions. It is interesting to note, though, that the total number of works in the repertoire during this period includes 5 of the 14 dropped by Mahler between 1888 and 1891, while 10 of the works introduced by him during this time were dropped from the repertoire by his successors.

Around the time when Mahler was director of the Budapest Opera, playbills and announcements of upcoming performances invariably omitted the name of the conductor. Newspaper critiques (not always published for repertory performances, in any case) also frequently failed to mention the conductor. Consequently, Table 2 gives, at best, a rough idea of the distribution of conducting assignments during the period in question. Even so, Table 2A provides some rather surprising information concerning Mahler's decidedly low rate of conducting activity in Budapest, especially in comparison with his subsequent activities in Hamburg and Vienna. Thus, in the course of nearly three seasons in Budapest he conducted no more than 16 different works, and possibly as few as 14. (There are also some notable absences from this list of operas, such as *Fidelio*; several of these later became mainstays of Mahler's personal repertoire.) The majority of these works (11) were either first performances or new productions. In comparison, Sándor Erkel conducted 34 different works (including 7 premières and new productions) during the same period.



It appears from a thorough search of the daily and weekly newspapers and journals that Mahler may have conducted as few as 48 performances (including 5 concerts) at the Budapest Opera. Even if one adds the 11 probable and 37 possible performances,<sup>277</sup> the total for the 24 performance-months amounts to 96 appearances out of a total of 458 performances. In comparison, during one period of his conductorship in Hamburg Mahler conducted 13 times in 16 days (see the letter of January 17, 1893 to Mihalovich, Chapter V), while in his first full season at the Vienna Hofoper (August 1897 to June 1898) he appeared on the podium 108 times, with 23 different works!

TABLE 2. Conductors at the Royal Hungarian Opera, October 1888–March 1891

*A. Gustav Mahler*

Date	Work	definite	probable	possible	Remarks
January 26, 1889	Das Rheingold	x			première
January 27, 1889	Die Walküre	x			première
January 29, 1889	Das Rheingold	x			Opera closed Jan. 30–Feb. 6
February 7, 1889	Die Walküre	x			
February 16, 1889	Das Rheingold	x			
February 17, 1889	Die Walküre	x			
March 2, 1889	Das Rheingold	x			
March 3, 1889	Die Walküre	x			
March 16, 1889	Das Rheingold		x		HLG, p. 195
March 17, 1889	Die Walküre		x		HLG, p. 195
March 31, 1889	Les dragons de Villars	x			première
April 1, 1889	Les dragons de Villars			x	
April 7, 1889	Les dragons de Villars	x			
April 11, 1889	Les dragons de Villars			x	
April 13, 1889	Das Rheingold	x			
April 14, 1889	Die Walküre	x			
April 21, 1889	Les dragons de Villars		x		GMB, p. 480
April 27, 1889	Le nozze di Figaro	x			
April 28, 1889	Die Walküre		x		HLG, p. 195
April 29, 1889	Le nozze di Figaro	x			
May 5, 1889	Les dragons de Villars			x	
May 15, 1889	Die Walküre	x			
May 20, 1889	Die Verschworenen	x			performance of the opera division of the Academy of Music
September 5, 1889	Lohengrin	x			new production
September 19, 1889	Lohengrin			x	
October 9, 1889	Lohengrin	x			
October 24, 1889	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor	x			première
October 26, 1889	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor			x	



Date	Work	definite	probable	possible	Remarks
October 30, 1889	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor			x	HLG, p. 208
November 3, 1889	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor		x		
November 9, 1889	Das Rheingold	x			
November 10, 1889	Die Walküre	x			HLG, p. 208
November 17, 1889	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor		x		
November 19, 1889	La Juive		x		
November 24, 1889	Die Walküre	x			HLG, pp. 207f.
November 28, 1889	Les Huguenots		x		
December 1, 1889	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor		x		
December 15, 1889	Lohengrin	x			HLG, p. 208
January 3, 1890	Concert	x			
January 5, 1890	Les dragons de Villars			x	
January 12, 1890	Les dragons de Villars			x	première
February 2, 1890	Die Walküre	x			
February 6, 1890	Lohengrin			x	
February 24, 1890	Concert	x			
February 25, 1890	Die Walküre			x	
February 26, 1890	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor			x	
March 8, 1890	Der Templer und die Jüdin	x			
March 11, 1890	Der Templer und die Jüdin			x	
March 15, 1890	Die Walküre	x			
March 16, 1890	Der Templer und die Jüdin			x	
March 22, 1890	Der Templer und die Jüdin			x	
March 25, 1890	Les dragons de Villars			x	
March 26, 1890	Die Walküre	x			
March 30, 1890	Die lustige Weiber und Windsor			x	
April 1, 1890	Der Templer und die Jüdin			x	
April 16, 1890	Concert	x			new production
April 22, 1890	Die Walküre	x			
April 26, 1890	Le nozze di Figaro	x			
April 29, 1890	Le nozze di Figaro			x	
May 1, 1890	Der Templer und die Jüdin			x	
September 16, 1890	Don Juan	x			
September 18, 1890	Don Juan			x	
October 3, 1890	Don Juan	x			
October 16, 1890	Un ballo in maschera	x			
October 29, 1890	Concert	x			
October 30, 1890	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor			x	
November 1, 1890	Lohengrin	x			
November 20, 1890	Asrael	x			
November 22, 1890	Asrael			x	
November 23, 1890	Don Juan	x			
November 24, 1890	Asrael			x	
November 27, 1890	Lohengrin			x	
November 29, 1890	Asrael			x	
December 5, 1890	Concert	x			Lilli Lehmann, Mein Weg, 366ff.
December 16, 1890	Don Juan	x			
December 20, 1890	Don Juan		x		



Date	Work	definite	probable	possible	Remarks
December 26, 1890	Cavalleria rusticana	x			première
December 27, 1890	Cavalleria rusticana			x	
December 28, 1890	Cavalleria rusticana			x	
January 1, 1891	Cavalleria rusticana		x		TG-MM, p. 189
January 11, 1891	Cavalleria rusticana			x	
January 15, 1891	Cavalleria rusticana			x	
January 17, 1891	Der Waffenschmied	x			première
January 18, 1891	Der Waffenschmied			x	
January 21, 1891	Cavalleria rusticana			x	
January 22, 1891	Die Walküre	x			
February 1, 1891	Die lustige Weiber von Windsor			x	
February 7, 1891	Der Waffenschmied			x	
February 8, 1891	Cavalleria rusticana			x	
February 12, 1891	Der Waffenschmied			x	
February 14, 1891	Cavalleria rusticana			x	
February 17, 1891	Die Walküre	x			
March 1, 1891	Loreley, etc.	x			première
March 3, 1891	Loreley, etc.	x			
March 4, 1891	Lohengrin	x			
March 10, 1891	Cavalleria rusticana, etc.	x			

#### B. Sándor Erkel

Otello; Les pêcheurs de perles (première); La fille du régiment (première); Das Nachtlager von Granada (première); Lohengrin (old production); Hunyadi László; Guillaume Tell; Don Juan (old production); Aida; Die Königin von Saba; Fidelio; Tannhäuser; Brankovics György (première); Der Freischütz; Der fliegende Holländer; Mefistofele; Les Huguenots; La juive; Carmen; La part du diable (première); Faust; István király; Lalla Roukh; Lakmé; Hamlet; La sonnambula; Mignon; Bánk bán (new production); Un ballo in maschera; Merlin; A vig cimborák; Egy vár története; Lucia di Lammermoor; Vióra (première).

#### C. Gyula Erkel (until March, 1889)

Bánk bán (old production); Le domino noir; Hunyadi László.

#### D. Henrik Benkő (from January, 1889)

Il barbiere di Siviglia; Das Nachtlager von Granada; Sonne und Erde (première); Faust; Lucrezia Borgia; La fille du régiment; Csárdás (première).

#### E. Others (occasional appearances)

Károly Szabados; Ferenc Erkel; Rezső Raimann.



TABLE 3. Guest appearances at the Royal Hungarian Opera,  
1886–1893.<sup>278</sup>

1886:	17 guests appeared	160 times
1887:	22 guests appeared	161 times
1888:	11 guests appeared	158 times
1889:	17 guests appeared	99 times
1890:	17 guests appeared	93 times
1891:	18 guests appeared	74 times
1892:	14 guests appeared	65 times
1893:	6 guests appeared	33 times

TABLE 4. Staging costs for selected premières and new productions at the  
Royal Hungarian Opera, 1889–1893.<sup>279</sup>

During Mahler's tenure:

Das Rheingold	10,123 florins
Die Walküre	8,207 florins
Brankovics György	5,913 florins
Les dragons de Villars	3,312 florins
Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor	1,133 florins
Lohengrin	13,166 florins
Új Rómeó	4,681 florins
Sonne und Erde	11,273 florins
Cavalleria rusticana	3,074 florins
Vióra	13,985 florins

Following Mahler's departure:

Siegfried	3,683 florins
Götterdämmerung	5,714 florins
Toldi szerelme	8,029 florins
La Korrigane	7,885 florins
Dárus kincse	9,076 florins



## Chapter IV

### THE ROYAL HUNGARIAN OPERA AFTER MAHLER

Zichy's self-aggrandizing recollections of his office-taking and of his relations with Mahler provide us with insight into the new intendant's personality; they also indicate clearly the sort of regime which was established at the Royal Hungarian Opera following Mahler's resignation:

[...] Als ich mein Amt antrat, fand ich die Oper in ziemlich heruntergekommenen Zustände. Zwar waren einzelne Vorstellungen, die Mahler dirigierte, vorzüglich, aber im ganzen Personale hatte sich die Disziplin bedenklich gelockert. Mahler war ein viel zu bedeutendes Talent mit viel zu genialem Einschlage, um ein halbwegs guter Direktor sein zu können. Ein nervöses, schroffes, öfters sogar unartiges Auftreten hat mitunter das ganze Personal zu Verzweiflung getrieben. Er zerbrach die Tacktstöcke wie Don Juan die Weiberherzen. Beim Dirigieren gab er die Zeichen (wenn er sie überhaupt gab), indem er gegen den betreffenden Musiker einen Stoß wie mit einem Degen führte, und sprach dabei fortwährend, die zornigste Grimasse schneidend, so daß mir einmal ein sehr hoher Herr während einer Opernvorstellung sagte: "Der kleine Mann ist unendlich amüsant!" Und das war eine Wirklichkeit doch gar nicht. Erstens war er ein großer Mann, und zweitens fühlte jeder Musiker, daß da eine große Musikerseele offenbarte. Ich befand mich in verzweifelter Lage. Auf der einen Seite wollte ich diese geniale Kraft dem Institut erhalten, auf der anderen vermochte ich das bis zum äußersten aufgeregte Personal nicht zu beruhigen. Immer häufiger traten Renitenzfälle ein. Ich unterstützte Mahler, wenn er im Rechte war, ich konnte und durfte es aber nicht, wenn er unrecht hatte. Schließlich schien er das Unerquickliche seiner Lage selbst eingesehen zu haben und bat um seine Entlassung, die er mit einer auf meinen Vorschlag hin ihm vom Minister angewiesenen namhaften Summe auch erhielt. Jetzt führte ich die Oper ohne Direktor weiter, wobei mir mein Freund Baron Alexander von Vécsey ein tüchtiger Beamtenkörper und der vorzügliche Oberregisseur Koloman Alszeghy zur Seite standen. [...]<sup>1</sup>

It is typical and significant that Zichy did not even mention Sándor Erkel in the foregoing account, although, according to Vidor, the intendant's artistic advisory council (functioning in place of a director, as had been forecast in the *Pesti Hírlap* already on March 15th) included both Erkel and Alszeghy.<sup>2</sup>

In point of fact, Mahler's departure brought about a worsening in Erkel's



fortunes in general. Far from having his "former rights" restored as one-time director, he now suddenly found himself responsible for conducting virtually the entire repertoire, including the works previously conducted exclusively by Mahler. For example, he had to take over *Cavalleria rusticana* on March 19th with only one rehearsal. It was only on May 13th that the press was able to report that Zichy's search for a new conductor was bearing fruit, with the imminent guest appearance of Rezső Máder (1856–1940), a Hungarian-born conductor employed at the time as a coach in Vienna.<sup>3</sup> It may be inferred from the *Zenelap*'s report two weeks later that Máder's trial appearance was unsuccessful; the writer was happy to report, however, that negotiations were "continuing" to engage Anton Seidl (then in New York).<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the 1890–1891 season Zichy announced — chiefly in order to refute the contention in "certain papers" that attendance at the Opera fell sharply after Mahler's departure — that the box office revenue for 70 performances between February and May had been 75 000 florins as compared to 70 000 for 75 performances during the same period a year earlier. He claimed that the "more favourable results were undoubtedly due to the more reliable and varied programme." In publishing the intendant's report, the *Budapesti Hírlap* commented on its misleading nature: there had been a major influenza epidemic in 1890; the most successful works had been inherited from the previous regime; and, above all, while certainly many works appeared on the programme in 1891, "the variety of performances was paralleled by their carelessness."<sup>5</sup>

The traditional season-end reviews in the press were split more or less according to partisan lines. The pro-Zichy *Pesti Napló* resented the attacks on the new intendant, and maintained that the problems under him were simply inherited from his predecessors. Nevertheless, he had already achieved much, especially in stabilizing the programme, and in restoring the spirit and confidence of the artistic staff.<sup>6</sup> The *Budapesti Hírlap*, on the other hand, protested its objectivity and realism: certainly no miracles could have been expected from the new regime in 3 months, but the indications hold no great promise for the future. It is not enough to have a rich programme and, "as concerns the artistic level of the performance, there has been a gradual decline." Then, this writer makes his main point, one which, while it will be echoed more and more frequently in the coming months, was being made here for the first time a mere two months after Mahler's departure: a new artistic director must be hired immediately. Some one person must be responsible for artistic matters; at the moment, it appears that "everyone [i.e., Zichy, Vécsey, Erkel and Alszeghy] is responsible, that is to say — no one really is".<sup>7</sup>

As even the most partisan elements of the press had to admit at the beginning of the 1891–1892 season, Zichy's efforts to 'Hungarianize' the Opera and to fill the gap left by the departure of the disliked 'foreign' director and conductor were proving to be conspicuously unsuccessful. Amidst great fanfare, in September he introduced the new conductor of the Opera, the Czech Josef Rebiček (1844–1904), who was most recently opera director in Warsaw. Rebiček responded with a brief speech — in German. Following his debut on September 19th, even Kereszty could only manage to be lukewarm; after listing Rebiček's shortcomings, he expressed the hope — based on the conductor's "background" — that better was to come.<sup>8</sup> In



fact, although he was given ample opportunity to shine on such occasions as the long-delayed premières of *Siegfried* (April 9, 1892) and *Götterdämmerung* (December 10, 1892), in his more than two years in Budapest Rebiček did not succeed in rising above a level the press consistently described as “kapellmeisterisch” mediocrity. It seems that the closest he came to emulating Mahler’s career in Budapest was to conduct the première of his Symphony in B-minor on November 23, 1892 — almost to the day 3 years after the first performance of Mahler’s First Symphony.<sup>9</sup>

Together with Rebiček, Zichy also hired Adolf Szikla (1868–1938) as vocal coach. He eventually became a reliable, workman-like conductor and remained with the Opera until 1925. But his appointment in 1891 must have been viewed as yet another case of patronage, something for which the intendant was increasingly coming under attack. For Szikla had originally come to Hungary from his native Vienna in 1889 as private music tutor to the Zichy-family.<sup>10</sup> Some measure of Zichy’s growing desperation for conductors (aggravated by Sándor Erkel’s increasingly frequent bouts of illness), together with his careless ineptitude for solving the problem, was graphically demonstrated a year later (at the beginning of the 1892–1893 season) when he invited Gyula Erkel to rejoin the conducting staff. Although Gyula agreed, he stayed for only five months.<sup>11</sup>

Zichy fared not much better in his efforts to expand the repertoire, even though there was no dearth of new works and revivals. A few examples taken from the repertoire tables at the end of Chapter III will suffice. The attempt was made to capitalize on the success of *Cavalleria rusticana* by presenting two new works by Mascagni in quick succession. The ballet *Danza esotica* (derived from an orchestral work) was premièred on December 18, 1891; it had only 14 performances in some 14 months when it was dropped from the repertoire. *L’Amico Fritz* failed to become popular in Budapest, as everywhere else; between January 23, 1892 and the end of 1893 when it was dropped, it had been staged only 16 times. Most of the new Hungarian works (even ballets) failed to capture the audiences. Thus, Jenő Hubay’s opera *Alienor* (premièred on December 5, 1891) stayed in the repertoire for only six performances, while Ferenc X. Szabó’s ballet *Dárus kincse* (The treasure of Darius), first performed on October 4, 1893, lasted for only five performances. Considerable public and critical antagonism was generated when on June 8, 1892, for the 25th anniversary of Franz Josef’s coronation (with the Royal Family present), the Opera staged the *théâtre paré Hazánk* (Our fatherland) to music by Zichy.

The intendant’s feuds with various members of the ensemble also kept the press occupied, providing clear evidence that the “pacification” of the staff was little more than wishful thinking on the part of Zichy’s supporters. Clashes between him and the artists invariably carried overtones of a feudal arbitrariness. For example, in December, 1891 it was reported that Zichy, riled by the refusal of one of the long standing and valued members of the ensemble to take over a role on short notice, was not going to renew the singer’s contract, saying: “Broulik ist ein sehr brauchbarer Sänger, doch hat er sich meinem Willen widersetzt, weshalb ich ihn nicht wieder engagierte.”<sup>12</sup> The dissatisfaction growing among all classes of employees occasionally precipitated against those members of the artistic and



business administration who were perceived to be closest to the intendant. The most dramatic evidence of this was seen on October 10, 1892, when an attempt was made on Alszegehy's life by a dismissed worker. Shortly thereafter Gyula Reich, the business manager of the Opera, received an anonymous letter threatening similar violence against him; apparently, Reich had been making excessive deductions from the already meager performance fees of the choristers.<sup>13</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the reviews published on the first anniversary of Zichy's office taking contained little that was positive. Even the most objective and moderate writer (August Beer), while wishing the Opera and Zichy success, could not avoid making comparisons with Mahler and his times. Beer felt that Zichy's chief error lay in attempting too much, trying to outdo his predecessors. "A pace was struck that was uncommon even under the tireless, impetuous Mahler." Consequently, the intrinsic worth and the level of presentation of new works left a great deal to be desired. "And there we must again recall Mahler who, to be sure, had spoiled the public." Perhaps under Mahler even a work like *Amico Fritz* would have succeeded.<sup>14</sup> Béla Diósy, writing in the *Neues Pester Journal* — though he admitted that matters did not turn out quite as badly as some had forecast (at least financially) — was less reticent in stating his views on the artistic standards:

[...] Werfen wir aber einen Rückblick auf das rein künstlerische Ergebnis des verflossenen Jahres, so müssen wir mit ehrlicher Betrübniß eingestehen, daß wir in dieser Hinsicht einen Rückschritt zu verzeichnen haben: das künstlerische Niveau unserer Oper ist in dem letzten Jahre unzweifelhaft gesunken. [...] der künstlerische Wert der geleisteten Arbeit war [...] nur ein geringer. [...] der Geist, der vordem in mancher Einzelleistung, in der Regie, in der Orchesterführung und vor Allem in dem mühevoll erzielten Ensemble zu Tage trat, ist verschwunden.

There is little doubt that the ills of the Opera can be cured only by a strong, outstandingly talented artistic leader; thus, Zichy's paramount concern must be to find a new director.<sup>15</sup>

The opening of the *feuilleton* of the *Magyar Hirlap* (written by Miksa Márkus, the young journalist who published the interviews with Zichy and Mahler in the *Ország-Világ* a year earlier) leaves no doubt about its writer's position. While wishing to be fair, and give credit where credit is due,

we wish to relate how, despite the intendant's undeniably good intentions, the artistic niveau of the institution had sunk under his one-year rule, how the discipline — so essential to any organically functioning body — was loosened, how the zeal of the artists, without which no art is imaginable, was destroyed.

The rest of the article presents a detailed comparison of the Beniczky–Mahler and Zichy regimes. In summing up his evaluation of the Opera's leadership, Márkus makes a very interesting point, one which brings into even sharper relief the true



magnitude Mahler's direct and indirect influence must have had on the staging and directing of the operas produced during his tenure:

There is no one at the Opera who could carry on the artistic direction with determination and ability. Géza Zichy is an ambitious intendant, Sándor Erkel and Josef Rebiček are eminent conductors, but they can only do the day-to-day job, they cannot perceive of higher and more distant goals. The unsatisfactory quality of the staging also contributes to the problems. There are constant omissions even in the most elementary aspects, inventiveness is out of the question, while ridiculous groupings and lifeless scenes are an everyday occurrence.<sup>16</sup>

It was inevitable, just as it had been during the Keglevich and Beniczky eras, that the problems of the Opera should be raised in the Hungarian Parliament. The occasion was provided by the debate of the Opera's 1892 budget at the 37th Sitting on April 25th. Member of Parliament Dénes Pázmándy led the attack; the fact that his arguments continued to be based on the same principles he espoused during the debates of earlier years shows that the anti-Opera faction in the Hungarian society of the time saw no substantive difference between various administrative regimes. To them, the Opera was a 'foreign' institution; its minimal contribution to Hungarian music and musicians did not justify the size of the state subvention. The latest (and, according to the Government's promise, final) attempt to make the system work having failed — implied Pázmándy — it was now time to lease the Opera. After all, the system was being maintained chiefly so that a man particularly favoured by the Prime Minister (meaning Zichy) could be employed. Ferenc Fenyvessy (who, it may be recalled, argued on behalf of the Beniczky-Mahler administration in 1889) defended Zichy's achievements, especially in advancing the cause of Hungarian music in contrast to the previous regime (!). He also echoed the call of earlier years for the transfer of the theatres from the Interior to the Education Ministry.<sup>17</sup>

If one recalls that the decline in Mahler's fortunes in Budapest may have been, at the very least, accelerated by a change of government in 1890, there appears to be something fateful in the fact that the decline in Zichy's power also coincided with a similar change. Less than seven months after the above Parliamentary debates, Szapáry resigned in November, 1892; Franz Josef appointed Sándor Wekerle as Prime Minister. He, a commoner, was a well-trained and highly experienced professional statesman, having already served as Finance Minister in both the Tisza and Szapáry cabinets. The portfolio of the Interior Ministry was assumed by Károly Hieronymi, also a commoner, and a pragmatist who was an engineer by training and an economist by avocation. Thus Zichy, "a man particularly favoured" by the former Prime Minister, suddenly lost his aristocratic power base in the cabinet. Although — as had to be expected in the Hungary of the 1890's — he was to remain intendant for some considerable time, there can be little doubt that his customary arbitrary and willfull conduct, generating widespread discontent and public antagonism, would have been viewed less kindly by the new government.

Since they accurately reflect the worsened situation at the Opera, as well as the



political shifts of the intervening period, it is appropriate to jump ahead here to the Parliamentary debates of the Opera's 1893 budget on January 20 and 21, 1893 (139th and 140th Sittings). The lion's share of the attack on the Opera (or, more correctly, on Zichy) was carried by Fenyvessy, speaking this time from the Government's side of the House. He recalled his defence of Zichy in the previous year's debates; while then he felt that the intendant deserved a chance to prove himself, now, after two years of Zichy's rule he had to conclude that Zichy is incapable of doing the job. "In any case", said Fenyvessy, "the position of the intendant is nothing more than the astonishingly deformed offspring of the marriage of absolutism and parliamentarianism": although normally he is paid by and is responsible to the state (through the Minister), in fact he has absolute power. Thus, while the theatres should in any case be transferred to the Ministry of Education, effective reform can only come from regulating the intendant's position, and the concomitant restoration of the artistic director's function at both theatres. Following his statement of the general principles he was advocating, Fenyvessy proceeded to paint a detailed picture of the current situation at the Opera, as well as the background of that situation. Zichy announced an admirable programme upon taking office, then promptly and at great expense dismissed the only man already in place who could have helped him to fulfil it. Instead of replacing him with an equally qualified artistic director, he hired a conductor from Warsaw who is the laughing stock of the orchestra and of the entire musical world. (According to Fenyvessy, Zichy had been forewarned by a member of the Opera about Rebiček's unsuitability for the position.) The intendant's behaviour and manner are so totally objectionable that the artists are disheartened and alienated, which shows in their performance. Fenyvessy then criticized the programme, listing the new productions which have failed, and the works which should be, but are not produced, including Hungarian works. At the same time, Zichy did not hesitate to have his own music performed for the Coronation Jubilee; it cost 14 000 florins to stage *Hazánk* at the Opera, whereas the total cost of the jubilee production at the National Theatre was 800 florins. Such aberrations could arise only because the intendant had absolute power. He should be forced to hire an artistic director for the Opera.

On the second day of the debate the defence of the Opera was conducted chiefly by Member of Parliament Lajos Bartók, publisher of the satirical review *Bolond Istók*. He rejected the assertion that a Hungarian Opera is a luxury the country cannot afford. As to Zichy, he is doing a reasonable job, but the public must support him more. Although briefly and somewhat perfunctorily, the Minister also spoke on behalf of the Opera and Zichy. The intendant is, in fact, controlled by the Minister of the Interior; experience shows that, at least for the time being, there is no better system for the administration of the Opera and the National Theatre. Zichy is in a difficult position: he would like to have more Hungarian works performed but the public demands a large programme, and all demands cannot be met from the tight budget.<sup>18</sup>

To some extent probably due to an awareness of his weakened position *vis-à-vis* the Government, Zichy had, in fact, begun to search for an artistic director by the time of the 1893 budget debate. But it is clear from a series of articles which



appeared in January that, at least initially, he went about the task in a typically careless and high-handed fashion.

On January 4th the *Nemzet* reported the "rumour" circulating in artistic circles that Zichy was considering Perotti for Opera director, and that talks were already under way.<sup>19</sup> When publishing the intendant's denial next day, the *Magyar Újság* expressed the hope that the denial was credible: it would be unacceptable if the new director could not speak Hungarian!<sup>20</sup> On January 6th, the same paper claimed, quoting the *Budapester Correspondenz*, that Zichy had asked Perotti to become at least a "directorial councillor" to assist in administering the Opera, especially the programming.<sup>21</sup> In actual fact, Zichy's denial of the talks with Perotti had been untrue. This became embarrassingly clear when the singer, angered by Zichy's falsehood, gave an interview in which he not only confirmed the talks, but also gave a detailed and unflattering account of conditions at the Opera. Having enough 'ammunition', so to speak, the *Magyar Újság* proceeded to publish what was the strongest attack on Zichy to date:

Because of the confusion in which Count Géza Zichy is running from pillar to post, just so he can retain his greatly weakened position and to regain the confidence of his superiors, he got himself trapped in a *cul-de-sac* from which he can no longer escape.

In light of what happened to Perotti, there is no other solution but that one of them must leave. While it is impossible to forecast which one it will be,

this much is certain: with Géza Zichy's departure, Hungarian art — and especially the Opera, suffering under the full weight of his ineptitude — would not only not lose anything, but would actually benefit by being freed from this paralyzing burden.

Count Zichy must see that every one of his directives only proves his incompetence anew, that all his actions are characterized by a hasty superficiality, impatience and arrogance — characteristics of a mediocre dilettante. Why does he not give up the intendant's chair? After all, when he first occupied it, he manfully declared that as soon as he realizes that Hungarian art does not benefit from his person, he would immediately resign. And now we are approaching the second anniversary; there could hardly have been poorer, sadder two years in the annals of Hungarian opera. [. . .]<sup>22</sup>

It is possible that such attacks in the press, and the Parliamentary debate, finally moved the Minister of the Interior to instruct Zichy to hire an artistic director for the Opera. For on February 1st the intendant sent a lengthy submission to the Minister, seeking his permission (and, just as importantly, additional financial support) to engage Arthur Nikisch. The following excerpts (comprising only about one third of the total) show the document as a jumble of fabrication, half truths and self-glorification:



[...] When I took office two years ago it was my considered opinion, just as it is now, that besides the intendant, the artistic director's function is an important adjunct of the system by which our institutions can be governed in accordance with their goals. That in spite of this I have led the Royal Hungarian Opera without the assistance of an artistic director since the departure of the former director Gustav Mahler was partly because of the force of circumstances, and in part due to the caution arising from my regard for the best interests of the institution.

After the German director, who arrived with great fanfare and left amidst an even greater one, and whose removal caused a veritable small cultural war — I could consider only an artistic director whose reputation and abilities would guarantee the fitting filling of the position and who, besides, would also be motivated by patriotic zeal as a son of our country [...] It was the more difficult to find such a man quickly, since there are hardly one or two among our native sons about whom it can be supposed that they possess all the abilities and traits expected of the Opera's artistic director. [...]

I also considered it necessary to lead the institution alone for a while [...] as a justification of my actions, to prove that Mahler's removal was motivated not by personal prejudice or capricious action but by conclusions drawn from expert appraisal. It was of this expertise and the consequent appropriateness of my action that I wished to convince the honoured government and the public, and thus to provide evidence that I was capable of knowing and judging what was in the institution's interest. Besides, I considered it my duty to pay with my own work for the sacrifice brought by the honoured government on behalf of the theatre by paying Mahler's severance. And, without wishing to brag, I look back with confident pride at my two years' activity, during which time the theatre not only retained the niveau demanded by its rank, but also accomplished much of note and excellence. [...]

Now I consider the time ripe for filling the vacant artistic director's position at the Opera, the more so because I could only continue to fulfil the expectations of both positions by gravely risking my own health [...] and finally because I believe that I found the individual to whom I could entrust the opera director's responsibilities with the best conscience.

This man is Arthur Nikisch, our compatriot, the conductor universally acknowledged and praised, for whose engagement already my predecessors Keglevich and Beniczky intendants did everything, but in vain. [...] Beside him, Anton Seidl, the Hungarian-born conductor also living in America could be considered. However, I have heard more good things about Nikisch, and have already entered into serious discussions with him. [...]

It may be surmised from what follows that the extent of the "serious discussions" was a telegram from Nikisch stating his salary and other expectations, probably sent in response to an exploratory letter from Zichy.

Zichy then resumes explanation of his request to the Minister, especially as concerns the supplementary subvention to cover the cost of a new director. The immediate hiring of a director-conductor is justified by citing Erkel's illness, the



serious nature of which is purported to be shown by a medical certificate attached to the submission. The superficially impressive urgency of Zichy's request appears in quite a different light, however, when one notes that the certificate is dated October 18, 1892! As to the supplementary funds (after all, a director's salary had always been included in the regular annual subvention), Zichy notes that out of consideration for his name and long, faithful service, it would be unthinkable to pension off Erkel prematurely. At the same time, Rebiček's contract (presumably absorbing much of what should have been available to cover the cost of a new director) had another 3 1/2 years to run.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, Zichy had given an initial five-year contract to a conductor about whose incompetence he had been forewarned!

Following a further exchange of letters between Zichy and the Interior Ministry, on March 10th the Minister gave his permission to engage Nikisch. Although in his submission of February 1st Zichy expressed the hope that he would be able to talk Nikisch into reducing his original contract demands, it is evident that he did not succeed. The new director was given a contract for five years, at an annual salary of 15 000 florins, 3000 florins pension contribution, and 2000 florins travel expenses to return from the United States. Thus, Nikisch was going to cost the Opera more than half as much again as Mahler had. In addition, he was to be advanced 12 000 florins (to be repaid over 25 years) to allow him to buy out the remainder of his contract in Boston.<sup>24</sup> Nikisch officially became artistic director and chief conductor of the Royal Hungarian Opera on June 1, 1893. He was introduced to the staff by Zichy on August 16th.<sup>25</sup> (Even though Nikisch was Hungarian-born, the fact that he spoke to the staff in Hungarian was greeted with great enthusiasm by the nationalist press.)

With Nikisch's office-taking, the immediate post-Mahler era at the Budapest Opera came to an end. But as there were many parallels between the tenures of Mahler and Nikisch — even though the two differed greatly as to background, temperament and ability —, it is instructive to look briefly at the next two years. Such a scrutiny reveals that, beyond the traditional fickleness of the public and the restless intractability of the press, the fortunes of the two eminent musicians had one common denominator: Intendant Zichy. Or, perhaps more precisely, it was the very institution of the intendantship itself and the type of person who, by dint of the social structure, had been appointed to that position in monarchist Hungary.

There is no doubt that Mahler and Nikisch had very different personalities. Izor Béldi, a contemporary, qualified observer (see Chapter III, Note 60), compared them in this evocative paragraph:

Mahler and Nikisch are opposites in every respect. Mahler is passion personified, nervous restlessness; Nikisch possesses cool, circumspect and level-headed sobriety. Mahler conducted in a grand style, with broad strokes, with elemental power; Nikisch strove more for minute detail, for the refined nuance. Mahler was ingenious, unbridled, often whimsical; Nikisch always distinguished, smooth and graceful. Mahler a boisterous titan — Nikisch a lovable abbé. Mahler's conducting was the most intensive nervous action; his eyes flashed during work. Nikisch's carefully arranged locks of hair



undulated gracefully to the rhythm, his eyes shone with a melancholy, dreamy light.

In a more tangible vein, Béldi went on to add that Mahler and Nikisch had one thing in common: their dislike for ballet.<sup>26</sup>

It became obvious very quickly that, excellent a conductor as he was, Nikisch lacked both the interest and the aptitude for other facets of the music theatre. His debut (in *Tannhäuser* on September 16, 1893) elicited the highest praise; the public and critical success equalled those of Mahler's best productions. Within a month, though (especially, although not exclusively in connection with new productions), complaints began to mount concerning the disorganized and careless staging and directing of the operas. Inevitably, comparisons were made with production qualities under Mahler — further, clear evidence of the extent to which his all-encompassing involvement affected all facets of operatic performances during his regime.

By early November it was widely known that Mahler and Nikisch had something else in common beside their dislike for ballet: their unwillingness to tolerate Zichy's absolute and arbitrary rule. Clashes between Nikisch and the intendant culminated in December when the former (apparently with the encouragement of the recipient) sent a submission to the Interior Minister, outlining his objections to the opera statutes, and to Zichy's application of them. Minister Hieronymi, with the true panache of the statesman, handed down a temporizing decision in January, 1894: the statutes were to remain unchanged, but the director was to be allowed to function without constant interference even in minor matters. It seems that the definition of "minor matters" was left to Zichy's discretion.<sup>27</sup>

Even if the Minister's decision provided Zichy with temporary satisfaction, it seems that by this time he was becoming aware of his alienation from practically all factions of the artistic, political and public sectors. When Lajos Kossuth, the great statesman and hero of the 1848 revolution died in his Italian exile on March 20, 1894, public and private buildings in Budapest were draped in black flags, with the notable exception of the Opera and the National Theatre. In retaliation, a "mob" (actually, students), led by "journalists"(!), forced the cancellation of performances at both theatres on March 22nd. Zichy, fearing further demonstrations and "violence", asked the government for military protection. That no further trouble occurred was probably due to the government's declaration of an official period of mourning from March 30th to April 1st (to coincide with Kossuth's interment in Budapest); during this time, the Opera was closed. Zichy described these events in two letters to an unknown addressee on March 24th and 27th; he also commented in an uncharacteristically resigned tone on his "difficult position" as intendant.<sup>28</sup>

Almost immediately afterwards, a personal tragedy gave Zichy the opportunity to leave his post voluntarily. His wife died suddenly, and his request for a "temporary" leave of absence was granted immediately. To no one's surprise, as early as July 11th the King consented to Zichy's release as intendant.<sup>29</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, Ministerial Councillor József Stesser was appointed by the Minister in April, initially as a substitute for Zichy, and then to act as government commissioner of theatres until November. At that time another



“haughty magnate”, Baron Elek Nopcsa was appointed, first as commissioner and later as intendant, to remain in the position until the autumn of 1897.<sup>30</sup> If Nikisch had thought that a change of intendants would bring a change for the better in the artistic director’s lot, he was to be gravely disappointed. In retrospect, and in light of the events which led up to Zichy’s departure, it is quite perplexing to find that Nopcsa — recalling Zichy’s arrival in 1891 — quickly instituted new statutes which stripped away even the vestigial powers that had remained to the director after Zichy’s ‘revisions’. While the notorious § 40 of Zichy’s statutes was retained intact (renumbered as § 38), it is sufficient to cite but one of the new paragraphs to illustrate the complete and final degradation of the artistic director’s position. According to § 21, thenceforth the programme *and* the casting were to be determined not by the director, but at weekly meetings by the majority vote (!) of a committee consisting of the intendant, the director, the conductors, the business manager and the secretary; by special invitation of the intendant, this committee could be enlarged by adding the ballet master and “selected artists”. Any member of the committee was free to bring forth proposals on programming and casting. To dispel any illusions that this innovation aimed at a democratic management, the paragraph also provides that the intendant may alter the committee’s decisions after the fact, “should the institution’s best interests so dictate”.<sup>31</sup>

Though it would have happened in any case, Nikisch’s sudden departure from Budapest (reminiscent of Mahler’s departure) was precipitated by a direct clash with Nopcsa. When Nikisch failed to return to Budapest promptly at the end of his holidays on August 1, 1895, the intendant had Gamauf send him a curt telegram, ordering him to return immediately. Professing himself insulted, Nikisch submitted his resignation, and disclaimed any imputation of a breach of contract because of the circumstances. From subsequent developments it appears likely that Nikisch, like Mahler before him, had been preparing for such an eventuality by making arrangements for another position. Shortly after his resignation in Budapest, he took over the Gewandhaus concerts in Leipzig, at a salary considerably higher than what he had been paid in Budapest.<sup>32</sup> Even years later, Nikisch apparently recalled his time in Budapest with great bitterness, referring to it as “the unhappiest of his life”.<sup>33</sup> Here, again, we see a characteristic difference of type between Nikisch and Mahler. The even-tempered and peaceful Nikisch (even though he was Hungarian by birth) was left with permanently unpleasant memories of the personal and artistic difficulties he encountered during his two years as director of the Budapest Opera. On the other hand, it will be seen in the next chapter that, even though his experiences had been even more unpleasant, Mahler was at least tempted by the idea of returning to Budapest, both after Nikisch’s departure, and at the time of Nopcsa’s resignation as intendant.



## Chapter V

### MAHLER AND HUNGARY AFTER MARCH 15, 1891

For well over a decade after Mahler had left his post as artistic director of the Budapest Opera, the country whose people, customs and mores remained largely an enigma to him continued to play a role in his life. As we only know of two occasions with certainty on which Mahler visited Hungary after March, 1891, the thread can be traced chiefly through letters to family, friends and professional associates.

From the first letter — written to Siegfried Rosenberg on March 26, 1891 on her brother's behalf by Justine — it appears that in his hasty departure from Budapest Mahler had not taken time to stock up on certain mementos:

[...] Ferner läßt er Sie bitten, bei Kalmár Andrassystraße 29 6 Bilder von denen in ganzer Figur zu bestellen, da diese doch die besten sind [...] außerdem, von jenen Witzblatt (ich habe nämlich den Namen vergessen, es fängt mit Bol an, es ist dasselbe, das Sie für Frau Singer am Bahnhof kauften) einige Exemplare zu besorgen, und zwar dasjenige, in dem nach dem 20. Nov. 1890 [sic! 1889] eine Caricatur über die Symphonie des Bruders erschienen ist, und noch einige, in welchem er carikiert ist. [...]¹

Possibly again because he had not been able to say his farewells properly in March, it appears that Mahler returned to Budapest already in July, "to visit friends and supporters".² From what is chronologically the first of a series of extant letters to his good friend and comrade-in-arms Ödön von Mihalovich, we may surmise that Mahler had not taken his Hungarian friends' farewell gifts with him in March, but posted them from Budapest later, probably in July. This letter is also interesting for what it reveals about Mahler's partly sentimental, partly curious and inquisitive attitude towards Budapest at this time. Clearly, he was also aware of the difficulties Mihalovich had encountered with his opera, *Toldis Liebe*:

Verehrter Freund!

Zugleich mit diesen Zeilen geht ein Brief an den Grafen Apponyi ab, welcher in sehr ungenügenden Worten meinen Dank für die lieben Kleinodien [note by Mihalovich at the top of the page: Geschenke die Mahler bei seinem Abschied von seinen Freunden erhalten hat] ausspricht, welche ich der Güte meiner Freunde in Budapest verdanke. — Ich fühle mich beschämt, daß ich damit so spät erscheine — hoffentlich nicht so spät, daß ich dadurch mir einen Teil ihrer Sympathien verscherzt hätte. — Jedoch die Geschenke



kamen erst vor 3 Wochen in meine Hand. — Sie lagen den Sommer über bei der Postbehörde, woselbst ich den Auftrag gegeben, und dann — bei meiner Rückkehr nach Hamburg — durch Beschäftigungen dringendster Art ferner die unvermeidlichen Zollplackereien — etc. etc.

Und ich wollte doch nicht etwa bloß formaliter schreiben, bevor ich auch gesehen.

Wissen Sie, lieber Freund, daß mir ordentlich bange ist nach Budapest, und daß ich jetzt erst sehe, wir mir B schon eine zweite Heimat geworden?

Wie schade, daß wir uns nicht in Bayreuth getroffen! Was sagen Sie zu den Aufführungen und Verhältnissen daselbst?

Ihre Eliane liegt auf meinem Schreibtisch und ich hoffe, daß ich bei Pollini eine Aufführung derselben durchsetzen werde. — Wie steht es denn mit *Toldi*?

Ich überlege eben, ob es nicht doch besser wäre, da Sie, wie es scheint, in Pest doch nicht dazu kommen, lieber *Toldi* hier zu bringen. Wie mir nachgerade klar wird, sind die Chancen eines äußeren Erfolges doch größer bei *Toldi*! Überlegen Sie sich das einmal, und schreiben Sie mir bald darüber!

Von Pest weiß ich gar nichts, als was der Pester Lloyd sagt — und das scheint mir nach *aller* Richtung — siehe Jaszberenyi — nicht auf Untrüglichkeit zu beruhen. — Hoherfreut wäre ich, wenn ich aus berufenem Munde z. B. dem Ihrigen, einiges hören könnte. Ich bin hier natürlich inmitten größter Tätigkeit — dies brauche ich wohl nicht erst zu versichern.

An Familie *Vegh* meine herzlichsten Grüße auch an Singers wenn Sie sie sehen.

Ich grüße Sie vielmals

Ihr freundschaftlich ergebener  
Gustav Mahler

[At the top of the last page]: *Was macht die Oper?*<sup>3</sup>

A few months later, Mahler had the pleasure of seeing his own entirely original compositions published for the first time. These were the three volumes of the *Lieder und Gesänge*. It was probably in January, 1892 that he wrote to Ludwig Strecker, owner of the publishing firm B. Schott's Söhne in Mainz:

[...] Ich erlaube mir Sie ferner noch auf folgende mir *bekannte*, und wohlgesinnte Rezensenten aufmerksam zu machen, welchen ein Exemplar von Ihnen zugesendet ein willkommener Anlaß sein dürfte, eine Besprechung meiner Lieder vorzunehmen.

Wien

Pest

[...] <sup>4</sup>

Hanslick, Heuberger  
August Beer (Pester Lloyd)

Mahler had been correct in his expectation of a sympathetic reception for his *Lieder* at the *Pester Lloyd*. As early as February 8th, Beer published a brief but most favourable review of the three volumes.<sup>5</sup>



A recently discovered letter by Mahler throws new light on certain of his relationships in Budapest. His supposedly strained, even inimical relationship with the Opera orchestra is frequently mentioned in contemporary and later accounts. Yet, from this letter it seems that when Mahler was making plans for the 1892 opera season at Covent Garden in London, his first choice for an ensemble for the German repertory under his direction was the orchestra of the Royal Hungarian Opera! We may thus surmise either that his feuds with the orchestra had been exaggerated, or that Mahler forgave and forgot very quickly. Most likely, though, his respect for the orchestra was such that he was prepared to make a new start, as it were, in order to have their assistance in this important new venture. In any case, we know that the Budapest Opera orchestra did not go to London, for reasons that are no longer possible to determine with any certainty. Could it have been that Zichy — who no doubt had the final say in the matter — refused to give his permission?

The complete text of the letter is as follows:

Sehr geehrter Herr!

Hiemit erlaube ich mir an Sie, als den Vertreter des Orchesters der Kgl. Oper, die vorläufige Anfrage, ob das dortige Orchester geneigt wäre in der vom 24. Mai bis 20. Juli d. J. dauernden Opernsaison am *Conventgarden* [sic]-theater zu London in den Aufführungen der deutschen Opern des Repertoires (für italienische ist ein anderes engagiert) unter meiner Leitung tätig zu sein.

Falls die *Geneigtheit* des Orchesters constatiert ist, könnten die Unterhandlungen rasch zu Ende geführt sein. Für Sie zu bedenken wäre auch, daß intendiert ist, *alljährlich* in London solche Aufführungen zu *wiederholen*, und daß unter Umständen eine lohnende und *durchaus nicht anstregende* Tätigkeit den Herrn als Ausnützung eines Teils Ihrer ohnedies sehr lang ausgedehnten Ferien sich eröffnen könnte.

Jedenfalls bitte ich mir möglichst rasch im Allgemeinen zu antworten da *Sir Harris*, welcher das Unternehmen gründet in den nächsten Tagen sich zur Besprechung aus London hier einfinden wird, und jedenfalls rasch die Wahl treffen muß zwischen den Angeboten, die ihm vorliegen.

Für den Fall eine zustimmende Antwort Ihrerseits würde ich mich dann auch [one word illegible] an H. Grafen Zichy Ihretwegen wenden.

Mit Hochachtung ergebenst

Gustav Mahler

Bundesstraße 10

Hamburg

(oder Stadttheater)<sup>6</sup>

Having left Budapest presumably for good in March, 1891, Mahler continued to maintain some rather unexpected connections with that city. In an undated letter, assigned by Alma Mahler to the summer of 1894, Mahler wrote to Emil Freund:

[...] Das Geld bitte ich Dich nicht auf die erwähnte Weise zu verwenden, sondern sofort nach Empfang an meine Bank in Budapest zu senden. [...]<sup>7</sup>



In his English edition of the letters, Knud Martner quite reasonably questions the likelihood of Mahler retaining a bank account in Budapest for all those years.<sup>8</sup> However, the evidence of the 1894 letter appears to be corroborated in one from Mahler to his brothers and sisters, dating from October 1, 1892:

[...] Zugleich mit diesem Brief geht einer nach Pest an die Bank. Es werden in den nächsten Tagen an Deine Adresse, liebe Justi, 300 fl. abgehen. [...]<sup>9</sup>

Thus, curious as it may seem, there is little doubt that Mahler did, in fact, maintain a bank account in Budapest for some years after his departure from there in 1891.

As was seen in the preceding chapter, by the end of 1892 the lack of competent conductors had brought about a critical situation at the Budapest Opera. Around the same time, Zichy was starting to look around for an artistic director. From a letter Mahler wrote to Justine around the middle of January, 1893, it may be surmised that one of them had been contacted privately and tentatively by representatives from Budapest. Mahler's reaction to the thought of returning there, though probably a truer expression of his feelings, is in striking contrast with the tenor of his letter some 15 months earlier to Mihalovich. His remarks also throw interesting light on his perception (at least at this time) of the circumstances under which he went to Budapest in 1888:

[...] Was Pest anbetrifft, so kannst Du Dir wohl denken, daß ich nicht im Schläfe daran denke, dahin wieder zurückzugehen! Aber, ich werde mich wohl hüten, das jetzt schon auszusprechen! Nein! Sie sollen nur zuerst an mich kommen, und mir einen Antrag stellen! Dann ist mein *Triumph* vollendet! Was für eine Antwort die kriegen, kannst Du Dir denken. —

Natürlich — wie sich nichts vorausbestimmen läßt — so auch nicht, ob ich im Stande sein werde, mich einem Antrag gegenüber so zu benehmen, wie ich es jetzt vorhabe. — Es könnte wieder sein, daß ich in der Zeit wieder stellungslos wäre, und dann wäre ich vielleicht ebenso wie im Jahre 88 gezwungen, *Ja* zu sagen. —

[...] Sprich auch Du zu niemandem etwas über meine Ansichten bezüglich Pest. —

[...] <sup>10</sup>

We do not know whether Mahler had actually had an official enquiry from Budapest late in 1892 or early in 1893. In any case, a long letter to Mihalovich from around the same time includes not even an allusion to this matter, though several sections of it are concerned with Budapest:

Lieber und verehrter Freund!

Was werden Sie von mir denken, daß ich Ihren, mir sehr lieben, Brief, noch immer nicht beantwortet habe! — Ich sehe Sie ordentlich Ihren mächtigen Bart streichen in gerechtem Unwillen über die Faulheit des lässigen Freundes, und sogar steigen wohlbegründete Zweifel über die Treue desselben auf;



Kößler sitzt Ihnen gegenüber und streicht seinen Bart nach Norden und Süden, fährt sich dann durch das Haar und fegt denselben nach Osten und Westen und brummt unverständliche, aber nach seiner finstern Miene zu urteilen, geradezu vernichtende Worte, und zeigt sich da wie immer als schnöder Rhadomantys — bekanntlich der Strengste unter den Richtern des Tartarus. Mein Gott, wenn Sie mit mir hier in Hamburg lebten, würden Sie Alles begreifen! Es ist unglaublich, was ich hier zusammen dirigiere. Z. B. der Komik halber will ich Ihnen mein Repertoire der vorliegenden beiden Wochen schildern.

Montag 16: *Freund Fritz* (Première)

Dienstag (heute) *Siegfried*

Mittwoch 18 *Freund Fritz*

Freitag 20 *Tristan u. Isolde*

Sonntag 22 *Freund Fritz*

Montag 23 *Fidelio*

Dienstag 24 *Zauberflöte*

Mittwoch 25 *Lohengrin*

Donnerstag 26 *Jolanthe* (Oper von Tschaikowsky)

Freitag 27 *Walküre*

Samstag 28 *Freund Fritz*

Montag 30 *Bezähmte Widerspänstige* (Oper von Götz)

Dienstag *Freund Fritz!*

Also alles in Allem nur 3 freie Abende.

Rechnen Sie dazu die Proben, und urteilen Sie dann, ob ich zum Briefschreiben komme. —

Sie können sich gar nicht denken, wie *einsam* ich mich hier befinde. — Wie denke ich an unsere gemeinschaftlich durchlebten anregenden Abende in Pest zurück!

Sehr gespannt bin ich auf die Aufnahme, welche Ihr Werk (Toldi) beim Pester Publikum finden wird, und noch mehr, wie Sie über die Aufführung denken werden. Daß ich leider nicht kommen kann, werden Sie aus obigem "Speiszettel" [sic] ersehen können. — Es wäre mir wirklich eine große Freude gewesen, dabei sein zu können, und die lieben, alten Freunde wiederzusehen.

Die Erfolge des Grf Apponyi erfüllen mich mit großer Freude und *Bewunderung*. Wahrlich, die Ungarn sind jetzt der Welt politisch um eine gute Nasenlänge voraus! Mit Neid nur können wir Deutsche nach dem Osten blicken. — Ich habe die Entwicklung nur aus der Ferne miterlebt, und Sie werden wahrscheinlich in Pest aus der Nähe nicht so sanguinisch darüber denken. — Aber ich habe es bis jetzt immer erlebt: eine große Bewegung kann doch am Besten *aus der Ferne* beurteilt werden; da der Blick in der Nähe eben von Einzelheiten und persönlichen Dispositionen zu sehr getrübt ist. Bitte, richten Sie dem Grf Apponyi dies von mir aus, und daß man *überall* so denkt, wo ich nur hinkomme. *Vor ihm* hat man einen großen Respect — einen um so geringeren vor Freund *Maxien*!\*

\*[footnote by Mihalovich: "vielleicht Max Falk, Redakteur im Pester Lloyd"]

Der Pester Lloyd, den ich natürlich noch immer lese, benimmt sich nach wie vor gleich jämmerlich! Aber die



Bocksprünge, die er in der letzten Zeit gemacht hat, übersteigen doch das Maß des Gewöhnlichen! —

Von mir ist eigentlich nicht viel zu berichten. —

Ich dirigierte hier im Bülow-concert in Vertretung des erkrankten Meisters. Unter Anderem dirigierte ich die *C-moll*! — Denken Sie sich, daß ich von den hiesigen Recensenten teilweise in *unflätigster* Manier wie ein Schuljunge über meine "Auffassung" zurechtgewiesen wurde. — Unwillkürlich mußte ich dann nach Pest denken, wo man mich so *gut* verstanden. — Mit Ihrer Eliane habe ich ein eigenes Pech! — Doch gebe ich *noch die Hoffnung* nicht auf, sie hier zur Aufführung zu bringen. — Ich muß nur einen günstigen Moment abwarten, um Pollini dafür zu gewinnen. —

Ich "stehe" jetzt wieder auf ziemlich gutem Fuß mit ihm. — Das heurige Jahr ist jedoch schon *besetzt*. — Es wäre daher vergebliche Mühe, ihn für jetzt zu haranguieren und würde vielleicht die Sache überhaupt bei ihm verschütten, da er darin ein Stimmungsmensch. — Dagegen werde ich auf der Wacht stehen, es für *nächstes Jahr* durchzusetzen. (Ich bin noch bis Frühjahr 94 engagiert — länger bleibe ich *keinesfalls* hier) — Also, bitte, lassen Sie die Noten noch eine Weile bei mir. Vielleicht gelingt es mir doch endlich einmal. — Jedenfalls aber bitte um einen Bericht über die *Pester* Aufführung welche ich für sehr wichtig halte.

Grüßen Sie bitte vielmals alle Freunde von mir und empfehlen Sie bestens dem Grf. Apponyi und Familie Vegh.

Ihr freundschaftlich  
ergebener  
Gustav Mahler<sup>11</sup>

A unique document originated from Mahler's pen at the beginning of February. It is in the form of a long letter to a certain Gisela Tolnay-Witt, a young girl in Budapest. Although some of his other letters (*e. g.*, those to Max Marschalk) contain comments and speculation on various developments in music, in this letter Mahler described his personal view of music history. It is an interesting and revealing melange of the perceptive and the erudite, and of the naive and ingenuous:

Liebes Fräulein!

Obwohl ich nicht leicht zu einem "Briefwechsel" zu bewegen bin, und meine besten Freunde sich nach dieser Richtung über mich beklagen müssen, so fühle ich mich doch gereizt, eine Frage in Ihrem letzten Briefe zu beantworten: "ob es denn eines so großen Apparates wie des Orchesters bedarf, um einen großen Gedanken auszudrücken". — Ich muß aber etwas weit ausholen, um Ihnen verständlich zu machen, wie ich die Sache sehe. —

Sie scheinen sich in der musikalischen Literatur umgesehen zu haben, und ich nehme an, daß auch die alte und ältere Musik bis Bach nicht ganz unbekannt ist. Ist Ihnen da nicht *Zerlei* aufgefallen?

*Erstens*, daß, je weiter Sie in der Zeit zurückgehen, desto primitiver die



Bezeichnungen für den Vortrag werden, d. h. desto mehr die Autoren die Auslegung ihres Gedankens den Interpreten überlassen. — Z. B. bei Bach finden Sie nur in den seltensten Fällen eine Tempobezeichnung oder sonst irgend eine Andeutung, wie er sich die Sache vorgetragen denkt — selbst die allergrößten Unterscheidungen wie *p* oder *ff* etc. fehlen. (Dort wo Sie sie finden, sind sie gewöhnlich erst von den Herausgebern, meist sogar ganz verkehrt, hinzugefügt.)

*Zweitens:* Je weiter sich die Musik entwickelt, desto komplizierter wird der Apparat, den der Komponist aufbietet, um seine Ideen auszudrücken. Vergleichen Sie nur einmal das Orchester, das *Haydn* in seinen Symphonien anwendet (d. h. so wie Sie es in der Redoute[nsaal in Budapest] in den philharmonischen Konzerten sehen, war es nicht — denn da sind schon mehr als die Hälfte der Instrumente *hinzugekommen*) mit dem Orchester, das Beethoven in seiner IX. fordert — von Wagner und den Neuern gar nicht zu reden.

Woher kommt das? — Glauben Sie, daß so etwas Zufall ist oder gar eine *unnötige*, bloß aus anmaßlicher Laune hervorgegangene Verschwendung des Komponisten? —

Nun will ich Ihnen meine Ansicht darüber sagen!: Die Musik war in ihren Anfängen lediglich “Kammermusik”, d. h. darauf berechnet, in einem kleinen Raum vor einem kleinen Auditorium (oft bloß aus den Mitwirkenden bestehend) zu erklingen. Die Empfindungen, welche ihr zu Grunde lagen, der Zeit gemäß *einfach*, naiv, nur in allergrößten Zügen die Erlebnisse des Gemüts wiedergebend: Freudigkeit, Traurigkeit, etc. Die “*Musicantes*” waren ihrer Sache sicher, sie bewegten sich in einem ihnen geläufigen Kreise der Ideen, und auf Grund einer festbegrenzten und innerhalb dieser Grenzen wohlgegründeten Kunstfertigkeit! Daher schrieben die Komponisten nichts vor — es war selbstverständlich, daß alles richtig gesehen, gefühlt und gehört wurde. “*Dilletiert*” wurde kaum (Beispiel[e], wie etwa Friedrich d. Gr. und andere waren wohl nur sehr vereinzelt.); sondern die Vornehmen, Besitzenden ließen sich höchstens von Bezahlten und “*Gelernten*” in der Kammer zu ihrem Vergnügen vormusizieren, und daher wurden die Kompositionen auch nicht von dem Unverstand mißhandelt! Gewöhnlich dürfte sogar Autor und “*musicans*” ein und dasselbe Individuum gewesen sein.

In der Kirche, welche natürlich die Haupt-Domäne dieser Kunst war, und woher sie ja auch gekommen, war von vorneherein Alles durch das Rituale genau bestimmt. Mit einem Worte, die Komponisten fürchteten nicht, mißverstanden zu werden, und begnügten sich mit skizzenhaften Aufzeichnungen für den eigenen Gebrauch — ohne besonders daran zu denken, daß andere dieselben zu interpretieren hätten, oder gar falsch interpretieren könnten.

Mit der Zeit dürften sie jedoch schlimme Erfahrungen gemacht haben und wurden nun darauf bedacht, durch nicht mißzudeutende Zeichen ihre Intentionen dem Ausführenden mitzuteilen. — So entstand allmählich ein großes System einer Zeichensprache, welche — wie die Notenköpfe für die Tonhöhe — für Zeitmaß oder Tonstärke bestimmte Anhalte gab.



Hand in Hand damit ging aber auch die *Aneignung neuer Gefühlselemente* als Gegenstände der Nachbildung in Tönen — d. h. der Komponist fing an, immer tiefere und kompliziertere Seiten seines Gefühllebens in das Gebiet seines Schaffens einzubeziehen — bis mit Beethoven die *neue Ära* der Musik begann: Von nun an sind nicht mehr die *Grundtöne* der Stimmung — also z. B. bloße Freudigkeit oder Traurigkeit etc. — sondern auch der Übergang von einem zum anderen — Konflikte — die äußere Natur und ihre Wirkung auf uns — Humor und poetische Ideen die Gegenstände der musikalischen Nachbildung.

Hier genügten nicht mehr noch so komplizierte Zeichen — sondern anstatt dem einzelnen Instrument eine so reichhaltige Palette von Farben (wie Herr Aug[ust] Beer sagen würde) zuzumuten, nahm der Komponist für je eine Farbe ein Instrument (die Analogie ist ja im Worte “Klangfarbe” festgehalten). So wuchs allmählich aus diesem Bedürfnis heraus das moderne, das “Wagnerische” Orchester.

Ich hätte nur noch drittens die äußerliche Nötigung zur Vergrößerung des musikalischen Apparates zu erwähnen: die Musik wurde mehr und mehr Gemeingut — der Hörer und Spieler wurden immer mehr und mehr — aus der Kammer wurde der Konzertsaal und aus der Kirche mit ihrem *einen* Instrument, der Orgel, wurde das Operntheater. Also Sie sehen, wenn ich noch einmal resumiere: Wir Modernen brauchen einen so großen Apparat, um *unsere* Gedanken, ob groß oder klein, auszudrücken. — *Erstens* — weil wir gezwungen sind, um uns vor falscher Auslegung zu schützen, die zahlreichen Farben unseres Regenbogens auf verschiedene Paletten zu verteilen; *zweitens*, weil unser Auge im Regenbogen immer mehr und mehr Farben und immer zartere und feinere Modulationen sehen lernt, *drittens*, weil wir, um in den übergroßen Räumen unserer Konzertsäle und Operntheater von vielen gehört zu werden, auch einen großen Lärm machen müssen.

— Sie werden nun zwar vielleicht nach Art der Frauen, welche beinahe nie überzeugt, höchstens überredet werden können, mir einwenden: “Ja, war denn Bach kleiner als Beethoven oder ist Wagner größer als er?” — Dann aber werde ich Ihnen sagen, Sie kleiner “Plagegeist” (wirklich Plagegeist, denn ich plage mich nun schon bald eine Stunde an diesem Brief) — “dies zu beantworten müssen Sie sich an Einen wenden, der die ganze geistige Geschichte der Menschheit mit einem Blick übersehen kann”. — Wir sind einmal so, wie wir sind! Wir “Modernen”! Sogar Sie sind so! Wenn ich Ihnen nun beweise, daß Sie, kleiner Plagegeist, einen größer[en] Apparat für Ihr Leben beanspruchen als die Königin von England im 17. Jahrhundert, welche, wie ich kürzlich gelesen, zum Frühstück ein Pfund Speck und eine Maß Bier bekam, und am Abend beim Scheine einer Talgkerze in Ihrer Kemenate sich die Langeweile mit Spinnen oder Ähnlichem vertrieb? Was sagen Sie nun?

Also fort mit dem Klavier! Fort mit der Violine! Die sind gut für die “Kammer”, wenn Sie allein oder in Gesellschaft eines guten Kameraden sich die Werke der großen Meister vergegenwärtigen wollen — als Nachhall —



etwa wie ein Kupferstich Ihnen das farbenglänzende Gemälde eines Raffael oder Böcklin in die Erinnerung zurückruft. — Hoffentlich war ich Ihnen verständlich — und in diesem Falle soll es mich nicht verdrießen, Ihnen, die ein so liebenswertes Vertrauen in einen Unbekannten setzt, eine Stunde meines Lebens gewidmet zu haben. —

Da nun die Epistel so lang geworden, möchte ich auch wissen, ob ich sie nicht umsonst geschrieben, und bitte, mich wissen zu lassen, ob sie richtig Ihre Hände gekommen. Mit den besten Wünschen

Gustav Mahler<sup>12</sup>

Next we find Mahler writing to Mihalovich after the March 18, 1893 première of *Toldis Liebe* at the Budapest Opera. Apparently, the news of Nikisch's appointment had also reached him by this time:

Verehrter Freund!

Mit großer Teilnahme habe ich die Vorbereitungen zu "Toldi" in Pester Lloyd verfolgt und endlich die Erstaufführung im Geiste miterlebt. — Wie ich mich freue, lieber Freund, nunmehr aus den Berichten zu ersehen, daß Ihr Werk einen großen Erfolg errungen, und seinem Autor endlich die verdiente, so lange vorenthaltene Anerkennung seines Talentes und Geistes gebracht.

Ich wollte Ihnen eigentlich am Tage der ersten Aufführung telegrafieren. unterließ aber im Hinblick darauf, daß Sie wohl zu aufgeregt waren, um Sinn für so äußerliche Zeichen der Teilnahme zu haben. —

Nun aber ist es mir ein Bedürfnis von Ihnen selbst zu hören, wie Sie mit der Aufführung, dem Publikum zufrieden waren, und welchen Eindruck Sie selbst hatten!

Ich stehe jetzt *sehr gut* mit Pollini, und hoffe bestimmt eine Aufführung einer Ihrer Opern für nächstes Jahr durchzusetzen.

Daß Nikisch als mein Nachfolger nach Pest engagiert ist, las ich, und beglückwünsche Sie aufrichtig zu dieser famosen Acquisition. — Das ist ein ausgezeichnete feinsinniger Musiker, an dem Sie viele Freude erleben werden.

Die Erfolge des Grf. Apponyi verfolge ich (durch "die Lügengestalt" des Pester Lloyd) mit sehr großer Teilnahme und Freude. Jetzt scheint wirklich der Tag nicht mehr ferne zu sein, wo dieser geniale Mensch endlich an den Platz kommen wird, wohin einzig er gehört: an die Spitze der Regierung. Es ist wirklich traurig, daß ein solcher Mensch seine besten Jahre und frischesten Kräfte bloß mit Wegräumung der *Hindernisse* zubringen muß, mit welcher die Kleinheit und Borniertheit seinen Flug aufhält. Bitte, lassen Sie mich wieder einmal ein kräftiges Wörtlein über sich und alle Freunde hören. — Wo werden Sie im Sommer sein? Der heurige darf doch nicht wieder vorübergehen, ohne daß wir uns gesehen!



Grüßen Sie herzlichst unsere beiderseitige Freunde Kössler u. Herzfeld und empfehlen Sie mich wärmstens dem Grf. Apponyi und Familie Vegh! Ihr treu ergebener

Gustav Mahler<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after he had written the above letter, Mahler, who never failed to include greetings to various Hungarian friends in his letters to Mihalovich, had the pleasure of seeing some of them in person in Hamburg. He expressed his joy in a letter to Justine:

Erst das allerneueste: *Singers* von Pest haben mich auf *einen* Tag hier besucht. — Ich habe sie selbstverständlich "fetirt". — Sie scheinen wirklich um mich zu besuchen, eine so weite Reise gemacht zu haben.

[...]<sup>14</sup>

As is implied by the apologies with which Mahler opened a long letter on February 7, 1894, he must have neglected his correspondence with Mihalovich for an extended time. In this letter, now, Mahler described his own uncertain future, and commented on the opinions and news emanating from Budapest with respect to Nikisch and the Opera:

Hochverehrter Freund!

Ihr Brief war mir eine große Freude und zugleich ein brennender Vorwurf. Wie oft dachte ich an Sie und immer hatte ich es vor, Ihnen zu schreiben. Aber Sie wissen ja, wie der Musikant lebt: immer nur in der Phantasie. Briefe denken kann er — aber schreiben, dazu ist er zu lüderlich! — Voriges Jahr lebten wir ganz nahe von einander — ich in einem wahren *dolce far niente*! Sie wissen, daß man in einem solchen Zustand am allerwenigsten zur Ausführung eines Entschlusses kommt, und ehe man sich umsieht ist die Zeit verflossen. —

Am allermeisten drückt es mich, daß ich Ihren Eliane immer noch auf dem Schreibtisch und nicht auf dem Dirigierpult habe. — Mein Vertrag mit Pollini geht heuer zu Ende, und immer dachte ich mir, daß die Unterhandlungen zu einer Erneuerung desselben mir die so lang gewünschte Gelegenheit geben würden, die Aufführung Ihres Werkes bei Pollini durchzusetzen. — Aber leider scheint diese Hoffnung mich betrogen zu haben. Ich werde voraussichtlich mit Ende dieser Saison Hamburg verlassen und muß Ihnen schweren Herzens den Eliane nun wirklich zurücksenden. Nicht, als ob Pollini sich nicht bemüht hätte, mich wieder zu engagieren. Er wäre auch zu allen materiellen Opfern bereit gewesen; aber gerade meinen künstlerischen Forderungen, welche, wie Sie ja wissen, mir weit über über [sic!] meine persönlichen Interessen gehen, giebt er vor, nicht erfüllen zu können, und so bin ich nun schon entschlossen wieder einmal den "Staub von den Schuhen zu schütteln"! So viel ich weiß, sind schon Unterhandlungen mit *Strauss* in Weimar angeknüpft, welcher, wie er mir sagte, Lust hätte, mein Nachfolger



hier zu werden. Ich bedauere den armen Kerl schon jetzt, denn, so weit ich diesen famosen Menschen kenne, ist auch er nicht der Mann der Concessionen.

Sehr enttäuscht bin ich durch Ihr Urteil über Nikisch! Das dachte ich schon, daß er als *Direktor* einer Oper nicht am Platz sein würde, mit seinem weichlichen und etwas passiven Naturell, aber daß er auch als *Dirigent* so äußerlich und frivol geworden ist, das hätte ich ihm nicht zugetraut.

Es ist doch ein eigentümliches Geschick, daß über diesem unglücklichen Institute waltet. Ich lese beinahe regelmäßig den "Pester Lloyd". Daraus freilich kann man kein Urteil gewinnen. Es fiel mir auf, daß das Repertoire sehr schablonenmäßig aufgestellt war; über den Wert der Vorstellungen selbst konnte ich keine Meinung gewinnen. — Herr A. B. scheint jetzt sehr civilisiert und wohlwollend geworden zu sein. Leider war ich nicht so glücklich, von ihm so zart behandelt zu werden.

Mit regster Teilnahme verfolgte ich besonders die politischen Constellationen der letzten Jahre, und kann Ihnen ganz unbefangen erklären (so weit ich als treuer Verehrer des Grf. Apponyi objektiv bleiben kann) daß ich den Eindruck habe, als ob Ungarn noch nie so *undankbar* gegen seine großen Söhne gewesen ist, als jetzt gegen Apponyi. In alle Welt werden jetzt die Errungenschaften Wekerles hinausposaunt. Ja, zum Teufel, *wer* war es denn, der in den schwierigsten Zeiten, immer und wieder die *Forderungen* aufgestellt und durchgekämpft, die *jetzt erfüllt* werden? Wer anders, als *Apponyi*? Ich meine, dahin müßte er das Schwergewicht seines Verhaltens legen, es den Menschen klar zu legen, daß die ganzen Erfolge Wekerles eben der treuen Ausdauer Apponyis und seiner Partei zu danken ist; und daß offenbar, wenn er nicht seit Jahren immer und immer wieder unter fortwähren [sic!] Opfern und Mühen diesen Ruf erhoben hätte, wahrscheinlich Alles weiter den Tisza'schen Trott weitergetrappelt wäre. — Man erinnert sich da wirklich an das Vergil'sche "tulit alter honores" etc. — Ist denn Niemand da, der das einsehen und sagen könnte!? Wie denkt er denn selbst darüber. Immer möchte ich ihm zurufen: Kopf hoch! du bist der, der das gemacht, und die Zeit *wird kommen*, die es anerkennen wird und muß! —

Wenn er sich nur *jetzt* nicht zu einem falschen Schritt verleiten läßt! Allerdings ist es schwer, so viel "Tücke des Objects" zu ertragen. — *Ich* kann es ihm nachfühlen — im Kleinen geht es mir eben auch so.

Aber, bei Gott! Wenn ich auch *betteln* gehen müßte — ich lasse meine Fahne nicht!

Im Sommer heuer komme ich bestimmt nach Aussee, wo ich hoffentlich Grf. A. sehen werde. — Von den anderen Freunden haben Sie gar nichts geschrieben? Wie geht es Vegh's? Kössler? —

Entschuldigen Sie das Gekritzel der vorstehenden Seiten. So wie ich während des Schreibens eifrig werde, kann meine Kratzfüße niemand mehr ordentlich lesen.

Sehr erfreuen würden Sie mich durch einen *ausführlicheren* Bericht über sich und Grf. A.

Ihre Umarbeitung des Toldi möchte ich im Sommer kennen lernen. Ich



freue mich auch sehr darüber; denn, Sie wissen, wir sprachen schon damals von der Notwendigkeit.

Nun sind Sie recht herzlich begrüßt und empfehlen Sie mich oftmals den alten Freunden. Ich denke treulichst Ihrer und Aller!

Ihr

Gustav Mahler<sup>15</sup>

It may seem surprising that, as his lengthy comments in letter after letter show, Mahler followed the Hungarian political situation with such keen interest. To a considerable extent this was due to his genuine admiration and friendship for Apponyi. At the same time (especially in view of the events to affect the Opera which were already in the air, so to speak), it is possible that Mahler's interest in political developments was coloured — even if subconsciously — by his ambivalent attitude to a possible return to Budapest.

Only two months after the above letter, Zichy fell as intendant in Budapest. It is a pity that Mahler's comments have not been preserved (and it is inconceivable that he would not have commented on such an event in his letters). In fact, it is evident that several of Mahler's letters to Mihalovich, subsequent to the above date, have been lost; the next letter we possess was written more than two years later. In the meantime, Mahler had decided to remain in Hamburg (although this now became a year-to-year proposition), Nopcsa took over the Hungarian theatres from Zichy, and Nikisch suddenly left Budapest. For want of other documentation, the thread of Mahler's connection with Hungarian affairs during this time must be followed through Diósy's account. Amazingly (surely, he must have been aware of the further revision of the Opera statutes by Nopcsa!), Mahler was prepared to return to Budapest in August, 1895:

Nach dem Rücktritt Nikisch's wurde von Verehrern M[ahler]s eine Bewegung eingeleitet, den Künstler für Budapest wiederzugewinnen. Seine Tätigkeit bei Pollini ging zu Ende und M[ahler] wäre trotz aller ihm widerfahrenen Unbill bereit gewesen, einen neuerlichen Rufe an das Institut, an dem ja der Stern seines Genies aufgegangen war, Folge zu leisten. Im Besitze von M[ahler]s schriftlicher Zusage wurde an den damaligen Intendanten Baron Nopcsa — der Nikisch vertrieben hatte — herangetreten. Ein allzu energisches Eintreten für den Künstler hatte indes ein Duell Nopcsa's mit dem Schreiber dieser Zeilen zur Folge — und damit war der schöne Plan begraben.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the fact that his future had seemingly become uncertain again, no bitterness — only surprise and, perhaps, a measure of sarcasm — colour Mahler's comment on Káldy's appointment as director in Budapest when he next wrote to Mihalovich:



## Verehrtester Freund!

Ich möchte die "Ferien" nicht antreten, ohne eine Schuld einzulösen, die mich schon seit Langem sehr drückt! Was werden Sie, lieber Freund, gedacht haben, aus ich auf die freundliche Zusendung Ihres "Toldi" mit der lieben Widmung, Wochen und Wochen verstreichen ließ, ohne zu antworten? — Die Sache kam freilich ganz natürlich, und könnten Sie meine Nieren prüfen, so wäre Ihnen mein Stillschweigen ein Beweis dafür, in welchen Ehren ich die Zusendung hielt. Einige gewöhnliche Dankesphrasen wollte ich Ihnen nicht senden, und kam gerade in jenen Wochen absolut nicht dazu vor Berufsarbeiten aller Art, mich zu einem ordentlichen Briefe hinzusetzen; und Sie wissen, je länger man so einen Brief aufschiebt, desto schwerer entschließt man sich dazu! Aber ich kenne Sie als langmütig und ich weiß, Sie werden Gnade für Recht ergehen lassen.

Am liebsten wäre mir als Antwort die Nachricht gewesen, daß wir Ihren Toldi hier in Hamburg aufführen. Aber mit Pollini war heuer nichts zu tun — er schwebte Monate hindurch zwischen Tod und Leben. Und nun bin ich so weit mit ihm, daß ich Hamburg wahrscheinlich schon im *September* für *immer* verlaße. Wohin ich gehe, weiß ich vorderhand noch nicht, doch das wird sich in der Sommermonaten finden. So wie ich aber einmal irgendwo was zu sagen habe kommt Ihr Toldi oder Ihre Eliane dran: Das habe ich mir fest gelobt. — Im Sommer bin ich wieder am Attersee, und ich hoffe, daß er nicht wieder vorüber gehen wird, ohne daß wir uns gesehen und gesprochen haben. *Wie viel* habe ich Ihnen zu erzählen. Wie geht es jetzt in Pest? Daß *Kaldy* mein Nachfolger geworden war allerdings für mich die *unerwarteste* Lösung der Frage! Doch es ist nicht unerwartet, wenn die Fragen an der Pester Oper unerwartet gelöst werden — Was macht Graf Apponyi? Ich bitte Sie, mich ihm bestens zu empfehlen, und seien Sie von mir aufs herzlichste begrüßt mein lieber Freund von Ihrem

treu ergebensten  
Gustav Mahler<sup>17</sup>

Was Mahler dissimulating with his old friend Mihalovich? Did he have something definite in mind as a solution for his employment problems during the "summer months"? Was Káldy's appointment (one that was, indeed, "most unexpected", considering Káldy's past history) seen by well-placed Hungarians only as a temporary measure in August, 1895? Had Diósy's "beautiful plan" perhaps not really been "buried" as early as 1895, as it seemed to him some 20 years later? A letter Mahler wrote to Diósy in the summer of 1896 appears to indicate that the answer to all of the foregoing questions is in the affirmative (unless the published date of the letter is incorrect!); evidently, the 'unofficial' correspondence concerning Mahler's return to Budapest continued into 1896:



Verehrtester Freund!

Verzeihen Sie, daß ich Ihre liebenswürdigen Zeilen erst so spät erwidere. Der Hauptgrund davon ist, daß ich jetzt über Hals und Kopf in der Arbeit stecke, die mich rein jedes anderen Gedankens unfähig macht. — Daneben befinde ich mich Ihnen gegenüber auch in einer etwas ungeschickten Situation. Was soll und kann ich Ihnen auf Ihre so wohlgemeinten Ausführungen antworten? Daß ich gerne einem Rufe nach Budapest Folge leisten werde, wenn ein solcher an mich ergeht, habe ich Ihnen ja schon geschrieben. — Es kommt eben ganz darauf an, unter welchen Bedingungen und von welcher Seite eine solche Berufung erfolgt. — Aber mich in eine Intrigue einlassen, oder auch nur die Ursache einer solchen zu sein, steht mir ferne!

Ich gehe für den heurigen Winter nach Hamburg zurück. Erfolgt ein Ruf an mich, solange ich noch frei bin, so soll es mich aufrichtig freuen, wenn ich demselben Folge leisten kann. Natürlich muß derselbe von autoritativer Seite ausgehen. — Ich glaube selbst, daß man die Entwicklung der Dinge ruhig abwarten muß. Es ist ja hinreichend, wenn die Pester wissen, daß ich eventuell "zu haben" bin. Das andere ist eben ihre Sache und nicht die meine! [...] Wenn Sie von einer neuen "Phase" der Dinge zu erzählen wissen, so werden Sie immer einen sehr gespannten Leser oder Zuhörer haben an [mich]! [...] <sup>18</sup>

While there came, indeed, a "new phase" about a year later (at least for Diósy), for now Mahler was in some uncertainty as to his future. A letter he wrote to Anna Mildenburg about four weeks after the above one seems to confirm what he wrote to Mihalovich in May:

[...] Wie die Verhältnisse sich [in Hamburg] entwickeln werden, kann vielleicht Pollini selbst nicht einmal ahnen. [...] Ob es Pollini gelingen wird, mich hinauszugraulen? Was ich dann täte, wüßte ich vorderhand wirklich nicht, da *nirgends* eine Stellung frei ist, die ich annehmen könnte. [...] <sup>19</sup>

Both this uncertainty and Mahler's continuing — if reluctant — consideration of a return to Budapest are confirmed in Bruno Walter's letter of August 6, 1896 to his parents:

[...] Vielleicht habt Ihr auch schon darüber gelesen, daß Pesth überhaupt rebellieren soll, um Mahler wieder dorthin zu bekommen. [...] Mahler verhält sich ganz passiv dabei und freut sich, wie dort alles drunter und drüber geht. [...] Ich bezweifle, daß Mahler nach Pesth geht, er täte es sehr ungern; wenn er es täte, würde er aber erst nächste Saison gehen, und mit einem noch nie dagewesenen Kontrakt.

[...] <sup>20</sup>



Before the year was out, however, Mahler must have abandoned all thoughts of returning to Budapest under the impact of a new, and in all likelihood previously unexpected, possibility. An extant series of four letters to Mihalovich from December and January virtually bristle with Mahler's determination to leave no stone unturned in pursuing the chance of a lifetime: an appointment to the Imperial Opera in Vienna. The first, and clearly initial letter on the subject to Mihalovich is dated December 21, 1896:

[Above the salutation, written upside down:] Ich schreibe H. Grafen Apponyi unter derselben Adresse wie Ihnen! Ist dies richtig?

Hochverehrter Freund!

Ich bitte Sie heute um einen Freundschaftsdienst, von dem die Gestaltung meines ganzen Schicksals abhängt. — In Wien ist die Kapellmeister- resp. *Direktorsfrage* akut. — In erster Linie stehe *ich* dabei in "Frage". —

2 Umstände sind mir dabei in Wege. Erstens, wie ich höre, meine "Verrücktheit", welche meine Feinde immer und immer wieder in's Feld schicken, so wie es gilt mir die Wege zu verrammeln. 2. daß ich als Jude geboren bin. Was dies anbetrifft, so möchte ich nicht verfehlen, Ihnen mitzuteilen (falls Sie es nicht schon wissen) daß ich bald nach meinem Abgange von Pest meinen Übertritt zum Katholicismus vollzogen habe. —

In erster Linie kommt bei der Besetzung der Stelle Fürst Liechtenstein in Betracht. — Doch läßt sich auch gewiß noch von anderer Seite her wirken. Mein lieber und verehrter Freund, bitte, tun Sie nun für mich, was in Ihren Kräften ist.

An Grafen Apponyi habe ich soeben auch geschrieben. Ich habe, wie Sie wissen, gar keine Verbindungen! Meine ganze Hoffnung beruht daran, daß Sie und Grf Apponyi Ihren Einfluß zu meinen Gunsten in's Feld führen werden.

Es ist nur noch ein letzter Streich zu führen, da meine Berufung in Wien, wie mir eben von offizieller Seite mitgeteilt wird, ernst in's Auge gefaßt worden ist.

Werden und können Sie mir diesen Liebesdienst erweisen? Ich möchte noch im Interesse der Sache, damit nicht zu unrechter Zeit von Mißwollenden entgegen gearbeitet werden kann, betonen, daß alles *sehr geheim* bleiben muß. Ich bitte Sie *dringendst* darum; es geht sonst alles schief. Ich lege mein Schicksal in Ihre Hände. Sie und Grf Apponyi werden Mittel und Wege wissen, für mich eine günstige Wendung herbeizuführen.

In Erwartung einer freundlichen Antwort bin ich Ihr

treu ergebenster  
Gustav Mahler<sup>21</sup>

Only one day later, he wrote to Mihalovich again:



Hochverehrter Freund!

Als Nachtrag zu meinem gestrigen Brief möchte ich noch erwähnen, was ich gestern in der großen Eile zu tun vergessen, daß auch die Grafen Kinsky und Wilczek in dieser Angelegenheit sehr einflußreich sein sollen. Vielleicht findet sich auch zu diesen Herrn ein Weg von Ihnen. Könnte nicht auch *Beniczky* als mein früherer Chef herangezogen werden, der wohl geneigt sein wird, mich zu unterstützen? Bitte, mein lieber Freund, versäumen Sie Nichts in dieser Angelegenheit; es bedarf jetzt nur noch eines kräftigen Vorstoßes in dieser Sache, um mich siegreich an's Ziel zu führen.

Vielleicht sind Sie ja, lieber Freund, ein wenig an dieser Sache beteiligt; da so endlich auch für Sie und Ihre Werke die Arene gewonnen wären. — Hoffentlich mißverstehen Sie diese Bemerkung nicht. — Sie kommt mir eben spontan, und soll nicht etwa Ihrer freundschaftlichen Hilfe ein "Ansporn" sein.

Ich bin wirklich ganz erregt durch diese Aussicht, *endlich* nach meinen endlosen Irrfahrten, als Künstler an ein würdiges Feld zu gelangen, auf dem ich von dem elenden Theatertrödel für immer befreit wäre. — Auch wäre nicht so anmaßend, nun meinen lieben Freund für mich in Bewegung setzen zu wollen, wenn ich nicht die Überzeugung hätte, daß ich durch mein Wollen und Können die Berechtigung dazu in mir trüge. Und auch Sie, ich weiß es, werden mir hierin Recht geben.

Bitte, lassen Sie mich bald wissen, ob Sie in der Lage waren, etwas für mich zu tun.

Kommen Sie oder Grf Apponyi nicht in der nächsten Zeit nach Wien? Ich vermute, daß eine persönliche Intervention die größte Wirkung ausüben würde. — Ist Grf Apponyi gegenwärtig überhaupt in *Pest*, und hat er meinen Brief bekommen?

Herzlichst grüße ich Sie, mein verehrter Freund und harre sehnsuchtsvoll auf eine günstige Antwort.

Ihr treu ergebenster  
Gustav Mahler<sup>22</sup>

The next letter dates from January 3, 1897. It reads as follows:

Mein teurer Freund!

Haben Sie herzlichsten Dank für Ihren lieben Brief. — Nun noch etwas: Wäre es Ihnen nicht möglich mit **Besetzny** [sic!] und **Wlassak** [sic!] entweder gelegentlich eines Besuches in Wien, oder wenigstens vermittelt eines Briefes in Verbindung zu treten? Dieß wäre jetzt, wie ich von eingeweihter Seite höre, das beste Mittel, die Sache für mich in günstigsten Fluß zu bringen. — Meine Chancen sind überaus günstig. — Es bedarf nur noch eines Vorstoßes von meinen Freunden, um alle jene Bedenken, von denen ich Ihnen schon geschrieben, zu zerstreuen, und mich an das gewünschte Ziel zu bringen.

Mein lieber Freund! Lassen Sie jetzt nur nicht locker: und wenn es Ihnen



irgendwie möglich, erweisen Sie mir den Freundschaftsdienst, und gehen Sie auf einen Tag nach Wien, um *Besetzny* und *Wlassak* für mich zu bearbeiten. Ich habe da gerade zu Ihrer Stellung in der Welt, und andererseits zu Ihrer persönlichen Fähigkeit, die Menschen zu Ihrer Ansicht zu bekehren, das größte Vertrauen! —

Es drängt die Zeit, denn, wie gesagt, die Kapellmeisterstellung soll in allernächster Zeit besetzt werden, und wie ich weiß, *nur mit einer Persönlichkeit*, die eventuell auch als Nachfolger für Jahn passend erachtet wird. *Letzteres allerdings* ist nur discret angedeutet, aber ich weiß, daß es den Ausschlag gibt. Auch *Benitzky* [sic!], dem ich morgen schreiben werde, würde mir einen *großen Dienst* erweisen, wenn er ein *Gutachten* für mich abgäbe. Vielleicht könnten Sie den auch ein wenig bearbeiten. —

Ich hoffe, mein lieber Freund, Sie sehen mir meine Zudringlichkeit, Sie so in Contribution zu setzen, nach, und setzten sie auf's Conto der unerhörten Wichtigkeit, welche die Angelegenheit für meine ganze Zukunft hat.

Nie werde ich Ihnen das vergessen! Bitte, lassen Sie mich in einigen Worten wissen, was Sie für mich tun konnten, und seien Sie im Voraus herzlichst bedankt

von Ihrem  
getreuesten  
Gustav Mahler<sup>23</sup>

When Mahler next wrote to Mihalovich some three weeks later, the situation in Vienna was still unsettled. Having now, apparently, burned his bridges in Hamburg, Mahler was not above enquiring about possibilities in Budapest!

Mein lieber Freund!

In Wien ist noch alles unentschieden. Wie lange man dort, nach alter Gewohnheit "fortwurschteln" wird, ist gar nicht vorausszusehen. — Wie meine Informatoren mir berichten, wäre an meiner Berufung nicht zu zweifeln, wenn ich nicht — Jude wäre. — Aber letzterer Umstand wird doch wahrscheinlich den Ausschlag geben, und so dürfte wohl *Mottl*, der von dem Metternich stark poussiert wird, als Sieger hervorgehen! Eine Äusserung Liechtensteins — gelegentlich einer Intervention eines meiner Protectoren, der mir nicht genannt wird (aber ich kann wohl vermuten, daß dieß Ihr oder des Grf Apponyis Gesandter war) — läßt mir freilich noch nicht alle Hoffnung aufgeben. Er sagte nämlich, als dieser betreffende Gönner meine Abstammung berührte: "So weit sind wir [in?] Österreich doch nicht, daß der Antisemitismus hier den Ausschlag gibt." Er selbst soll über mich gut informiert sein, und sehr günstig über mich denken! Man müßte *da* aber immer noch weiter arbeiten, und nicht "locker lassen"!

In Dresden traf ich neulich mit *Jahn* zusammen, mit dem ich ganz offen über die Sache sprach. — Er scheint mir nicht ungünstig gesinnt zu sein. — Wie er mir sagte, warte er nur den Ausgang seiner Augenoperation ab, um im Falle, daß diese seine Gesundheit wiederherstelle, einen Kapellmeister sich an



die Seite zu setzen. In diesem Falle werde er "an mich denken"! Es könnte also immerhin nunmehr seine Stimme für mich gewonnen werden. Aber auch da brauchte ich wohl Freunde, welche meine Sache vertreten. — Meine Entlassung habe ich von Ende dieser Saison ab nun definitiv erwirkt, und zwar, weil ich es in dieser Schw... wirtschaft nicht länger aushalte. — Lieber will ich kleinen Kindern Clavierlektionen erteilen, als mich länger als Künstler so entwürdigen.

Ich habe also den Würfel fallen lassen, ohne irgend einen Ersatz in sicherer Aussicht zu haben. —

Wie steht es denn in Budapest? Bleibt Nopcsa? Und ist dort eine Berufung von mir ganz ausgeschlossen? Warum schweigt dort alles über mich? Glauben Sie, daß ich mit dieser Eventualität noch rechnen soll?

Vom Juni ab bin ich hier frei!

Haben Sie herzlichen Dank für Ihre freundschaftlichen Bemühungen. Wie sehr wünschte ich, daß ich Ihnen diesen meinen Dank einst durch die *Tat* beweisen könnte. — Empfehlen Sie mich dem Grafen Apponyi, und sind Sie herzlichst begrüßt

von Ihrem getreuesten  
Gustav Mahler

Wenn Sie Kössler und Singer sehen, bitte, grüßen Sie dieselben herzlichst von mir. Beniczky hat sich prachtvoll benommen, und mich sehr warm empfohlen. Bitte, danken Sie ihm in meinem Namen.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, by this time Beniczky, as well as Mahler's other two Hungarian patrons had sent their recommendations to Vienna. All three letters are extant; as they were written by three men of different temperament, background and vantage point, in their totality they provide us with a uniquely complete portrait of Mahler as man and opera director in Budapest. For this reason, they are given here (in chronological order) in their entirety.

*Ödön Mihalovich:*

Abbazia, d. 8. Dez. [sic!] 897

Ew. Excellenz!

Entschuldigen Sie gütigst, wenn ich mir die Freiheit nehme, Sie mit diesen Zeilen zu belästigen, doch es geschieht ja im Interesse der Wiener Hofoper.

Ich habe erfahren, dass Gustav Mahler sich um den Capellmeister-Posten bewirbt. Mahler ist mein langjähriges Freund u. ich kann mit dem besten Gewissen behaupten, dass er sowohl als Künstler wie auch als *Mensch*, zu den Besten u. Edelsten seiner Art gehört. Seine hervorragende Begabung als Musiker, seine Genialität als Capellmeister dürfte auch Ew. Excellenz genügend bekannt sein. Seine Feinde werfen ihm vor, dass er ein Jude u. obendrein noch ein verrückter u. überspannter Mensch ist. Das Erstere ist nicht mehr wahr, denn Mahler ist zum Christentum übertreten. Das Letztere ist eine böse Verläumdung, weil man ihm auf keine andere Weise beikommen kann.



Wenn also Ew. Excellenz eine Kraft *ersten* Ranges für die k. u. k. Oper gewinnen wollen, dann dürften Sie es gewiss nicht bereuen mit Herrn Mahler in Verbindung getreten zu sein. Ich kann ihn als Künstler u. als Menschen auf das allerwärmste anempfehlen.

Empfangen Ew. Excellenz den Ausdruck meiner vorzüglichsten Hochachtung mit der verbleibe, Ihr ergebener

E. v. Mihalovich

*Albert Apponyi:*

Pressburg, Lorenzerthorgasse 3  
10 Jan. 97

Ew. Excellenz!

Ich erfahre aus bester Quelle daß bei der k. k. Wiener Hofoper eine Kapellmeister- oder Direktionskrise bevorsteht, und daß auf die erledigte Stelle u. A. Herr Gustav Mahler reflektiert.

Da mir die Wirksamkeit dieses hervorragenden Künstlers an der Budapester Oper unvergeßlich ist, und ich überhaupt in meiner ziemlich vollständigen Kenntniß der bedeutenden Dirigenten *seinesgleichen* nicht gefunden habe, nehme ich mir die Freiheit einige Worte zu seiner Empfehlung zu sagen. Durch den Unverstand und die Herrschsucht des Grafen Géza Zichy, als derselbe zum Unglück unserer Oper Intendant wurde (um später freilich durch Herrn Nopcsa noch "übertraffen" zu werden) ist dieses unglückliche Institut einer Leitung beraubt worden, welche in 2 Jahren ein gänzlich diskreditiertes Personal zu bedeutenden künstlerischen Leistungen zu erziehen wußte, ein vielseitiges reiches Repertoire schuf, und — bei Festhalten der höchsten künstlerischen Ziele — das zweite Jahr mit einem nicht unerheblichen finanziellen Überschuß abschloß. Mahler ist nicht bloß — wie andere berühmte Dirigenten, die ich leicht nennen könnte — Orchestermusiker, sondern er beherrscht bei den Werken die er leitet mit souveräner Gewalt die Bühne, das Spiel — die Mimik, die Bewegungen der Darsteller und des Chores, so daß eine von ihm vorbereitete und dirigierte Vorstellung etwas nach jeder Richtung künstlerisch Vollendetes ist. Sein Blick erstreckt sich über die ganze Regie, auf die Dekorationen — die Maschinerie, die Beleuchtung. Ich habe nie eine so harmonisch-abgerundete Künstlernatur gefunden. Ich bitte E. E. zur Bestätigung dieses meines Urteiles Brahms zu fragen, was er über die von Mahler geleitete Don Juan-Vorstellung denkt, welcher er in Budapest beiwohnte; ich bitte Goldmark zu fragen, wie ihn Lohengrin unter Mahler's Leitung impressioniert hat. Beide werden sich an diese Eindrücke erinnern; denn dieselben gehören zu jenen die man zeitlebens nicht vergißt.

Indem ich hinzufüge daß Mahler auch als Mensch ein hochachtbarer, eminent anständiger Charakter ist, so habe ich das Bild vervollständigt, aus welchem hervorgeht daß die Oper ein großes Loos ziehen würde, wenn sie ihn gewänne.



Entschuldigen E. E. diese vielleicht inkompetente Einmischung; es soll nur ein wahrheitsgetreues Zeugnis sein das ich für meinen Freund Mahler ablege ohne zu wissen in wie weit es in's Gewicht fällt.

Mit größter Hochachtung Ew. Excellenz

ganz ergebener  
Albert Apponyi

*Ferenc Beniczky:*

Excellenz!

Durch einen Brief Gustav Mahlers, des früheren Directors an der k. ung. Oper, ist mir zur Kenntniss gelangt, dass an der Wiener Hofoper nächstens eine Kapellmeisterstellung vacant wird, um welche Mahler sich auch bewirbt.

Gestatten Sie Excellenz, in Mahlers Interesse, dass ich denselben mit wenig Worten charakterisiere, — da ich bestimmt glaube, dass man über die Unverträglichkeit seiner Natur verschiedene Gerüchte in Umlauf gebracht hat.

Ich muss gestehen, dass ich Mahler als einen in gewisser Beziehung nervösen Menschen kenne, ein Umstand, der in seinem Berufe seine Erklärung findet; — doch bin ich in der Lage, ihn Ew. Excellenz auf das wärmste zu empfehlen, — da ich ihn als einen Mann kenne, der neben seiner hohen Begabung als Musiker, als Dirigent und Director, auch ein gesundes Urteil für die geschäftlichen Seiten eines Kunstinstitutes besitzt; — vor allem aber ein durch und durch ehrenwerter Character ist, so dass ich aus Überzeugung behaupten kann, dass seine Vorzüge diese Schwäche bei weitem überwiegen. —

In der Hoffnung, durch meine Zeilen der Sache Mahlers nützen zu können, — zeichne ich mit Hochachtung

Budapest, 15/I. 1897.

Franz v. Beniczky<sup>25</sup>

And thus the wheels of the Imperial bureaucracy were set in motion; they were to grind for nearly three months — no doubt an eternity for Mahler — before a decision was made.

In the meantime, however, Mahler found himself back in Budapest — even if briefly, and not as opera director. He had been invited to conduct a special concert of the Budapest Philharmonic, given for the benefit of the Society of Budapest Journalists. For Mahler, the stop in Budapest was one of several on an extended concert tour. In February he wrote to Arthur Seidl:

[...] Verzeihen Sie meine Flüchtigkeit. Ich schreibe dies in fliegender Eile mitten unter den Vorbereitungen zu einer mehrwöchentlichen Tournee, die mich nach Moskau, Petersburg, München, Budapest etc. führen wird. [...] <sup>26</sup>



Mahler arrived in Budapest in the evening of the 27th of March, 1897.<sup>27</sup> Diósy described his arrival and the subsequent events thus:

[Eine] kleine Gruppe von Schriftstellern erwartete ihn am Bahnhof. Im Hotel schlang M[ahler] rasch einige Schnitten Schinken herunter, dann bat er: Kinder, ich will zur Oper! Es war eine milde Frühlingsnacht. Als wir in der Andrassystraße das schöne Haus erblickten, zog M[ahler] den Schlapphut tief über die Augen und — weinte bitterlich! Hier war ihm die erste glänzende verheißungsvolle künstlerische Saat zerstampft worden.<sup>28</sup>

Mohácsi, relating the same scene, recalled that Mahler cried out upon seeing the Opera: "Still, those *were* the most beautiful days for me!"<sup>29</sup>

Rehearsals began the next day, and were observed by distinguished visitors. It was reported that a rehearsal of "several hours" on the 30th was attended by Intendant Nopcsa and Director Káldy of the Opera.<sup>30</sup> In the afternoons Mahler visited friends and acquaintances, leaving obligatory calling cards at, for example, Nopcsa's and Káldy's.

The programme of the concert on the 31st consisted of the overture to *Rienzi*, an aria from *Tannhäuser* sung by Sophie Sedlmair, the second movement from Mahler's Third Symphony, Weber's *Aufforderung zum Tanz* in Felix Weingartner's orchestration, an aria from *Fidelio* with Sedlmair, and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The concert generated extraordinary interest, and was reviewed by almost all major papers.<sup>31</sup> The variety of tone and content of the critiques shows that even after six years, the echoes of Mahler's residence in and departure from the Hungarian capital continued to reverberate. The *Egyetértés*, for instance, introduced its actual review as follows:

Today's Philharmonic concert was the *pièce de resistance* of the season; it will be recalled by future chroniclers as an artistic event, a veritable music festival [...] Gustav Mahler is an old, beloved friend of the capital's musical public. As former director of the Opera, he had had ample opportunity to display his conducting genius from its most glittering vantage point. The resplendent, artistically rounded performances we had heard under his leadership are amongst the fondest memories of the public; that these pleasurable evenings had not been forgotten was proved tonight when the genial conductor was given a noisy ovation in celebration of his return. [...] <sup>32</sup>

The *Pesti Hírlap*, on the other hand, reporting on the glowing reception Mahler got from those "who still remember his work here", had this to add as an aside:

(This part of the public would no doubt be happy if Gustav Mahler would return to the Royal Hungarian Opera. However, the cruel Baron Elek Nopcsa had this to say in reply to a question on this subject: "the complement of the R. H. Opera is at this time like a beaker filled to overflowing; it is true that according to an Oriental saying a rose petal may be added to such a beaker without causing it to run over — but, even with the best will, I cannot



consider Gustav Mahler a rose petal!" And with this, all such speculations came to an end.)<sup>33</sup>

While Mahler received unstinting praise for the evening's performance as a whole, in retrospect the most interesting parts of the reviews concern his own symphonic movement. The following three excerpts provide a good sampling of the variety of critical attitudes.

*Egyetértés:*

[...] This menuet was a little too packed with orchestral effects, the composer allowed himself to be carried away by his fantasy; the flowering meadow turned into a primeval forest, and instead of the whispering of the tiny wild flowers we thought to hear the roaring of tree giants. Mahler's menuet dances on leaden feet but, after all, the genial conductor is in no need of the composer's laurels. He established his fame with his baton; we may view his composing as the small, innocent passtime of the genius, something which gives him pleasure, and hurts no one. [...]

*Pesti Napló:*

[...] In this movement the eminent conductor showed himself as a composer fully the equal of Strauss, Weingartner and Schillings. Like they, he is also a master of the ingenious, audacious orchestration which shuns no contrast, and of the unexpected, shocking twist; he also follows the same path as they, as concerns the inner content of the music. [...]<sup>34</sup>

*Pester Lloyd:*

[...] das Ganze ein anmutiges, helles Frühlingsbildchen mit einfacher Zeichnung und fein abgetöntem duftigem Kolorit. Den ländlichen Grundton stellt gleich der erste Teil fest, eine volkstümliche, pastoralartige Melodie, die von der modernen Schalmey, der Oboe angestimmt und sehr nett von den Pizzikatos der Violoncelle begleitet wird. Denselben Hirtengesang spinnen dann die Geigen graziös weiter. Eine Episode von sehnsüchtigem, süß schmachtendem Charakter schließt sich daran. Flüstern die Blumen einander ihre zarten Geständnisse zu, oder lagert der Träumer in der blühenden Au nicht — allein? Wer kann es wissen?

After praising the instrumentation, Beer ended by saying that this so-called menuet is a splendid specimen of ballet music in the style of Delibes; as part of a symphony, however, it appears too "elegant".<sup>35</sup>

The concert was followed by a festive banquet in Mahler's honour; the critic of the *Egyetértés* also reported on this. He noted that many of Mahler's admirers were present, and the ladies were especially well represented. Speeches were made by Member of Parliament Fenyvessy, by Singer and by Mihalovich. Although Mahler had planned to respond from a written text, he tore it up and improvised a speech,



praising Budapest as a city where he felt himself at home. Mahler's own sentiments may have been these, but clearly not everyone of his former colleagues shared them: Diósy recalled that of the entire ensemble of the Opera only one singer, Diósy's wife, attended the banquet.<sup>36</sup>

The day after the concert Mahler travelled to Vienna, hoping to conclude his quest for the position at the Imperial Opera. And, in fact, on April 4th he signed the provisional acceptance of a conductorship for one year beginning on June 1st.<sup>37</sup> Eleven days later the final contract was signed by Director Jahn and was approved by the intendant's office. As it appears from a letter he wrote to Max Marschalk on April 20th, Mahler knew already then that soon he would be replacing the ailing Jahn as director.<sup>38</sup>

In light of the above developments, it hardly seems credible that still that summer Mahler should have flirted with the idea of returning to the Budapest Opera. Yet, Diósy's recollections include the following, astonishing account of a conversation with Mahler at Innsbruck, where Mahler spent about ten days before the end of June:

Im Sommer 1897, da [Mahler] schon die Berufung nach Wien als Kapellmeister und Direktor-Stellvertreter in der Tasche hatte, traf ich ihn in Innsbruck. Ich teilte ihm mit, daß Nopcsa gestürzt sei und Graf Zichy wieder als künftiger Intendant genannt werde. Daß ich mit Zichy gesprochen und dieser mir gesagt habe: es sei der größte Fehler seiner Tätigkeit gewesen, daß er Mahler hinausgedrängt habe. Wenn er — wozu keine Aussicht vorhanden sei — wieder Intendant würde, seine erste Tat werde die Rückberufung M[ahlers] sein. — Mahlers Augen leuchteten. "Halten Sie die Sache im Auge", sagte er, "wenn sich die Dinge *rechtzeitig* so gestalten, verständigen Sie mich! Will mich Graf Zichy haben, so komme ich!"<sup>39</sup>

Even if the above conversation did take place as and when Diósy recalled it — that is, in the summer of 1897 — the complete lack of any other later evidence suggests that Mahler never again contemplated returning to Budapest on a permanent basis. In fact, from 1897 on there is a sharp decrease in documentary materials that would indicate continuing contact between Mahler and his Hungarian friends and colleagues. Although we know that he made plans from time to time for brief trips to Budapest, there is no evidence to indicate that he returned there at all after the Philharmonic concert in March, 1897.

The next sign of contact with Hungary is in the form of a letter Mahler wrote to Max Falk on October 1, 1899. Although its contents are not unequivocal, it is possible to surmise that it concerned either an invitation to Mahler for a guest appearance with the Philharmonic, or the guest appearance of one of the Vienna Opera's singers with the orchestra. The letter reads as follows:

Euer Hochwohlgeboren!

Die Bewilligung der von den Budapester Philharmonikern gestellten Bitte hängt nicht von mir ab, sondern ich muß darüber die Genehmigung der hohen General-Intendanz einholen.



Von meiner Seite besteht dagegen kein Anstand und ich werde sehr gerne die Genehmigung befürworten, besonders mit Rücksicht auf die von Ihnen, hochverehrter Herr Doktor, geäußerten Wünsche.

Das offizielle Schreiben der Philharmoniker ist mir bis heute noch nicht zugekommen.

Ich bitte Sie gütigst die aufrichtige Versicherung freundlichst entgegennehmen zu wollen, daß nach wie vor immer mit großer Freude zu Diensten stehen wird

Ihr  
dankbar ergebenster

Wien am 1. Oktober 1899.

Gustav Mahler  
K. u. k. Direktor der k. k. Hofoperntheater.<sup>40</sup>

A letter from 1902 also concerned official business. It is addressed to Nicolaus Guerra, who was at the time a solo dancer at the Vienna Hofoper. In it, Mahler notifies him that his request for release from the Hofoper had been granted.<sup>41</sup> Through this action, Guerra became the Budapest Opera's ballet master in the autumn of the same year; he occupied that position until 1915.<sup>42</sup>

From the tone of a letter Mahler wrote to Mihalovich sometime in April, 1904, one may also surmise that his contacts with his Hungarian friends had lessened considerably, possibly due to his marriage to Alma in 1902. In this letter he wrote as follows:

Mein verehrter Freund!

Wenn ich es nur irgend möglich machen kann, so sage ich mich für die 2. Hälfte Mai bei Ihnen an. — Da ich lediglich *nur zu Ihnen und Ihrem Werke* komme, so bitte ich dringendst, wenn möglich, von meinem Besuch vorher nichts in die Öffentlichkeit dringen zu lassen. Ich komme zur Oper und muß wahrscheinlich noch in der Nacht wieder zurück.

Daß Sie mir noch immer die alten, freundschaftlichen Gesinnungen bewahrt haben, ist mir unendlich lieb, und daß dieß auch meinerseits der Fall, brauche ich wohl nicht erst zu versichern. —

Meine Frau kann leider nicht mitkommen, da [auch?] sie im Monat Mai für die Nachwelt tätig sein muß, sonst hielte sie nichts ab, meinen alten Freund mit mir aufzusuchen. — Hoffentlich haben wir aber auch hier einmal das Vergnügen, Sie bei uns zu sehen.

Mit herzlichsten Grüßen in aller Eile  
Ihr alter Mahler<sup>43</sup>

As was seen from Mahler's last extant letter to Mihalovich, already quoted in connection with the première of his First Symphony, Mahler made at least one more — albeit unsuccessful — attempt to get to Budapest to see *Toldi* in October,



1904. This letter was written a few months before what appears to have been, to all intents and purposes, Mahler's last major contact with Hungary before his death.

Having heard one movement from Mahler's Third Symphony as early as 1897, the musical public of Budapest was given the opportunity to hear the complete work in the spring of 1905. Surprisingly, the setting for such a momentous occasion was not one of the regular concerts of the Budapest Philharmonic. Rather (due to the personal enthusiasm and private means of the young conductor involved), it took place in the framework of a charity concert for the benefit of the "Otthon" Writers' and Journalists' Circle and the Budapest Journalists' Benevolent Society on April 14, 1905, following the regular Philharmonic season. As the Philharmonic had apparently refused to lend its name to the undertaking, the orchestra appeared as the Opera orchestra; the vocal forces (women's and boys' choruses) also came from the Opera, while the alto solo was sung by Chamber Singer Therese Behr from Berlin.<sup>44</sup>

The most astonishing aspect of this concert was represented by the person of the conductor. According to the little we can piece together from newspaper accounts, Kálmán Feld was a young, well-to-do insurance executive, also well-known in amateur circles. His gigantic undertaking — and even more its considerable success — appeared to take all knowledgeable observers of the music scene by complete surprise.<sup>45</sup>

In the Manuscript Archives of the National Széchényi Library there are three undated and unattributed notes by Mahler to an unknown addressee. Judging from their content, they were probably written to Feld, and concerned the performance of the Third Symphony in 1905. The first one of these notes was written prior to the performance, and in all likelihood even prior to the rehearsals:

Sehr geehrter Herr College!

Anbei folgt die Partitur zurück. Ich habe alle meine Bemerkungen und Änderungen mit roter Tinte eingetragen, und nun müßte ein intelligenter Copist diese Zeichen in die Orchesterstimmen sorgfältig übertragen. Ich versichere Sie übrigens, daß diese Einzeichnungen von *höchster Wichtigkeit* für die Aufführung ist [sic], und ich würde raten, sich durch keine Schwierigkeiten abhalten zu lassen, jedes Zeichen von den Musikern auf's Sorgfältigste zu fordern. Nicht nur, daß die Aufführung darunter leiden würde, wenn sie nicht beobachtet würde [sic!], sondern sie ist überhaupt unmöglich in diesem Falle, und würde weder Ihnen Freude, noch mir Ehre bringen.

Nehmen Sie herzlichsten Dank für Ihr freundliches Interesse, und erfreuen Sie mich gelegentlich durch einen kurzen Bericht über den Verlauf der Dinge.

Mit freundlichsten Grüßen (in aller Eile)

Ihr ergebenster

Mahler<sup>46</sup>

The concert was reviewed at length in the major papers. As two of the following examples illustrate, most writers were fascinated by Feld's role in the undertaking;



all but one or two of them praised his accomplishment very highly. Mahler's music, on the other hand, gave rise to mostly negative comments; even Beer found it difficult to say anything good about this work.

*Egyetértés:*

The Redoutensaal was the scene of an interesting concert tonight. The Opera orchestra performed Gustav Mahler's Third Symphony, under the direction of Kálmán Feld. Before I deal with the music briefly, I would like to tell the story of tonight's event. Without a doubt, Kálmán Feld occupies a distinguished position among our amateur actors[!]. He is an enthusiastic musician, who supports anything to do with music with what may be termed a pathological zeal. He has been an admirer of Gustav Mahler ever since the latter's days as our Opera director. The Philharmonic refused to undertake the performance of the symphony, but Kálmán Feld was determined to bring glory to Mahler, and today managed to realize the performance at the cost of great financial sacrifice. [...] I wish to describe the work only briefly by saying that it is the insane mistake of a great genius. [...] It is obvious that the work, as a whole, lacks unity, continuity and originality. It is packed with flitting ideas, nervousness, pretension and madness. [...] This is not a symphony, not art, but wild Secession. [...] Those music lovers who applaud Gustav Mahler the conductor, would do well to lock him up in a sanatorium for the summer months, and forcibly stop him from composing. [...] We know Kálmán Feld for a fine musician, who only hurt himself by performing the greatest conductor's weakest work.<sup>47</sup>

*Pesti Napló:*

This critic compared Mahler's career to others of true greatness, such as Beethoven and Wagner: reviled at first, praised and acclaimed later. For his five gigantic symphonies, Mahler is a hero to his champions, but

[...] to the objective listener, he is a long-bearded, pot-bellied drum-major who marches at the head of the Turkish military band, huffing and puffing in his inflated arrogance. Whoever heard Mahler's Third Symphony today was struck by its similarity to the "Burgmusik", for there is something in this music that reminds one of the square, pedestrian imagination of the needlessly, emptily noisy style of, in particular, the uniformed military band master, [especially in the first movement]. [...] We credit Gustav Mahler with enough good taste, enough — maliciousness, to think that he does not take this music seriously. The remaining five movements left the listener wondering. His attention is tied down by a whole host of unresolved, incomprehensible problems. How can anyone mix together so much that is fine, with so much crass vulgarity; so much tenderness and warmth, with such decadent sophistication. Why does someone who has so little to say forget that something insignificant will not gain in interest just because it is repeated over and over again. [...]



Greatly disliking the first movement, this reviewer approved of the second, fourth and fifth movements. The Finale, however, tilted the scales against Mahler:

It is possible that the first five movements, with all their baroque-ness and lack of grace, are merely caricatures, witty programme pieces. But there can be no doubt that the saccharin, luke-warm last movement is a pitifully earnest piece of absolute music. This is what determines the final outcome, this swings the balance against Mahler: he is an imaginative musician, but not the great symphonist he is declared to be by some. [...]<sup>48</sup>

*Pester Lloyd:*

Beer began his *feuilleton* by recalling earlier performances of Mahler's music in Budapest. Then he proceeded to a detailed and thoughtful analysis of his complex musical personality:

[...] In dieser komplizierten, schwer faßbaren Künstlernatur vereinigt sich so ziemlich Alles, um zu fesseln, zu erwärmen, im Schwunge fortzureißen, aber auch zu ernüchtern, zu ärgern oder dem Zuhörer ein ironisches Lächeln zu entlocken. Das bringen die Gewöhnlichen, die bequeme Mittelstrasse Wandelnden natürlich nicht zu Stande. Solches Aufwühlen in Gutem wie in Schlimmem ist den Stürmern vorbehalten, den Kampfnaturen welche die neuen Pfade suchen, wenn sie auch ins Dickicht führen oder in ein wunderliches Zickzack ablenken. Dabei zeigen sich doch wieder die verschiedenen Quellenläufe, denen er folgt. Deutlich merkt man den Einfluß Beethovens noch mehr Wagners, dessen Sprache vernehmlich anklingt, wie bei [...] Anton Bruckner, der neben der oberösterreichischen die Bayreuther Mundart in seinen Symphonien mit Vorliebe pflegte. Und offenkundig sind die fruchtbaren Anregungen, die er von Berlioz empfängt. [...]

Finally, Beer went on to deal with the symphony; he also did not neglect to credit Feld for his role:

Das in vieler Hinsicht interessante, aber auch von Schrullen, Posen und bedenklichen Trivialitäten durchzogene Werk schien bei dem recht zahlreichen Publikum, das sich in der Redoute eingefunden, eher Verwunderung, als echte, tiefe Teilnahme zu wecken. Der erste Satz freilich, der in seinen riesigen Proportionen für sich allein dem Umfange einer ganzen Symphonie gleichkommt, wirkte so abspannend, daß die noch folgenden fünf Teile schon eine ermüdete Zuhörerschaft fanden. Auch die vom Komponisten selbst vorgeschriebene Erholungspause war zu kurz bemessen, um die Lebensgeister gehörig aufzufrischen. So gab es nach dieser Abteilung noch lebhaften Beifall, der später im Decrescendo verlief. Am meisten litt das folgende reizvolle, entzückend kolorierte Blumen-Menuett, das eine weitens wärmere Zustimmung verdient hätte. Herr Koloman Feld, der Gastdirigent dieses Abends, hat sich mit der Aufführung der Symphonie eine ungewöhnlich



schwierige Aufgabe gestellt. Er löste sie zu allgemeiner Zufriedenheit, was nicht wenig heißen will, wenn man bedenkt, daß er bisher nur zu seinem Privatvergnügen den Taktstock schwang. [...] Er hatte die Aufführung gewissenhaft vorbereitet, dirigierte, wenn auch nicht mit besonderem Schwünge oder feinerem Eingehen auf das Detail, mit lobenswerter Ruhe und Umsicht, wie sie nur ein gründliches Studium der partitur verleiht. [...] <sup>49</sup>

*Pesti Hírlap:*

This, one of the longest reviews, was written by Izor Béldi, and was devoted in almost equal proportions to Mahler and Feld. Although Mahler deserves unlimited praise as conductor and as opera director, such people are seldom truly creative; his works provide ample proof of this:

[...] Mahler's music reflects his great knowledge, impeccable artistic taste, and brilliant instrumental virtuosity — but he seldom has an original idea, his invention is shallow like a small creek dried up by the sun; what he has to say has already been told better and more interestingly by others before him. [...] All of his musical expressions are decadently overwrought; some sections of his orchestral works strike us as the feverish hallucinations of a musician tortured into exhaustion by endless rehearsals. [...]

That this work, interesting despite its faults and awkwardness, was performed here, was due exclusively to Kálmán Feld, who took care of the financial details with exceptional generosity. In addition, he alone rehearsed this difficult and long work, and conducted the large performing forces with astonishing finesse Friday night. Heretofore, Kálmán Feld had not played a large role on the music scene. He wrote music criticism for the Budapest *Tagblatt* for a while, then retired from journalism to devote his life to his business and family. Then suddenly Friday night — like Minerva from the head of Jupiter — he appeared before us as a full-fledged conductor. He conducted with verve and temperament, yet also with surprising calmness. He ruled the varying emotions of the two camps of performers and audience with incredible panache and superlative strength. "*Dirige et impera*" was his motto, and he fulfilled it with a truly artistic achievement. [...] <sup>50</sup>

Mahler's next note to Feld was evidently written in response to the latter's report on the concert, and his complaint about the lack of critical appreciation of Mahler's music:

*In Eile!*

Verehrter Herr College!

Herzlichsten Dank für Ihre liebe Zeilen. Ich bin gewappnet gegen Zeitungsartikel; wenn mein Werk sich die Liebe des Musikers erwerben konnte, so verzichte ich auf die Anerkennung des Zeitungsschreibers.

Nochmals aufrichtigst dankend  
Ihr sehr ergebener Mahler <sup>51</sup>



Probably immediately after dispatching the above note, Mahler had an opportunity to read some of the reviews of the concert. He hurried to reassure Feld:

Verehrter College!

Ich muß meinem Billet noch ein zweites nachschicken. Ich habe nämlich unterdessen auch die Berichte gelesen, die Sie mir zugesandt, und muß mein hartes Wort über Ihre Kritiker *zurücknehmen*. Was haben Sie denn so eine ernste Miene angenommen, als Sie von ihnen sprachen? Ich finde, daß sich Ihre Rezensenten ganz ausgezeichnet gehalten haben, und würde nur wünschen öfters einem solchen teilnehmenden Verständniß zu begegnen. Die Aufführung muß ja aber nach alledem ganz herrlich gewesen sein! Nochmals also meinen Dank

Ihr ganz ergebenster  
Mahler

Dürfte ich Sie bitten, den Herrn, die mir persönlich unbekannt sind, gelegentlich meinen herzlichsten Dank auszudrücken?<sup>52</sup>

The postscript is baffling: Mahler certainly knew most, if not all, members of the Opera orchestra, as well as most of the Hungarian music critics.

There is no doubt that Mahler was sincerely pleased by what he read (and perhaps heard) about Feld's performance of the Third. Less than two years later, he was prepared to recommend the young conductor for a position on the strength of this one-time, 'long distance' impression. When the Amsterdam Concertgebouw was searching for a second conductor in the autumn of 1906, Mahler wrote this to Willem Mengelberg:

Lieber Freund!

Suchen Sie noch immer einen 2. Kapellmeister? Hr. Kalman Feld, der sich um die Stelle bewirbt ist mir als sehr guter Musiker und ernster tüchtiger Mensch bekannt, und bittet mich, ihn Ihnen zu empfehlen. Als Dirigenten kenne ich ihn nicht, doch weiß ich, daß er als blutiger Anfänger vor 2 Jahren in Budapest meine 3. Symphonie mit großem Erfolg zur Aufführung brachte — als 1. Dirigentendebüt immerhin eine beachtenswerte Leistung. (N. B. die Aufführung soll wirklich gut gewesen sein.)

Also falls Sie noch Niemanden haben, so wäre er vielleicht in Betracht zu ziehen. Er soll auch gut Violine spielen.

[...] <sup>53</sup>

Although it would seem quite unlikely that contacts between Mahler and Hungary could have ceased altogether during the last four and a half years of his life, the fact is that the above letter is the last extant document to show such contact. Therefore, it now remains only to look at the Hungarian reactions to his death in 1911. For the want of any other, private documents such as letters, the obituaries published in Hungarian newspapers must suffice. In any case, a cross section of



these provides a good idea of the fascinating (and, were it not for the occasion, at times amusing) admixture of fact and fiction, genuine admiration and continuing resentment (sometimes discernible only by implication) into which the phenomenon of Mahler had been molded in the course of the almost two decades since his resignation as director of the Royal Hungarian Opera.

The *Zenelap*, at this time published as a monthly journal, included the following brief bulletin in its issue of May 20, 1911:

We learnt the sad news at press time that Gustav Mahler, the great composer, former director of our Opera between 1888 and 1891, died in Vienna on May 17 [sic!], at eleven o'clock in the evening.<sup>54</sup>

Surprising as it may seem that the *Zenelap* was willing to acknowledge Mahler's stature as a composer, this turned out not to signal a genuine change of attitude. No further obituary of any kind was published by this journal. Though it was undoubtedly a coincidence, it is yet ironic to note that the next issue of the *Zenelap* on June 20th was devoted to a celebration of the accomplishments of its editor József Ság — one of Mahler's bitterest enemies in Budapest.

Most of the major dailies, however, devoted extensive space to their obituaries, and in some cases occupied themselves with Mahler's illness and death for several days. The *Egyetértés* began its main article thus:

The world-renowned conductor, music's fanatical worshipper and learned interpreter, whose name has been inscribed forever in the history of music, died after a lengthy struggle with death.

Following details of Mahler's return journey to Vienna, the article continued:

A great musician died in his person, a towering organizing and leadership talent, an unparalleled conductor, and an always interesting composer. [...] He accomplished much new and beautiful [in Budapest] [...] Endless possibilities were open to him here, but his personality, difficult to adapt, made it impossible for him to remain in this high position. [...] He was one of the most fanatical and energetic musicians; the news of his death kindles the light of beautiful memories everywhere.

A very detailed description of Mahler's illness and last hours includes the following gem:

His death, in all likelihood, was caused (or at least hastened) by his sojourn in America. [...] So many irritations awaited him in America that it is not surprising that the fatal illness developed and overcame him in short order. First of all, he had to take a *pro forma* oath that in time he will acquire American citizenship; his second trial consisted of having to take — before an American music jury — formal examinations in piano playing and music theory. [...] <sup>55</sup>



Next day, several sections of the same paper dealt with Mahler directly or indirectly. Reporting the Parliamentary debates of May 19th on the Cultural Ministry's programme (following many years of demands for such an action, the theatres had finally been transferred to this Ministry in 1907), the paper quoted Minister Count Jenő Zichy (no relation to Géza) to have said: "We must realize very clearly that it is not yet possible today to maintain an Opera of European standards in our country." One of the other Members interjected: "It existed under Mahler!" The rest of the Minister's speech contained no reference to the matter.

Another article, simply entitled "Mahler", is signed "K" (could it have been Ludwig Karpath?). Apparently, the writer met Mahler as a young reporter in the hours of his resignation. According to him, Mahler was happy to be free, and said to the assembled reporters: "Children, the Budapest Opera gave me a golden key with which to open the door to the world at large. I have money, fame, determination and freedom — I can go out into the world." Afterwards, he is said to have danced the *csárdás* with a young woman.

One of the subsections in the daily art and theatre column is headed "About Mahler — by his brother-in-law". It is an interview with "Bertalan" (Eduard?) Rosé, then in Budapest temporarily with an operetta company. To the question, "Did Mahler ever speak of his directorship in Budapest?", he replied:

Of course! After all, he was "discovered" in Budapest. His world fame began with his work here. [...] He described the situation he found here as totally desolate [...] He always referred with pride to his three-year directorship in Budapest because he felt that he had managed to elevate the niveau of the Royal Hungarian Opera. He readily acknowledged that the Budapest audiences — about whose wide intelligence, receptivity and enthusiasm he always spoke admiringly — made his work much easier, and understood and accepted all his goals.<sup>56</sup>

The May 21st issue of *Egyetértés* (p. 10) reported on the preparations for Mahler's funeral, and published the complete text of his will. Finally, the issue of May 23rd (p. 13) reported on the funeral itself, and on the Hungarian participation in the final farewell to Mahler. At the funeral, a wreath was laid by Alszeghy on behalf of the Opera; on that day, the black flag was flown on the Opera House, and Director Imre Mészáros sent a telegram of condolence to Alma.

The *Pesti Napló* published a detailed report on Mahler's illness and condition on May 18th (p. 13). Next day's issue contained a long, objective but laudatory obituary entitled "Mahler is dead". Among other things, the unidentified columnist wrote:

[...] Although [Mahler] was active here for only three years, even this time was sufficient for him to somehow lift our Opera from a more or less neglected state to a niveau approaching the European. [...] During this time he established a musical life here and awakened in our public a curiosity for higher music. [...]



This column also includes a discussion of, and praise for Mahler's symphonies, especially of the orchestration.<sup>57</sup>

Unquestionably the most interesting reversal of past attitudes was shown by the *Pesti Hírlap*. With the exception of May 15th, it published daily medical bulletins and reports, beginning as early as the 13th with a report from Paris (p. 7). On May 19th, it published a long obituary, extolling Mahler's qualities and accomplishments in all areas in superlatives. For example:

[...] in him was lost one of the most excellent conductors, opera directors of genius and talented symphonists of our age. [...] He opened a new chapter in the history of the symphony with his works. [...] He was also a first rate opera director: the most eminent stage manager who was familiar with all the tricks of stage technique, and who could not only rehearse, but also to cast and direct, to "turn out" an opera, like no one else.

The writer (regrettably, unidentified) went on to praise Mahler for his ability to discern and to develop "hidden" talent (e. g., Szilágyi). Mahler the composer is discussed at length, in some of the most perceptive and erudite terms published theretofore in Hungary. The main body of the obituary is followed by several subsections devoted to a biography, the details of Mahler's illness and death, and anecdotes. One such section deals specifically with his years in Budapest. Following a brief recapitulation of the Opera's problems under Keglevich, Beniczky's era and "reforms" are discussed, with especial praise for his hiring of Mahler. The latter's activities and contributions are highlighted through such topics as his desire to create a Hungarian Opera, his collaboration with Újházy, and the triumphs of *Rheingold*, *Walküre* and *Cavalleria*.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, it is appropriate to complement the foregoing material produced by native Hungarian writers with the column of the German-speaking critic who, more than any other, had attempted to remain objective towards Mahler throughout his time in Budapest, as well as in the years following. Although the *Pester Lloyd* was also occupied with Mahler for several days, August Beer's *feuilleton* appeared in the issue of May 19th. It opened with the following, poetically evocative passage:

Er war ein Künstler, dem nichts Menschliches fremd blieb, der zwischen dunkeln Todesgedanken und transzendentalen Phantasieflüge auch jubeln und jauchzen konnte, die Schmerzen und Leiden, aber auch das stille Glück, die lärmenden Freuden eines Menschenschicksals in Tönen einfing, diesen Mikrokosmos in der ganz eigenen Art schilderte, wie er sich in seiner empfänglichen Seele und seiner glühenden Phantasie abspiegelte. [...]

Most of the obituary is devoted to a positive, sensitive and knowledgeable discussion of Mahler's music, including both the symphonies and the songs. Following a positive evaluation of his contributions in Budapest (as director, stage manager, talent-discoverer, and so on), the column ends with a detailed analysis of Mahler's art as a conductor.<sup>59</sup>

The foregoing obituaries — the one or two discordant voices notwithstanding



— reflect the fact that already in 1911 the phenomenon of Mahler had come to be seen in Hungary in a perspective that is far closer to that of our own day than was common in many countries at the time.<sup>60</sup> The discernible increase in the popularity of his music during the quarter century following his death also reflects this, especially when it is realized that until the 1930's the Budapest Philharmonic was the capital's (in reality, the country's) only well-established, fully professional orchestra. Although the historical records of even this one orchestra are not entirely complete, a few selected examples from the available performance statistics will be sufficient to illustrate the point.

*Das Lied von der Erde*, performed for the first time posthumously on November 20, 1911 in Munich, was played in Budapest already on December 4, 1912 during one of the regular subscription concerts of the Philharmonic. "Revelge" was included in one of the 'popular' concerts as early as 1915. During the 1917-1918 season, the opening concert included "Um Mitternacht", "Ich atmet' einen Linden Duft" and (as an encore) "Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht", while the Ninth Symphony was played in one of the later subscription concerts. During a tour of Czechoslovakia in 1925, a concert given in Prague included "Um Mitternacht". In 1931, the 1930-1931 concert season closed with the Second Symphony, and the opening concert of the next season included the First.

After 1936, as in all countries in the German orbit, Mahler's music ceased to be heard in Hungary. Thus it is the more significant and noteworthy that in the commemorative volume issued for the 90th anniversary of the Budapest Philharmonic in 1943 (well into the Nazi era), the chapter devoted to past greats in the history of the orchestra includes a section on Mahler which is the equal of those on Nikisch, Richter and even — Sándor Erkel! It is most suitable, I think, to end this volume devoted to Mahler and Hungary with the courageous and prescient words of the editor of this anniversary publication. Written as they were at a time when the flame of Western civilization was threatened with extinction, they stand as a substantial atonement for whatever neglect, injustice and hurt Mahler may have suffered in Hungary some 50 years earlier. As is plain from the opening words, the pretext for Mahler's inclusion was the first publication on this occasion of his 1889 letter to the musicians of the orchestra:

If we had not in our possession an unpublished letter by Mahler which had long been deserving of public knowledge, perhaps it would not even be timely today to deal with him. His origins and his personality — it appears — make him equally untimely in the eyes of today's official world. These same two factors had caused his life's battles and his great spiritual struggles, and if he still succeeded in gaining recognition and understanding in the last years of his short life, he had achieved this chiefly through his indomitable will, and deserved it for the deep faith which shines through his works again and again. Above all, he believed in the victory of noble aspirations, and his faith did not deceive him, even if for long years he could count on his fingers the few friends and the small number of strangers who understood him and followed his course with sympathy. [...] Sporadic recognition gave way to a mass movement only after many years, because ears accustomed to the music of the



19th century found it difficult to adapt to the newness of the Mahlerian expression; the distance from Wagner to Mahler in the second half of the century was just as great as that from Beethoven to Berlioz during the first half. [...]

Several passages in a similar vein follow before Mahler's letter is printed (in facsimile and in Hungarian translation) and commented on. Finally, this admirable eulogy concludes with the following homily:

If, aside from the actuality of the above letter, we reexamine the question: is Mahler timely for today's humanity — we must inevitably answer with a "yes". The arguments issuing from the interpretative questions of his conducting have long died down, and with his work he has inscribed his name forever into the intellectual history of mankind where, after all, not the form of the expression, the language is of importance, but rather that which is to be expressed by that language. Someone who dealt with questions of Nature and the spirit with such a pure conscience as he, and who chose the words "*Vater, sieh an die Wunden mein, kein Wesen laß verloren sein!*" as a motto for one of his works; someone who through his whole life occupied himself with, and attempted to express through his works the deeply Christian, Dostoievskian question: "How can I be happy so long as there is someone else who suffers?" — we need not fear for the immortality of such a one as he.<sup>61</sup>



## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Cited as JPH.

<sup>2</sup> Diósy's (1863–1930) essay served Guido Adler for his monograph on Mahler, published in 1916. The handwritten essay of 5 pages is now part of the Guido Adler Papers in the Special Collections of the University of Georgia Libraries (Athens, Georgia, U.S.A.); cited as BD.

<sup>3</sup> Jemnitz (1890–1963) was an eminent Hungarian critic, as well as a composer and conductor; his article appears in AJ.

<sup>4</sup> Cited as TG-MM.

<sup>5</sup> Cited as KBM.

<sup>6</sup> Cited as HLG. 32 of the 36 chapters and the appendices of this edition were revised and published in French; whenever it is necessary to refer to the French edition, it will be cited as HLG(F).

<sup>7</sup> Cited as BME.

<sup>8</sup> Cited as MOS.

<sup>9</sup> "A M. Kir. Operaház története", MA-HNL, Fol. Hung. I/4.2671. Cited as DVO.

<sup>10</sup> Cited as MKO 1909, the volume has 423 pages. A few corrections and additions were published in MKO 1935.

### CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> In the 1910 census, Nagytétény was found to have "3224 Hungarian and German" residents (*Révai Nagy Lexikon* 14 [1911], p. 243).

<sup>2</sup> On April 24, 1879, he participated in a concert in Iglau (today Jihlava). A facsimile of the programme of this concert is reproduced as Illustration 39 in BRM.

<sup>3</sup> See letters to Freund and Spiegler.

<sup>4</sup> *Puszt*a is difficult to render literally into any other language. "Heide", used by Mahler in the following letter, is a good approximation in German. Geographically, it denotes the flatland region of Hungary, known there as the Alföld; Batta was located at the edge of the Alföld.

<sup>5</sup> What Mahler heard was, in all likelihood, the *tárogató*, the traditional shepherd's instrument. An ancient double-reed instrument of Asian origins, the *tárogató* was probably known to the Hungarians already before they occupied their present homeland in the ninth century. Since its modern form (a single-reed instrument more closely resembling the saxophone) was developed by the Czech-born Hungarian instrument maker Josef Schunda only between 1888 and 1896, Mahler would have still heard the original instrument.

<sup>6</sup> GMB., pp. 9 and 11 (English: MSL, pp. 55 and 56f.).

"Now here I am in the Hungarian Puszt, living with a family who have hired me for the summer; I am required to give the boys piano lessons, and occasionally to send the family into musical raptures, so here I am, caught like a midge in the spider's web, just twitching. Yet 'the Moor has done his work: the Moor can go'. But in the evening when I go out on to the heath and climb a lime tree that stands there all lonely, and when from the topmost branches of this friend of mine I see far out into the world: before my eyes the Danube winds her ancient way, her waves flickering with the glow of the setting sun; from the village behind me the chime of the eventide bells is wafted to me on a kindly breeze, and the branches sway in the wind, rocking me into a



slumber like the daughters of the elfin king, and the leaves and blossoms of my favourite tree tenderly caress my cheeks. — Stillness everywhere! Most holy stillness! Only from afar comes the melancholy croaking of the frog that sits all mournfully among the reeds. —”

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“It is six o'clock in the morning! I have been out on the heath, sitting with Farkas the shepherd, listening to the sound of his shawm. Ah, how mournful it sounded, and yet how full of rapturous delight — that folk-tune he played! The flowers growing at his feet trembled in the dreamy glow of his dark eyes, and his brown hair fluttered around his sun-tanned cheeks. [...] [...] I am so utterly alone here, with no soul to speak to, no books to read.”

<sup>7</sup> GMB., pp. 11f. (English: MSL, p. 57).

“When your letter came, I was suffering from the most terrible yearning — I simply can't stand it any longer.

I am very pleased to be able to tell you that the family is going to the seaside, to Norderney, on 12 August, which means that I shall then be as free as a finch.”

<sup>8</sup> English: MSL, pp. 57f.

“Dear Albert,

Many thanks for your writing to me. It is really a high holiday for me whenever a letter strays into this hermitage of mine here. I received your reminder just as everything had been settled. I will say nothing of my sufferings. How could I describe them to you, who have not yet borne the woes of loneliness, nor the torments that heartless people cause one, nor the disgust evoked by this shallow scrambling as in an ant-hill!

On 10 August (I expect to write to you before that) I am coming to Vienna, Thence continuing my journey to Iglau. I hope I am sure of seeing you there. You cannot imagine, dear Albert, how I yearn to see human beings again, and how I long once again to hear the sound of the organ and the peel of the bells. A breeze as of heavenly wings blows through me when I see the peasants in their finery at church. They kneel in prayer before the altar, and their songs of praise mingle with the sound of drums and trumpets. — Ah, it is long since there was any altar left for me: only, mute and high, God's temple arches over me, the wide sky. — I cannot rise to it, and would so gladly pray. Instead of chorales and hymns it is thunder that roars, and instead of candles it is lightning that flickers —

Storm on, storm on, I understand your language not, ye elements, and when ye jubilate to God, to my human ear it sounds like wrath!

Write soon, Everyone else is silent.

Ever,  
Gustav Mahler.”

An excerpt from this letter was first published in BRM, p. 156. The original letter is published here in its entirety for the first time with the kind permission of the Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

<sup>9</sup> According to HLG(F) (p. 137), Mahler also spent the summer of 1882 in Hungary with the Baumgarten family.

<sup>10</sup> GMB., p. 58 (English: MSL, p. 103).

“I herewith ask to be released from my contract. — Now that I have put this into words, you will, I hope, believe that I mean it entirely seriously, and for my part I declare myself ready to make any sacrifice in order to obtain this favour, for which — I do recognize — you too will have to pay dearly.

It goes without saying that I leave it entirely to you to determine the date of my departure hence, according to your needs and convenience.”

See also two earlier letters to Staegemann, GMB., pp. 57f. (English: MSL, pp. 102f.).



<sup>11</sup> GMB., p. 60 (English: MSL, pp. 105f.).

"As you probably know, my colleague Nikisch has received a brilliant offer.

If he leaves, I shall take his place as first conductor with a completely free hand. — If he stays, I shall go to Hamburg, to be in charge of the opera-house there, having been offered really splendid terms. There my salary would be 6000 marks per annum, I would get three months' holiday, have the exclusive right to the *Nibelungen*, *Meistersinger*, *Tristan*, *Fidelio*, *Don Giovanni*, and the right to give notice after the first year. You can imagine I naturally wish to go to Hamburg — but I am not free to choose, because if Nikisch decides to go to Budapest Direktor Staegemann will not release me from my contract. The matter will be decided by 15 January at the latest."

In the first edition of GMB this letter was assigned to January, 1887 by Alma Mahler; this date was adopted for the second edition. In MSL (p. 105) the date was changed to "early January". In fact, I am convinced that it predates the next letter, assigned to Christmas Day, 1886.

According to DVO (Part III, p. 70), Sándor Erkel "resigned" as director of the Opera in Budapest already in September 1886, in preparation for assuming a position in Berlin (for the facts pertaining to Erkel's position at the Budapest Opera from 1886 on, and for further details on his attempts to leave Budapest, see Chapters II and III). In any case, the intendant, Count István Keglevich, began his search for a new director during the autumn (see his letter to the Minister of the Interior, dated October 24, 1886, in Chapter II). The following comment in PL, included in a review of Erkel's "last" Philharmonic concert, shows that the uncertainty lasted until at least December:

"No one is able to say what will happen at the Opera, at the Philharmonic, beginning with the New Year, when Sándor Erkel quits his posts. No one knows whether Herr Nikisch, who is foreseen as his successor, has accepted the job." (December 14, 1886, p. [5]; original in German.)

In Leipzig, the LTA announced Nikisch's impending departure for Budapest already on November 23rd.

Lastly, it seems most likely that Mahler would have written to Löhr about the details of his offer from Hamburg in a letter *predating* the one in which he already refers to a "Gegenkontrakt" from Pollini.

<sup>12</sup> GMB., p. 59 (English: MSL, p. 104).

"My own affair has become a little more complicated — in so far as yesterday I received: I. Contract signed by Pollini (who has tied himself down, whereas I have to make up my mind by 18 January '87); II. an offer from the Court Theatre in Karlsruhe (to become Mottl's successor); III. a splendid offer from Neumann in Prague.

Now four carrots are dangled before the donkey! What am I to do?

As a result of all I have experienced I have made up my mind not to do anything, just to wait and see what wheel I come under."

<sup>13</sup> GMB., pp. 61f. (English: MSL, pp. 106f.)

"The decision about my situation here has become somewhat more imminent, since Nikisch has now definitely decided to stay on and Staegemann has declared his readiness, in principle, not to put any obstacles in my way. ...

[...]

At the moment it seems not improbable that I shall go to Karlsruhe, starting in the autumn."

Nikisch's decision to remain in Leipzig was announced in the LTA on January 9th; although this announcement was contradicted in the same newspaper on January 11th, Nikisch's decision seems to have been made in early January. (For that matter, the decision may have been made *for* Nikisch by the events in Budapest as early as November; see the correspondence between Intendant Keglevich and the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior in Chapter II.)



<sup>14</sup> GMB., p. 62 (English: MSL, p. 107).

"My affairs are becoming steadily more incomprehensible. — I have conducted *Die Walküre* here (as a result of my colleague's sudden illness), and this has put me in a very strong position. At the same time I have received an offer from *New York*, an invitation to replace Anton Seidl — perhaps I shall end up by accepting it! —"

<sup>15</sup> GMB., p. 64 (English: MSL, pp. 108f.).

"I dare say you know that for about the last three months I simply haven't been able to call my soul my own — owing to my colleague's illness I have to do *two men's* work. I conduct big operas almost daily, literally almost never getting away from the theatre. [...] Now it is I who am busy 'getting up' *Siegfried*. — I have gone up a good deal in the public's estimation, very often get 'curtain calls', and so on.

I am positively on terms of friendship with my chief, and treated as a member of the family. They are almost the only people here whom I visit. [...]

[...] Of course all this also means an increased prospect of my staying on here, since I really no longer have any reason to go away."

In GMB the undated letter was assigned to the "beginning of May"; regarding the revised date, see MSL, p. 399.

<sup>16</sup> GMB., p. 70 (English: MSL, p. 112).

"In the matter of the prevailing difference between myself and Herr Goldberg, about which you are informed, I must again return to my request to be released from my contract."

<sup>17</sup> GMB., p. 72 (English: MSL, p. 113).

"Kapellmeister Gustav Mahler respectfully requests to be relieved of his duties pending termination of his contract."

<sup>18</sup> LTA, May 24, 1888, 4. Beilage, p. 3210 (English: BRM(E), p. 181).

"The exceptionally talented musician, Herr Kapellmeister Gustav Mahler, whose musical revival of *Die drei Pintos* by C. M. von Weber deserves and has found the highest recognition, has been discharged from his association with the Leipzig Stadttheater at his request."

<sup>19</sup> For details, see HLG, p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> Max Steinitzer, "Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler, II", *Musikblätter des Anbruchs* 2, No. 7–8 (1920) (Sonderheft Gustav Mahler), pp. 297f.

"Above all, I am virtually incapable of writing about myself. Only this much: there are no prospects that I shall be employed again soon, and I must tell you honestly that this causes me great distress."

<sup>21</sup> BH, June 2, 1888, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> MKO 1909, p. 402.

<sup>23</sup> PH, October 1, 1888, p. 2. He is also mentioned in DVO, Part IV, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> For details on the relationship between Mahler and Adler, see RMA.

<sup>25</sup> RMA, pp. 18f. (English: RMA(E), pp. 84f.).

"In immediate reply to your kind lines, let me inform you that I shall convey their principal contents, regarding Herr G. Mahler, to the proper place; there where the decisions about the ultimate filling of the long-pending Pest position, a kind of ancient mare's nest, will finally be made.



[...] Fourteen days ago I left the business at the stage in which serious negotiations, which were apparently going well, were in progress with a very renowned foreign conductor. That may have changed overnight since then, as so often in this case. [...]"

<sup>26</sup> RMA, pp. 19f. (English: RMA(E), p. 85).

"Königswart, July 11, 1888

Most esteemed Herr Professor,

Enclosed is the answer of Director von Mihalovich to my letter in the Mahler affair. Naturally it will not end there, and as is expressly stated in the letter, Herr Mahler will be the object of the most searching enquiry very soon, if by chance Mottl's engagement is not settled in the meantime.

I have declared myself strongly for Mahler, but as you can perceive from the enclosed letter, the opera and concert conductor, obviously presumed highly gifted, is considered only secondarily: first of all the gentlemen have their focus on the organizational ability and activity of the future opera director, to whom will fall the thorough cleansing of an artistic Augean stable.

Now patience is called for! The decision cannot be kept waiting for long: when in autumn the first leaves fall, then many scales will fall from the eyes of the by-no-means-to-be-envied new Pest opera director! For the rest, the position is splendidly paid (10 000 fl.), and that is, after all, a kind of consolation!

With the request for the due return of the Mihalovich letter and with kindest greetings, I am always most willingly,

Your faithfully devoted,  
D. Popper"

<sup>27</sup> RMA, p. 20 (English: RMA(E), p. 85).

<sup>28</sup> RMA, pp. 21f. (English: RMA(E), p. 86).

"Dear Friend!

Just quickly my sincerest thanks and acknowledgement of the receipt of your letter. The business about Bayreuth and Königswart I must first think over a little more — here I have my hands full now — and at present do not know how I can get away. — I am now really curious about how all that will turn out.

[...]

Prague. Saturday."

<sup>29</sup> Although Popper apparently did meet Mahler in Prague in August, and declared him to be "our next opera director in Budapest" (Gisela Wien-Steinberg, "Meine Mahler-Erinnerungen", *Neues Wiener Journal*, June 29, 1921, p. 4; original in German).

<sup>30</sup> MKO 1909, p. 403.

<sup>31</sup> GMB, p. 73 (English: MSL, p. 114).

"On Sunday evening I shall be arriving in Vienna, on very important business."

The letter is assigned to the summer of 1888 in GMB; as is suggested in MSL (p. 401), however, it was undoubtedly written in September.

<sup>32</sup> PL, September 27, 1888, l. Beilage, p. [5]. Mahler arrived in Budapest on the 26th and stayed at the "Hotel zum Jägerhorn"; his name does not appear in the guest-list published on the 28th.

<sup>33</sup> HLG, p. 186. However, in Footnote 37 (p. 872) Mahler's contract is said to have been valid "up to December 31, 1899"; if this date is correct, it must have been signed late in 1889.

<sup>34</sup> MKO 1909, p. 306; this date was adopted in MKO 1935 (p. 79).

<sup>35</sup> DVO, Part IV, p. 17; MKO 1909, p. 403.

<sup>36</sup> BD, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> PH, October 1, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> PH, October 2, 1888, p. 4.



<sup>39</sup> PH, October 7, 1888, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Z, October 10, 1888, p. 159.

<sup>41</sup> Z, November 25, 1889, p. 186.

<sup>42</sup> Gábor Halász, ed., *Justh Zsigmond Naplója* (The diary of Zsigmond Justh), Budapest, Athenaeum, [n. d.: ca. 1936], p. 343. — Justh (1863–1894) was an essayist and novelist; he established a peasant theatre on his estate where he directed his peasants in performances of folk as well as classical plays.

<sup>43</sup> *Bélgymintisztériumi Levéltár. Belügyminisztérium. Elnöki Iratok* (Archives of the Interior Ministry. Interior Ministry. Executive Documents). HNA, K 148-1890-VIII-38. — Concerning the Opera's Documents Nos. 55 and 2, see also Chapter III.

<sup>44</sup> "When then will Mahler be appointed officially?" Dated February 25, 1890, the letter is in MA-HNL (Fond XII/873, no. 15).

<sup>45</sup> FL, December 2, 1889, p. 2457.

<sup>46</sup> Mahler is said to be "thirty years old" here. The same 'error' occurs in the report of the PH on October 2nd. Was this really an error in reporting, or was the information intentionally propagated in order to make him appear older, and thus more 'suitable' for his high position?

<sup>47</sup> BH, October 7, 1888, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> TG-MM, pp. 65f.

<sup>49</sup> GMB, pp. 73f. (English: MSL, pp. 117f.).

"Ladies and gentlemen,

Today I have the honour of assuming the leading position in an establishment that is in every respect fitted to be a home for and an ornament to this country's art. — First of all I should like to thank our revered chief, the Secretary of State, Herr von Beniczky, for the confidence he has shown in me by conferring upon me an office at once so responsible and so eminent, and I hereby pledge myself to devote myself to my duties wholeheartedly and single-mindedly. I also wish to address a few words to you, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with pride and pleasure that I see gathered around me a throng of artists whom any general might be proud to lead to victory. It must fill each one of us with pride to belong to an establishment promoted so benevolently and munificently by that noble patron of the arts, His Majesty the King, an establishment towards which the highest representatives of the kingdom have always been open-handed, one that forms — and which should form — the focal point of Hungary's artistic endeavours and at the same time is the pride of the nation. — Yet what stringent demands we must make on ourselves in our awareness of our duty to maintain and enhance the significance of such an establishment. —

Ladies and gentlemen, let us vow to dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly and with utter devotion to the proud task that falls to us! To perform our tasks with the utmost rigour, with complete absorption in and devotion to the work as a whole — let that be the motto inscribed on our banner.

Do not expect either promises or acts from me in the immediate future. Nor shall I present you with a programme today.

Let us first get to know one another and collect ourselves for the difficult work that lies ahead of us.

If I promise one thing today, it is that I shall set an example in being keen on the work and always sincere in intention.

Let us set to work — each one to his task! Then our labours will be crowned with success.

I conclude now in the joyful hope that as true artists you all agree with what I have said and will support me in the difficult task ahead of us."

Alma Mahler's date of September 1888 was revised in MSL (pp. 117f. and 401) to October 10, 1888.

<sup>50</sup> N, October 11, 1888, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>51</sup> Z, October 20, 1888, pp. 161f.



## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860) on November 27, 1842 in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Quoted in Arthur Graf Polzer-Hoditz, *Kaiser Karl*, Zürich, etc., Amalthea-Verlag, 1929, pp. 44f. (English: Robert A. Kann, *The Multinational Empire*, New York, Octagon Books, 1964, vol. I, p. 109.)

“While other peoples may determine a course of action on the basis of the true merits of a cause, little concerned with its source or form, the Magyar wants to garb everything, great or small, in Magyar dress. Anything which is not so garbed is an object of suspicion to him. I for one know of no real Magyar who, though his hair may have grayed and experience and worldly wisdom may have furrowed his brow, would not, as a lunatic whose *idée fixe* has been touched, disregard doctrines of fairness and even of justice when the affairs of our language and nationality are touched upon. On such occasions the most cool-headed becomes ecstatic, the most perspicacious, stricken with blindness, and the fairest and most just, ready to forget the first of the unalterable rules of eternal truth: Do onto no one what thou would's not have them do onto thee!”

<sup>2</sup> AJ, pp. 7f. As this type of example clearly shows (and as Széchenyi's description, quoted earlier, foreshadows), Hungarian nationalism — a necessary and dynamically positive force prior to the *Ausgleich* of 1867 — had, by the 1880's, deteriorated in many areas into an emptily rhetorical and counter-productive phenomenon. (See also Note 59 below.)

<sup>3</sup> Ede Sebestyén, *Magyar operajátszás Budapestén 1793–1937* (Hungarian opera performances in Budapest). Budapest, Somló Béla, 1937 (Budapest Zenei Múltjából [From Budapest's musical past], 1), pp. 33ff. Unless otherwise indicated, historical and technical-architectural information relating to the construction of the Royal Hungarian Opera was taken from MKO 1909 and from Miklós Borsa and Pál Tolnay, *Az Ismeretlen Operaház* (The Unknown Opera House), Budapest, Műszaki Könyvkiadó, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Although later on a number of attempts were made to increase it, even in 1906 the seating capacity was only 1220 (DVO Part III, pp. 23f.). While such a relatively small auditorium has undeniable acoustical (and even aesthetic) advantages, this proved to be the underlying reason for the financial difficulties of the Opera from the very first.

<sup>5</sup> Lajos Laurisin, *A M. Kir. Operaház* (The Royal Hungarian Opera). Budapest, 1941 (A Budapesti Királyi Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Művészettörténeti és Keresztényrégészeti Intézetének Dolgozatai [Publications of the Institute for Art History and Christian Archeology of the Royal Hungarian Peter Pazmany University in Budapest], 72), pp. 38, 59.

<sup>6</sup> The list of subscribers published in MKO 1909 (pp. 382–386) for the period 1884–1909 reads like a “Who is Who” of Hungarian society around the turn of the century. Unlike in many other countries at the time, however, the composition of the Hungarian Opera's subscriber list provides an accurate reflection of the realities of public life. Thus, even in the Lower House (House of Representatives) of Parliament, the nobility (aristocrats and gentry) held approximately 65% of the seats between 1887 and 1910. The same group also held an overwhelming majority of the bureaucratic posts: nearly 60% of the executive branch of four key ministries came from noble ranks in 1890 (JPH, pp. 137 and 110).

<sup>7</sup> According to MKO 1909 (p. 306), Erkel had held that title continuously since the inception of the permanent opera company in 1837. He retained it, together with an annual honorarium of 3000 florins, throughout Mahler's tenure, and until his death in 1893 (Arisztid Valkó, “Erkel Ferenc hivatali működésével kapcsolatos levéltári akták” [Archival documents relating to Ferenc Erkel's official activities], in Ferenc Bónis, ed., *Magyar Zenei történeti Tanulmányok* [Hungarian music historical studies] [II], Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1969 [Festschrift Bence Szabolcsi, 70 years old], p. 225).

<sup>8</sup> November 22, 1885, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Sebestyén, *op. cit.*, pp. 118ff.

<sup>10</sup> PH, December 22, 1885, p. 4. About 10 days earlier Erkel had been awarded the cross of the Franz-Josef-Order for “meritorious service in the theatrical field.”

<sup>11</sup> December 29, 1885, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 306, 402.

<sup>13</sup> DVO Part III, pp. 23, 26.

<sup>14</sup> DVO Part III, p. 28.



<sup>15</sup> DVO Part III, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> DVO Part III, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> BT, April 4, 1886, Beilage, pp. 1f.

<sup>18</sup> FL, May 8, 1886, p. 923.

<sup>19</sup> DVO Part III, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 285ff.

<sup>21</sup> For example, following a threat to strike over their demand for compensation for the loss of a free evening, the orchestra had to be paid extra (DVO Part III, pp. 77f.).

<sup>22</sup> AVE I, pp. 432f.

<sup>23</sup> AVE I, p. 421.

<sup>24</sup> Gyula Erkel stayed with the Opera until March, 1889 (for further details, see Chapter III); the business manager, Gyula Horváthy, was dismissed on October 15, 1886. The dismissal of the secretary, János Jósika, was delayed for a while by the Ministry; when Keglevich eventually dismissed him on March 31, 1887, this action caused public and political indignation (MKO 1909, pp. 306, 308; DVO Part III, pp. 95–98).

<sup>25</sup> Letter from the Minister to Keglevich, AVE I, pp. 433f. Although the date of the letter is given as December 18, 1886 in AVE I, it is obvious from its contextual position among the related letters that it must have been written in October.

<sup>26</sup> AVE I, p. 434.

<sup>27</sup> AVE I, pp. 435f. The date suggested for this apparently undated letter (December, 1886) is clearly incorrect; on the basis of its content and its position among the other letters, it was written after October 23rd but no later than November 7th.

<sup>28</sup> AVE I, p. 435; the letter, dated November 7, 1886, was signed by Beniczky as state secretary.

<sup>29</sup> DVO Part III, pp. 80ff.

<sup>30</sup> On March 13, 1886 (MKO 1909, p. 402). (See also Note 59 below.)

<sup>31</sup> AP 1884, vol. XIII (1886), p. 310; 285th Sitting.

<sup>32</sup> 306th Sitting. AP 1884, vol. XIV (1887), p. 227.

<sup>33</sup> "A pénzügyi bizottság jelentése, a belügyminisztérium 1887. évi költségvetéséről" (Report of the Finance Committee on the estimates for 1887 of the Ministry of the Interior). AU 1884, vol. XX (1887), No. 602, pp. 337, 339ff.

<sup>34</sup> AP 1884, vol. XIV (1887), pp. 365–377.

<sup>35</sup> AP 1884, vol. XIV (1887), pp. 378–400.

<sup>36</sup> Most of the details regarding the enquiry were taken from DVO Part III, pp. 113, 134ff.

<sup>37</sup> *A Magyar Kir. Belügyminisztérium által a Magyar Kir. Opera és budapesti Nemzeti Színház ügyében összehívott enquete rendelkezésére bocsátott adatok* (Data furnished by the Royal Hungarian Ministry of the Interior to the enquiry concerning the Royal Hungarian Opera and the National Theatre of Budapest), Budapest, Pesti Könyvnyomda-Részvény-Társaság, 1887.

<sup>38</sup> 25th Sitting. AP 1887, vol. I (1887), p. 243.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. BT, December 4, 1887, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> BT, December 11, 1887, p. 5. Perotti had been a popular guest-singer since the opening of the Opera; from 1892 to 1899 he was a member of the permanent ensemble (MKO 1909, pp. 299ff., 315). His offer to lease the Opera was also reported in the *Neue Freie Presse* in Vienna and in the LTA. (See also Note 12, Chapter III)

<sup>41</sup> December 11, 1887, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> December 10, 1887, p. [2].

<sup>43</sup> DVO, Part III, p. 138, and MKO 1909, p. 306.

<sup>44</sup> AU 1887, vol. III (1888), No. 94, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> 49th Sitting. AP 1887, vol. II (1888), pp. 258–265.

<sup>46</sup> During the summer holidays, when Erkel was still titular director (DVO, Part IV, p. 15).

<sup>47</sup> AVE II, p. 197. Although it appears that no documents concerning Erkel and the Opera have come down to us from 1887 and 1888, Beniczky's complete letter (pp. 196–200), written on September 5, 1889 provides a detailed account of Erkel's position and activities at the Opera from Beniczky's initial appointment as government commissioner to the time of the letter.

Beniczky also claimed in this letter (p. 198), as well as in another sent to the Minister on November 29, 1889 (p. 201), that Erkel himself came to realize his unsuitability as director and resigned voluntarily, only following which did Beniczky take the necessary steps to fill the position. There is a discrepancy



between this claim and Mottl's signing of a contract as director already on June 5, 1888 (see Chapter I), especially in light of an explicit statement by Vidor to the effect that Erkel asked to be relieved as director only on October 1st (DVO, Part IV, p. 17).

<sup>48</sup> DVO, Part IV, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> AU 1887, vol. VII(1888), Appendices 1–137 to Document No. 242, pp. 166–323.

<sup>50</sup> 104th Sitting. AP 1887, vol. V(1888), pp. 56f. and AU 1887, vol. VII(1888), Document No. 242, pp. 160–165: “A magyar királyi belügyminister jelentése, a magyar királyi opera 1888. és 1889-ik évi költségelőirányzata tárgyában, és annak a jövőben miként leendő kezelése iránt” (Report of the Royal Hungarian Minister of the Interior on the estimates of the Royal Hungarian Opera for 1888 and 1889, and on the ways and means of its future management).

<sup>51</sup> AP 1887, vol. V(1888), p. 224, and AU 1887, vol. VIII(1888), No. 261, pp. 72f.

<sup>52</sup> MKO 1909, p. 308.

<sup>53</sup> AU 1887, vol. VII(1888), Appendix 86 to Document No. 242, p. 300.

<sup>54</sup> DVO, Part IV, p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> MKO 1909, p. 308; MKO 1935, p. 82.

<sup>56</sup> As this document was filed with the papers of Béla Várady, legal counsel of the Opera between 1877 and 1891, it escaped destruction in 1956 (HNA, P 696/13/87). That it is an official copy is clear from the fact that it is signed (illegible; possibly Várady) and dated (July 13), and shows the date of despatch (July 14) and the Opera's registry number (82.biz./1888).

<sup>57</sup> 239th Sitting, May 10, 1889. AP 1887, vol. IX(1889), p. 239. A recently published collection contains the text of a letter from Beniczky to the Minister, in which Beniczky himself recommends awarding the compensation (as severance pay) to Káldy, who had agreed to withdraw his appeal of the dismissal ([Géza Staud, ed.], *A százéves Operaház válogatott iratai* (Selected documents of the 100-year old Opera House), Budapest, Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1984; (Document No. 43, dated September 26, 1888, pp. 61f.).

<sup>58</sup> MKO 1909, p. 306.

<sup>59</sup> DVO, Part IV, p. 16. (See also Note 30 above.) As may be gathered from its frequent recurrence in this study, the question of the language of the performances at the Opera proved to be a troublesome and contentious one. To this day, its detractors consider the introduction of the practice as little more than a symptom of the chauvinism that was rapidly gaining ground towards the end of the nineteenth century (see Note 2 above).

<sup>60</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 15–28.

<sup>61</sup> All staff statistics for the years between 1885 and 1908 are found in MKO 1909, pp. 306–342.

<sup>62</sup> DVO, Part III, p. 139. A detailed comparative analysis of the repertoire during Mahler's directorship with those of selected periods before and after him will be found at the end of Chapter III.

### CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> See especially KBM, HLG and BRM.

<sup>2</sup> WSt, I. N. 123.515.

“Dear Friend!

In the greatest rush, the following:

The Intendant offers Frau Braga a 3-year contract 12000 fl: winter vacation out of the question. In the summer, as stipulated, 4 months vacation. — Debut immediately, or as desired! Unfortunately, we are unable to pay more! Tell Frau Braga how happy it would make me to be able to greet her here at the earliest. — If Frau Braga does not agree, I should like other offers immediately, —

I shall take Lara into consideration once more. — Would she agree to quite a low fee?

I shall make an offer to Lederer in the near future — in principle, we are agreeable to his demands. — Please ask him expressly whether he has been active in grand opera — especially Wagner — in Frankfurt!

Coaches must, of course, be able to manage in Hungarian. — Don't you know any Hungarians?



But now the most important thing: a heroic tenor — a high dramatic female singer (Brünnhilde)!

These two factors are a burning issue for me! I must solve this problem at any price (only not too high!) in the near future.

How do we stand with Szigelli[?]?

Please make suggestions!

Concerning Braga please reply by return post, in order to allow time for a replacement.

Best regards  
from  
Mahler"

Hermine Braga (1859–?), soprano, member of the Vienna Court Opera 1878–1888: sang as a guest at the Hungarian Opera five times during the autumn of 1889 (MKO 1909, p. 300). — József Lederer (1843–1895), heroic tenor of Hungarian origin, sang in Frankfurt, Leipzig, Hamburg and Vienna; although he had appeared as a guest several times with the opera division of the National Theatre prior to 1884, he did not sing at the Royal Hungarian Opera.

<sup>3</sup> WSt.

"Worthy Friend!

To be sure, I should very much like to consider Frau Braga — but I cannot alter the situation here — I can only operate within the existing conditions, and so I must stand by my proposal. As I also must make a decision at the earliest — I have a few offers in this speciality — please let me know immediately whether an agreement can be reached, based on my offer. Further, please also advise me immediately, if possible by telegram, of Herr Sigilli's[?] terms. — Guest appearance in November, please — possibly he should sing Walküre already as a contracted member — approximately the second half of December or the beginning of January.

Concerning [?] I can certainly not decide as quickly as you think. The situation here is still too confused — I must first also shift course (in this direction), in order to avoid treating the concerned parties here brusquely at once. —

In any case, please enquire from Kreibitz at once whether he can manage in Hungarian, and find out why he had left Hamburg after the first year.

Finally, please also let me know something definite about Ernst and de Grach. — I should most especially like to consider the latter. Dear Friend — acquire him for me — possibly I should even be ready to travel to Frankfurt.

At any rate, please remind Frau Braga that it will be absolutely impossible to allow winter vacations, especially at the beginning — and that all negotiations in this regard are pointless. I cannot understand why notice in the first year doesn't make sense to her, as all theatre contracts include this clause. — Why would she not risk learning the little bit of Hungarian (which could not possibly be difficult for her, a Hungarian) — when we, on our part, must again and again be content with that and always allow her time from role to role and, consequently, are unable as yet to find in her a pillar for the repertoire.

In any case, this matter must be resolved soon because I cannot wait much longer.

Please reply immediately.

Your devoted  
Mahler"

As it is most unlikely that Mahler would have been dealing with two impresarios simultaneously (especially concerning the same singer, Hermine Braga), this letter must also be to Lewy. In all likelihood, it was written following the receipt of a telegraphic communication from Lewy in response to the previous letter. The connection between the two letters is also confirmed by the annotation "Mahler/Budapest/5/10/ 88" in a different hand on the second page of this letter.

Henrik Ernst (1848–?) was the son of the renowned coloratura soprano Jozefin Kaiser; he went to Leipzig in 1872 or 1873, and sang in Budapest in 1885 and 1895. — Julius de Grach sang twice as a guest at the Hungarian Opera in the spring of 1889; he was a member of the permanent ensemble from April to December, 1889 (MKO 1909, pp. 300 and 314).



"Dear Herr Wilt[sic]!"

My most sincere thanks for being so very considerate! Only see to it that Brunn, Graz, etc. — also come around now. —

Concerning Frau Kupfer-Berger I must declare firmly that I cannot exceed the sum of 14 000 fl, so please make no further attempts. — I am — because of our present budgetary situation — simply not in a position to offer more.

Now I must also ask for the quickest decision, as I may eventually have to look elsewhere. For a debut, Senta, Elsa, Gioconda would suit me very well. — We can then agree verbally with Frau K. on the other roles.

I shall write to you soon about Frau Papier.

Best regards from your devoted

Gustav Mahler"

Although the letter is undated, the reference to (Rosa) Papier, together with Mahler's letter of October 31st to Wild (see Note 11), supports the assumption that this letter was also written in October, 1888. — Ludmilla Kupfer-Berger (1852–1905), dramatic soprano, member of the Vienna Court Opera 1875–1885, sang five times as a guest at the Budapest Opera in the spring of 1889 (MKO 1909, pp. 75f.). — Rosa Papier (1858–1932) gave a recital in Budapest in 1889, but does not appear to have sung at the Budapest Opera. Later she became famous as a teacher at the Academy of Music in Vienna, and in 1897 played a significant role in Mahler's engagement at the Hofoper.

<sup>5</sup> AU 1887, vol. VII(1888), Appendix 16 to Document No. 242, p. 195; and MKO 1909, p. 313.

<sup>6</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 17.

"Dear Miss!"

You know how much I should like to take you into consideration — still, it is really not possible: I have broken with Italian here because it is impossible, after all, that one should sing in Hungarian, another in Italian.

You do not know Hungarian — that is a real pity!

I am writing in great haste so that you do not wait too long for an answer.

With assurances of my full appreciation of your talent, I am your always devoted

Gustav Mahler"

<sup>7</sup> Although the cumulative personnel lists in both MKO 1909 (p. 309) and MKO 1935 (p. 83) give October 1st as the date of Lányi's appointment, October 16th is given in the chronological list of significant events in the former (p. 403); the same date is given in AJ (p. 9). Lányi (1861–1923) was a respected composer and theatre conductor. — While in the cumulative personnel lists Lányi appears as the Opera's first full-time coach (Korrepetitor) (other than for ballet), the chronological list (MKO 1909, p. 401) indicates that one of the younger Erkels, Elek (1843–1893) had been appointed as "chorus master and coach" on October 16, 1884, that is, upon the opening of the new Opera House. This is also confirmed in the list of personnel on hand during the new Opera's first season (MKO 1909, p. 23). In the latter list the name of Károly Szabados (1860–1892) also appears as coach since September 1, 1880; in the cumulative staff lists, however, he is listed as assistant conductor (p. 309), and also as voice teacher (p. 310). I will return to Szabados again in later sections.

<sup>8</sup> N, November 15, 1888, Morning edition, p. [3]. The fact that Újházy (1844–1915) had been appointed already on October 8th is clear from MKO 1909 (p. 312).

<sup>9</sup> October 1, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> The decision to appoint Alszeghy (1852–1927) was made on October 28th with the appointment becoming official on November 1st (MKO 1909, pp. 403 and 308). Alszeghy had been with the Opera since 1872, that is, since its days at the National Theatre. It is evident from MKO 1909 (p. 308) that contemporary as well as later references to him in 1888 as "chief stage director" are in error: he was promoted to that rank only in 1892.



<sup>11</sup> "Herr I. Wild, Esq.  
Vienna.

In reply to your enquiry of the 30th of this month, I must regretfully advise you that we are unable to consider the guest appearance of the Imperial and Royal Chamber Singer Rosa Papier in the near future.

Yours faithfully,

Budapest, 31 October, 1888.

Mahler  
Director  
of the Royal Hungarian Opera"

The letter, which is in a private collection, carries the Opera's registry number 2804/88. It was written by a clerk and signed by Mahler. However, the clause "for the near future" was added by Mahler; while this probably shows his desire to keep future options open, undoubtedly it also indicates that the Opera's priorities at this time lay in building a strong permanent ensemble, rather than in hosting expensive guest singers whose permanent engagement would have been unlikely.

<sup>12</sup> Actually, Perotti had been singing in Budapest regularly during other times of the year as well. In fact, for several years he had been one of the most frequently heard members of the entire ensemble; for example, in the calendar years 1885, 1886 and 1887 he sang 59, 40 and 61 times, respectively (MKO 1909, p. 299) (See also Note 40, Chapter II).

<sup>13</sup> HNA, P696/13/87. The letter to Várady, with the registry number 2831/I.888, was written by a clerk and signed by Beniczky. Várady's reply is a dated and unsigned draft, although it carries the registry number 581/88.

<sup>14</sup> ThPrag.

"Herr I. A. Šubert, Esq.  
Director of the Royal Bohemian  
National Opera in Prague  
Most Honoured Sir!

Following upon a private enquiry, a Herr Mann was recommended to me as Principal Trumpet; — I found out only yesterday that he is a member of your orchestra. — Otherwise, I know nothing about offers to your members. — Naturally, I would finalize an engagement only through legal means, and I am in a position to set your mind wholly at ease in this respect. — But I cannot prevent the one or the other from approaching me with an enquiry, and in such an eventuality I must leave it up to the individual to decide to what extent such negotiations are compatible with his contractual obligations.

Hoping to assure you of my continuing loyalty, I am,

Your faithfully devoted  
Gustav Mahler"

Except for the registry number (3085/888) and the date line, the letter was written by Mahler. — No one named Mann played in the Opera orchestra during Mahler's time in Budapest. — For later correspondence with Director Šubert, see Season III.

<sup>15</sup> AJ, p. 9 and TG-MM, p. 86. This is also confirmed by the fact that after only two more performances in November, the opera was dropped from the repertoire. It was performed again only in March of 1889, and then only once. (Unless otherwise indicated, performance statistics are taken from the day-by-day list of programmes for 1884–1909 in MKO 1909, pp. 33–256.)

<sup>16</sup> O-V, November 3, 1888, p. 714. The sets for this production were designed by Ágoston Spannraft (1855–1910) — the first Hungarian-born stage designer and painter of significance — with the assistance of Gyula Hirsch. In addition to a drawing for Act I, engraved with the above review (p. 712; reproduced in MOS), one scene painting survives (see Illustration 14).

<sup>17</sup> TG-MM, p. 86. For some reason, the literature contains repeated references to Bianchi's "guest" appearances in Budapest at this time (e. g., AJ, p. 9; HLG, pp. 189 and 195). In fact, the popular soprano



had been a permanent member of the ensemble in Budapest since 1885, and remained one for 10 years (MKO 1909, p. 312).

<sup>18</sup> BH, December 17, 1888, p. 3. — Because the original plans had called for the elder Erkel to conduct only the overture and the first act, this has come down in the literature as a fact (e. g., BME, p. 480; HLG, p. 190). It is clear from the reviews, however, that Erkel returned to the podium for the second act (e. g., Z, December 22, 1888, p. 213).

<sup>19</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/720, no. 1.

“Nagyságos Úr!

Brankovics György című operáját, a m. kir. operaházban új betanulással színrehozatni szándékozván, azon tiszteletteljes kérelemmel fordulok Nagyságodhoz, szíveskedjék ezen opera szerezposztására vonatkozó intentióit velem mielőbb közölni.

Fogadja Nagyságod kiváló tiszteletem nyilvánítását.

Budapesten, 1888. november 29.

Gustav Mahler  
a m. kir. operaház  
műv. igazgatója.”

The letter was written in Hungarian by a clerk and signed by Mahler: it carries the registry number 3188/88. A German translation is published in BME, p. 482.

<sup>20</sup> MKO 1935, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> Z, January 1, 1889, pp. 2f.

<sup>22</sup> In view of the eventual, seemingly very long postponements of the Wagner-premières, it is worth noting that in his second letter to Lewy on October 7th Mahler estimated the première of *Die Walküre* for “the second half of December or the beginning of January”; at least one newspaper account in the autumn also reported Mahler to have been planning to “introduce himself on the artistic side with *Rheingold* at the beginning of January, followed in four weeks by *Walküre*” (PH, October 2, 1888, p. 4).

<sup>23</sup> DSB (VI 1924.212).

“Most Honoured Herr Director!

I am taking quick advantage of your kind permission, and ask you to lend me the harmony parts (winds and brasses) from *Rheingold*, and if possible also from *Walküre*, for 3 weeks, so that I may quickly have them copied out here.

Naturally, I will take great pains to return them promptly.

With my sincerest thanks in advance, I am,

gratefully devoted  
Gustav Mahler

Budapest, 22 October, 1888.”

Except for the date line, the letter was written by Mahler, and carries the registry number 2657/I.888.

<sup>24</sup> JM, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Z, November 1, 1888, p. 175.

<sup>26</sup> N, January 27, 1889, Morning edition, p. [1]. Although Keszler is the likely author of the review-portion of the *feuilleton*, the attack on Wagner — even with all its viciousness — is so well written that it may well be the work of the paper's publisher, the prolific and celebrated belletrist Mór Jókai.

<sup>27</sup> Emil Haraszti, *Wagner Richard és Magyarország* (Richard Wagner and Hungary), Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1916, pp. 407f.

<sup>28</sup> Having been an undistinguished member of the permanent ensemble for two years, Szilágyi was one of the solo singers whose contract was allowed to lapse at the end of May, 1888 as part of Beniczky's austerity measures (AU 1887, vol. VII(1888), Appendix 16 to Document No. 242, p. 195); she was permanently engaged again only in 1894 (MKO 1909, p. 313). Thus, the first Hungarian Brünnhilde was, to all intents and purposes, a ‘guest’ singer!



<sup>29</sup> GMB, p. 75 (English: MSL, p. 118).

"My very dear Herr Director,

The enclosed letters will clarify the situation for you. I beg you to treat them as in previous cases, as confidential.

Are you yet able to reach a decision? And what line shall I take in the matter? — I am in a dreadful 'Soubrette scrape'!

I take this opportunity of wishing you and yours a happy Christmas and New Year and hope you will sample the 'genuine Magyar' specialities that I am sending by the same post.

[...]

I expect to spend a very lonely Christmas Eve this year — the theatre will be closed — and I have as yet no acquaintances at all here.

I am now well into the *Nibelungen* rehearsals, but am in serious straits about a tenor and have the most ridiculous difficulties in all directions. — But I shall not give up!

[...]

Your most obedient servant,  
Gustav Mahler

[...]

Just for fun I am sending you both Artner's letters herewith, so that you can enjoy them to the full."

<sup>30</sup> Josephine von Artner (1869–1932) sang under Mahler both in Leipzig and Hamburg: she was also a soloist at the first performance of the Second Symphony in Berlin on December 13, 1895 (Ferdinand Pfohl, *Gustav Mahler*, ed. Knud Martner. Hamburg, Karl Dieter Wagner, 1973, p. 71). She did not sing in Budapest during Mahler's time there.

<sup>31</sup> TG-MM, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> E, January 7, 1889, p. 2. On January 10 Z reported Mahler to be "convalescing", and continuing with the rehearsals (p. 15).

<sup>33</sup> DVO, Part IV, pp. 32f.

<sup>34</sup> January 24, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> N, January 23, 1889, Evening edition, p. [2].

<sup>36</sup> Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Published with permission.

"My Dear Parents!

Both dress rehearsals were brilliantly successful — the whole of Pest is in an uproar —

The enclosed represents a sample from the innumerable articles and letters I have already received. — The Intendant is very happy. I shall write more soon. Again, this was a huge success! How are you? Do write more often!

Affectionate greetings from your  
Gustav"

<sup>37</sup> BH, January 21, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> PN, January 25, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>39</sup> Z, February 1, 1889, p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> DVO, Part IV, p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> As is noted on the placards, the sets were designed and painted by Spannraft and Hirsch; only an engraving of Spannraft's drawing for a moonlit forest scene in *Walküre* is known (O-V, November 3, 1888, p. 713; republished in MOS). The costumes were designed by Peter Caffi.

<sup>42</sup> N, January 27, 1889, Morning edition, pp. [1f.].

<sup>43</sup> PN, January 27, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>44</sup> N, January 28, 1889, Morning edition, p. [1].

<sup>45</sup> N, January 29, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>46</sup> HLG, p. 194.

<sup>47</sup> PH, February 18, 1889, p. 5.



<sup>48</sup> PH, February 20, 1889, p. 7, and February 22, p. 6. Bernhard Mahler had died on February 18th.

<sup>49</sup> Z, March 2, 1889, pp. 49ff.

<sup>50</sup> The long process of getting this decoration for Erkel is related on the basis of original documents by Ferenc Bónis in "Erkel Ferenc vaskoronarendje" (Ferenc Erkel's Order of the Iron Crown), in Ferenc Bónis, ed., *Magyar Zenei történeti Tanulmányok* (Hungarian music historical studies) [III]. Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1973, pp. 85–101.

<sup>51</sup> N, April 1, 1889, Morning edition, p. [2].

<sup>52</sup> E. g., BT, March 9, 1889, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> DVO, Part IV, p. 55. Gyula was to conduct again at the Opera for only a few months between September 1892 and January 1893 (MKO 1909, p. 309).

<sup>54</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 330 and 309.

<sup>55</sup> TG-MM, p. 146; MKO 1935, p. 83.

<sup>56</sup> The documentary evidence relating to this affair spans nearly two years; it will be most conveniently discussed as a self-contained unit between the sections devoted to Seasons I and II.

<sup>57</sup> One of Mahler's letters to Sándor Erkel also contains a reference to his apparently unsuccessful attempts to engage a satisfactory second conductor. — Mahler left Budapest after the second performance of *Eremiten* on April 2nd (BT, April 3, 1889, p. 5), and not after the première (as in HLG, p. 194; no specific day is mentioned in HLG(F), p. 296); he returned on the evening of the 6th (not the 7th, as in HLG, p. 195) to conduct the third performance of this opera the next evening (BT, April 7, 1889, p. 6).

<sup>58</sup> GMB., p. 414 (English: MSL, p. 402).

"I have very pleasant memories of the following people, with whom he was then constantly in touch: Herr Ödön von Mihalovich; that excellent serious musician, Professor Hans Kößler, of the Budapest Conservatory, whom I was later to meet again with Mahler in Salzburg and Berchtesgaden; the singer Bianca Bianchi; the actor Ede Újházy and Herr Doctor Ebner and his family. The following may bear witness to the thoroughness and sense of direction with which Mahler, in a foreign country, prepared the ground for what he had in mind: on Holy Saturday he gave an authentically Magyar dinner, in truly princely style, for a small gathering of artists and their families, an occasion at which everyone enjoyed themselves vastly, and which also bore the hoped-for fruits for Mahler's serious plans."

In his note Löhr also states that during his visit in Budapest Mahler conducted *Eremiten* and Rossini's *Il barbiere*. But it is clear from the reviews (e. g., in BT) that the performance of the latter opera on April 18 was conducted by Benkő. Based on Löhr's faulty recollection, it has come down in the literature that Mahler conducted *Il barbiere* during his first season in Budapest (e. g., TG-MM, p. 113; HLG, p. 195). In fact, there is no evidence known to me that he conducted this opera at all in Budapest.

<sup>59</sup> N, April 28, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>60</sup> Wilhelm Kienzl, *Meine Lebenswanderungen*. Stuttgart, J. Engelhorn's Nachf., 1926, p. 135.

"he does not know him well as an artist; but he considers him a Germaniser, who does not represent a benefit to Hungarian musical life."

A more balanced account of the relationship between Mahler and the Erkels is found in the reminiscences of Izor Béldi (1867–1926; lawyer, was to become the music critic of PH in 1901). According to him, although the Erkels were cold to Mahler, there was no professional jealousy involved; it was simply a question of different cultural roots and attitudes: the Erkels were nationalists, while Mahler was a cosmopolitan. It was the malcontents who tried to make the Erkels a cause for their anti-Mahler intrigues, but this was rejected by the Erkels ("Operaházi remniszcenciák, II" (Reminiscences of the Opera House), PH, July 22, 1921, p. 7). For an objective historical account of the relationship, see also BME.

<sup>61</sup> "A pénzügyi bizottság jelentése, a belügyminisztérium 1889. évi állami költségvetéséről" (Report of the Finance Committee on the estimates for 1889 of the Ministry of the Interior), AU 1887, vol. X(1889), Document No. 333, pp. 55ff.



<sup>62</sup> AP 1887, vol. XI(1889), pp. 276–314. — Mór Wahrmann (1832–1892), prominent businessman and politician, became the first Jewish Member of Parliament following the emancipation; he remained in Parliament until his death.

For a detailed discussion of the rise of antisemitism in Hungary during the second half of the nineteenth century (and especially of its economic background and political implications), see JPH, pp. 112–118 and 141f.

<sup>63</sup> N, May 22, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>64</sup> HLG, p. 198.

<sup>65</sup> HNA, P. 1045/1/7.

<sup>66</sup> The letter is at the same location.

“[...] Nagyön lekötelezne ha *Dolores* szemmel tartaná [...] biztosítsa a zenekar részvételét — Előre jószolom hogy a zenekart csak *nagy nehézséggel* fogjuk megkapni, megemlékezzék szavaimra [...]”

Although the letter was dated by Zichy as January 8, 1888, it is clear from the subsequent letter (as well as from the events) that he simply made a mistake — not an unnatural one at the beginning of a new year.

<sup>67</sup> Z, April 3, 1889, p. 80.

<sup>68</sup> Z, May 8, 1889, p. 102.

<sup>69</sup> Justh, *Diary*, p. 368 (for full bibliographical details, see Note 42, Chapter I). Justh also added the revealing comment that *Dolores* was “prepared” by Imre Bellovich (conductor-president of the Society); Zichy (as is also implied by his letter of March 9th) had been interested in doing little more than ‘conducting’ the performance itself.

<sup>70</sup> The letter is in FLA.

<sup>71</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/721, no. 1.

“Dear Sir!

It is with the greatest regret that I must tell you that the Government Commissioner Herr Beniczky has decided negatively in the matter of your request, despite my intercession; I am prepared to elaborate further in person. As concerns the first part of your request, I think that in actual fact this can be of no real concern to you; at any rate, I am prepared to state that you could have in your hands the renewal of your current contract no less than a year before it expires.

Yours faithfully,  
Gustav Mahler”

The letter, written by Mahler except for the date line, bears the Opera’s registry number 2319/89.

<sup>72</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/1280.

<sup>73</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/873, no. 1.

“Most Honoured Herr Kapellmeister!

I am in receipt of your letters of the 7th and 8th inst. That his Excellency has once more refused does not come unexpectedly. [...] If you leave no stone unturned, you will yet achieve your goal; a petition to His Majesty, as a last resort, must succeed in my opinion. [...] I am convinced that the position awaiting you is a brilliant one, and that you could not even wish for more advantageous conditions.

-----  
I am also in receipt of your letter of the 13th from Csaba. It appears from it that Mahler takes the position that your request for release must yet succeed in the end. This strikes me as an important factor. One cannot set store by his congenial words, I have predicted that much for you. We had also foreseen the fact that the Minister must consult the Intendant.”

<sup>74</sup> In fact, at the end of the first season Beer reproached Mahler for allowing Erkel to conduct an excessive share of the repertoire (HLG, p. 195); a year later several critics advised him to relieve the heavy work load of the first conductor by taking over a greater part of the repertoire (TG-MM, p. 161).



"Dear Sir!

Your valued letter reached me on my sick bed. — The importance of the matter allows me to conquer the lassitude caused by my weakness, but I must be brief.

First of all, I beg you to believe me that I have considered your request with the kind of objectivity and interest to which I am obligated by my respect for you and by the weight of the arguments you advanced. —

Aside from the fact that I find it difficult to imagine that you could find a financially more advantageous position (thinking of a salary of 4500 florins and 4 months' holidays), you are so necessary and indispensable to the institution that I would consider it grossly unconscionable on my part if I should wish to lose you in such a frivolous manner. — I agree that in a moral sense your position is now a difficult and painful one, — with this in mind, I have already indicated that I am ready for any concession which would ease the unpleasantness of the current situation for you.

— At the same time, however, I disagree that you fill the role of a second Kapellmeister with us. Above all, you are independent in the exercising of your duties — I dictate nothing to you — you conduct practically everything — I shall have to limit my activities to a very few operas in the future, just as I have in the past — and, as you know, I am also endeavouring to lessen your large work load by engaging a second Kapellmeister. — As everything is mitigated by time, so eventually grass will grow over recent events, and then you will feel just as much at home and happy again as your nature will allow.

We can discuss everything more thoroughly when I return to Budapest —

only, I beseech you most sincerely: withdraw your request and remain in your position; whatever is in my power to make it an honourable and pleasant one, will be done.

Yours faithfully,  
Gustav Mahler"

<sup>76</sup> GMB, p. 76 (English: MSL, p. 119).

"At last I have been sent home from hospital. [...] Today I am going to Bayreuth for five days, and from there to Marienbad for three weeks. — I hope to be in Vienna in the middle of August."

Although after "scrupulously precise reflection" Löhr assigned this undated letter to the summer of 1888, (p. 413), the reference to Bayreuth and Marienbad leaves no doubt that it was written in 1889. It is also known that in late June or early July Mahler underwent an operation for haemorrhoids in Munich (MSL, pp. 402f.).

<sup>77</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/289.

"Igen Tisztelt Karmester Úr!

Szíves sorait épen egy hét előtt Bécsben vettem, elutazásom pillanatában. Késtem a felelettel, mert előbb Mahler állapota iránt akartam tudakozódni. Ma kaptam a választ, hogy szegény bizony rosszul van és pár hét előtt felgyógyulása nem várható. Hogy ily körülmények közt tisztelt kegyednek elmeneteléről kevésbé lehet szó, mint valaha, magától érthető. Így tehát Beniczkynek sem írok, mert tagadó válasza teljes biztonsággal előrelátható."

<sup>78</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/763, no. 1.

"Tisztelt Karnagy Úr!

Beniczky és Mahler urakkal, kik jelenleg itt időznek, beszéltem, de — hasztalan. Ők semmi áron nem bírhatók arra, hogy Önt szerződése alól felmentsék."

The date on the letter is only "Bayreuth, júl. 22".



<sup>79</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/873, no. 3.

"Honoured Herr Kapellmeister,

The contract arrived on my desk yesterday from Count [Hochberg]. I must now urge you to pursue the matter of your release in such a way that you can sign in Vienna between August 9 and 16, receiving from me at the same time the countersigned contract. [...] Your contract is for 5 years. [...] Commencement on September 1st of this year. Salary 9000 marks.

While I hope that you will be satisfied with the latest version, I ask you once again, under all circumstances, for the strictest confidence. [...]"

<sup>80</sup> AVE II, p. 195. This is the earliest extant document in which Beniczky is addressed as "intendant"; for his appointment, see Season II.

<sup>81</sup> AVE II, pp. 200f.

<sup>82</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/873, no. 12.

"Honoured Herr Kapellmeister,

Your letter of [October] 28th pleased me greatly; after all, I had always recommended that you make a [royal] petition. But now do proceed in all seriousness at last, so that we may see the end of the matter. Why did you, then, not present yourself to the Count in Vienna? [...] It would be very good if you could take up your post here before the end of the year, if possible within a few weeks, so take the necessary steps with the utmost speed and energy. [...]

In your place I would be done with Mahler, following the latest proof of his attitude towards you [...]

Pressure will also be brought to bear on the Minister of the Interior from Vienna [...]"

<sup>83</sup> The text of the royal petition is in AVE II, pp. 202f. Apparently, the petition was undated. The date suggested by Valkó ("August? 1889") is clearly incorrect; a date-of-writing of mid-to-late November is suggested both by Pierson's letter cited above, as well as by the royal annotation on the petition:

"Sándor Erkel, conductor of the Budapest Opera — regarding his release from his contract with the administration of the Opera.

For the attention of my Hungarian Minister of the Interior.

Budapest, December 2, 1889.

F[ranz] J[osef]"

(AVE II, p. 204; original in German)

By this time Count Géza Teleki was the Minister of the Interior; he was to remain in the position until the resignation of the Tisza-government in March, 1890.

<sup>84</sup> AVE II, pp. 203f.

<sup>85</sup> AVE II, pp. 204f.

"Ami azon panaszát illeti, hogy a nagyobb operák melyeket nagy fáradsággal ő hozott színre lassanként elvételnek tőle, — erre azt jegyzem meg, hogy a régi nagy operákból Mahler igazgató úr csak *Lohengrin*t vezényli, melyet újonnan tanított be, a többi még jelenleg is Erkel Sándor vezényli.

Erkel Sándor tehát olyan működési kört tölt be, a mely sem testvére, sem oly karnagyokra nem bízható, a melyekben "bővíben vannak az országban..."

(Jellemző külföldben Erkel Sándor hazafiságára s az intézet iránti szeretetére az, hogy ő ilyeneket ajánl e működési körre.) De csakis ennyiben van az ő nélkülözhetetlensége; mert ha akarnám helyettesíthetném őt külföldi s tán jobb erővel is, ezt azonban nem kívánom tenni, azon ellenszenv miatt melylyel külföldi erő mindig találkozik. [...]"

Concerning the reference to the new production of *Lohengrin*, see Season II.

<sup>86</sup> AVE II, pp. 205f.



<sup>87</sup> AVE II, p. 207. The press also reported that Erkel's request to be released from his contract had been "refused at all levels" (Z, February 20, 1890, p. 8), while the PL reported that the differences between the Intendantur and Erkel had been resolved (February 17, 1890, p. [4]); but see second part of Note 89.

<sup>88</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/873, no. 15.

"Honored Herr Kapellmeister,

After checking with the Count, I can now once again affirm in writing that the contract concluded with you is completely valid and has already received His Majesty's assent, regardless of whether you come now or only on April 1, 1892. It is of extraordinary regret to me that you could not win your release despite all efforts in that direction, but at this point I know of no solution. [...]"

The reference "His Majesty" is to the King of Prussia.

<sup>89</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/721, no. 2.

"With respect to your letter of the 5th, in which you renew your request to be released from the company of the Royal Opera. I must once again answer in the negative, for the interest of the institute continues to demand your collaboration. [...] I am, however, ready to extend your contract by several years."

The letter, bearing the Opera's registry number 37.biz./1890, was written by a clerk and signed by Mahler ("biz." in the registry number designates the government commissioner's/intendant's correspondence register).

As two letters published in [Staud], *op. cit.* (see Chapter II, Note 57) show, even Mahler's reiterated denial of his request did not, finally, silence Erkel. On June 11, 1890, he wrote to Beniczky and, referring to Mahler's latest refusal, pleaded with the intendant to release him from his contract. A sentence in this letter also implies that Erkel was unaware of the rejection of his petition by the King! Beniczky's reply in the negative is dated June 14, 1890. (The two letters, sharing the registry number "48 biz./1890", are Documents Nos. 47 and 48 in [Staud], pp. 64ff.)

<sup>90</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/872.

"Honoured Herr Kapellmeister,

As I see from the newspapers, Director Mahler has resigned. With that the *status quo ante* has been restored, and you have regained your old jurisdiction. Please accept my very best wishes for this *mutatio rerum* which, incidentally, is by no means a joyous one for us in Berlin, and especially for me. When I think how much time and effort it cost me to win you and to pry you loose, the thought that you will now not come at all is a rather bitter one. [...] Please let me know immediately whether my assumption is correct that you are once more in command in Budapest. [...]"

Should you still come, however, you can be certain that you will be welcomed with open arms here and will find a splendid position. The engagement of Kapellmeister Weingartner from Mannheim has absolutely no connection with you, and you, too, were meant to share top billing with Sucher and Weingartner. Count Hochberg has high hopes for you. [...]"

<sup>91</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 407 and 309.

<sup>92</sup> Although the very detailed descriptions of the Shah's visit carried by the press, including the evening of ballet (e. g., NPJ, August 28, 1889, p. 6), make no mention of this, according to HLG(F) (p. 303) Mahler conducted this performance. The programme given in Note 11 of the latter source is misleading or incorrect in three particulars. Only the first *tableau* of *Naila* (the music of this and of the fourth *tableau* is by Ludwig Minkus, of the middle two by Delibes) was performed (MKO 1909, p. 76); the choreography used in Budapest was not the one by Saint-León, but by Friedrich Campilli, ballet master of the Opera until 1887 (MKO 1935, pp. 159 and 99). The music of *Der neue Romeo* is not by Peter Lazar Stojanovits (1877–1957), but by Jenő Sztojanovits (1864–1919) and by Lajos Steiger.

<sup>93</sup> N, September 14, 1889, Evening edition, p. [2].



<sup>94</sup> GMB, p. 78 (English: MSL, pp. 120f.).

"I am in the midst of work — *Lohengrin* on Sunday!  
Very bad news from home — the catastrophe is awaited hourly.  
There has been no improvement in my condition so far.  
I take morphia in order to get through rehearsals."

The letter is undated; "between 9–13 September" 1889 is suggested in MSL (p. 120). It was only at the end of October that Mahler was finally able to write to Löhr that "mein Zustand ist von Tag zu Tag besser" ("My condition improves daily") (GMB, p. 79; MSL, p. 122; this letter is also undated, but the arrival postmark is given as November 1).

<sup>95</sup> PN, September 14, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3]. In fact, the placard of the première informs us that the scenic design was by Spannraft and Hirsch (and not by Árpád Molnár, as I had mistakenly stated in MOS, and in my "The Royal Hungarian Opera under Mahler", *Beiträge der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Musik '79–'81*), while the costumes were made "under the direction of Peter Caffi, based on the drawings of the historical painter Professor [Joseph] Flüggen [1842–1906] of München." Probably because it encountered critical resistance, the orchestra pit was no longer lowered after a few performances (*cf.* report on the performance of December 15th in PN, December 16, 1889, Morning edition, p. [2]).

<sup>96</sup> Z, October 15, 1889, p. 156. According to Vidor, even the parts in the small chorus were assigned to solo singers (DVO Part IV, p. 58).

<sup>97</sup> Ludwig Karpath, "Wie ich mit Gustav Mahler bekannt wurde", in *Begegnung mit dem Genius*, 2. ed., Wien, Fiba-Verlag, 1934, pp. 24f.

"I agree completely that much in my production is similar to the one here, but that is actually not at all astonishing: Frau Wagner and I have both perceived the spirit of the work, and have created from that spirit."

Karpath (1866–1936), of Hungarian origin, first met Mahler during his very brief and unsuccessful career as a singer under contract at the Budapest Opera between October 18 and November 30, 1888 (MKO 1909, p. 314). In a recently discovered note (March 12, 1889, registry No. 1434/89; signed by Mahler), sent to Karpath in Vienna, Mahler regretfully refuses what appears to have been a request by Karpath to be reemployed at the Budapest Opera. (Personal communication from Mr. Knud Martner.)

<sup>98</sup> TG-MM, p. 131.

<sup>99</sup> HLG, p. 201.

<sup>100</sup> The two letters are in GMB, pp. 78 and 79, respectively; additional information is given in Löhr's annotation to the first letter on p. 415 (English: MSL., pp. 121, 121f., 403f.).

"I hear that Justi is going to stay with you for a short time. What are we going to do with Emma?

All that matters to me now is that the brief transitional period up to the time when I can have my two sisters with me should be as tolerable as possible for them."

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"I beg you to give me, for my orientation, precise figures as to [...] how much I shall have to send regularly every month for the two children — and I must admit I cannot quite suppress a slight groan. — [...] here expenses seem to be turning out considerably higher than I had originally hoped, and these owing to Justi's singularly sensitive and debilitated constitution. Tomorrow I shall ask for an advance!"

<sup>101</sup> The ballet was performed only 9 times at the Opera and 3 times at the Várszínház between 1889 and 1893 (MKO 1935, p. 160). The music was variously reported as having come from the "estate of a former Viennese ballet master", and as being by "various composers" (FL, October 19, 1889, p. 2129, and October 21, 1889, p. 2144).



"Director Mahler's secret lies in his resolute striving to create a Hungarian ensemble suitable for all operas, and in the most painstaking, minutely detailed study which he devotes to the works under his direction.

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We have never seen our singers play with such verve and in such a smart tempo; specifically, Fräulein Bianchi was the good genie of this performance. . . . Under Director Mahler's baton, the orchestra, not lowered on this occasion, shone in full splendour. Already the masterful playing of the overture earned stormy applause, and the orchestra remained at the height of its form throughout the opera."

<sup>103</sup> E, October 25, 1889, p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> TG-MM, p. 89.

<sup>105</sup> TG-MM, pp. 133f.

<sup>106</sup> PH, September 27, 1889, p. 4. Kordin was under contract at the National Theatre and the Opera between 1879 and the end of 1889 (MKO 1909, p. 313).

<sup>107</sup> The document in question is a court order, dated December 2, 1889; it establishes the date of the preliminary hearing for December 23rd. It was found among the papers of Várady (HNA, P 696/13/93).

<sup>108</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 77f. and 314.

<sup>109</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 6.

"Dear Herr Rosenberg!

This is by way of an enquiry as to when I can reckon with your wife's debut. — Time flies, and I must carry out my plans. —

If your wife could arrive here in November, I could ensure a brilliant debut for her.

I beg you for the speediest possible reply."

The letter is undated, and bears the Opera's registry number 4066/89.

<sup>110</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 7.

"Dear Herr Rosenberg!

Naturally, I should be very happy still to activate our contract; only, I thought to have understood from your wife's last letter that you had reconsidered matters. Well then, when can you come here with your wife, and for when can I plan the actual guest appearance?

The conditions here are as you already know them, and they provide an arena for your wife for the most beautiful and diverse artistic activity. —

I am even hoping that we can activate your wife's contract immediately following the end of her guest appearance.

So then, just come! You will both like it very much here!"

The letter is undated; although the blank fourth page has the date 23/11/89 written in a different hand, judging from the registry number (5034/89), this date more likely refers to another letter, perhaps a reply from the Rosenbergs.

<sup>111</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 3.

"Dear Herr Rosenberg!

As far as your affairs are concerned, I have already discussed these with you in detail in Prague! — What I said to you about this is still valid. — I cannot guarantee you anything, but I will make every effort to find you a position commensurate with your qualifications, if possible at our Opera. — Naturally, it will not go quickly. — As my time is very limited and, besides, as you will have already noticed I find all correspondence very arduous — as you can see, I am my own "Rosenhain" — in my letters I always concern myself only with the immediate — the factual — and the obligatory. —



Well then, quickly to the matter at hand:

I await you definitely at the end of December and will schedule [her] guest appearance for the middle of January. —

As concerns the roles themselves, Mignon as the first one suits me very well. —

Orpheus, however, is not yet in the repertoire, so please forget about it, and choose Amneris instead, as we had intended from the beginning.

Cherubino as the third one is quite alright with me, and I hope to be able to schedule the opera for January.

Given our relationship, and the tendency to follow a guest appearance immediately with an engagement or (if this is not possible before the contractually stipulated time) with another kind of extended connection which makes your wife ours immediately, we have plenty of time to discuss the details following your arrival in Budapest. — Should your wife not yet be prepared for Amneris, we could perhaps repeat Mignon once or twice, thereby making up for lost time. — I am sending you Mignon's part as it is sung here, naturally with recitatives.

If your wife desires to make a cut, or the occasional alteration, she is entirely free to do so. —

Similarly, I am sending you Amneris once more — although I vaguely remember seeing both parts already in your possession."

The letter has the Opera's registry number 5187/89; the date is in a different hand (probably the registry clerk's). — The following spring it was rumoured in Budapest (and was opposed in the press) that Mahler wanted to hire Rosenberg to replace Alszeghy as stage manager (FL, April 24, 1890, p. 826).

<sup>112</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 4.

"Orpheus can, indeed, come later.

Budapest, November 30, 1889.

Dear Herr Rosenberg!

Truly, you are asking for the impossible — Rienzi is not in the repertoire! and cannot be produced in a short time, no more than Orpheus. If, for reasons incomprehensible to me, your wife has something against Amneris, she should choose any part she desires from our repertoire — it is all the same to me!

So, send me a list of the parts your wife likes to sing, and I will then mark those that are possible."

The letter has the Opera's registry number 5250/89; the dateline is in the registry clerk's hand.

<sup>113</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 5.

"Dear Herr Rosenberg!

Must I, then, poor man, continuously write letters to you?

So: for all I care, [she] can be declared anything at all by the theatre arbitration tribunal, it does not change our plans at all. In any case, I await you here at the end of December, and have already announced Mignon and Fräulein Bianchi as Philine for the middle of January.

But now, for heaven's sake, I beg you, leave your doubts behind, and let me know the day of your arrival. Which roles would your wife wish to sing in Italian here?

Best regards, you whiner

from your  
pitiable  
Mahler"

The letter has the Opera's registry number 5593/89; the dateline is in the registry clerk's hand. The suit over Hilgermann's breach of contract in Prague dragged on for about a year. Neumann took his case to the civil courts, asking for an indemnity of 5000 florins. At the beginning of November, 1890, however, the suit was dismissed, "opening Frau Hilgermann's way to any stage" (PH, November 5, 1890, p. 4).

<sup>114</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 81f., and 312. — HLG states (p. 208) that on January 19th the Swedish soprano Sigrid Arnoldson also made her Budapest debut in *Mignon*; earlier (p. 198), Mahler is said to have "engaged" her for the 1889–1890 season there. In fact, on January 19th the role of Philine was sung by



Bianca Bianchi (as had been forecast in Mahler's letter of December 16, 1889); in general, it is evident from the Opera's records that Arnoldson first sang at the Budapest Opera as a guest in 1895, returned from time to time for several years, but was never actually "engaged" there (in the sense of a permanent contract) (MKO 1909, pp. 301–304 and 312f.).

<sup>115</sup> E. g., PN, October 1, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3]. Although this seems unlikely, the same press reports claimed that the work was "already in rehearsal under Mahler"; it is also mentioned that "another symphony by Mahler, 'Tottenfeier'" would be performed during the winter in Munich.

<sup>116</sup> "[...] this 'Himmlische Leben', which was the first one to burst in Hamburg from the long-dammed spring following the stagnation in Budapest."

(Quoted in Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler* I, Wiesbaden, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1977, p. 198.)

<sup>117</sup> According to the voice and piano manuscripts of the five *Wunderhorn*-songs, initially grouped by Mahler under the collective title "Fünf Humoresken", "Das himmlische Leben" (dated February 10, 1892) was preceded by three other songs composed in January and February.

<sup>118</sup> In an undated letter to Löhr (GMB, p. 70; English: MSL, p. 111), dated by the recipient to March, 1888, Mahler wrote: "My work is finished!"; in his annotation (GMB, p. 413; MSL, p. 400) Löhr states that Mahler meant the First Symphony. Corroboration is provided by another undated letter from Mahler (also traceable to March, 1888), in this case to his parents (quoted in BRM and BRM(E), p. 180); it is interesting to note that in this letter Mahler referred to his just completed work specifically as "the symphony".

<sup>119</sup> BRM, p. 182.

<sup>120</sup> NBL, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> GMB, p. 414 (English: MSL, p. 401).

"[...] at home he would go to the piano and play for me parts of what was to become his Second Symphony."

<sup>122</sup> Those published by Schott in 1892 in Volumes II and III of the *Lieder und Gesänge*; Volume I of the same collection, published in the same year, contains five miscellaneous songs (also for voice and piano), composed between 1880 and 1883 (HLG, p. 738, after Guido Adler).

<sup>123</sup> For several decades, the generally accepted date for Mahler's discovery of the *Wunderhorn* anthology had been 1888, a date apparently introduced by his early biographers (e. g., Richard Specht, *Gustav Mahler*, Berlin, Leipzig, Schuster & Loeffler, 1913, p. 165). Circumstantial evidence advanced over the past few years by, among others, Donald Mitchell and myself, however, leads to the inescapable conclusion that the composer came to know the anthology earlier than 1888.

<sup>124</sup> NBL, p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> HLG, pp. 760f.

<sup>126</sup> In the spring of 1886, the soprano Betty Frank sang three of Mahler's songs in Prague. Only one of these ("Hans und Grete") is named in the reviews (see BRM, p. 175); the other two could have been "Erinnerung" and "Frühlingsmorgen".

<sup>127</sup> It must be noted, however, that the precise order in which Mahler composed these songs is unknown. The only extant autograph manuscript, entitled "Aus des Knaben Wunderhorn — 9 Lieder von Gustav Mahler", is a continuously written, clean copy of the songs. Could this copy have been made by Mahler for Justine while they lived together in Budapest?

<sup>128</sup> Z, November 15, 1889, p. 181.

<sup>129</sup> N, November 14, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3]; and PH, November 14, 1889, p. 4, respectively.

<sup>130</sup> PN, November 14, 1889, Morning edition, p. [2].

<sup>131</sup> N, November 14, 1889, Evening edition, p. [1].

<sup>132</sup> N, November 18, 1889, Evening edition, p. [2].

<sup>133</sup> N, November 19, 1889, Evening edition, p. [2].

<sup>134</sup> "Gentlemen!

Still under the impression of today's dress rehearsal, I feel obliged to thank you and all participants for the unselfish and genuinely artistically spirited effort with which you have contributed to the realization of my humble work.



Already today's dress rehearsal convinced me that I shall never again have the opportunity to hear my work with such perfection.

I am proud to lead such an ensemble, one which devotes itself to the service of art with such dedication and a setting aside of personal interests, and beg you to remain as good to me as I am grateful and indebted to you.

Your most devoted,  
Gustav Mahler."

The manuscript of this letter is in the Archives of the Budapest Philharmonic; its facsimile is published in BRM, p. 186.

<sup>135</sup> Cherubini's *Abencerage* overture, an aria from *The Marriage of Figaro* (and, as an encore, one from *Mignon*) sung by Hermine Braga (appearing as a guest at the Opera at the time), and Bach's *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue* in Abert's transcription for orchestra. — For a facsimile of the concert programme see Illustration 23.)

<sup>136</sup> Z, November 25, 1889, p. 187. Although it is true that no programme notes were available at the concert, "explanations" of the "symphonic poem" were published in some newspapers prior to the concert. The PN, for instance, brought out a strikingly sensitive and understanding explication of the "content" of the work; among other observations, the writer described the Funeral March as the "most daring and gigantic instance of conception" in the entire work (November 19, 1889, Morning edition, p. [1]).

<sup>137</sup> N, November 21, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>138</sup> PH, November 21, 1889, p. 6.

<sup>139</sup> NPJ, November 21, 1889, p. [1].

"We regret having to say that the expectations that had been raised by the work were not fulfilled. If one had not known from Mahler's splendid achievements as a conductor that he is a sensitive musician of varied tastes, intimately familiar with the masterpieces of all stylistic periods, one would not have gathered this from his symphony. Judging from the title "symphonic poem", and from our genial Director's known predilections for the most radical advances of the "new romanticism", one should have been prepared for extravagances of all sorts; at the very least, however, one would have expected interesting and meaningful things in that style. Instead, we heard music which, aside from occasional eccentricities, did not rise above the level of the ordinary (at best!) in any department — melody, harmony or orchestration.

[...] If we now sum it all up by way of a general impression, we cannot put it any other way but that Mahler, who is in the very first rank as a conductor, also resembles that group in that he is no symphonist. [...]

The success of the new symphony, rehearsed and conducted by the composer himself, was small; even a modicum of opposition was evident at the end. In contrast, Herr Sándor Erkel was applauded almost demonstratively upon his return — that is how grateful the public is for a conductor who does not compose."

<sup>140</sup> NBL, p. 152 (English: NBL(E), p. 161).

"In Budapest, where I first performed it, my friends avoided me afterwards; no one dared to mention the performance or the work to me, and I went about like a leper or an outlaw. In these circumstances, you can imagine what the reviews were like."

<sup>141</sup> "Dear Friend!

Warmest thanks for your kind letter. I am very happy that you liked my work, and recall with emotion the time when you were virtually the only one who did not "tactfully" avoid me following the unhappy performance of my First. It made me very unhappy that I could not come on Tuesday — and angered me the more since the performance was cancelled in the evening. — Please do not neglect to notify me again, though, when *Toldi* is scheduled for performance. I will



yet succeed once in getting away for it from here, and I already look forward to spending a few hours again with you, old friend — it would make me happiest if nobody at all could take away from that.

With warmest regards  
your old Mahler"

The letter is undated. The year can be made out on the cancellation stamp on the preserved envelope as "04"; the day and month may be "8.10." The supposition that the letter was written between the 5th and the 10th of October, 1904 is supported by the fact that Mihalovich's opera *Toldis Liebe* was performed at the Opera on October 4th (a Tuesday) (MKO 1909, p. 213); Mahler had probably intended to travel to Budapest to hear it. On the other hand, we know of no performance of Mahler's music at that time in Budapest.

The original of this letter is in FLA, as are those of the other letters from Mahler to Mihalovich included in this volume. They were published for the first time in their entirety by András Bata and Ágnes Gádor as "Tizenegy kiadatlan Mahler-levél a Zeneművészeti Főiskola könyvtárában" (Eleven unpublished Mahler-letters in the Library of the Academy of Music) in *Magyar Zene* 21, No. 1 (March 1980), pp. 86–108 (together with Hungarian translations). As this source is not readily available outside Hungary (and contains a few transcription errors), however, the letters are republished here in their entirety with the kind permission of FLA.

<sup>142</sup> GMB, pp. 415f. (English: MSL, p. 404).

"... after just hearing, with deep emotion, the symphony — I rejoice that I shall be hearing it again tomorrow' I wrote to my wife [following the dress rehearsal]. [...] It need scarcely be said that the experience of this performance dominated my visit, all the more so since Mahler himself heard the work for the first time when he rehearsed it. That was the main thing, and a source of continuing encouragement. He also had to work out what the work's reception meant for him. Mahler's own circle in Budapest was deeply moved. A large section of the audience, having, as usual, no taste for formal innovations, was painfully disconcerted by the dynamic force of tragic expression that rages in this work. A fashionable lady sitting near me was so startled by the *attacca* leading into the last movement that she dropped all the things she was holding. The next day's newspapers carried the reviews that were to be expected: while the *Pester Lloyd* had a warmly appreciative notice by A[ugust] B[eer], the *Neues Pester Journal* published a damning critique, its repellent arrogance and total misunderstanding merely serving to condemn the taste of that scribbler V[iktor] von Herzfeld. That was the beginning of a long period of suffering for Mahler in his creative life — a period of lonely, often anguished, unfailingly constant rising above whatever the day might bring."

<sup>143</sup> AJ, p. 63. "he was ignored to death".

<sup>144</sup> PL, November 28, 1889, 1. Beilage, p. 4.

"With regard to tomorrow's performance of *Die Hugenotten* in the Royal Opera, the directorate wishes to inform the opera-going public that the closing scene, which depicts a street battle, is to be omitted for artistic reasons. Thus, the above-named opera will from now on always end with the grand duet (Raoul and Valentine)."

<sup>145</sup> PL, November 29, 1889, p. 5.

"Incidentally, today's Hugenotten-performance presented us with a less than stylish innovation, namely, the opera ended with the grand duet. [...] The fifth act fell by the wayside, and thus it shall remain — 'for artistic reasons', as a communiqué, published in every paper today, had it."

<sup>146</sup> PL, November 30, 1889, Beilage, p. 3 (English: BRM(E), pp. 186f., and Zoltan Roman).

"In the course of this article the view is expressed 'that an opera is not an arbitrary succession or jumble of arias, duets, etc., but a drama set to music, which follows the same rules as any drama that is spoken'. [...]"



Quite the contrary: nearly all operas which belong to the era before Richard Wagner are in fact, with very few exceptions, only an 'arbitrary jumble' of pieces of music [...] and of all operas it is [...] *Die Hugenotten* [which] suffers most from this deficiency.

*Die Hugenotten* [...] lasts six hours; and in Paris [...] they had to resort to the expedient of giving it on two successive evenings.

An opera house which does not wish to imitate this Parisian experiment has to be prepared to cut at least three hours of music from this work in order to render it performable. [...] In this now customary arrangement, nothing of the last act remains except the part known in theatrical jargon as the shooting scene. [...]

I will not even mention that in the spiritually richest and most admired theatrical works of our time the actual conclusion of the drama takes place behind the scenes, and the members of the audience — enlisted as co-authors, so to speak — are left to imagine the outcome, each in his own way. [...]

Now the question arises: is it possible to spare the audience this painful moment without thereby harming the sense of the whole?

Let us now examine the conclusion of the fourth act: the two lovers have [...] pledged themselves to one another with all the unfettered emotion which accompanies the sense of imminent death. Raoul [...] hastens [...] to join his brethren [...] We know that no Huguenot will survive this night. [...]

Valentine lies on the ground in a deep swoon, from which we sense that she will not awaken.

Is it now nice or necessary that we, moved to the core [...] should see the curtain rise again [...] for one brief moment [...] in order to see [...] these two lovers fall [...] wordless and defenceless like hunted hares? [...]

Precisely this duet, which [...] is a pearl [...] of the entire musical-dramatic literature, was originally included neither by the poet nor by the composer, but was only composed subsequently by Meyerbeer upon the wish and on the words of a tenor at the Opera.

Is it now desirable, for instance, that we restore the original plan of the authors, and omit the duet?

In one of the most immortal masterpieces, namely Mozart's *Don Juan*, for many decades now — and this has been endorsed by the most eminent music critics — the original closing scene has been omitted and the opera concluded quite simply 'for artistic reasons' by the penultimate scene! — Would anyone now dare to demand a return to the original ending as the great Mozart wished it to be?"

<sup>147</sup> PL, December 1, 1889, I. Beilage, p. 3. — That Mahler remained equally steadfast in his conviction is evident from a letter he wrote to Lilli Lehmann prior to her guest appearances in Budapest at the end of 1890 (see Note 221, Chapter III): "*Hugenotten* letzter Akt bleibt bei uns fort" (We omit the last act of *Hugenotten*), he wrote to her on or about September 23, 1890.

<sup>148</sup> On October 27, 1889, FL (p. 2190) reported that the opera was in preparation "under the direction of Director Mahler". Perhaps Mahler relinquished this opera to Erkel as a goodwill gesture; or did he, perhaps, foresee its failure?

<sup>149</sup> PN, November 23, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3], and December 12, 1889, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>150</sup> GMB, p. 81 (English: MSL, p. 123).

"I shall arrive in Vienna with Justi at noon on Monday. . . . Justi will then remain with you, and I shall go on to Iglaui, to settle things there."

Löhr's annotation to the letter is on p. 416 of GMB. (English: MSL, p. 404). Mahler conducted *Lohengrin* at the Opera on Sunday, December 15th. Thus, the "Monday" of their journey to Vienna was the 16th, implying that the letter was written between the 10th and 14th.

151

"Budapest, January 1, 1890

Your Excellency!

This is to respectfully advise you that I must make use of my contractual right to give notice of the termination of my contract as of September 1 of this year. At the same time I declare myself



ready to withdraw my notice, should His Excellency the Interior Minister grant my application recently submitted to Your Excellency.

Your Excellency's

most obedient  
Gustav Mahler  
Director"

The original of the letter is in the Archives of the Hungarian State Opera in Budapest. It displays two registry numbers. One of these, "2.biz. /1890 érk. I/1", indicates the date the letter was received in the intendant's office; the other, "Előirat 55.biz./1889 szám", is the registry number of an earlier, directly related document.

<sup>152</sup> GMB, p. 91 (English: MSL, p. 131). — Additional light is thrown on this matter by the history of the Opera's pension fund (MKO 1909, pp. 345–348). It appears that following their separation from the National Theatre, attempts were made to establish a separate pension fund for the employees of the Opera. The main architect for same, submitted to the Ministry of the Interior, was István Gamauf, since 1887 secretary of the Opera and, thus, Mahler's own secretary. One of the chief points in Gamauf's proposal was to remove the officials of the Opera from the pension fund by declaring them state employees. It is conceivable that Gamauf — described by Mohácsi as "totally appreciative and devoted" *vis-à-vis* his superior (JM, p. 27) — told Mahler about the pension fund negotiations, creating an anxiety which caused Mahler to seek establishing a pension directly through the Ministry. It is known that the Ministry ultimately rejected Gamauf's proposal concerning the pension status of the Opera's officials; consequently, Mahler must have continued to make payments into the Opera's planned pension fund (established officially only in 1895).

<sup>153</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 2.

"Dear Frau Hilgermann!

Please do not be offended that I had made you wait for so long. I have had such frightful annoyances. Please come at 10 o'clock tomorrow, so that we may make up for lost time; the first blocking rehearsal is at 12.

Mahler"

<sup>154</sup> TG-MM, p. 148. The reference in Z of January 30th (see Note 157) was undoubtedly to this occasion.

<sup>155</sup> TG-MM, p. 149; unattributed.

<sup>156</sup> TG-MM, p. 149. It is likely that Mahler had this illness in mind when he wrote to Löhr: "Bei uns liegt immer eine oder die andere!" (There's always one of us ill in bed) in an undated letter assigned by Löhr to February, 1890 (GMB, p. 81; English: MSL, p. 124).

<sup>157</sup> Z, January 30, 1890, pp. 1f.

<sup>158</sup> N, February 25, 1890, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>159</sup> Z, March 1, 1890, pp. 1ff. — Kereszty's reference was probably to the February 25th performance of *Walküre*; this was, in fact, the twelfth performance.

<sup>160</sup> TG-MM, pp. 150f.

<sup>161</sup> Z, March 22, 1890, p. 3 and March 31, 1890, p. 3, respectively. It is a fact that after the second performance *Der Templer* was always paired with a ballet. It disappeared from the repertoire altogether at the end of the season. — It must be said in favour of Kereszty that in the latter issue of Z (p. 4) he also declared his opposition to the cuts made in *Walküre*, especially in Act II (further details follow).

<sup>162</sup> GMB, p. 82 (English: MSL, p. 124).

"I am so madly busy — have to bottle up so much vexation that I am incapable of writing!  
[...]

Write soon to your care-worn

Gustav"

Löhr assigned the letter to "spring 1890".

<sup>163</sup> E. g., Z, March 11, 1890, p. 8. — It may be mentioned here that preceding the season's first planned *Rheingold* and *Walküre* performances in November, the press carried the announcement that



"numerous scenic innovations deriving from Alszegehy's study-tour in the off-season" were to have been incorporated (FL, November 6, 1889, p. 2258). Eventually, *Rheingold* announced for the 23rd was cancelled, and the critiques of the *Walküre* performance make no mention of scenic "innovations".

<sup>164</sup> PN, March 16, 1890, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>165</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/720, no. 2.

"Nagyságos Úr!

Elhatároztatván a Nagyságod által szerzett Bánk-bán és Hunyadi László operák előadása, azon tiszteletteljes kérelemmel fordulok Nagyságodhoz, hogy — mivel fennjelzett operákból zongorakivonatokat az intézet birtokában nincsenek s így a szerepek újólag való betanítása, illetőleg correpetálása a partitúrából egyrészt nehézségekbe ütközik, másrészt sok időt vesz igénybe — a birtokában lévő fenti operákból készített két zongorakivonatokat az intézetnek lemosztatás céljából átengedni méltóztatnék.

A lemosolás után az eredeti kivonatokat azonnal Nagyságod rendelkezésére bocsátom.

Kérelmemet becses figyelmébe ajánlva, fogadja kérem kiváló és őszinte tisztelettem nyilváníását.

Kész szolgája  
Mahler Gusztáv  
műv. igazgató"

The letter, with the Opera's registry number 1253/90, was written by a clerk. Mahler's signature is interesting: it is one of the four known examples, where he signed his name in its Hungarian form as "Mahler Gusztáv" (two others are also to Erkel — see Notes 169 and 200 — while the third one is the note to Karpath, mentioned in Note 97). A German translation of the letter is in BME, pp. 482f. — A new production of *Bánk bán* was mounted in the autumn of 1890 (see Season III), but not of *Hunyadi László*. Actually, it is possible to read the pertinent phrases in Mahler's letter in a way which leads to the conclusion that only *Bánk bán* was slated for a new production, while *Hunyadi* was only to be refreshed, as it were. In any case, the inference in HLG (p. 872) that *Hunyadi* was not performed during Mahler's directorship, is incorrect; in fact, it had one partial and four complete performances during that time.

<sup>166</sup> It is intriguing to think that Mahler may have had prior warning from Beniczky of the consequences of just such a political change. In his biographical essay published with the American edition of Bruno Walter's book on Mahler, Ernst Křenek wrote as follows:

A contract was drawn up which testified to the fairness as well as to the realistic pessimism of [Beniczky]. Mahler's services were secured for ten years. [...] [He] was given to understand, however, that a premature termination of this arrangement was to be expected if and when a certain political constellation should change, in which case Mahler would be paid off properly. This is precisely what happened after little more than two years [...] (Ernst Křenek, "Gustav Mahler", in Bruno Walter, *Gustav Mahler*, New York: The Greystone Press, 1941, pp. 179f.).

This possibly explains what otherwise may appear as a premature — not to say prescient — action on Mahler's part to open negotiations with Pollini for a position in Hamburg, quite some time before Zichy replaced Beniczky as intendant (see Season III for Mahler's letter of October 11, 1890 to Pollini).

<sup>167</sup> TG-MM, p. 157.

<sup>168</sup> HLG(F), p. 315. Because of *Die Walküre* on the 26th, in no case could Mahler have been away from Budapest continuously between March 20th and the beginning of April.

<sup>169</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/720, no. 3.

"Nagyságos Úr!

A Mátyás király halálának négyszázados emlékére a M. Kir. Operaházban f. hó 13-án tartandó díszelőadás műsora a Nagyságod műveiből válogatott részletekből lévén összeállítva,



azon felkérést van szerencsém Nagyságodhoz intézni, hogy az előadás egy részét vezényelni s ekképpen az ünnepély díszét emelni méltóztassék.

Elhatározásáról nagybecsű értesítését kérve kiváló tisztelettel maradok

Budapesten, 1890, április 8-án

Nagyságodnak

alázatos szolgája  
Mahler Gusztáv  
műv. igazgató"

The letter was written by a clerk, and signed by Mahler with the Hungarian form of his name (see Note 165); it has the Opera's registry number 1723/90. A German translation is in BME, p. 483.

<sup>170</sup> PN, April 17, 1890, Morning edition, p. [2], and TG-MM, p. 155.

<sup>171</sup> N, April 27, 1890, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>172</sup> Albert Apponyi, *Emlékirataim. Ötven év* (My memoirs. Fifty years), 2., revised ed. (Budapest, Pantheon, 1922), pp. 47f.

<sup>173</sup> E. g., HLG, pp. 212 and 884.

<sup>174</sup> "I am in receipt of your kind letter of the 21st concerning the opera *Asrael*.

Given this opportunity, I cannot avoid raising a complaint against the excessive demands of Herr Dr. O. F. Eirich.

He is asking a price of 4000 florins for the materials for the opera *Asrael*; that is why I have made direct enquiries at the Ricordi firm.

Now I am taking the liberty of requesting that you advise Herr Dr. Eirich that he should set a normal and reasonable price, otherwise I shall have to forego production of this opera.

-----  
As our Opera closes already on May 15th, and I must finalize the arrangements for the upcoming season by that date, I would ask for the most practicable acceleration of these negotiations.

M[ahle]r"

Although the letter, in DSB, is undated, its registry number (2050/90; compare with that on the letter of April 8th to Ferenc Erkel), as well as Mahler's references to a letter received from Bote und Bock dated "21. d." and to the closing of the Opera "am 15. Mai", allow us to assign this letter to the last few days of April. — O. F. Eirich was a Viennese lawyer and dramatist who acted as rights representative for many authors and organizations.

<sup>175</sup> NPJ, May 8, 1890, p. 5.

"A deputation of the workers of the Royal Opera yesterday handed a petition to Intendant Beniczky, asking for higher wages, the approval of accommodation monies and two sets of clothing annually; also for permanent appointment, pension eligibility, and to be brought before a theatre tribunal in disciplinary cases. A reduction of working time was not requested."

The events of 1905 are recounted in Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler — Erinnerungen und Briefe*, Amsterdam, Allert de Lange, 1940, pp. 104f.

<sup>176</sup> His departure was announced, among others, by the morning edition of PN on May 7th (p. [2]). Also, in an undated letter to Löhr he wrote: "On Wednesday and Thursday I shall be in Trieste" (GMB, p. 83; English: MSL, p. 125); Wednesday and Thursday were May 7th and 8th, respectively.

<sup>177</sup> GMB, p. 85 (English: MSL, p. 127).

"We shall arrive in the Hinterbrühl on Tuesday evening."

The arrival postmark date is given in MSL.



When I was last there, I forgot something very important: please advise Fräulein Barberini in Florence, at the familiar address, that the Intendant had consented to her engagement, and therefore we await her for certain on the 15th of September. At the same time, I request acknowledgement of this notice.

Yours most sincerely,  
Gustav Mahler"

The letter, in the archives of the Hungarian State Opera in Budapest, is undated; however, it carries the Opera's registry number (2770/1890) and shows the date of receipt as "VI/14". — Dina Barberini sang in Budapest as a guest three times in September and October, 1890 (MKO 1909, p. 87).

<sup>179</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 9.

"Dear Herr Rosenberg!

Contrary to my usual habit, I must reply to your last letter immediately for I find it intolerable that you, and especially your wife, should make yourselves miserable because of such inane news items. See where your confounded news-hunting gets you. —

Believe me, I could reconcile it neither with my conscience nor with my artistic sense of duty to demote your wife — whose service to our theatre I value highly — to the second rank, or to jeopardize her material interests in any other way: — as concerns the Stein matter, I'll tell you about that in Pest. —

Of the news item, one per cent is truth, all the rest is a ridiculous fabrication. — Your wife should have a good rest and get well, and you, too, and do not worry about anything! You are afraid of your own shadow. What other stupidities do you indulge in? Is it right to make yourself sick? You, always the healthiest one of us all! Take care that you are good and healthy when I return to Pest, or else —!

Heartiest greetings to you and your dear wife

from your devoted  
Gustav Mahler

Being in Hungary right now presents your wife with the perfect opportunity to learn Hungarian! Do not pass it up!"

<sup>180</sup> Hamburg, 1961/1006, 8.

"Dear Herr Rosenberg!

First of all: Cammaroth is nothing. Thus, he is not part of the plan.

Pawlikow should be pursued further — in any case, I must hear her before I engage her for a guest appearance — I simply dare not risk another débacle with a guest. — Her demands are quite acceptable to me — if she is more or less respectable, we could go even further. —

In any case, I am producing *Asrael* in October: the translation is about to be finished. Tomorrow I go to Eirich, to attempt to settle something. Upon her arrival, your wife absolutely must sing Nancy in Hungarian as this will probably be her first part! Thereafter, without question, *Asrael*. — I beg you, influence your wife in this direction — it is unarguably necessary for both parties, why, I will tell you later when you are here with me. — I spoke with Beniczky; he is now completely untractable; but I have a plan — more about that, too, in person.

If Floriansky cannot be had in an honest way, please forget about him. According to Šubert's telegramme, *Asrael* is on Sunday. Alszeghy and Christofani will attend. — Please use your influence on Šubert so that he shows them everything thoroughly, and especially the cost-overruns — and how one can save.

When are you coming here?

Best regards from your

Gustav Mahler"



The names of Cammaroth[?], Pawlikow and Floriansky do not appear in the records of the Budapest Opera prior to 1909. — József Cristofani appears in the records as “technical inspector” between October, 1889 and August, 1911 (MKO 1909, p. 337 and MKO 1935, p. 115). — Because the Prague première of *Asrael* was on Sunday, March 30, 1890, the reference to *Asrael* in Prague on “Sonntag” is potentially misleading with respect to dating this letter. However, because it is quite unlikely that the Rosenbergs would have been away from Budapest before the previous season had come to an end in May, Alszeghy and Cristofani must have attended a later performance of *Asrael* in Prague. Mahler’s next letter to Šubert bears out this assumption: it would have been unthinkable for Mahler to have waited for nearly 3 months before thanking Šubert for having the visitors from the Budapest Opera.

<sup>181</sup> “Most Honoured Herr Director!

Please accept my best for your friendly message and for the exceptionally kind reception of our stage manager and technical director.

I will be able to come in August at the earliest, and also hope to find *Asrael* in the repertoire at that time.”

The original of this letter is in ThPrag. It was first published in Czech translation in *Dopisy*, p. 84. There this letter is mistakenly identified as the first one of the several letters Mahler wrote to Šubert over the years.

<sup>182</sup> GMB, p. 417 (English: MSL, pp. 405f.)

“During this period [ca. June] Mahler often came to [Vienna], and once made a brief trip for professional reasons to Budapest. [...] Officials of the Budapest Opera came to report to Mahler. Furthermore, he was already planning ahead for the coming season, reading through possible scores, among them — with growing amazement — one newly arrived: Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*, which he quickly decided to produce.”

<sup>183</sup> “Most Honoured Herr Director!

Please accept my most sincere thanks for your great kindness.

Regrettably, I am no longer able to take up your kind invitation, as I must return to Pest already on Saturday.

Should Baron Franchetti still be in Prague, I beg you to great him for me unbeknownst.”

ThPrag.; Czech translation first published in *Dopisy*, p. 84. — Referring to a letter of Mahler’s to the agent Wild, presumably seen by him at an auction in 1965, HLG states that Mahler returned to Budapest on August 22nd (pp. 215, 872).

<sup>184</sup> GMB, p. 86 (English: MSL, p. 127). The annotation by Löhr, quoted above, belongs to this letter.

“I am still having quite a pleasant time here, since I still have my afternoons free.  
So I am still taking delightful solitary walks.”

<sup>185</sup> “Most Honoured Herr Director!

I am in receipt of your kind letter of the 26th in which you advise me that Dr. Eirich has been authorized to reduce his original demands concerning *Asrael*.

I hope you will allow me to call once again on your indulgence in this matter. Thus, since Dr. Eirich at first demanded the inconceivably high sum of 4000 florins for the *Asrael* materials, the question arises: should not his current demand of 1500 florins have been the ‘original’ one. If you should be in the position to give information about this, I would most welcome a message from you.”

The letter is only signed by Mahler, and has the Opera’s registry number 3237/1890. — ThPrag; Czech translation published in *Dopisy*, p. 85.

<sup>186</sup> MKO 1909, p. 419.



"L. S. R.

In great hurry!

Your wife should come here as soon as possible! After all, there are good doctors here, too! Naturally, only Martha should be ready! As debut — Mignon — followed immediately by Martha! If only *Asrael* did not have to be postponed! That would be very touchy!

In *Cavalleria*, which would come right after *Asrael*, your wife has an exciting role!

If only you would be here again!

Please let me hear from you as soon as possible and, above all, come soon!"

"Dear Sir!

I was sorry to learn from your letter that your wife has been seriously ill. Yet I am very happy that she is well once again.

As concerns the request for a period of recuperation, I regret to have to say that I cannot consent to your wish.

Quite aside from the fact that her prolonged absence would cause undesirable problems with the repertoire — Mignon is already scheduled as your wife's first role on the 20th — I am also not authorized to grant her the desired holidays. —

Accordingly, should she be unable to resume her artistic activities punctually in consequence of her illness, I beg you not to forget that in keeping with the regulations, she must send in a medical certificate."

The letter, written by a clerk and signed by Mahler, carries the Opera's registry number 3317/90.

<sup>189</sup> PH, September 16, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>190</sup> E. g., Z, September 22, 1890, p. 7.

<sup>191</sup> PN, September 20, 1890, p. [2].

<sup>192</sup> PN, October 5, 1890, p. [1].

<sup>193</sup> PN, October 9, 1890, p. [1].

<sup>194</sup> PN, October 12, 1890, p. [1].

<sup>195</sup> DVO Part IV, pp. 69f.

<sup>196</sup> MKO 1909, p. 312.

<sup>197</sup> TG-MM, pp. 146f. Mahler's judgement of Vasquez-Molina's potential proved excellent: she remained an active member of the Budapest Opera until 1912, when she was elected an "honorary life member" of the institution (MKO 1935, p. 89).

<sup>198</sup> BH, September 17, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>199</sup> Z, September 22, 1890, pp. 3f.

<sup>200</sup> MA-HNL, Fond XII/720, no. 4.

"Nagyságos Főzeneigazgató Úr!

A magyar színészet száz éves fennállásának évfordulója alkalmából, f. é. október hó 27-ére a színműintézetek s az országsszerte működő színi testületek előkészületeket tesznek, hogy eme, a magyar nemzeti kulturára nézve nagynevezetességű napot méltóan megünnepeljék.

E mozgalomból természetsszerűen egyetlen hazai dalműszínházunk sem vonja ki magát, sőt örömmel ragadja meg az alkalmat, hogy hírnevéhez méltóan ő is hozzá járuljon az ünnepélyességek emeléséhez és e célból a mondott napon hangversenyt szándékozom rendezni.

Egyrészt ezokból, másrészt pedig azért, mert eme hangverseny fényét emelni óhajtom, tisztelettel kérem Nagyságodat, hogy általa szerzett s eddig még elő nem adott hangversenyszámokat előadhatás céljából ez alkalomra átengedni szíveskedjék.

Engedje Nagyságod remélnem, hogy e kérésem méltánylásra találand, mert hisz' nagyban csökkentené a hangverseny erkölcsi értékét, ha a közönség éppen a magyar Dalművészet megalkotója s fáradhatatlan, buzgó munkása alkotását nélkülözni kénytelenítették.



Rendkívül lekötölezne Nagyságod azáltal, ha az áténgedendő hangversenyszámok czímét velem tudatni s a zeneanyagot és a szereplők névsorát minél előbb rendelkezésemre bocsátani kegyeskednék, hogy a műveket hozzájuk méltó módon betaníttathassam.

Fogadja Nagyságod ezúttal is kiváló tiszteletem és nagyrabecsülésem nyilvánítását.

Budapesten, 1890. évi szeptember hó 24.-én

Mahler Gusztáv  
a magy. kir. operaház  
műv. igazgatója.”

The letter, with the Opera's registry number 3612/1890, was written by a clerk and signed by Mahler with the Hungarian form of his name (see Note 165). A German translation is published in BME, pp. 483f.

<sup>201</sup> E, October 3, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>202</sup> BT, October 23, 1890, p. 6. The names of Radvánszky and Rakovszky as intendant-candidates had been mentioned already in PH on October 13th (p. 3); foreshadowing the developments which were to transpire before and following Zichy's eventual appointment as intendant, this account also mentioned the rumour that Radvánszky stipulated certain conditions for his acceptance of the position, the chief one of which was a guarantee of his control over the *artistic* governance of the Opera.

<sup>203</sup> GMB, p. 87 (English: MSL, p. 128).

“I am unfortunately unable to modify my requirements to meet your proposals and deeply regret the possible failure of our negotiations: all the more since I had already taken preliminary steps.”

Bernhard Pollini (born Baruch Pohl, 1838–1897) was at this time director of the Stadttheater in Hamburg, and was widely regarded as one of the leading opera directors and impresarios of his day. Mahler was to serve under him as first conductor from 1891 to 1897.

<sup>204</sup> In fact, HLG (p. 216) states that there is an extant draft of a letter to Pollini, dated September 26, in which Mahler stipulated his salary expectations. Apparently, he was also negotiating with the Dresden Opera (Löhr in GMB, p. 419).

<sup>205</sup> GMB, pp. 87f. (English: MSL, p. 129).

“In reply to your esteemed letter of the 9th inst., I am now prepared to accept your proposal, on condition that you approve my salary without any deduction.  
[I am] looking forward to your final decision in the matter.”

<sup>206</sup> “Most Honoured Herr Director!

In light of the kindness you have previously shown towards me, I am taking the liberty of calling on your indulgence once again, and am sending you a vocal score of *Asrael* with the humble request that you mark in it the cuts effected in your theatre, and kindly return it to me at your earliest convenience.”

ThPrag. — The letter, only signed by Mahler, shows the Opera's registry number 3956/890.

<sup>207</sup> NPV, October 17, 1890, p. 6.

“We are informed by other sources that certain members of the Opera have been conspiring against Director Mahler for some time, with the apparent aim of provoking him. Even the circumstances which led to the latest affair appear to have a certain intentionality about them. [...] The Intendant must create order if he wishes to forestall the setting in of a chaos detrimental to the institution.”

<sup>208</sup> PH, October 18, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>209</sup> E. g., Z, October 20, 1890, p. 5.

<sup>210</sup> “Dear Friend!

You are offering me an exciting prospect there, and I will spend the next few days in happy anticipation. Only, be sure to come; it doesn't seem to me at all as if we had just met. We have so



many mutual friends, and our paths would have crossed long ago had it not been for my bad luck. — I would prefer it that you not attend a performance I conduct because then I would see too little of you. — On such days I am unfit for company. It will be far nicer if we sit together in my box and listen.

I must devote the mornings to my official duties, but we have the afternoon and evening to ourselves.

Any day suits me equally well as long as I know it in good time, so that I can organize accordingly.

I am very happy for my sister for spending time with you; that must have been a genuine ray of sunshine in her dreary existence. It is sweet of you to take pleasure in a simple, in truth quite inconsequential creature, and I wish I could thank you for it.

Write to me in good time about your arrival so that I may await you at the station. Do you have specific plans for accommodation, or should I find you some? Are you, indeed, an enthusiastic walker? I have already made plans for city and country. I will show you Pest from its best side (for that, you see, one must be far away from it). I am writing this in great haste on my office desk — all around me the greatest turmoil — and let everything wait — you are worth it to me, and let them disturb me all they can.

So, I will close quickly — all that I might still add is: just come! But for sure! We do, indeed, know each other well already — I am now only curious whether we shall be silent or have a lot to say to each other!

With kind regards from

your sincerely devoted  
Gustav Mahler

Budapest, October 19, 1890"

The letter is at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester (N. Y.), U.S.A. It is published here for the first time with their kind permission.

<sup>211</sup> NBL, pp. 5f. (English: NBL(E), pp. 27f.).

"Mahler led a very lonely life in Budapest. 'Except in my distasteful profession, I've practically forgotten how to talk' he said. '[...] what I'm doing here is mere drudgery [...]' [...]"

On the street you could hardly walk five steps with him without everyone stopping and craning their necks to get a look — so well known was he. This made him so furious that he would stamp his foot and yell: 'Am I a wild animal then, that everyone can stop and stare at me as in a menagerie?'"

<sup>212</sup> PH, October 29, 1890, pp. 4f. The news of Zichy's likely appointment was confirmed in the same paper on November 3rd (p. 2).

<sup>213</sup> TG-MM, p. 177.

<sup>214</sup> BT, November 4, 1890, p. 5.

"We hear from various sources that the Director of the Opera, Gustav Mahler, received during the last few days the offer of an engagement from abroad, and that he has been consulting with several of his friends on whether he should take up this offer and leave Budapest. These discussions have had no results as yet, for his friends have advised the Director to wait and see how things develop under the new Intendant, and only then make a decision. [...]"

Nevertheless, it would be a serious mistake to assume that Director Mahler will remain in Budapest. Even people who are not close to him know that he is in a very bad mood and that he has often been [...] under the weather lately. He complains about ill-will and cliques, asserts that people misinterpret his intentions and that he has to battle with a spirit of opposition at the Opera. Further, it may also be mentioned here that there are people who steadfastly maintain that a large part of the opposition who make life in Budapest miserable for Mahler, act not from artistic, but rather from nationalistic and confessional motives.

While we take note of all that, [...] the decision is solely and entirely up to the public. It is not led by personal sympathies or antipathies, but judges performance. During the past season, the



Opera created an impression of joyous creativity and growth. A series of new works were presented, one noted the beginnings of a good ensemble and, as a consequence, the public confronted the Director with goodwill. In the current season [...] the Opera, unfortunately, declined. [...] Under such circumstances it is only natural that the prevailing mood would turn against the Director, and that the displeasure of the public would also be felt in the Opera.

Director Mahler has not yet lost the battle. If he can win back the public and justify the trust which has been shown him [...] then his enemies will be harmless. [...] In any case, it would be regrettable if Budapest should lose one of the most skilful of musicians, who had made such a promising start in so many ways."

<sup>215</sup> PH, November 5, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>216</sup> FL, November 7, 1890, p. 2262. — Such verbal barbs were often complemented by caricatures. Typical of these was the one published on November 2nd in the conservative political satirical paper *Bolond Istók* under the title "Removal from the Opera House" (see Illustration 41).

<sup>217</sup> GMB, p. 88 (English: MSL, p. 129).

"I received your esteemed letter of 2 November with the enclosed contract on my return to Budapest. After reading same I must return to a matter [...] which I, as you will gather from the relevant letter, regard as an issue of much importance.

I should have accepted your offer of 12 000 marks annual salary if you had been prepared to be responsible for the customary deductions such as tax and pension contributions.

Having given ample evidence of my willingness to come to terms with you, I must now ask you to make this concession and allow me to enter a clause to this effect in the contract I have received.

There will be then no further obstacle to my joining the staff of your establishment."

<sup>218</sup> BH, November 7, 1890, pp. 1f.

<sup>219</sup> "Operaházi reminiscenciák, II" (Reminiscences from the Opera House), PH, July 22, 1921, p. 7.

<sup>220</sup> A telegram sent to Director Šubert in Prague on November 14th, requesting Franchetti's address, indicates that Mahler may have intended to invite the composer to the première (*Dopisy*, p. 85). As there is no evidence of the composer's attendance, however, perhaps Mahler changed his mind because of the antagonistic press.

<sup>221</sup> Concerning her 1890 guest appearance in Budapest, five letters from Mahler to Lilli Lehmann are extant (the autographs are in DSB). They are published in my edition in their entirety in Zoltan Roman, "Gustav Mahler and Lilli Lehmann", in Herta Blaukopf, ed., *Gustav Mahler — Unbekannte Briefe* (Festschrift Gottfried von Einem), Wien, Hamburg, Zsolnay, 1983, pp. 93–108 (Bibliothek der Internationalen Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft) (English: *Mahler's Unknown Letters*, tr. Richard Stokes, London, Gollancz, 1986 [revised edition]).

"At the same time I should like to express the hope that your sojourn in Budapest will be the first one of many return visits to our institution."

<sup>222</sup> Apparently unaware of the last one of the extant letters from Mahler to Lehmann (written in late October or early November), HLG (p. 874) gives an incorrect list of these operas: Lehmann did not sing in *Lohengrin*, while *La Juive* has to be added to the list.

<sup>223</sup> Lilli Lehmann, *Mein Weg* (2., vermehrte Auflage), Leipzig: Hirzel, 1920, pp. 366f. (English: BRM(E), p. 188).

"Immediately thereupon [concerts in Berlin and Hamburg under Hans von Bülow] Gustav Mahler entered my artistic life as Director of the National Opera in Budapest. A new man, with a strong will and understanding. He had told me in a letter that my fees were in excess of his budget, but that he considered my visit in a leading role to be entirely necessary in order to give the members of his company an artistic example towards which they should strive. We spent an enchanting time in a small select circle there. Mahler, in all his devout spontaneity, steering towards his goal; the marvellous Hungarian tragedienne, Mari Jaszai [...]; Count Albert Apponyi and Professor Mihalovich [...] We went everywhere together. All my roles I sang in



Italian; and only that of Recha (*Die Jüdin*) — as the choice had been left to me — in French, without having any idea that Perotti would sing the part of the Jew in Italian. Everyone else was singing in Hungarian, and one can just imagine the cosmopolitan confusion of languages in these operatic performances in which every foreigner, singing without a prompter, had to remain true to his own language. In *Don Juan*, Mahler, at that time still young and fiery, took the short trio for male voices in the first act at the fastest *allegro*, because *alla breve* is written over it — which does not in this case mean an increased but only a more tranquil tempo. Mahler made the same mistake in the mask trio without an *alla breve* signature, but here I immediately cast my veto, and never again — so I believe — did he relapse into his *allegro* folly in that passage. When I discussed it with Bülow, he was horrified, and said about the *alla breve* exactly what I have just written.

[...] We often walked, leapt and dashed around with him, over bush, over briar, in the magnificent countryside round Budapest, and we had a marvellous time."

Mari Jászai was one of the two playmasters to be appointed at the Opera in the autumn of 1891. — Lehmann's recollection of her appearance in *La Juive* appears to have been faulty in one detail: neither the reviews nor MKO list Perotti among the performers on the evening of November 30th. In fact, Perotti sang in Budapest only three times in 1890, all in October (MKO 1909, pp. 87 and 300). — With respect to some of Mahler's tempi in *Don Juan*, it is interesting to note that critics continued to find fault with them as much as 18 years later. Otherwise highly laudatory reviews of his production at the Metropolitan Opera in New York included such comments as "The most significant feature [...] was in the matter of tempo, which in several places differed from what lovers of Mozart's masterpiece here are accustomed to" (*The New York Times*, January 24, 1908, p. 7); and "[Mahler] refused to follow the traditional tempi in a few instances, generally to the grievous disappointment of his hearers" (*New-York Daily Tribune*, January 24, 1908, p. 7).

<sup>224</sup> This is a lesser known one of the many versions of the story (TG-MM, p. 186).

<sup>225</sup> GMB, p. 90 (English: MSL, p. 130).

"I am leading a life entirely devoted to external affairs. And in this respect I have achieved much that is profitable, even experience a number of pleasant things. What will interest you is that Brahms heard me conduct *Don Giovanni* here and forthwith became my fiercest partisan and benefactor. He has distinguished me in a way that is quite unheard of with him, indeed treats me on terms of real friendship. —

[...] it is far from impossible that you will suddenly be descended on by me too!

All sorts of things are going on — who knows what wind will suddenly waft me away from Budapest."

Mahler also wrote about his newfound connection with Brahms to Justine (letter in the Rosé-collection, quoted in HLG, p. 221), and it is also mentioned in a letter to Richard Heuberger, the Viennese critic (see Note 237).

<sup>226</sup> Otilie von Balassa, *Die Brahmsfreundin Otilie Ebner und ihr Kreis*, Wien, Bondy, 1933, p. 111.

"When Mahler was Director of the Budapest Opera, he often visited us and frequently sent us [tickets for] a box. My mother was quite in raptures at his astonishing accomplishments. In a short time, he elevated the Opera to a much higher level: the orchestra was excellent and he made the singers into serious artists. He committed the 'error' of being too industrious, and of demanding just as much industry from the others. It happened that he rehearsed through many hours and forgot to eat. That was too much of a good thing; the musicians conspired against him and, as the end result, he left Budapest. The public and all serious musicians recalled him longingly, my mother especially so.

He also visited us in the country, delighted in the beautiful walks and climbed about like a chamois."

<sup>227</sup> BT (December 9, 1890, p. 4) informs us that the staging — apparently excellent — was directed by Alszegey. It is indicative of the visual quality of this production that the *Tagblatt* — contrary to custom — also names the lighting designer, one József "Nietzsche" (actually, Nitsche, at the Opera since 1884).

<sup>228</sup> PH, December 13, 1890, p. 6.



"The public showed enthusiastic loyalty towards Mahler, but one segment of the chauvinistic press behaved with open hostility against Mahler who did not possess the talent in any case to recruit personal followers. He also had some artistically justified reproaches directed against him, thus that following the triumphant success of the first parts of the Ring, he failed to complete the work in subsequent years, and frittered away his energies on trifles by Offenbach and others. — But there were also incitements of a personal nature; the [?] discipline demanded by Mahler did not appeal to the artistic folk who were used to a milder rule, and Mahler's [?] way of doing things, based as it was on the belief that it had to succeed through brusque firmness, caused him many unpleasantnesses."

<sup>230</sup> E, December 13, 1890, pp. 3f.

<sup>231</sup> The latest one of these is evident from two telegrams Mahler sent to Director Šubert in Prague, where they were then also preparing to stage *Cavalleria*. No doubt wishing to return the hospitality Šubert had shown in connection with *Asrael*, Mahler wired him on December 18th: "Première of 'Cavalleria rusticana' on Monday, December 22. Should I reserve seats?" Two days later, however, he was obliged to advise Šubert that the première had to be postponed to the 26th (*Dopisy*, p. 86). — *Cavalleria* opened in Prague only a few days after Budapest, on January 4th, 1891.

<sup>232</sup> Although Budapest's claim to precedence *vis-à-vis* all other non-Italian cities is invariably mentioned in the Mahler literature, this is in error: *Cavalleria* had its first Stockholm performance (in Swedish) on December 11th, while the Madrid première also took place in December (Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera* I, 2., revised ed., Genève, Societas Bibliographica, 1955, col. 1138f.).

<sup>233</sup> TG-MM, p. 184.

<sup>234</sup> MKO 1935, p. 91.

<sup>235</sup> PH, December 27, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>236</sup> Z, January 10, 1891, pp. 4f.

<sup>237</sup> GMB, p. 89.

"I am extremely happy that you will do us the honour. The ticket is ready for you, please have it picked up in the office — or let me know at which hotel you are staying and I will have it sent there. In any case, I ask that we meet after the opera. Perhaps you will come on stage? It makes me very happy that Brahms is so complimentary — I consider this my greatest success up to this point. I hope to keep to the date of the performance. [...] I will see you here!"

<sup>238</sup> From the *Wiener Tagblatt*, December 28, 1890, quoted in BRM, p. 190 (English: BRM(E), p. 189).

"Gustav Mahler, the energetic and intelligent director of the Royal Opera in Budapest, has stolen a march on every theatre outside Italy by producing the most outstanding new opera from Italy by Mascagni, whose fame has spread rapidly. Soon we shall have the chance to hear this unusual work, and so a fairly precise report on the latest musical event in the Hungarian capital may be of particular interest. [...]"

The production, conducted by the Opera Director, Herr Mahler, may be described — under the prevailing circumstances — as quite exceptional. Only a conductor and stage manager of Mahler's unusual talent and unparalleled enthusiasm for work can accomplish such a thing with beginners. Of the few principals two, Turiddù (Herr Szirovatka) and Alfio (Herr Veress), were decidedly beginners, and only after the most detailed instruction was it possible to put them on the stage in these two important roles. However, Mahler's baton has limitless force, and Mahler has managed to instil into all his players his own insight. To watch this affords an unusual, unfortunately truly pleasure. We made the acquaintance of an excellent dramatic singer in Fräulein Szilágyi, who sang and acted Santuzza touchingly. [...] The orchestra did excellently."

It is interesting to note that neither of the two Hungarian critiques quoted found it worth mentioning, as Heuberger did, that Alfio was sung by a "beginner". Sándor Veres had been under contract at the Opera only since the beginning of September (MKO 1909, p. 315); Alfio was his first major role. In his memoirs Veres reveals that it took him six weeks of uninterrupted work to master the role. He also recalls with



gratitude that his apparently indefatigable coach was none other than Sándor Erkel! (Sándor Veres, *Egy énekes emlékiratai* [Memoirs of a singer], Budapest, Magyar Könyvkiadó, 1914, p. 107. I am grateful to Mr. Péter Fülöp of Budapest for bringing this book to my attention.)

<sup>239</sup> The original of the letter is in the Rosé-collection (London, Canada). Its receipt in Budapest was also reported in the press (e.g., PH, January 6, 1891, p. 3).

<sup>240</sup> FL, December 29, 1890, p. 2657 and TG-MM, p. 189.

<sup>241</sup> "Please permit me a confidential question. I have engaged Herr Grützmacher, whose contract you were so kind to sign as witness, as a solo 'cellist — in the belief that he was the 'cellist from Weimar I know about. — But I see from the written correspondence that it is a third Grützmacher about whom I know nothing more than that he left Sondershausen suddenly. — I am now asking you to let me know quite confidentially whether you know Herr Grützmacher as a musician and instrumentalist, and what you think of him. —

I had the pleasure of getting to know your symphonic poem *Aus Italien* in the last Philharmonic concert here, and I was quite enchanted, especially by the last two movements. As the concert management had the to me incomprehensible idea of putting your work at the end of an over-long concert, the impression created on the public was not quite as intense as I would have wished it."

The original of this undated letter is in the Richard-Strauss-Archiv, Garmisch-Partenkirchen. It is published in *Gustav Mahler — Richard Strauss — Briefwechsel 1888–1911*, ed. Herta Blaukopf, München, etc., Piper, 1980, p. 14 (Bibliothek der Internationalen Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft).

Some eight years later, in the course of ruminating on the nature of musical invention, following a concert at which *Aus Italien* had been played, Mahler recalled his first hearing of the work:

"It is only in the last movement that the delightful motif of the Italian folksong offers sufficient material for the composer. On the strength of this motif, which I had not known as a song, I took Strauss for a genius when I first heard the symphony." (NBL(E), p. 136; original German in NBL, p. 126.)

As to the 'cellist Mahler was enquiring about, the records of the Opera show that a musician listed as Frigyes Grützenmacher [sic!] played in the Opera orchestra between September 1, 1891 and April 30, 1894. Further investigation revealed that this musician, with his name misspelled, was, in fact, the 'cellist Friedrich Grützmacher junior (1866–1919). He went to Budapest from Sondershausen, and moved on to Cologne in 1894. While in Budapest, he also taught at the National Conservatory (Nemzeti Zeneoda), the oldest Hungarian music training institute, whose president at the time was Géza Zichy! (MKO 1909, p. 331; *Révai Nagy Lexikon* 9 [1911], p. 47; *Zenei Lexikon* 2 (1965), p. 702.)

<sup>242</sup> PH, January 18, 1891, pp. 2f. — Apparently overlooked by most observers was a dramaturgical innovation. Jemnitz wrote: "[...] Mahler's artistically perfect solution of the performance problem — to have the scattered chorus declaim in rhythmic speech — was too advanced for the as yet rudimentary appreciation of dramaturgical achievement in opera to be fully appreciated." (AJ, p. 185; original in German.)

<sup>243</sup> NPJ, January 18, 1891, 1. Beilage, p. 9.

"The performance [...] was such an excellent one that we have never seen the likes of it on our stage. [...] The accomplishments of all of the participants, including the chorus, orchestra and conductor, can be described only in terms of the highest praise. [...] Director Mahler, who rehearsed and conducted the work, has once again earned the greatest merit in the service of raising the standard of our stage; there could hardly be a court theatre out there in the great realm which could present such a preeminent ensemble as ours was in today's performance."

<sup>244</sup> PL, January 25, 1891, 1. Beilage, p. [2] (English: BRM(E), pp. 189f. and Zoltan Roman).

"I took over the Theatres in the midst of a crisis which was all but a catastrophe, with reduced material means, with restrictive decisions and directions from the Parliament and the Government; I took them over at a moment when the most important question was whether it was possible, or advisable, to keep the Opera going at all — and I am handing over to my successor both institutions in a consolidated material and artistic condition. [...]"



When I took over the management of the Theatres I stated that I did not wish to control the artistic direction closely but to leave it, together with responsibility for it, to the Artistic Directors. To this programme I remained faithful right up to the end, and that this was right is attested by the results.

[...] The artistic direction of the Royal Hungarian Opera House, and in particular the new Director's policy, has [...] repeatedly been sharply attacked. These attacks can be traced to personal motives. The new Director was attacked because he kept to his programme: 'Work, work, work, and, where possible, use of indigenous resources.'

Upon publishing Beniczky's statement, the FL commented at this point: "How much unfruitful work the artistic director had done is proved by the ample number of operas which had failed one after another. [...] As to the 'use of indigenous resources', this could be viewed in a very strange light if it were necessary." (January 25, 1891, p. 175.)

<sup>245</sup> See Note 244.

"The rehearsal and production of thirty-one works in the twenty months of performing time [...] is a testimony to the work of the management and the members of the company, in the face of which any attack appears only as ill-will. When it is taken into account here that at the start of this activity the entire personnel had to be reorganized, with some of the older members retrained in new areas; taking into account, furthermore, the staggering work of the minutest detail, of which the non-theatre person naturally cannot even conceive; taking into account, finally, that the operas rehearsed and conducted by Director Mahler — the heaviest Wagnerian ones, as well as the lightest Italian ones — were performed with immaculate precision and with complete artistry: then even an adversary cannot withhold recognition.

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These are the results I have achieved. ... goes without saying, of course, that the responsibility for any deficiencies which may be discovered lies with me and I accept this. On the other hand I must assign the credit for the successful results to the departmental heads in these institutions; at most, I can share them with them, for I had disposed of not a single matter — whether material or personal — against their advice and without their recommendation."

<sup>246</sup> E, February 3, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>247</sup> DVO Part IV, p. 91.

<sup>248</sup> BD, p. 3.

"[Zichy was] a haughty nobleman who demanded obedience bordering on the obsequious from the entire personnel, and who treated Mahler with open aversion already on confessional grounds. Zichy had the ministry approve an altering of the statutes which gave him the right to assume the directorial functions in whole or in part. Mahler already knew then that he could not remain in Budapest. Mahler's public and secret enemies immediately went to work, even before Zichy assumed his office, in order to create an animosity between him and the 'untractable Jewish director'. Already at their first meeting Mahler saw that a personal relationship was out of the question and that it was no longer possible to think of a useful artistic collaboration."

<sup>249</sup> As the printed copy of the statutes clearly shows, they were signed by Interior Minister Szapáry on February 1st (as Regulatory Document No. 8601 of the Ministry) and went into effect that day (*Szabályrendelet a magyar királyi operaház vezetése és igazgatása tárgyában*. Érvényes 1891. február 1-től [Statutory regulations in the matter of administering and directing the Royal Hungarian Opera. Effective from February 1, 1891]. Budapest, Neumayer, 1891). How hastily these new statutes were drawn up and put into effect is clear from another published document; it shows that the revised regulations governing the disciplinary process were drawn up only later and were approved by the Ministry (under No. 31933, signed for the Minister by State Secretary György Lukács) only on May 1st (*Eljárási szabályok a m. kir. operaház törvénykönyvéhez* [Procedural regulations to accompany the disciplinary code of the Royal Hungarian Opera]. Budapest, Müller, 1891).



"Now, as ever, the final decision in all important matters remains incumbent upon the Intendant, yet much more latitude for his immediate intervention is opened up by the new statute. Thus in the new statute the section numbered 13 in the old one is deleted, under which the Intendant did not intervene directly in the choice of the repertoire and the apportionment of roles; section 16 of the new statute lays down that at the weekly meetings under the chairmanship of the Intendant the latter alone makes the decisions. A completely new provision, section 20, similarly lays down that the Intendant has the right to terminate appointments on his own responsibility and without consulting the Artistic Director. In the opera assessment committee the Intendant replaces the Director as chairman, and the latter has only the right to make suggestions. The most important provision of the new statute appears to be, at all events, that of section 40, on the position of the Artistic Director, which states: 'Any or all of the powers of the Artistic Director enumerated in these statutes may be exercised by the Intendant in person, on his own responsibility, for appropriate reasons, and in cases of emergency to which such reasons apply, in so far as he obtains the consent of the Minister of the Interior, which consent with reference to individual powers may be sought after the event and with reference to all powers must be sought prior to the event'."

<sup>251</sup> HNA, K 148-1891-VIII-488. — It is interesting to note that when Zichy resigned as intendant in 1894 (see Chapter IV), Stesser became government commissioner of the theatres for some 7 months (MKO, 1935, p. 79).

<sup>252</sup> O-V, February 7, 1891, p. 89. The article also includes a brief biographical sketch of Zichy, and an interview with him (pp. 88f.). Concerning his forthcoming collaboration with Mahler, he stated that he does not know Mahler, hopes to get to know him soon, and that their peaceful cooperation will depend entirely on Mahler.

<sup>253</sup> TG-MM, p. 202, taken from NPJ.

<sup>254</sup> Z, February 4, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>255</sup> TG-MM, pp. 197ff., taken from E.

<sup>256</sup> PN, February 23, 1891, p. [2].

<sup>257</sup> PN, March 1, 1891, Beilage, p. [4].

<sup>258</sup> NPV, February 21, 1891, pp. 3f. (English: BRM(E), p. 190).

"The investment of the Intendant with the plenary powers of an Artistic Director has of course not failed to make its repercussions felt in the personal relationship between Count Géza Zichy and Herr Mahler. [...] A relationship such as currently prevails between Intendant and Director cannot persist without seriously damaging the institution's repute. [...] The arrival of the Intendant means in fact the departure of the Director, which is impending but has not yet taken place. [...] Herr Mahler is now adopting a waiting posture. He now no longer possesses any influence on the management of the Opera. [...] The opera [*Toldis Liebe*] by Mihalovich, which had already been accepted for production, was shelved without the Director being consulted. The Director learns of the repertoire from the newspaper, like any other mortal."

Evidently, Zichy's dislike for Mahler also had its effect on his friends and patrons. Ostensibly as a direct consequence of the situation between Mahler and Zichy, Mihalovich's opera — from which, it may be recalled, Mahler had already performed the overture at the concert on October 29, 1890 — was not to receive its first performance until March, 1893, more than two years later!

<sup>259</sup> BT, February 22, 1891, p. 4.

"Life in Budapest.

Will he leave or will he stay? That is the question which today occupies that segment of the Budapest public interested in theatre and music.

Now then, Gustav Mahler [...] himself does not yet know at the moment whether or not he will remain Director of the Budapest Opera. Seemingly, he has no desire to leave Budapest. [...]



Director Mahler has many enemies, and exceptionally bitter ones. There are many who attack him — yet possibly do not know at all why. [...] Are nervousness, parsimony, capriciousness and — sound ability sufficient grounds to justify such a degree of hate? [...]

Now, these enemies have been circulating, for a longish time now, the news that Director Mahler finds it impossible to work with or beside the new Intendant [...] and this information has reached Mahler so often and from so many sides that in the end both of them believe it. [...]

Yet among the public Mahler possesses not only enemies but also friends, and when the former achieved strength, the latter also got hot under the collar. Thus it is said that numerous upset subscribers have decided that if Director Mahler must leave, they will cancel their subscriptions. [...] For the record, we can simply report that Director Mahler had submitted his resignation upon Intendant Beniczky's departure, and that the matter has remained unresolved ever since. We understand further [...] that Intendant Count Zichy has the highest opinion of the abilities of the Director, and that Director Mahler harbours the desire to remain in Budapest. From these facts one must logically conclude that Director Mahler [...] will not leave but will stay. Unfortunately, in Budapest, what happens is not always what should logically happen."

<sup>260</sup> NPJ, March 2, 1891, p. 4.

"Today's performance in the Royal Opera House gave us one of the most enjoyable evenings experienced in a long time in that mighty home of the Muses. [...] The performance of the [*Loreley*]-fragments once again brought back the often demonstrated proof of Mahler's lofty artistic comprehension, as well as of his genial talent as conductor and teacher. The few scenes had been learnt with a refinement, with a precision, which deserves the highest praise and gratitude. [...] The immaculate choruses again display the great advances made in this area under Mahler's leadership. [...] Following the final chords [of the 'Hebrides'-Overture], a storm of applause broke out, providing Director Mahler with eloquent testimony of the high appreciation in which he is held by all true friends of the arts."

Mahler's venture in Budapest with Mendelssohn's fragment was not his first intensive involvement with dramatic music based on the *Loreley* legend. In September of 1887 he had conducted the Leipzig première of Max Bruch's opera *Loreley*.

<sup>261</sup> NPJ, March 8, 1891, pp. 1ff.

"Everyone had the feeling that this was demonstrative applause. It was directed at the musician and conductor Mahler, about whom it is said that his remaining with our Opera has become questionable since the assumption of power by Count Géza Zichy. To be sure, the new Intendant inaugurated his regime with an injunction which indicates that he does not like to see the internal affairs of the Opera discussed in the columns of the newspapers. He has forbidden members of the institute to relay to journals the goings on in the theatre — and he has made it stick. Consequently, we are also uninformed as to whether the theatre is really in a director-crisis right at the beginning of the Zichy-era. [...]

It would be wrong and foolish to fabricate a rivalry between Intendant and Director. [...] Two positions, one of which represents the higher authority as against the other, cannot stand opposed to each other on the basis of the nature and magnitude of their jurisdictions. As far as we are aware, [Herr Mahler has] the same avocation and competencies in the field of opera as Herr Paulay has in dramatic theatre; and Count Zichy must be just as close to or stay distant from the artistic and economic direction of the Opera as he is from the dramatic institution's. [...]

We cannot [...] believe that Count Zichy would wish to differentiate between the two institutions in his personal attitude to them. The Count is a practicing musician and composer; but, indeed, he is also a man of letters and a poet. [...] However, Count Zichy has never written an actual opera or play; therefore, drama is as close to him as opera, and opera as distant as drama.

[...] [We would] consider it unfortunate if the Intendant [...] would interfere with the development of one of the institutions more extensively and frequently than is warranted by his official position. [...] The Intendant cannot and should not be a director, especially as long as both institutions have their Directors. [...]



Director Mahler has [...] definitely had the good fortune or the merit to bring the Opera — avoided, even feared earlier — closer to the public's liking. He has enemies and critics [...]; in any case, he has elevated the institution and made it acceptable to the public.

There is only one error against which we wish to forewarn Count Zichy publicly. He should not be deluded into thinking that he, just because he is at home in music, could himself be Opera director in an emergency. First he has to prove (and hopefully he will) that he is a good Intendant; but that he could replace a director, anyone would be hard put to believe. One can be a devil of a fellow on the piano, without, therefore, knowing everything."

<sup>262</sup> FL, March 10, 1891, p. 491. In its report of the incident, the PH (March 10, 1891, p. 6) professed itself shocked that those displeased with the changes at the Opera would stoop so low as to accuse Zichy of antisemitism! — HLG (pp. 223f.) mistakenly states that the scheduled performance of *Don Juan* on March 7th did take place under Mahler's baton. In fact, probably because of Ney's cancellation, *Mignon* was performed that evening; *Bánk bán*, however, was performed as scheduled on March 8th (MKO 1909, p. 92).

<sup>263</sup> NPV, March 11, 1891, pp. 5f.

<sup>264</sup> E. g., E, March 14, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>265</sup> GMB, p. 90 (English: MSL, pp. 130f.).

"Your Excellency,

With reference to our conversation today I wish to express my willingness — without prejudice to any rights covered by my contract — to terminate my present contract and enter into a new one with Your Excellency, on the basis of the new statutes.

This new contract would have to stipulate:

I. Duration of the contract: from date of signature to 1 October 1892.

II. The conditions remain essentially as before, with the exception of those special clauses that are at variance with the new statutes and which would have to be modified in accordance with them.

III. Should no new contract have been made with me by 15 May 1892, I am then to receive in settlement a payment of 25 000 florins ... payable in cash and without any deduction by the accounts department of the Royal Opera-House."

<sup>266</sup> NPJ, March 8, 1891, p. 2, and TG-MM, p. 203, after Z.

<sup>267</sup> FL, March 15, 1891, p. 531. The figure of 10 000 florins is also confirmed in BD (p. 3); according to Diósy, Mahler threatened to take legal action at this point.

<sup>268</sup> "For the present, the situation is at a stage which admits neither of discussion nor of any prospect of a speedy resolution."

The original of the letter is in the WSt (Handschriftenabteilung, I.N.182.110).

<sup>269</sup> BT, March 15, 1891, p. 5 (English: BRM(E), p. 190).

"Sir, — From today I have resigned from the position of Artistic Director of the Royal Hungarian Opera House and have relinquished my office into the hands of my superiors. I was unfortunately not given the opportunity to take my leave, from the spot where I worked and strove for nearly three years, of the Budapest public which has so kindly honoured my efforts, of the personnel of the Royal Opera House which has faithfully and hard-workingly stood by me. I hereby do so by this means, and combine with it my heartfelt thanks to the press of the Capital for the manifold assistance and recognition that my activities have found here. I depart from my post in the consciousness of having faithfully and honestly fulfilled my duty, and with the sincere wish that the Royal Hungarian Opera House may blossom and flourish.

Budapest, 14 March 1891.

Gustav Mahler."

<sup>270</sup> PH, March 15, 1891, p. 3.



"Director Mahler took his leave at midday today. One can imagine the joy in the 'leading circles'! It proved possible to get rid of Herr Mahler [...] and this achievement was reached dirt cheap, for a settlement of 25 000 florins. Finding the money caused not the slightest difficulties, after a much larger sum had been saved during the Beniczky-Mahler era, and could now be used in good conscience for this good cause. [...] A new era dawns with this day, the stumbling block for so many ambitions has been removed, the way is open to the up-and-coming and to the already arrived. Of course, little has been said to this point about the ways and means, how and with whom Mahler will be replaced. But then, that is altogether unimportant. The main thing is that the man is gone; he who had such an uncomfortable, sharply honed artistic personality, took his thing so confoundingly earnestly, was a conductor of the first order, and with unremitting sharpness demanded from all under his command the same as he conscientiously gave himself. [...] Luckily, then, we are left with the opera statutes and Mahler is gone. Whether we will now easily find a new director to go with the rescued opera statutes, that we doubt. [...] It may well turn out that neither the new Intendant nor the new statutes will tolerate a director in the proper sense. Count Zichy feels in himself the desire and the strength to be intendant of both theatres, as well as director of the Opera. That is a bold experiment, a risky undertaking, the success of which does not fill us with too much optimism for the time being. [...] When Count Zichy was named Intendant, it was presumably done on the assumption that this man, having an amateurish acquaintance with music and literature, even being important as a performing artist, would be suitable to fulfil that aspect of the intendantship which endows it with artistic meaning: the highest artistic leadership and control of the two great theatres. It was not intended [...] that Count Zichy should be intendant and director. [...] From whichever standpoint one examines the debut of the new Intendant, it is exceptionally peculiar and painful. He must achieve significant successes, in order to make people forget his debut."

<sup>272</sup> NPJ, March 17, 1891, p. 4. — Similar sentiments were probably also rife in private circles. According to the PL, Mahler attended a *soirée* at the home of the Countess Csáky on March 14th. During a small, impromptu concert, he accompanied one of the noble guests "so tastefully that one could have interpreted the attendant applause as an act of demonstration." (I am grateful to Mr. Knud Martner for bringing this report to my attention.)

<sup>273</sup> Z, March 28, 1891, pp. 3f.

<sup>274</sup> Friedrich Löhr recalled the date as March 23rd (GMB, p. 419); HLG (p. 227) has it as the 22nd, while HLG(F) (p. 341) gives it as the 25th, a totally unlikely date. Löhr refers to a "two-day sojourn" in Vienna, while in a letter to Siegfried Rosenberg written from there on the 26th, Justine wrote: "[...] he left here yesterday evening" [...]. (Hamburg, 1961/1006,20). Mahler was to make his first appearance on the podium of the Stadttheater in Hamburg on March 29th, conducting *Tannhäuser*. It is interesting to note that on the advance playbills Mahler is identified as being "from the Royal Opera in Budapest" (facsimile in MSL, p. 136); it seems that his immediate past must have at least endowed him with an aura of distinction!

<sup>275</sup> TG-MM, p. 214. The silver dish is now part of the Rosé-collection.

<sup>276</sup> Hans H. Stuckenschmidt, "Charakteristika des modernen Musiklebens", in Joachim E. Berendt and Jürgen Uhde, ed., *Prisma der gegenwärtigen Musik*. Hamburg, Fische-Verlag, 1959, p. 105 (Soziale Wirklichkeit, Bd. 6).

"When the young Gustav Mahler was Opera Director in Budapest seventy years ago, opera in Central Europe was similarly, even if far less drastically, endangered. He found the energy to oppose himself to the system, the star-mania, the greed of the singers. After a few years, his example bore fruit everywhere."

<sup>277</sup> "Definite" performances: derived from a review or other dated reference in a primary source (e. g., newspaper, diary);

"Probable" performances: mentioned in a secondary source, but no review or similar documentation was found;



"Possible" performances: works introduced or normally conducted by Mahler; no review or other mention was found.

<sup>278</sup> MKO 1909, pp. 299ff.

<sup>279</sup> [Count István Keglevich], *Adatok a Nemzeti Színház és a M. Kir. Operaház fenntartásának költségeiről* (Statistics concerning the operating costs of the National Theatre and the Royal Hungarian Opera), [Budapest, 1901], Appendix III. (The amounts are given in Kronen; 1 florin = 2 Kronen.)

## CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Géza Zichy, *Aus meinem Leben — Erinnerungen und Fragmente* III, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1920, pp. 166f.

"When I assumed office, I found the Opera in a fairly rundown condition. Although the occasional performance conducted by Mahler was outstanding, discipline had declined significantly among the personnel as a whole. Mahler was too great a talent, with characteristics far too genial, to make an even passable director. A nervous, gruff, at times even uncivilized approach has driven practically the entire personnel to desperation. He broke batons almost like Don Juan broke female hearts. When he conducted, he gave cues (when at all) by stabbing towards the affected musician as with a rapier; in addition, he kept up a running patter, grimacing fiercely, so that once during an opera performance a very high personage said to me: 'The little man is endlessly amusing!' And yet that was not at all the truth. First, he was a great man and, secondly, every musician felt that this was the manifestation of a great musical spirit. I found myself in a confounding situation. On the one hand, I wished to retain this genial force for the institution, on the other, I was unable to pacify the extremely agitated personnel. Disciplinary cases arose increasingly frequently. I supported Mahler when he was in the right, but I could and dared not do so when he was wrong. Finally, he appeared to recognize his untenable situation himself and requested his release, which he duly got with a sizeable settlement recommended to the Minister by me. Now I continued to lead the Opera without a director, with my friend Baron Sándor von Vécsey — a diligent official — and the eminent Chief Stage Manager Kálmán Alszegehy at my side."

Vécsey took office at the same time as Zichy, with the title of directorial councillor; such a position had last existed in the days of Podmaniczky and Keglevich. In effect, as is clear from the new statutes, Vécsey was the intendant's right hand man and deputy, and thus the second most powerful person in the Opera's hierarchy.

<sup>2</sup> DVO Part IV, p. 109. As a letter from Zichy to the elder Ábrányi shows, at the end of his first season as intendant Zichy wanted to add Ábrányi to his entourage of advisors, in part to reward him, but no doubt also to bind to himself even more closely his chief supporter among the music critics. In part, Zichy's letter reads as follows:

"Please accept my sincere thanks for your enthusiastic support. [...] There are countless matters, artistic concerns at the Opera which I cannot take care of myself. Would you be willing (for an appropriate honorarium) to shoulder some of this work?"

MA-HNL, Fond XII/1237, no. 7; the letter is dated May 26, 1891.

<sup>3</sup> PN, May 13, 1891, p. [2].

<sup>4</sup> Z, May 27, 1891, p. 6. Máder was to be engaged as a conductor in 1895 (shortly after Nikisch's departure), and was subsequently director from 1901 to 1907 and from 1921 to 1925 (MKO 1935, pp. 83 and 79).

<sup>5</sup> BH, May 20, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> PN, May 20, 1891, p. [1].

<sup>7</sup> BH, May 21, 1891, pp. 4f.

<sup>8</sup> Z, October 1, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Filharmóniai Társaság, *Kilenc évtized a magyar zeneművészet szolgálatában* [Nine decades in the service of Hungarian music], ed. Béla Csuka. Budapest, Egyetemi Nyomda, 1943, pp. 114 and 192.



<sup>10</sup> *Zenei Lexikon* 3 (1965), p. 451.

<sup>11</sup> MKO 1909, p. 309.

<sup>12</sup> NPJ, December 18, 1891, p. 18.

"Broulik is a very competent singer, yet he has set himself against my will; therefore, I shall not re-engage him."

As Broulik remained with the Opera continuously until 1896 (MKO 1909, p. 314), Zichy must have changed his mind, probably under pressure exerted by some papers, among them the *Journal* (eg., December 20, 1891, p. 5).

<sup>13</sup> MKO 1909, p. 404; TG-MM, p. 219.

<sup>14</sup> PL, February 2, 1892, 1. Beilage, pp. [1f.] (original in German).

<sup>15</sup> NPJ, February 7, 1892, p. 9.

"If we look back at the purely artistic results of the past year, however, we must admit in all honesty that in this respect we have a set-back to record: the artistic standard of our Opera has unquestionably declined during the last year. [...] The artistic merit of the work carried out was [...] only minimal. [...] The spirit, which was evident before in many individual performances, in the staging, in the orchestra and, most of all, in the ensemble, achieved through hard work, has disappeared."

<sup>16</sup> *Magyar Hírlap*, February 11, 1892, pp. 2ff.

<sup>17</sup> AP 1892, Vol. II(1892), pp. 315–321.

<sup>18</sup> AP 1892, Vol. VIII(1893), pp. 3–44.

<sup>19</sup> N, January 4, 1893, Morning edition, p. [3].

<sup>20</sup> *Magyar Újság*, January 5, 1893, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Magyar Újság*, January 6, 1893, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Magyar Újság*, January 7, 1893, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> AVE III, pp. 416–419.

<sup>24</sup> AVE III, p. 420.

<sup>25</sup> DVO Part IV, p. 172.

<sup>26</sup> Izor Béli, *Intimitások (Művészek és műbarátok miniatűrben* [Intimations (Artists and amateurs in miniatures)] Budapest, Légrády [1922], pp. 17 and 22.

<sup>27</sup> TG-MM, pp. 231f., and DVO Part IV, pp. 179f.

<sup>28</sup> The letters are in HNA, P 344/1/169–172. — As the relevant correspondence published in [Staud], *op. cit.*, pp. 81–87 (see Chapter II, Note 57) clearly shows, Zichy was acting on confidential instructions from the Minister of the Interior himself when he refused to raise black flags on the institutions under his control. The Minister also denied his plea for military protection.

<sup>29</sup> MKO 1909, p. 405.

<sup>30</sup> MKO 1935, p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> *Szabályrendelet a magyar királyi operaház vezetése és igazgatása tárgyában* (Statutory regulations in the matter of administering and directing the Royal Hungarian Opera). Budapest, Müller, 1895. The new statutes were approved by the new (since January 16th) Minister of the Interior Dezső Perczel as Executive Document No. 23.138 on March 22, 1895.

<sup>32</sup> TG-MM, pp. 237f.

<sup>33</sup> Ferdinand Pfohl, "Arthur Nikisch", in Heinrich Chevalley, ed., *Arthur Nikisch — Leben und Wirken*. Berlin, Bote & Bock, 1922, p. 27.

## CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> "Further, he would have you order, from Kalmár at Andrassy Street 29, six copies of the full-figure photograph, since that is the best one [...] in addition, to obtain certain issues of that satirical magazine (I have quite forgotten its name, it begins with Bol, it is the one you bought for Frau Singer at the railway station), specifically the one in which a caricature of my brother's



Symphony appeared after November 20, 1889, and another one in which there is a caricature of him."

Hamburg, 1961/1006, 20. The letter is dated only as "Wien am 26/3". — The two caricatures are the ones published in *Bolond Istók* on the occasion of the First Symphony's première (November 24, 1889), and by way of welcoming the news of Beniczky's removal as intendant in 1890 (see Illustrations 27 and 41).

<sup>2</sup> Z, July 3, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> "Honoured Friend!

Together with this letter I am posting one to Count Apponyi in which I am expressing my thanks in very inadequate words for the kind gifts which I received owing to the goodness of my friends in Budapest. — I am ashamed to be so late with this — hopefully not so late as to have lost part of their goodwill in this way. — However, the gifts came into my possession only three weeks ago. — Throughout the summer, they sat in the post office where I myself had left an order, and then — following my return to Hamburg — the most urgent business to attend to, also the inevitable customs hassles — etc., etc.

And yet I did not want to write merely as a formality, so to speak, before I could see them. Do you know, dear friend, that I have a real longing for Budapest, and I am just beginning to realize that Budapest had become a second home to me?

What a shame that we did not meet in Bayreuth! What do you say about the performances and the situation there?

Your *Eliane* is on my desk, and I hope to prevail on Pollini to have it performed. — How are things with *Toldi*?

I am just wondering whether it would not be better if you were to bring dear *Toldi* here, as it appears that you will not get anywhere with it in Pest. It seems to me more and more that the chances for a success abroad would be greater with *Toldi*! Do think it over, and write to me about it soon!

I hear nothing about Pest, other than what I read in the *Pester Lloyd* — and this seems to me on all accounts — see Jászberényi — less than infallible. — It would give me great pleasure if I could hear about things from a well-versed source, such as you, for instance. Naturally, here I am in the midst of the most frantic activity — I'm sure I don't have to convince you of this.

My heartiest greetings to the Vegh family, and also to the Singers when you see them.

With many greetings,

Your cordially devoted  
Gustav Mahler

What is happening at the Opera?"

The letter is in FLA and is undated. The preserved envelope carries a Hamburg postmark which may be October 5, 1891; the receiving postmark in Budapest is definitely October 7. — *Eliane* was an opera by Mihalovich, composed between 1885 and 1887, but first produced only in 1908. — "The Vegh family" is, in all likelihood, a reference to the family of János Végh (1845–1918), a composer, who had been vice president of the Academy of Music from 1881 to 1887. — Zsigmond Singer (1850–1913) was an eminent journalist and respected humanitarian, at first in Vienna (and as Budapest correspondent for Viennese papers), later as editor of PL.

<sup>4</sup> "I should also like to take the liberty of calling to your attention the following well-disposed critics known to me; receiving a free copy sent by you may well provide them with an opportune occasion to review my songs.

Vienna  
Pest

Hanslick, Heuberger  
August Beer (*Pester Lloyd*)"

The letter is in Schott's archives; although it is undated, it is known to have been received by the firm in January, 1892. It was first published in Rudolf Stephan, ed., *Gustav Mahler. Werk und Interpretation. Autographe, Partituren, Dokumente*, Köln, Arno Volk, 1979, pp. 24f.

<sup>5</sup> PL, February 8, 1892, *Abendblatt*, p. [3].



"Dear Sir!

I am taking the liberty of addressing the following preliminary question to you as representative of the orchestra of the Royal Opera: would your orchestra be disposed to participate under my leadership in the performance of the German operas in the repertoire (another orchestra is engaged for the Italian ones) at the Covent Garden Theatre in London during the opera season from May 24th to July 20th of this year?

Should the interest of the orchestra be established, negotiations could be concluded speedily. You should also take into consideration that it is intended that such performances should be repeated in London every year, and that under such circumstances a lucrative and not at all strenuous activity would provide the men with the opportunity to exploit a part of their otherwise very protracted holidays.

In any case, please let me have a reply in general terms as soon as possible because Sir Harris, who is the backer of this undertaking, will be arriving here from London for talks in the next few days, and must under any circumstances make a quick choice from among the offers he had had presented to him.

In case of a positive response from you, I would also approach Count Zichy on your behalves.

Your most devoted  
Gustav Mahler."

Although the letter carries the date "28/III 92", this is written in pencil, and is not by Mahler. The number "35/92" also appears on the letter; it may be the Hamburg Stadttheater's correspondence registry number. The letter is published here for the first time with the kind permission of HNL.

<sup>7</sup> GMB, p. 115 (English: MSL, p. 156).

"Please do *not* use the *money* in the way you suggest, but send it to my *bank* in Budapest as soon as you receive it."

<sup>8</sup> MSL, p. 418.

<sup>9</sup> "Together with this letter another one is being sent to Pest to the bank. In the next few days 300 florins will be dispatched to your address, dear Justi."

The original of the letter is in the Gustav Mahler/Alfred Rosé Room, The Music Library, The University of Western Ontario, London, Canada (hence London, Canada), MZ 1000, No. 6. The excerpt (as also from the letters identified in Notes 10 and 14) is quoted with the kind permission of the Library. — At the head of the letter Mahler wrote the following exhortation, rather amusingly in light of his own general practice: "*Briefe immer datieren! Es ist doch manchmal wichtig!*" (Always date letters! This is often important, indeed!).

<sup>10</sup> London, Canada, MZ 1000, No. 18.

"As concerns Pest, you can well imagine that I would not think in my sleep of going back there again! But, I will take good care not to declare that right away! No! Let them first come to me and make me an offer! Then my triumph will be complete! What sort of an answer they will get, you can imagine for yourself. —

Naturally — as nothing can be taken for granted in advance, so it also not whether I will be in a position to treat an offer as I foresee it now. — It could happen again that I could be unemployed again at the time and then I could be forced again, as in '88, to say 'yes'. —

You should not say a word to anyone either about my views concerning Pest. —"

Although the letter is undated, the references in it to a number of topics, as well as Mahler's own reference to this letter in one he wrote on January 30, 1893, allows us to assign this letter to approximately the middle of January, 1893.



What must you think of me that I have not yet replied to your letter, so dear to me! — I can actually see you as you stroke your mighty beard in righteous indignation over the indolence of the slovenly friend, even allowing well-founded doubts to arise about the faithfulness of same; Kössler sits across from you, stroking his beard to north and to south, then proceeding through his hair, sweeping that east and west, and muttering unintelligible words which are, however, judging from his morose visage, devastating, and showing himself, as always, a merciless Radamantis — well-known as the sternest one of Tartarus's judges. My God, if only you lived with me here in Hamburg, you would comprehend all! It is unbelievable, what all I have to conduct here. For instance, just for the fun of it, I will outline for you my repertoire for the next two weeks.

Monday 16: Freund Fritz (première)

Tuesday (today) Siegfried

Wednesday 18 Freund Fritz

Friday 20 Tristan and Isolde

Sunday 22 Freund Fritz

Monday 23 Fidelio

Tuesday 24 Magic Flute

Wednesday 25 Lohengrin

Thursday 26 Iolanthe

Friday 27 Valkyrie

Saturday 28 Freund Fritz

Monday 30 Bezähmte Widerspenstige (opera by Götz)

Tuesday Freund Fritz!

So, all in all, only 3 free evenings.

Add to this the rehearsals, and then judge for yourself whether I have a chance to write letters. —

You can't even imagine how lonely I am here. — How I remember the stimulating evenings we spent together in Pest!

I am very anxious about the reception your work (Toldi) will get from the Budapest public, and even more about how you will feel about the performance. That it is, unfortunately, impossible for me to come, you can see from the above "menu". — It would have been truly a great joy for me to be able to have been there, and to have seen the dear, old friends again. —

Count Apponyi's successes fill me with great joy and awe. Truly, Hungarians are now well ahead of the world politically! We Germans can only look to the East with envy. — I have experienced the developments only vicariously from a distance, and you in Pest, from close by, perhaps do not have such a sanguine reaction. — But I have always found so far that a great event is best judged from a distance; for a close-up view is often clouded by small details and personal concerns. Please convey my thoughts to Count Apponyi, and also that everywhere I go people think the same. People have great respect for him — and equally little for friend Maxi [probably Max Falk, editor of the *Pester Lloyd*]. The *Pester Lloyd*, which I naturally continue to read, is behaving in a pitiful manner, as always! But its latest capers exceed even the usual!

There isn't much to report about myself. —

I conducted here in the Bülow-concert, replacing the ailing master. Among other works, I conducted the c-minor! Can you imagine, a number of the local critics took me to task over my interpretation like a school boy, in the most unflattering manner. — Quite involuntarily, I had to think of Pest then, where they understood me so well. — I am having downright bad luck with your Eliane! — But I am not yet ready to give up hope to have it performed here. — Only I must await an opportune moment, in order to convince Pollini. —

I am once again fairly well in his good graces. — But, this year is already fully booked. — Thus, it would be wasted effort to harangue him about this now, and it might even squash the matter for good, as he is a moody man in such things. — Instead, I will look out to have it happen next year. (I am under contract until spring '94 — longer than that I will not remain under any circumstances.) — So, please leave the music with me for a while longer. Perhaps I will yet succeed once. — In any case, though, please let me have a report about the Budapest performance which I consider very important.



Please greet all the friends for me, and my special regards to Count Apponyi and the Vegh family.

Your cordially devoted  
Gustav Mahler"

The letter (in FLA) is undated. However, from Mahler's list of performances it is clear that it was written on January 17, 1893; it was received in Budapest on January 20th. — Apponyi's "successes" had to do with the change in the Hungarian government in November, 1892. He became one of the most visible spokesmen of the Wekerle-government, and was especially celebrated for his stand on regularizing the relationship of church and state.

<sup>12</sup> GMB, pp. 106ff. (MSL, pp. 147ff.)

"Dear Fräulein,

Although I am not easily persuaded to enter into 'correspondence', and my best friends bemoan my habits in this respect, there is a question in your letter that provokes an answer from me: 'why such a large apparatus as an orchestra should be necessary in order to express a great thought'. But there are a number of things I must say first if I am to make it clear to you how I see this problem.

You seem to have explored musical literature somewhat, and I assume that you are not unacquainted with early and very early music, up to the time of Bach. Have you not then been struck by two things?

First: that the further back you go in time, the more elementary the terms relating to performance are, i. e. the more the composers leave the interpretation of their thought to the performers — for instance in Bach's work it is very rare to find the tempo indicated, or indeed any other hint of how he intends the work to be performed — there are not even such crude distinctions as *p* or *ff* etc. (Wherever you do find them, they are usually put in by the editors, and mostly wrong, at that.)

Secondly: the more music evolves, the more complex the apparatus becomes — the apparatus that the composer produces in order to express his ideas. Just try comparing the orchestra that Haydn uses in his symphonies (i. e. it was not the way we see it at Philharmonic Concerts at the Redoute — for many more instruments have been added, perhaps half of them) with the orchestra that Beethoven requires for his Ninth. To say nothing at all of Wagner and modern composers. What is the reason for this? — Can you suppose such a thing to be accidental or even an unnecessary extravagance, the result of mere whim, on the composer's part?

Now I will give you my view of the matter: in its beginnings music was mere 'chamber music', i. e. intended to be played in a small space before a small audience (often consisting only of those involved in the work). The feelings intrinsic to it were, in keeping with the time, simple, naive, reproducing emotional experience only in bare outline: joy, sadness, etc. The musicians were confident that they knew their business, they moved within a familiar field of ideas, and on the grounds of clearly delimited skill, well-grounded within these limits! Therefore the composers made no prescriptions — it was taken for granted that everything would be rightly seen, felt and heard. There were scarcely any 'amateurs' (Frederick the Great and others were, I am convinced, very rare cases). The noble and rich simply had paid performers, who had learnt their trade, to amuse them by playing to them in their chambers. That is why the compositions were not maltreated by lack of understanding! Usually, indeed, composers and musicians will have been one and the same person.

Within the Church, which was of course the chief domain of this art and whence it had come, everything was precisely ordained in advance by ritual. In short, the composers did not need to fear being misunderstood, and contented themselves with sketchy writings for their own use — without giving special thought to the fact that others would have to interpret them or might even interpret them wrongly.

In the course of time, however, they seem to have had such bad experiences that they began to concern themselves with making sure the performer had unambiguous directions as to their intentions. So a great system of sign-language gradually evolved, which — like the heads of notes indicating pitch — provided a definite reference for duration or volume. Together with this,



moreover, came the appropriation of new elements of feeling as objects of imitation in sounds — i. e. the composer began to relate ever deeper and more complex aspects of his emotional life to the area of his creativeness — until with Beethoven the new era of music began: from now on the fundamentals are no longer mood — that is to say, mere sadness, etc. — but also the transition from one to the other — conflicts — physical nature and its effect on us — humour and poetic ideas — all these become objects of musical imitation.

Now not even quite complicated signs suffice — instead of requiring a single instrument to produce such a rich palette of colours (as Herr August Beer would say), the composer took one instrument for each colour (the analogy is apparent in the word 'tone-colour'). It was out of this need that the modern, the 'Wagnerian' orchestra gradually came into being.

Thirdly, I would now mention only one thing more, the physical necessity to enlarge the musical apparatus: music was becoming more and more common property — the listeners and the players becoming ever more numerous — in place of the chamber there came the concert hall, and from the church, with its one instrument, the organ, the opera-house evolved. So you see, if I may sum it up once more: We moderns need such a great apparatus in order to express our ideas, whether they be great or small. First — because we are compelled, in order to protect ourselves from false interpretation, to distribute the various colours of our rainbow over various palettes; secondly, because our eye is learning to distinguish more and more colours in the rainbow, and ever more delicate and subtle modulation; thirdly, because in order to be heard by many in our over-large concert halls and opera-houses we also have to make a loud noise.

Now perhaps you will object, as women will, being almost never convinced, at the most persuaded: 'Well, does that mean that Bach was less than Beethoven or that Wagner is greater than he?' — in reply to which I will tell you, you little 'tormenting spirit' (really a tormenting spirit, for I have been tormenting myself with this letter for almost an hour now) — in order to answer this question you must apply to One who can behold man's entire history at a single glance. We are the way we are! We 'moderns'. You too are that way! Supposing that I now prove to you that you, little tormenting spirit, demand a greater apparatus for your life than the Queen of England did in the seventeenth century, she having breakfasted, as I read recently, on a pound of bacon and a tankard of beer, and having whiled away the tedium of her evenings in her boudoir by spinning, or the like, by the light of a tallow candle? What do you say now? — Away, then, with the piano! away with the violin! which are good for the 'chamber' when you are alone, or with some good companion, wishing to call the great masters' works to mind — as good, as a recollection, as, say, an engraving is as a reminder of the brilliantly colourful paintings of a Raphael or Böcklin — I hope I make my meaning clear to you — in which case I shall not be vexed at having devoted an hour of my life to you, who have shown such lovable trust in a stranger.

And now, since this letter has grown so long, I should be glad to know that I have not written it in vain, wherefore I ask you to let me know whether it reaches you safely.

With best wishes,  
Gustav Mahler"

Written on February 7, 1893, the original German text of the letter was first published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on May 10, 1958. — The identity of the addressee has not been established conclusively. The references to Budapest, and the terms of endearment used by Mahler suggest that the letter was written to a young girl in Hungary. This would support Knud Martner's belief (MSL, p. 414) that she was Gisela Tolnay-Witt (later Selden-Goth; 1884–1975), even though she was only nine years old at the time.

<sup>13</sup> FLA

"Honoured Friend!

I have followed the preparations for "Toldi" with great interest in the Pester Lloyd, and in the end was present in spirit at the première. — How happy it makes me, dear friend, to read now in the reports that your work achieved a great success, and at last brought its author the deserved, long-denied acknowledgement of his talent and spirit. —



I had actually intended to send a telegram on the day of the first performance, but decided against it in the end, thinking that you must be far too excited to pay heed to such an overt sign of sympathy. —

However, now I need to hear from you yourself how you felt about the performance, the public, and what sort of an impression you yourself had!

I am now on very good terms with Pollini, and hope for certain to arrange for the performance of one of your operas for next year.

I read that Nikisch had been engaged as my successor in Pest, and I congratulate you sincerely for this fine acquisition. — He is an extraordinary, refined musician, from whom you will receive much pleasure.

I follow Count Apponyi's successes (from the 'tall tales' of the Pester Lloyd) with great interest and joy. Now the day truly does not seem too far when this genial fellow finally achieves the position which is so rightfully his: as head of the government. It is truly sad that such a man should have to spend his best years and prime energies simply in overcoming the obstacles that are placed in his path by pettiness and narrow-mindedness. Please let me hear from you incisively again about yourself and all the friends. — Where will you spend the summer? This year must not again pass without us seeing each other!

Hearty greetings to our mutual friends Kössler and Herzfeld, and please convey my best regards to Count Apponyi and the Vegh family. Your truly devoted

Gustav Mahler"

The letter is dated March 20, 1893.

<sup>14</sup> London, Canada, MZ 1000, No. 35.

"First of all the very latest: the Singers from Pest visited with me here for a day. — Naturally, I 'fêted' them. — They appeared to have made such a long journey really to visit me."

Although the letter is undated, later passages indicate that it was written prior to the first summer Mahler spent at Steinbach am Attersee; thus, it can safely be assigned to April or May, 1893.

<sup>15</sup> FLA

"Most Honoured Friend!

Your letter brought me great joy, and at the same time a stinging rebuke. How often I had thought of you, and had always decided to write to you. But, then, you know how a musician lives: always in a fantasy world. He can think about letters — but to write them, for that he is too indolent! — Last year we lived quite near each other — I in a veritable *dolce far niente*! As you know, one is least likely to carry out an intention under such circumstances, and before one has a chance to realize it, the time has passed. —

What weighs on me the most is that your Eliane is still on my desk rather than on the conductor's stand. — My contract with Pollini expires this year, and I had been thinking all along that the negotiations aimed at renewing it would at long last bring the necessary opportunity to effect the performance of your work with Pollini. — But, unfortunately, this hope appears to have let me down. Foreseeably, I shall leave Hamburg at the end of this season and, with a heavy heart, I must now really return Eliane to you. It is not as if Pollini had not done his best to reengage me. He was also ready for any material sacrifice; but it is precisely my artistic demands that he claims to be unable to fulfil (and, as you know, they matter far, far more to me than my personal interests), and so, I have already made up my mind to once again 'hit the road'! As far as I know, negotiations have already begun with Strauss in Weimar; as he told me, he is of the mind to become my successor here. I am already sorry for the poor chap for, as far as I know this fine fellow, he is also not a man of concessions.

I am most disappointed about your judgment of Nikisch! I had already thought that he would be out of place as an opera director, with his mild and somewhat passive nature, but that he turned out to be so superficial and frivolous also as a conductor, that I would not have believed of him.



It is, though, a rather peculiar fate that rules over this unfortunate institute. I read the "Pester Lloyd" quite regularly. Admittedly, one cannot form a judgment from it. It seems to me that the repertoire is put together rather routinely; I cannot form an opinion as to the worth of the performances themselves. Herr August Beer appears to have become more civilized and benevolent. Pity that I could not have been so lucky, to have been treated so kindly by him.

I followed especially the political developments of the past year with lively interest, and I can tell you without reservation (so far as I can remain objective, being a true admirer of Count Apponyi) that my impression is that never yet has Hungary behaved so ungratefully towards her great sons as now towards Apponyi. Now the whole world hears about Wekerle's achievements. Yes, the Devil take it, who was it then who, in the most difficult times, again and again made and fought for the demands that have now been met? Who else but Apponyi? I mean — he should throw his entire weight into the effort to make it clear to people that the entire success of Wekerle is due precisely to the true faith of Apponyi and his party; and that, obviously, had he not raised the same cry again and again over the years of hardship and toil, everything would probably still be going on in Tisza's old humdrum ways. — One is truly reminded of Vergil's 'tulit alter honores' etc. — Is there no one there who can comprehend and say this!? What does he himself think about it. Forever I want to call to him: Hold up your head! you are the one who had achieved this, and the time will come that will and must acknowledge it! —

If only now he would not be led into taking a false step! After all, it is difficult to bear so much of the 'cussedness of things'. — I can sympathize with him — on a small scale that is also my lot.

But, by God! Even if I have to go begging — I shall not abandon the flag!

This summer, I shall definitely come to Aussee, where I hope to see Count Apponyi. — You have written nothing about the other friends? How are the Veghs? Kössler?

Please excuse the scrawl on the preceding pages. As my enthusiasm grows while I am writing, so my scratchings become increasingly illegible.

A detailed report about yourself and Count Apponyi would please me greatly.

I should like to get to know your revision of Toldi during the summer. I am also very happy about that; for, as you know, we spoke about the need for it already back then.

And now heartiest greetings to you and please remember me to the old friends. I think of all of you most fondly!

Your  
Gustav Mahler"

<sup>16</sup> BD, p. 4. The duel between Nopcsa and Diósy is confirmed by Mohácsi (JM, p. 29).

"Following Nikisch's resignation, Mahler's admirers started a movement aimed at reclaiming the artist for Budapest. His work with Pollini drew to an end and Mahler — in spite of all the wrongs that had been done to him — would have been ready to act on a new invitation from the institution where, after all, the star of his genius had ascended. Armed with Mahler's written agreement, an approach was going to be made to Nopcsa, who had driven Nikisch away. In the meantime, an all too energetic intervention on the artist's behalf led to a duel between Nopcsa and this writer — and so the beautiful plan came to nothing."

<sup>17</sup> FLA

"Most Honoured Friend!

I should not like to embark on the 'holidays' without making good on a debt that has been weighing on me for a long time! What must you have thought of me, dear friend, that I have allowed week after week to slip by without acknowledging your kindness in sending me your "Toldi" with the kind dedication? — To be sure, it happened quite naturally, and if you could see into my soul, my silence would be proof to you of the great honour I considered this. I did not want to send you a few routine lines of thanks, and just in those weeks all manner of professional obligations had absolutely prevented me from getting down to a real letter; and as you know, the longer one puts off such a letter, the harder the decision to do it becomes! But I know you to be forbearing, and I know that you will temper justice with mercy.



By way of a reply, I should have been happiest to convey the news that we will perform your Toldi here in Hamburg. But there was nothing to do with Pollini this year — for months on end he hovered between life and death. And now I have got to the point with him that I will leave Hamburg forever probably already in September. I do not know yet where I am going, but that will turn out during the summer months. But once I am somewhere where I have a say, then we get to your Toldi or Eliane: that I have firmly promised myself. — I will be at the Attersee again during the summer, and I hope that it will not pass without our seeing and speaking with each other. How much I have to tell you. How are things now in Pest? That Kaldy became my successor was certainly the most unexpected solution of the problem for me! Yet, it is not unexpected when problems at the Pest Opera are solved in an unexpected manner. — What is Count Apponyi doing? Please give him my very best regards, and heartiest greetings to you, my dear friend, from you

truly devoted  
Gustav Mahler"

The letter is undated; the postmark is clearly May 16, 1896.

<sup>18</sup> GMB, pp. 162f. (English: MSL, pp. 187f.).

"Most Honoured Friend!

I must apologize for the long delay in replying to your kind letter. The chief reason is that I am up to my neck in work, which makes it simply impossible for me to think about anything else. — Apart from that I feel I am in a rather awkward position. What shall or can I reply to your well-meant arguments? I have already written to you saying I shall be glad to accept a post in Budapest if one is offered to me. — It depends entirely on the terms and from whom the offer comes. — But I have no wish to become involved in intrigues, or even to be the cause of them!

I shall be returning to Hamburg for this winter. If I am made an offer and am still free, I shall be sincerely glad to accept it. It must, of course, be made officially. — I myself believe that one will have to wait and see how things turn out. It is enough, after all, if the people in Budapest know I may possibly be 'available'. The rest is up to them, not to me! [...] If you hear of any new 'development' in the situation, you will always find a very eager reader or listener in me."

<sup>19</sup> GMB, p. 171 (English: MSL, p. 191).

"Perhaps even Pollini himself has no notion how things will turn out [in Hamburg]. [...] Will Pollini succeed in driving me into clearing out? I really don't yet know what I should do then, since there is nowhere a vacant post I could accept."

The letter is dated July 21, 1896.

<sup>20</sup> Bruno Walter, *Briefe 1894–1962*, Frankfurt a.M., Fischer, 1969, p. 19.

"Perhaps you have already read that Pest is ready for a general rebellion in order to have Mahler return there. [...] Mahler conducts himself quite passively and is glad at the topsy-turvy state of things there. [...] I doubt that Mahler will go to Pest, he would do so most reluctantly; if he goes, it would be only for the next season, and with an unheard of contract."

<sup>21</sup> FLA

"I am writing to Count Apponyi at the same address as yours! Is this correct?

Most Honoured Friend!

Today I am asking you for a service of friendship, on which depends the entire course of my future. — In Vienna, questions of the conductorship, respectively the directorship are a burning issue. — In the first instance, I am the one who is 'in question'. —

There are two obstacles in my way. First, as I hear it, my 'madness', that is again and again brought up by my enemies, in order to bar my way. Secondly, that I was born a Jew. As concerns



this, I must be sure to mention to you (in case you don't already know it) that I had converted to Catholicism shortly after leaving Budapest. —

The first person concerned when it comes to the filling of the position is Prince Liechtenstein. — Yet, surely there must also be other directions from which to work. My dear and honoured friend, please do everything in your power for me.

I have just written to Count Apponyi also. As you know, I have no connections whatsoever! All my hopes rest on you and Count Apponyi using your influence on my behalf.

It requires only a final blow now, for my being called to Vienna is seriously being considered, as I have just been advised by official sources.

Could you, will you do me this service of friendship? In the interest of the matter I should add further that all this must remain totally secret, in order to prevent an untimely intervention by opponents. I ask you most earnestly; otherwise it will all fail. I place my fortunes in your hand. You and Count Apponyi will know ways and means by which to steer the course most in my interest.

Awaiting your kind reply, I remain your

truly devoted  
Gustav Mahler"

From among the various aspects of Mahler's quest for the position in Vienna, only those are recounted here which connect him with Hungary. For a full account, see Robert Werba, "Mahlers Weg nach Wien", *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 34, No. 10 (October 1979), pp. 486–498.

<sup>22</sup> FLA

"Most Honoured Friend!

As an addition to my letter of yesterday I should mention something else I forgot in the great rush: Counts Kinsky and Wilczek should also have great influence in this matter. Perhaps you can find a path also to these gentlemen. Could not Beniczky, as my former chief, who may well be disposed to support me, also be approached? Please, my dear friend, leave no stone unturned in this matter; only one more powerful thrust is needed now in this matter, to see me emerge victorious.

Perhaps you, dear friend, also have a small stake in this thing; for finally it may create an arena for you and your works. — Hopefully, you will not misunderstand this remark. — It occurred to me spontaneously, and is not meant as some sort of a 'stimulus' for your friendly help.

I am really quite excited by this possibility, to finally find as an artist, after countless wrong turns, a worthy post in which I would be freed forever from the miseries of second-rate theatre. — Also, I would not be so presumptuous to call my dear friend to my assistance now, were I not convinced that my determination and abilities serve as my justification. You, too, I know, will agree with me in this.

Please let me know soon whether you are in a position to do anything for me.

Are you or Count Apponyi coming to Vienna in the near future? I suspect that a personal intercession would do a world of good. — Is Count Apponyi actually in Pest these days, and did he get my letter?

Heartly greetings to you, honoured friend, and I await your kind reply anxiously.

Your truly devoted  
Gustav Mahler"

The letter is dated December 22, 1896.

<sup>23</sup> FLA

"My dear Friend!

Many thanks for your kind letter. — Now one more thing: Could you not make contact with Beseczny and Wlassack, either on the occasion of a personal visit in Vienna, or at least by means of a letter? As I understand it from informed sources, this would now be the best way in which to move things in a direction favourable to me. — My chances are altogether good. — It only needs



a push from my friends now, to lay to rest the thoughts about which I had written to you already, and to carry me to the desired goal.

My dear friend! Only do not let up now; and if it is at all possible, do me the favour of going to Vienna for a day, and work on Beseczny and Wlassack on my behalf. I have the greatest faith in your status in the world, and otherwise also in your personal ability to bring people to your point of view! —

Time is of essence for, they say, the conductor's post will be filled in the immediate future and, as I know it, only with a person who is considered acceptable as the eventual successor to Jahn. The latter is, however, only being hinted at discreetly, but I know that it is the determining factor. Beniczky, to whom I shall write tomorrow, would also be of the greatest service to me if he would vouch for me. Perhaps you could also work on him a bit. —

My dear friend, I hope that you will overlook my forwardness in demanding so much of you, and will chalk it up to the unprecedented importance this matter has for my entire future.

I will never forget you for this! Please let me know in a few words what you were able to do for me, and please accept my sincerest thanks in advance from your true

Gustav Mahler"

Josef von Beseczny was Intendant of the Court Theatres; Eduard Wlassack was his chancery-director.

<sup>24</sup> FLA

"My dear Friend!

Everything is still undecided in Vienna. How long they will 'fiddle around', as usual, is anyone's guess. — As I am informed by my sources, my appointment would be a certainty, were I not — a Jew. — But this fact may yet be the deciding factor, and so Mottl, who is being strongly pushed by Metternich, may emerge victorious! A remark by Liechtenstein (made during an intercession by one of my supporters, whose identity I do not know, but who, I imagine, was sent either by you or by Count Apponyi) allows me to retain some hope. He said, as the patron mentioned brought up my origins: 'We have not yet reached the point in Austria where antisemitism is a deciding factor.' He himself is said to be well-informed about me, and to be thinking kindly about me! But one must continue to exert pressure there and not 'let up'!

I met Jahn in Dresden recently, and we spoke quite openly about the matter. — He did not appear unkindly disposed towards me. — As he told me, he is merely awaiting the outcome of his eye operation, in order to appoint a conductor, should his health be restored. In that case, he will 'keep me in mind'! Thus, it may be possible, in any case, to win him to my side. But there, too, I need friends to represent my interests. — I have now definitely obtained my release with the end of this season; in fact, I could no longer hold out in this mess. — I would rather give piano lessons to small children than to continue to demean myself so as an artist.

So, I have cast the die, without having any assurance at all of an alternative. —

How are things in Budapest? Is Nopcsa staying on? And is an invitation for me from there completely out of the question? Why is nothing said about me there? Do you think that I should still count on this?

I shall be free here from the end of June!

My sincerest thanks to you for your kind efforts. How I would wish that one day I could express these thanks to you through deeds. — Convey my best regards to Count Apponyi, and heartiest greetings to you

from your most devoted  
Gustav Mahler

When you see Kössler and Singer, please greet them for me most heartily. Beniczky did himself proud, and recommended me very warmly. Please thank him for me."

The letter is dated January 25, 1897. — Prince von und zu Liechtenstein was Lord Chamberlain whose area of responsibility included the Court Theatres.

<sup>25</sup> The three letters are in Vienna, in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Hoftheater-Generalintendanz, Personalakt Gustav Mahler. — To the best of my knowledge, Mihalovich's letter is published here for



the first time. Apponyi's letter was first published in its entirety in KBM, p. 153 (facsimile of the first page) and pp. 154f. (this English translation: KBM(E), p. 133 and Zoltan Roman). An excerpt from Beniczky's letter is published in KBM, p. 154 (this English translation: KBM(E), p. 132 and Zoltan Roman). Beniczky's letter was written by a clerk and signed by Beniczky.

"Your Excellency,

Kindly forgive me for taking the liberty of imposing on you with these lines, but I do so actually in the interest of the Vienna Court Opera.

It has come to my attention that Gustav Mahler is an applicant for the post of conductor. Mahler has been my friend for many years and I can state with the best of conscience that, both as artist and as a man, he belongs to the best and noblest of his kind. His exceptional talent as a musician, his brilliance as a conductor may already be well-known to Your Excellency. His enemies tax him with being Jewish and, on top of it, with being a mad and eccentric man. The first is no longer the case, for Mahler has converted to Christianity. The latter is a malicious fabrication, invented in lieu of any real basis for opposing him.

Therefore, if Your Excellency wishes to gain a worker of the first order for the Imperial and Royal Opera, you will certainly not regret it if you established contact with Herr Mahler. I can recommend him most emphatically as man and artist.

Please accept, Your Excellency, my most humble respects with which I remain, yours truly,

E. v. Mihalovich."

"Your Excellency,

I am informed by a reliable source that the Imperial and Royal Vienna Court Opera is on the verge of a crisis concerning its conductor or director, and that among others Herr Gustav Mahler is considering the post. Since the work of this outstanding artist at the Budapest Opera is vivid in my memory and since in my fairly comprehensive acquaintance with distinguished conductors I have not found his like, I take the liberty of saying a few words by way of recommending him.

Through the incompetence and misplaced ambition of Count Géza Zichy during his unhappy rule of our Opera House (although, to be sure, he was later to be 'outdone' by Herr Nopcsa), this institution has to its detriment lost a leader who within two years succeeded in training a completely discredited company to achieve considerable artistic results; built up a rich and varied repertoire; and, while preserving the highest artistic ideals, ended his second season with a not inconsiderable financial surplus. Mahler is not merely — like some famous conductors I could name — an orchestral musician, but with all the works he produces he dominates the stage, the action, the expressions and movements of actors and chorus, with supreme control, so that a performance prepared and conducted by him attains artistic perfection in every dimension. His eye ranges over the entire production, the decor, the machinery, the lighting. I have never met such a well-balanced all-round artistic personality. I would beg Your Excellency by way of confirming this opinion to ask Brahms what he thought of the *Don Juan* performance conducted by Mahler which he watched in Budapest; please to ask Goldmark how *Lohengrin* under Mahler's direction struck him. Both will remember their impressions, for they were of the kind one remembers for a lifetime.

When I add that Mahler as a person, too, is a highly estimable, eminently respectable character, I shall have completed a portrait which, I trust, suggests that the Opera would be fortunate indeed to gain his services.

Please forgive, Your Excellency, this perhaps incompetent interference; it is intended merely as a truthful testimonial for my friend Mahler that I present without knowing how much it will weigh in the balance.

Your Excellency's most obedient servant,

Albert Apponyi."

"Excellency,

From a letter by Gustav Mahler, former Director of the Royal Hungarian Opera, I have learnt that a conductor's position is about to come vacant at the Vienna Court Opera, for which Mahler is also an applicant.



Please allow me, Excellency, that in Mahler's interests I give a description of him in a few words, — for I am quite certain that various rumours have been brought into circulation concerning the insufferability of his nature.

I must confess that I consider Mahler a very excitable person in some ways, no doubt owing to his profession; but I would nevertheless recommend him most warmly to Your Excellency, knowing him for a man who, apart from his great gifts as a musician, conductor and director, also has a healthy regard for the commercial side of an artistic institution. Above all, he is a thoroughly honourable character, and I am convinced that his merits far surpass the weaknesses.

In the hope that with my lines I have furthered Mahler's cause, I remain faithfully,

Franz v. Beniczky."

<sup>26</sup> GMB, p. 201 (English: MSL, p. 213).

"Forgive the sloppiness of this letter. I am writing in a great hurry in the midst of preparations for a tour of several weeks, which will take me to Moscow, Petersburg, Munich, Budapest, etc."

The letter is dated February 17, 1897.

<sup>27</sup> E, March 28, 1897, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> BD, p. 4.

"A small group of journalists awaited him at the railway station. In the hotel Mahler quickly devoured a few slices of ham, then he commanded: Fellows, I wish to go to the Opera! It was a mild spring evening. As we glimpsed the beautiful house in the Andrássy Street, Mahler pulled the rim of his hat deep over his eyes and — cried bitterly! It was here that his first glittering, promising artistic blooms were crushed."

<sup>29</sup> JM, p. 27 (original in German).

<sup>30</sup> E, March 31, 1897, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> A notable exception was represented by Z; it neither announced nor reviewed the concert!

<sup>32</sup> E, April 1, 1897, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> PH, April 1, 1897, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> PN, April 1, 1897, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> PL, April 1, 1897, 1. Beilage, p. [3].

"The whole is a charming, bright little spring picture with simple lines and finely shaded breezy colouring. The basic rustic tone is established immediately by the first part, a folkish, pastorale-like melody, played by the modern shawm, the oboe, neatly accompanied by the pizzicati of the 'celli. The same shepherd's song is then graciously spun out by the violins. It is followed by an episode of a longing, sweetly pining character. Are the flowers whispering sweet confessions to each other, or is the dreamer encamped in the blooming meadow not — alone? Who is to know?"

<sup>36</sup> BD, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> The autograph document, in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, is published in BRM, p. 211.

<sup>38</sup> KBM, pp. 156f.

<sup>39</sup> BD, p. 4.

"In the summer of 1897, when [Mahler] already had the invitation to Vienna as conductor and assistant director in his pocket, I met him in Innsbruck. I told him that Nopcsa had fallen and that Count Zichy was being mentioned again as the next Intendant. Also that I had spoken with Zichy and that he had told me: it had had to be the greatest mistake of his tenure that he had driven Mahler away. If he were to be Intendant again — of which there was no apparent chance — his first act would be to recall Mahler. — Mahler's eyes lit up. 'Keep an eye on things', he said, 'if there should be a timely turn of events, notify me! If Count Zichy wishes to have me, I shall come!'



The granting of the request made by the Budapest Philharmonic is not up to me, but I must seek the agreement of the high office of the intendant.

On my part there is no objection to it and I will very gladly second the approval, especially in view of your personal wishes, most respected Herr Doctor.

The official letter of the Philharmonic has not arrived to this day.

Please accept my most sincere assurances that, as always, I shall consider it a great pleasure to be of service to you in the future.

Vienna, October 1, 1899.

Your  
gratefully devoted  
Gustav Mahler

Director of the Imperial Opera"

The letter was written on Hofoper stationery by a clerk, and signed by Mahler (MA-HNL, Fond IV/554).

<sup>41</sup> The letter is dated August 26, 1902; it is on Hofoper stationery, written by a clerk and signed by Mahler, and bears the Hofoper's registry number Z 539/1902 (Archives of the Hungarian State Opera).

<sup>42</sup> MKO 1935, p. 99.

<sup>43</sup> FLA

"My Honoured Friend!

If I can find any way at all to do it, I wish to announce myself for the second half of May. — As I am coming exclusively to you and for your work, I would ask most earnestly that, if possible, you do not make my visit public. I am coming to the Opera and will probably have to return the same night.

That you have preserved your former, friendly feelings towards me makes me extremely happy, and I'm sure I don't have to assure you that I feel the same way. —

Regrettably, my wife cannot accompany me, as she will be busy in May, taking care of providing the future generation. Otherwise, nothing could have kept her from visiting my old friend with me. — Hopefully, some day we will have the pleasure of seeing you here.

With heartiest greetings, in a  
great hurry  
your old Mahler"

The letter is undated. The sending and receiving postmarks on the envelope are from April, 1904; the numerals for the days are barely legible, and may be either 02 and 03, or 22 and 23, respectively. — Mihalovich's *Toldi*, to which Mahler undoubtedly refers, was performed in Budapest on April 12 and 17, but not in May; of course, a performance may well have been scheduled and then cancelled.

<sup>44</sup> It seems that Mahler could not escape the spectre of bilingual performances in Budapest even of his own music. PH had praise for all of the participants in this concert, and complained only that Behr sang her part in German, while the choirs sang in Hungarian (April 15, 1905, p. 11).

<sup>45</sup> It is ironic that after such a sensational debut, Feld could have disappeared virtually without a trace. His name cannot be found in any reference work — musical or non-musical — or other published source. Only a letter of his to Jenő Hubay, preserved in MA-HNL. (Fond 73/176), shows that he was still alive in 1930.

<sup>46</sup> MA-HNL, Fond 14/56.

"Honoured Colleague!

Enclosed I am returning the score. I have made my notes and alterations in red ink; now an intelligent copyist must transfer these markings carefully into the orchestral parts. I can assure you that these markings are of the greatest importance to the performance, and I would advise you to spare no effort to ensure that each marking is executed most carefully by the musicians.



Not only because the performance would suffer if they were not observed, but because it is altogether impossible in that case, and would bring neither joy to you nor credit to me.

Please accept my most sincere thanks for your kind interest and, when you get a chance, drop me a short note to let me know how things went.

Most cordially (in a great hurry)  
your most devoted  
Mahler"

<sup>47</sup> E, April 15, 1905, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> PN, April 15, 1905, p. 14. Checking the earlier issues of this paper reveals that the concert was very well advertised, with regular news bulletins appearing as early as April 2nd. One of these items informs us that the bells were sent by Mahler from Vienna; these, together with the boys' choir were placed in the gallery of the Redoutensaal (April 11, 1905, p. 13).

<sup>49</sup> PL, April 15, 1905, pp. [1f.].

"This complicated, difficult to grasp artistic nature seems to unite in itself everything that is fascinating, heart warming, capable of carrying one along, but also disillusioning, irritating or conducive to ironic laughter. Naturally, the ordinary, the middle of the road does not cause such a reaction. Such wallowing in the good as well as in the bad is reserved for the turbulent, the fighting disposition seeking new paths, even if they lead into the wilds or meander an astonishing zigzag course. With all that, though, the various influences are clearly evident. One can clearly discern Beethoven's influence and even more Wagner's, whose language is quite perceptible, similarly to [...] Anton Bruckner who, in addition to the Upper Austrian dialect, is fond of cultivating the Bayreuth accent in his symphonies. And the fruitful impulses received from Berlioz are obvious. [...]

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The work — in many respects interesting, but also riddled with whimsy, posturing and dubious trivialities — appeared to generate wonderment rather than genuine, deep sympathy in the large audience filling the Redoutensaal. To be sure, the first movement, approximating a complete symphony with its large proportions, had such a tiring effect that the five sections yet to follow were greeted by an already exhausted audience. Even the pause prescribed by the composer himself was cut too short to appropriately revitalize the spirit. Thus, this section was still greeted with lively applause which was to diminish later. Most to suffer was the following attractive, charmingly coloured flower-minuet which would have deserved a far warmer reception. Herr Kálmán Feld, the guest-conductor for the evening, posed himself an extraordinarily difficult task with the performance of the symphony. He acquitted himself to general satisfaction, which is saying quite a lot when one considers that heretofore he had wielded the baton only for his private enjoyment. [...] He had prepared the performance conscientiously and conducted, if not with the greatest vitality and most minute attention to detail, with praiseworthy calmness and circumspection, as is possible only through a thorough knowledge of the score."

It is interesting to note that the audience interested had a complete, musically illustrated guide to the Symphony. It was published in the *Zeneközlöny* (April 14, 1905, pp. 209–219), a monthly (or, when called for, more frequent) magazine devoted chiefly to the publishing of concert guides to major works since 1903.

<sup>50</sup> PH, April 15, 1905, pp. 10f.

<sup>51</sup> MA-HNL, Fond 14/57.

"In a hurry!

Honoured Colleague!

Most sincere thanks for your kind lines. I am well armed against newspaper articles; if my work can earn the love of the musicians, I am prepared to forego recognition by the scribes.

Once again my most sincere thanks  
your most devoted Mahler"



Honoured Colleague!

I must send yet another note to follow the previous one. In the meantime I have read the reports you sent me, and I must retract my harsh words about your critics. Why, then, the sour tone when you wrote about them? I find that your critics did themselves very proud, and I would only wish that I could meet with such sympathetic understanding more often. The performance, though, must have been splendid, indeed! With my thanks, once again,

your most devoted  
Mahler

May I ask that you convey my heartiest thanks to the gentlemen whom I don't know personally?"

<sup>53</sup> "Dear Friend!

Are you still searching for a second conductor? Herr Kalman Feld, who is applying for the post, is known to me as a very good musician and as a serious, solid person; he has asked me to recommend him to you. I do not know him as a conductor, but I know that, as a raw beginner, he performed my Third Symphony very successfully in Budapest 2 years ago — on all accounts, a most conspicuous accomplishment for a conducting debut. (NB apparently, the performance was truly good.)

So, in case you have not yet hired someone, perhaps he could be considered. He is also said to be a good violinist."

*Gustav Mahler und Holland — Briefe*, ed. Eduard Reeser. Wien, Universal Edition, 1980, pp. 71f. (Bibliothek der Internationalen Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft). The letter is undated, but the preserved envelope shows the Viennese date stamp as 22. IX. 1906. — Eventually, Cornelis Dopfer was hired for the position sought by Feld.

<sup>54</sup> Z 25, No. 12 (May 20, 1911), p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> E, May 19, 1911, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> E, May 20, 1911, pp. 5, 7 and 12.

<sup>57</sup> PN, May 19, 1911, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> PH, May 19, 1911, pp. 8f. and 12.

<sup>59</sup> PL, May 19, 1911, pp. [1f.].

"He was an artist who was familiar with everything that is human, who could, between dark death-wish and transcendental flights of fantasy, also rejoice and shout for joy, who captured in tones pain and sorrow, but also quiet happiness and the uproarious joys of the human destiny, who depicted this microcosm in his entirely unique manner, as it was reflected in his receptive soul and his glowing fantasy."

<sup>60</sup> A good comparison is provided by some of the unsympathetic obituaries published in New York.

<sup>61</sup> *Kilenc évtized*. . . (for bibliographic details, see Chapter IV, Note 9), pp. 30–33. The information about performances of the Budapest Philharmonic, cited on the preceding pages, was also taken from this volume. — Editor of the volume and author of the narrative sections was Béla Csuka (1893–1957), a 'cellist (Popper's pupil) and writer on music, who also pioneered the revival of the gamba and the barytone in Hungary.







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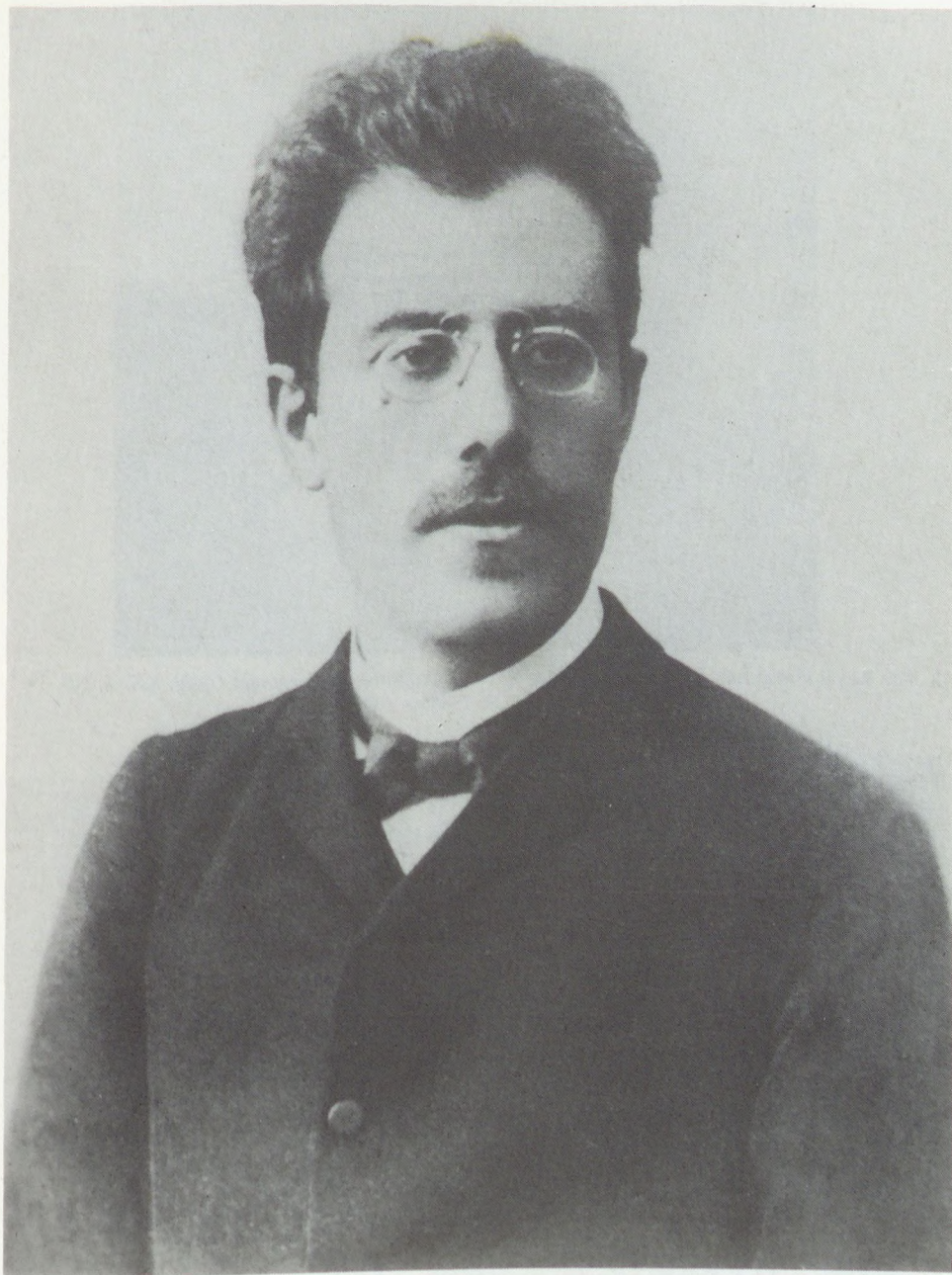
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1. Gustav Mahler in 1888. (Photograph; Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv)





2. The Royal Hungarian Opera. (Engraving by Theodor Dörre, in *Vasárnapi Újság*, XXXI. No. 39. September 28, 1884, p. 662)



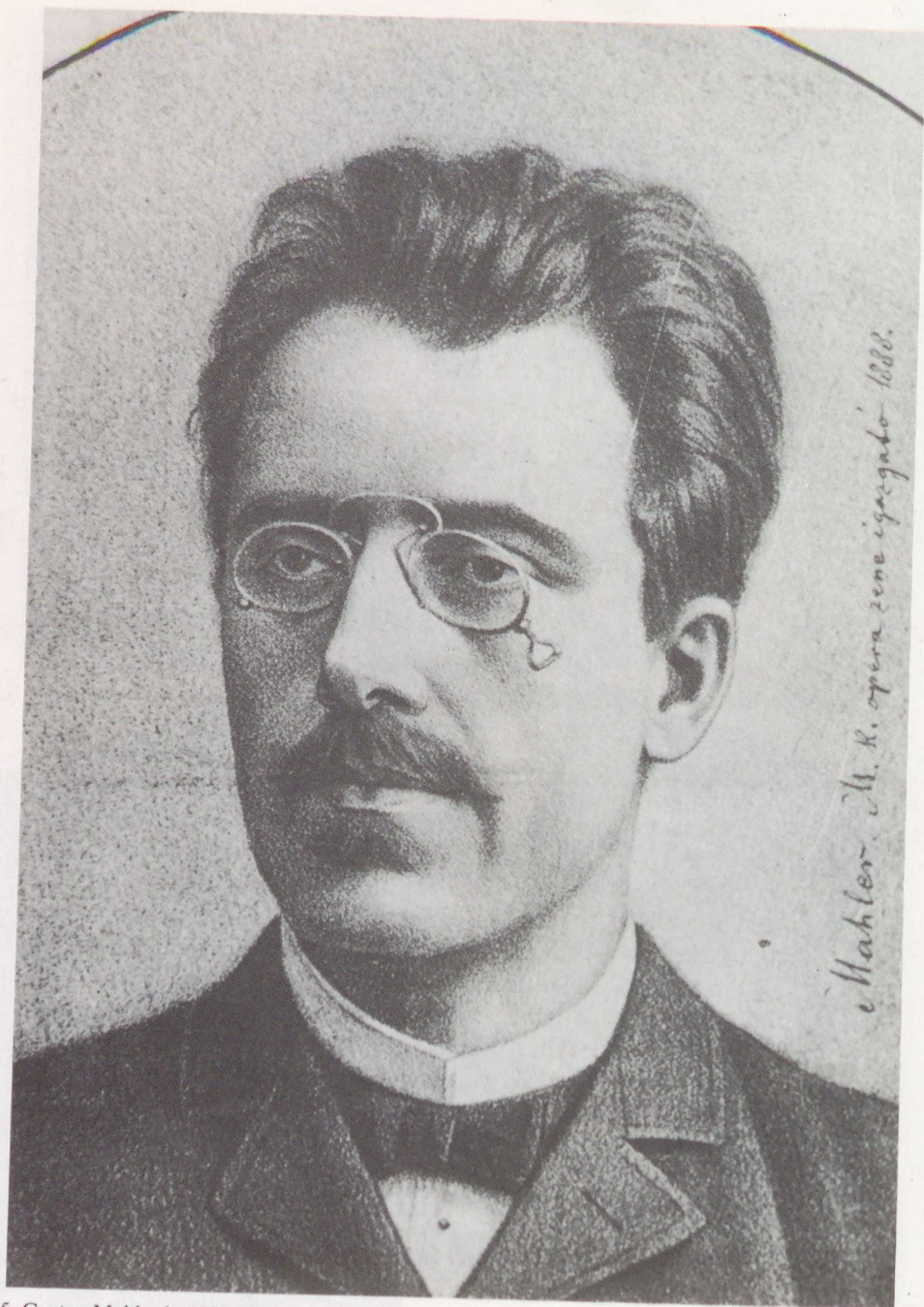
3. The main staircase of the Royal Hungarian Opera. (Engraving by Theodor Dörre, in *Vasárnapi Újság*, XXXI. No. 40. October 5, 1884, p. 640)





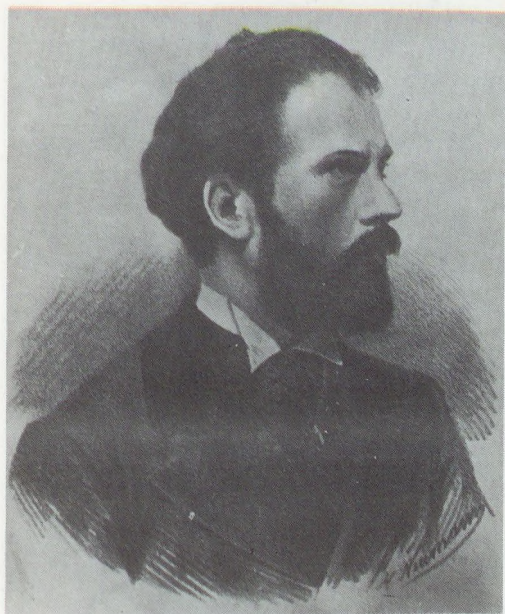
4. Gustav Mahler in 1888. (Engraving by Zsigmond Pollák, in *O-V*, November 3, 1888)





5. Gustav Mahler in 1888. (Drawing by an unknown German master; Hungarian National Museum, Historical Portrait Gallery)





6. Ödön Mihalovich. (Drawing by Henrik Neumann; Hungarian National Museum, Historical Portrait Gallery)



7. Ferenc Beniczky. (Engraving by Zsigmond Pollák, in *Vasárnapi Újság*, XXXI. No. 41. October 12, 1884, title page)



8. Ferenc Erkel.  
(Photograph; HNL)



9. David Popper.  
(*O-V*, October 16, 1886, p. 83)





10. Mórícz Vavríecz. (Photograph; HNL, Music Collection)



11. Sándor Erkel. (Photograph; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)

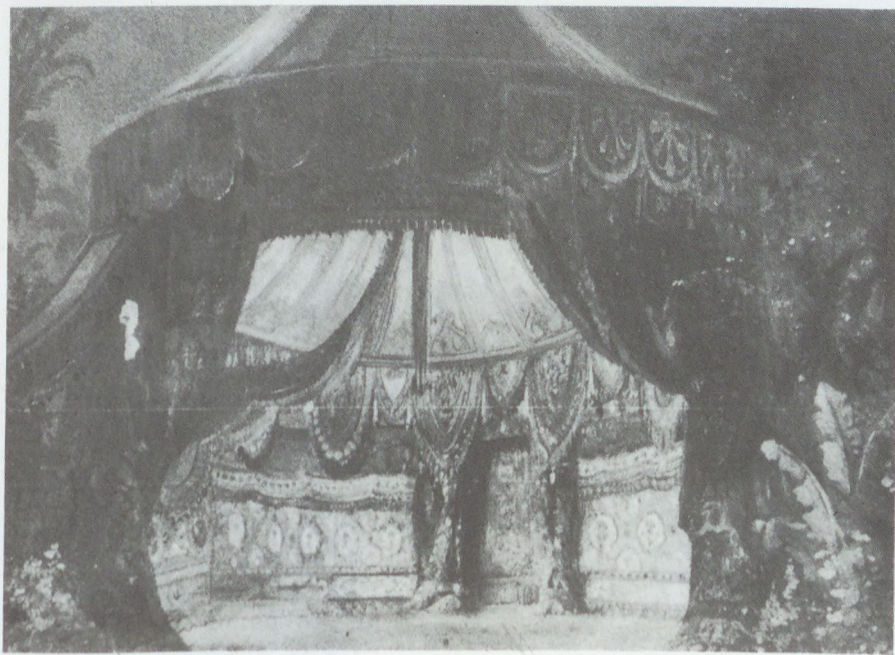


12. Kornél Ábrányi, senior. (Drawing by an unknown German master; Hungarian National Museum, Historical Portrait Gallery)





13. Ágoston Spannraft's stage design for Karl Goldmark's *Merlin*. This opera had been premiered, and continued to be given, under Sándor Erkel. (Painting; Hungarian Theatre Institute)



14. Spannraft's stage design for Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles*, the first premiere during Mahler's directorship. (Painting; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)









17. Spannraft's Stage design for *Die Walküre*. (Engraving; in *O-V*, November 3, 1888, p. 713)



18. Mahler opened his second season with a new production of *Lohengrin*; this contemporary stage design is by Árpád Molnár. (Painting; HNL, Theatre History Collection)





19. Laura Hilgermann as Mignon, her first role in Budapest. (Photograph; HNL, Theatre History Collection)



20. Arabella Szilágyi, the first Hungarian Santuzza. (Photograph; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)

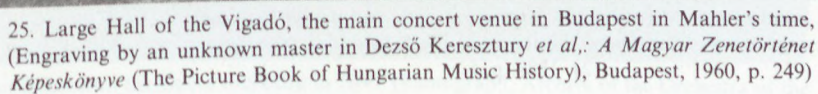
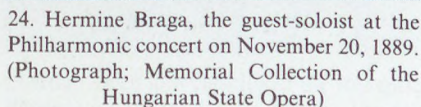
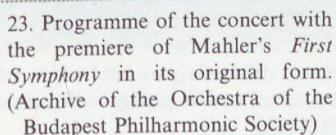


21. Bianca Bianchi sang three songs by Mahler at a concert on November 13, 1889. (Photograph; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)



22. Mihály Takáts sang Telramund in Mahler's *Lohengrin*. (Photograph; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)







Budapest, 1889. 19. November

Meines sehr verehrten Herrn!

Das wiederholte Einwirken der pastigen Seele,  
welche sich in mich gedrängt haben und vielen  
Mitspielern für die aufopferungswillige und von  
reife Kunstflüsse Geste gebungener Leidenschaft  
zu drücken, dringende die meine bescheidenen Kraft  
zu mehrwertigen gesellen haben.

Nun die pastigen Generalprobe hat sie mir die  
Grenzfahrt gegeben, das ist mein Werk in diese  
Weltung und auf so fern belohnen wird.

Ich habe mich sehr, wie in der Folge, um so  
vieler Körperkraft zu setzen, weshalb und für  
großer Fingering und Fingerring, um allen  
persönlichen Interessen in dem dringenden Wunsch  
Halt, und bitte Sie, mir persönlich so gut zu  
helfen, als es Ihnen drücken und möglich ist.

Ihre ergebene Verehrung  
Gustav Mahler

26. Facsimile of Mahler's letter to the members of the Philharmonic Society after the dress rehearsal. (Archive of the Orchestra of the Budapest Philharmonic Society)

# A MALÉR-SZYFÓNIA.

(A Filharmóniai koncerten.)



27. Caricature published after the performance of the First Symphony. Its title means the "The Malheur-Syphon", and the caption, "Affect!"; the main characters depicted are Mahler (playing the large brass instrument and conducting), Mihalovich ("playing" a cat), and János Koessler (playing the bass drum labelled "Publicity"). (In *Bolond Istók*, November 24, 1889. p. 6.)





28. Mahler on an 1889 excursion with the Opera orchestra, which also constituted the Budapest Philharmonic. (Photograph; Alfred Roller, ed., *Die Bildnisse von Gustav Mahler*, Leipzig, Vienna, 1922, Illustration 17.)



29. Sándor Erkel with the Opera orchestra in 1890. (Photograph; Archive of the Orchestra of the Budapest Philharmonic Society)





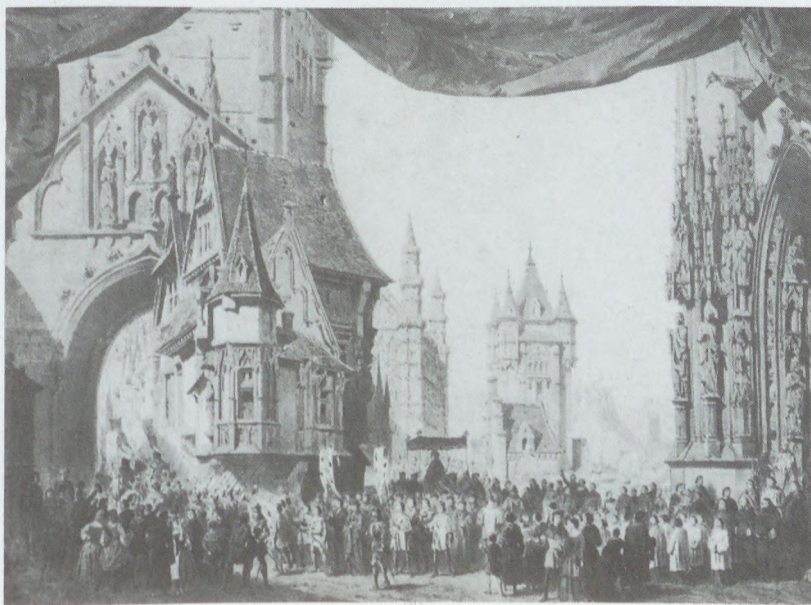
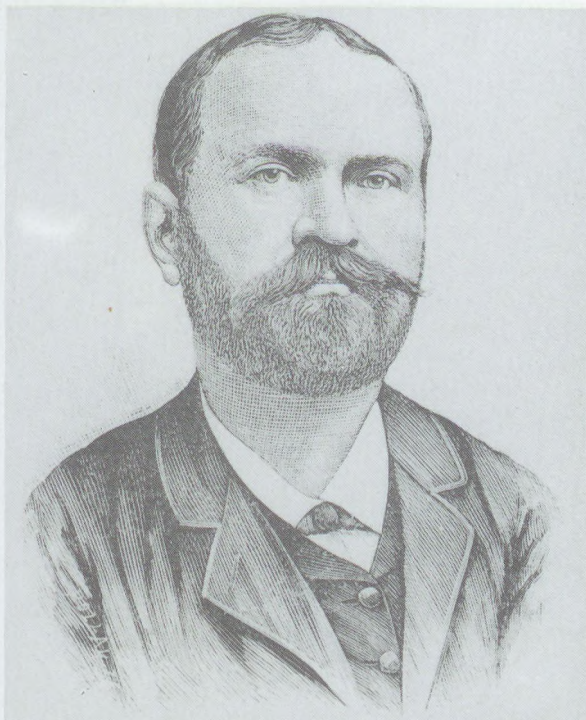
30. Mihály Takáts as Don Juan in Mahler's season-opening new production in 1890. (Photograph; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)



31. Italia Vasquez-Molina (here dressed as Brunnhilde) joined the cast of Mahler's *Don Juan* as Donna Elvira after holding out for a new costume. (Photograph; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)



32. Kálmán Alszegehy. (Engraving by Zsigmond Pollák in *O-I*, November 3, 1888)



33. Spannraft's stage design for Halévy's *La Juive*, performed during Lilli Lehmann's guest-appearances in 1890. (Painting; HNL, Theatre History Collection)





34. Albert Apponyi. (Painting by Ede Balló; Hungarian National Museum, Historical Portrait Gallery)





35. David Ney in the title-role of *Der Waffenschmied*. (Photograph; Memorial Collection of the Hungarian State Opera)

# Magy. Kir.

Evi belet 9. szám.

# Operaház.

Evi belet 9. szám.

Budapest, szombaton. 1891. január hó 17-én:

## Nádány V. K. asszony vendégfelleptével,

először:

# A FEGYVERKOVÁCS.

Egy 4-tes 3. felvonás. Szöveg és zenéj a szerző: Károly Zerkov, Budapesti nagy színház.

Személyek:			
Alkotó: ...	D	Vendég: ...	D
Műve: ...	D	Vendég: ...	D
Lengyel: ...	D	Vendég: ...	D
... ..	D	Vendég: ...	D

Főleg: ... ..  
... ..

A színház igazgatója és főkezelője: ... ..

### Kezdete 7 órakor, vége 10 óráig.

Rendek helyeinek:			
Férfi:	Tudás:	II. em. konyha:	III. emeleti erkély és konyha:
... .. ... .. ... ..	... .. ... .. ... ..	... .. ... .. ... ..	... .. ... .. ... ..

... ..

**Ettől pentantritisz a színházban 6 óra orokor.**

... ..

**Nádány V. K. asszony vendégfelleptével,**

**A fegyverkovács.**

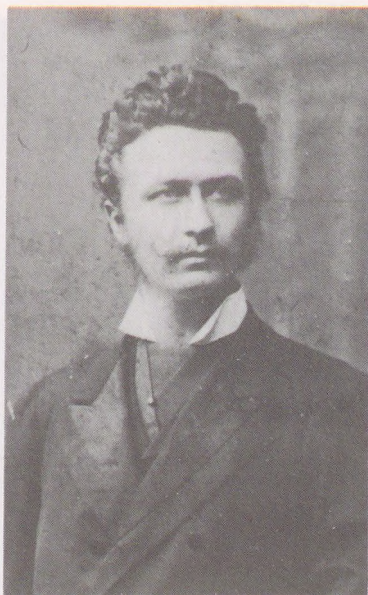
... ..

Rendek helyeinek:			
Férfi:	Tudás:	II. em. konyha:	III. emeleti erkély és konyha:
... .. ... .. ... ..	... .. ... .. ... ..	... .. ... .. ... ..	... .. ... .. ... ..

... ..

36. Playbill for the premiere of Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied*, Mahler's last major production. (Hungarian National Museum)





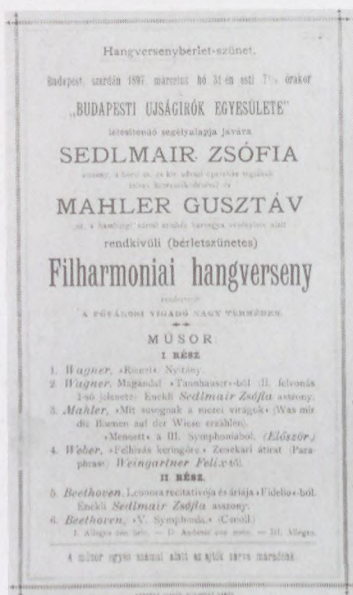
37. Géza Zichy. (Photograph; HNL )



38. Arthur Nikisch. (Photograph; HNL, Music Collection)



39. Gustav Mahler in 1892. (Photograph; Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv)



40. Programme for Mahler's guest-appearance with the Budapest Philharmonic in 1897. (Archive of the Orchestra of the Budapest Philharmonic Society)





41. Caricature published on the occasion of Beniczky's removal as Intendant. The legend reads: (top) "Departing the Opera House/Ben Itzky intendant and his director Malheur," (bottom) "and moving into the county seat, Ben Itzky chief magistrate and his under-magistrate Malheur." A sack labelled "Artistic deficit" hangs around the elephant's neck; he is led by Mihalovich. (In *Bolond Istók*, November 2, 1890, p. 7.)



42. Silver fruit bowl, presented to Mahler upon his departure from Budapest. (Mrs. Maria Rosé, London, Canada)

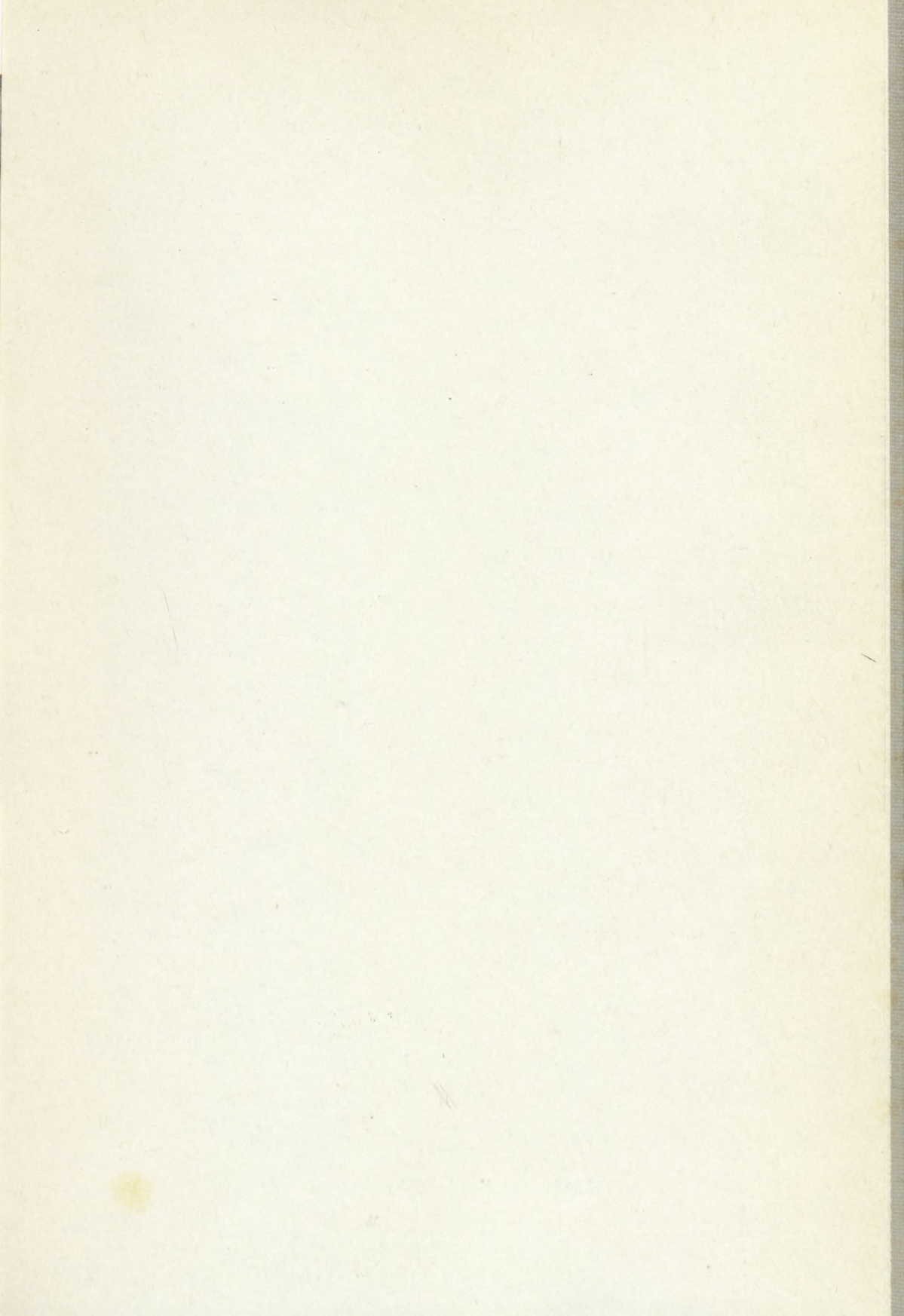


E HÁZBAN LAKOTT  
GUSTAV MAHLER  
OSZTRÁK ZENESZERZŐ  
1888 ÉS 1891 KÖZÖTT,  
AMIKOR A BUDAPESTI OPERAHÁZ  
IGAZGATÓJA VOLT.  
MAGYAR ZENEMŰVÉSZEK SZÖVETSÉGE

43. Commemorative plaque in Mahler's residence in Budapest







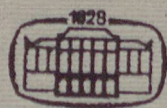














Zoltan Roman

Gustav Mahler and Hungary

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