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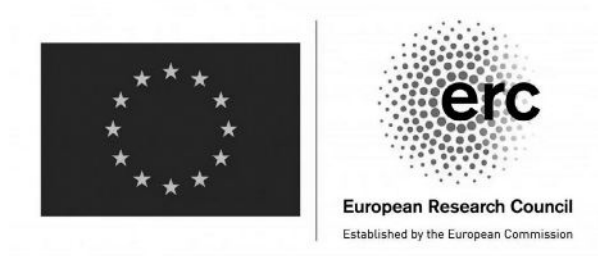
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## DONIZETTI IN HABSBURG EUROPE

edited by

Barbara Babić, Axel Körner, Riccardo Mandelli

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Anna Sanda

## Donizetti in (Buda-)Pest: opera, national identity, and transcultural encounters in Habsburg Europe, 1837–1847

A decade after the zenith of Gaetano Donizetti's great success at Pest's National Theatre, in the autumn of 1862, the first Hungarian-language music journal *Zenészeti Lapok* [Musical Journal] published a short biography of the composer in five successive parts.<sup>1</sup> Put together by László Maszlagi, the text was an abridged translation of William Neumann's German biography of Donizetti, originally published in 1854. The work describes the late 1830s, the years leading to the summit of Donizetti's career, as the decisive ones in the composer's life.<sup>2</sup> The author's account of the circumstances of Donizetti's ultimate success is telling:

after Rossini, Pacini and Bellini had faded away, Donizetti became the head of the new Italian composers, and in circumstances that only belong to such a great and envied position. [...] Even in Germany there were only a few cities, whose theatres did not perform his newest productions. *Alina, regina di Golconda*, *Anna Bolena*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Belisario*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* were all familiar to the German stage.<sup>3</sup>

1. *Zenészeti Lapok. Heti közlöny a zeneművészet összes ágai köréből* [Musical Journal. Weekly Gazette from all the Branches of Music] (1860–1876): see a description of the journal prepared by János Kárpáti (with the introduction by Katalin Szerző) for the Répertoire international de la presse musicale: <<https://www.ripm.org/index.php?page=JournalInfo&ABB=ZLA>> (last accessed 27 July 2025). LÁSZLÓ MASZLAGI, "Donizetti Cajetán élete", *Zenészeti Lapok. Heti közlöny a zeneművészet összes ágai köréből*, edited by Kornél Ábrányi, 3/1 (2 October 1862), pp. 2–4; 3/2 (9 October 1862), pp. 10–12; 3/3 (16 October 1862), pp. 18–21; 3/5 (30 October 1862), pp. 35–36; 3/6 (6 November 1862), pp. 42–43. I would like to thank the editorial team and the reviewers of this essay for their invaluable comments and suggestions, which have considerably shaped its final version.

2. WILLIAM NEUMANN, *Gaetano Donizetti: Eine Biographie* (Cassel: Ernst Balde, 1854), *Die Componisten der neueren Zeit*, 8, <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10623716>> (last accessed 21 November 2024).

3. "Most tehát Donizetti, Rossini, Pacini s Bellini elhallgatása után ott állott az új olasz zene-költők élén, s oly körülmények közt állt, melyek csak ily nagy és irigylet állás sajátjai. [...] de még Németországban is alig volt valamire való város, melynek legújabb zene és drámai műveit előadni ne buzgókodtak volna. A 'Golkondai királynő', 'Boleyn Anna', 'Bájital', 'Borgia Lucrétia', 'Belizár', 'Lammermoori Lucia' dalművek a német színpadokon is otthonosak levének". MASZLAGI, "Donizetti Cajetán élete", *Zenészeti Lapok*, 3/2, p. 11.

The article then explains Donizetti's recipe for success, a consequence of the composer's skill of subtly combining three distinct musical styles: "classical-German" instrumental music; French Romanticism, understood as the expression of an adventurous, twisty and mysterious character; and finally sweet Italian melodiousness and lightness. In his translation, however, Maszlagi slightly departs from Neumann's account by adding that Donizetti's *German training* came from Simon Mayr:

Donizetti was brought up in Mayr's school [...], and so from his childhood listening to German classical and chamber music he had the best foundation [...].

The French romance of the opera was combined with the light melodious, bravura coloraturas of the Italian convention, often ingeniously, in such a way that from this mixture came a tasty drink, whose intoxicating effect was triggered with each repeated enjoyment.<sup>4</sup>

What is noticeable in this short sketch of Donizetti's career, is its ambivalent nature. It explains the composer's popularity, but immediately (dis-)qualifies it. Only the favourable constellation of Vincenzo Bellini's death, as well as Gioachino Rossini's and Giovanni Pacini's withdrawal from the operatic stage, paved the way for Donizetti. Furthermore, his music's originality is dismissed as an almost random assemblage of different national traditions; and only the composer's proper German training was the basis for his success.

The purpose of this 1862 publication and its aims were closely linked to the Hungarian context in which it appeared. Much had changed in Hungary since Donizetti's arrival at the zenith of European operatic life in the 1830s and 1840s. Due to the changing political climate, Hungary's cultural and social life presented itself in a different and new light. Maszlagi's reference to Mayr and the Germanic origins of Donizetti's skills aligned with the musical ambition of *Zenészeti Lapok*, whose editors Mihály Mosonyi (1815–1870) and Kornél

4. "Donizetti a Mayr-féle iskolában nevelkedett [...], s így már gyermekkorától fogva a német klasszikus és kamarai zenét hallgatá ő tehát a legjobb alapokat szerzé meg [...] az opera francia regényességét az olasz szokásnak könnyű melódias, bravour szökéseivel, gyakran genialis módon, olyképpen alakítá egygyé, hogy e keverékből jól izlő ital eredett, melynek részegítő hatása minden ismételt élvezésnél működőnek nyilvánult". MASZLAGI, "Donizetti Cajetán élete", *Zenészeti Lapok*, 3/2, pp. 10, 12. Cf. NEUMANN, *Gaetano Donizetti*, p. 18: "Etwas davon ['von jenen harmonischen Würfeln, deren sich vorzüglich Frankreich bediente'] mußte auch nach Italien kommen, seitdem die Lebensklugheit des italienischen Opernfürsten vom Grafen Ory bis auf seinen Wilhelm Tell in oft genialer Weise die französische Romantik der Opernmusik mit dem leicht Melodischen und flüchtig Bravourmäßigen der italienischen Manier dergestalt in Eins zusammengeworfen hatte, daß in der That ein neues wohlschmeckendes Getränk aus der Mischung wurde, das seine schnell berauschende Kraft bei jedem wiederholten Genuß als wirksam bethätigte".



Ábrányi (1822–1903, editor-in-chief) were enthusiasts of Franz Liszt and of Richard Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik* [Music of the future], referring to the essay the German composer had published, in French, in 1860.<sup>5</sup> The (aesthetic) mission of Hungary's first specialised music magazine, at least during its early years, was to be a "central theoretical forum", broadly didactic in character, with an intention to "educate" Hungarian audiences in line with "European" standards.<sup>6</sup> This strategy had to include Donizetti, but it also had to express a critical distance to Italian opera, a sentiment that had emerged among German language critics since the public's almost fanatical endorsement of Gioachino Rossini in the 1820s.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the series of articles on Donizetti also responded to Pest's current opera season: Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* was about to return to the Hungarian National Theatre in a new production, to be premiered on 22 November 1862 (Figure 1b). The dramatist Ede Szigligeti (1814–1878) and the conductor Károly Huber (Karl Huber, 1828–1885) being responsible for the production's staging and music respectively.<sup>8</sup>

Taking this context into account, the publication of Donizetti's late and subtly polemical biography in the Hungarian periodical reflects not just German language debates on Italian opera; it also points to the distinctive historical and historiographical approach that characterises the composer's reception

5. On the editors' aesthetic concepts see TIBOR TALLIÁN, "'Opern dieses größten Meisters der Jetztzeit.' Meyerbeer fogadtatása a korabeli magyar operaszínpadon", *Zenetudományi Dolgozatok* (2004–2005), pp. 1–60, here p. 24. *Zenészeti Lapok* was launched in the autumn of 1860 and run until 1876. For the first German version of Wagner's article see RICHARD WAGNER, *Zukunftsmusik: Brief an einen französischen Freund als Vorwort zu einer Prosa-Uebersetzung seiner Operndichtungen* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1861).

6. As Katalin Szerző has shown, from the beginning, articles published in the journal were devoted to theoretical subjects such as harmony and thorough-bass, music history, Hungarian musical idioms, operatic productions at Hungary's National Theatre, and to the premieres of works by Liszt, Erkel, Mihály Mosonyi and Ödön Mihalovich. The periodical also summarized in Hungarian the primarily German musicological literature of the period. These articles served the dual purpose of circulating contemporary information on music, thereby laying the foundations of Hungarian musicological terminology. See KATALIN SZERZŐ, "Introduction to János Kárpáti, *Zenészeti Lapok* (1860–1876)", *Répertoire international de la presse musicale*, p. X, <[ripm.org/pdf/Introductions/ZLAintroEnglish.pdf](http://ripm.org/pdf/Introductions/ZLAintroEnglish.pdf)> (last accessed 20 February 2025).

7. On the origin of this debate see *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini. Historiography, Analysis, Criticism*, edited by Nicholas Mathew and Benjamin Walton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On Rossini's reception in Habsburg Europe see AXEL KÖRNER, "Culture for a cosmopolitan empire: Rossini between Vienna and the lands of the Bohemian crown", in *Gioachino Rossini 1868–2018: la musica e il mondo*, edited by Ilaria Narici, Emilio Sala, Emanuele Senici, Benjamin Walton (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini, 2018), pp. 357–380. Also *Rossini in Wien. Tagungsband*, edited by Reto Müller (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2024).

8. See the playbill: <<http://resolver.szhnartortenet.hu/collection/OSZMI134438>> (last accessed 16 February 2025).

Nemzeti Színház				
1	Április 7-én	Mai 1851	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
2	Április 20-án	Mai 1851	János. János. János. Bonyai	
3	Április 25-én	Mai 1851	János. János. János. Bonyai	
4	Április 26-án	Mai 1851	János. János. János. Bonyai	
5	Április 27-én	November 1851	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
6	Április 28-án	August 1852	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
7	Április 29-án	August 1852	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
8	Április 30-án	August 1852	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
9	Április 31-én	August 1852	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
10	Április 1-én	September 1852	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
11	Április 2-én	September 1852	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
12	Április 3-án	Jänner 1853	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
13	Április 4-én	September 1853	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
14	Április 5-én	September 1853	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
15	Április 6-án	October 1853	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
16	Február 3-án	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
17	Február 7-én	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
18	Marcius 20-án	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
19	Április 22-én	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
20	Július 1-én	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
21	Július 20-án	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
22	September 5-én	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
23	November 18-án	1854	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
24	December 26-án	1855	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
25	Január 30-án	1855	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
26	Február 27-én	1855	Kaiser. Torda. Sárosi, János. Ekeferron	
H. Maruk meghalt				

14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> Logen.

MACYAN ALLAMI  
Op. 11-12-13  
Baukosten 1200  
28 = 9/2.

Lucretia Borgia

Basso.

27 Ungarisch am 17 April 1856 Kaiser. Ellinger's  
Schultheiss. Buda

28 in 1. August 1856 in 1. 12

29 in 1. 4. September 1856 in 1. 12

30 in 1. 10. September 1856 in 1. 12

31 in 1. 3. April 1857 in 1. 12

32 in 1. 8. März 1857 in 1. 12

33 in 1. 11. April 1857 in 1. 12

34 in 1. 5. August 1858 in 1. 12

35 am 30. Juni 1860 in 1. 12

36 in 1. 1. Juli 1860 in 1. 12

37 am 2. Juli 1860 in 1. 12

38 am 1. Juli 1860 in 1. 12

39 am 22. April 1861 in 1. 12

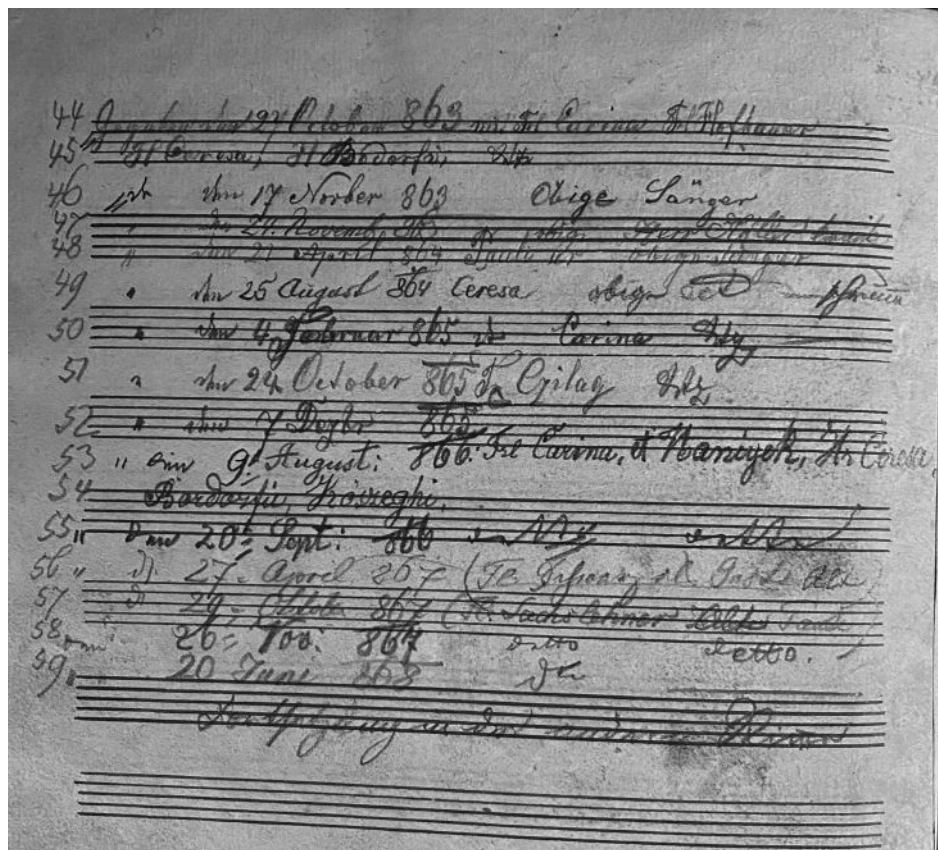
40 am 6. Dezember 1861 in 1. 12

41 am 10. Februar 1862 in 1. 12

42 am 10. Februar 1863 in 1. 12

43 am 10. April 1863 in 1. 12

Fortsetzung. 1. 12. 1863



Figures 1a-c

Performance dates of *Lucrezia Borgia* in the set of parts of the performing material, H-Bn, ZBK 80 f.

in the musical life of Pest during the years prior to the Hungarian Compromise of 1867, when Hungary would achieve independent statehood within the Habsburg monarchy. Maszlagi treats the public success of Donizetti's operas as "a tasty drink"<sup>9</sup>—nothing more than an invigorating entertainment that was not to be taken too seriously in terms of their cultural-political impact on Hungary's emerging nation-state.

A generation earlier, audiences in Pest had gradually acquired a taste for this "drink", beginning quite literally with the reception of a German *Liebestrank* (*L'elisir d'amore*) in the late 1830s, which continued to inebriate audiences until the 1850s.<sup>10</sup> By the time Maszlagi published his biography in 1862, signs of a "sobering phase" had become discernible, at least as the critics were concerned. The cultural and political landscape of Pest had changed significantly during this quarter of a century. After the 1848 Revolution—which led to the dissolution of the nation's estates-based social structure—Hungary went through a profound constitutional crisis, which was only resolved with the Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and creation of the dual monarchy, celebrated in Hungary by means of the coronation.<sup>11</sup> During the 1840s and 1850s, however, in quantitative terms alone, the proportion of Donizetti's operas within the repertoire of both the German and the Hungarian (later National) Theatre in Pest seems striking, speaking for the contemporary interest in Donizetti, even though this trend has been largely ignored by scholarship. Although performance lists,<sup>12</sup> playbills<sup>13</sup> and other materials documenting the

9. MASZLAGI, "Donizetti Cajetán élete", *Zenészeti Lapok*, 3/2, p. 12.

10. The first premiere of an opera by Donizetti was *Anna Bolena*, produced at the Pest German Theatre (Royal Municipal Theatre) on 29 August 1833, but resulting in a failure. Much more successful was *Der Liebestrank*, also taking place at the German Theatre on 30 July 1838.

11. Cf. JUDIT BEKE-MARTOS, "After 1848: the heightened constitutional importance of the Habsburg coronation in Hungary", in *More than Mere Spectacle: Coronations and Inaugurations in the Habsburg Monarchy during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, edited by Klaas Van Gelder (New York–Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021), pp. 283–302.

12. On the German Theatre and German-language theatre life: JOLÁN KÁDÁR, *A pesti és budai német színművészet története* [The history of German theatricals in Pest and Buda 1812–1847] (Budapest: 1923), see the table of performances at the Pest German Theatre between Easter 1824 and 2 February 1847; WOLFGANG BINAL, *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Budapest* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1972); *Deutsche Theater in Pest und Ofen 1770–1850. Titellkatalog und Dokumentation I–II*, edited by Hedvig Belitska-Scholtz and Olga Somorjai (Budapest: Argumentum, 1995). On the Hungarian Theatre and beginning of the Hungarian language theatre life: TIBOR TALLIÁN, *Schodel Rozália és a hivatásos magyar operajátszás kezdetei* [Rozália Schodel and the beginnings of the professional Hungarian opera playing] (Budapest: Balassi, 2015); JOLÁN PUKÁNSZKY KÁDÁR, *A Nemzeti Színház százéves története* [A hundred years of the National Theater], 2 vols. (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1938–1940).

13. ALGERNON LÁSZLÓ HAJDU, *A Nemzeti Színház műsorlexikona* [Programme lexicon of the National Theater], 5 vols. (Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, 1944); GÉZA STAUD, "A

preponderance of Donizetti within the repertoire have been consistently collected by scholars over the last century,<sup>14</sup> no dedicated study to Donizetti's role during the formative years of Pest's theatrical and musical life has been attempted.<sup>15</sup> Pest's two theatres and their repertoire are generally studied in separation, although they shared a common pool of musicians and singers. The fact that Donizetti wrote no works specifically for Pest, and that he had no personal ties to the city's institutions, might have created a blind spot in opera research.<sup>16</sup> Even though recent research has discussed Donizetti in the context of his Viennese reception, it has done so without considering Hungary's role within the operatic culture of Habsburg Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Against this background, this article attempts to draw attention to the cultural-political and institutional circumstances of Donizetti's reception in Pest during the decade prior to the revolution of 1848. Moving the capital from Pressburg/Pozsony, the old site of Hungary's coronations, to (Buda-)Pest was more than mere symbolism and carried significant cultural and political prestige in its wake. Emerging as one of the Empire's new capital cities, Donizetti's oeuvre spoke to the city's cosmopolitan and imperial ambitions, as well as its national ones. The article therefore aims to add to this special issue's understanding of the relationship between opera and politics from the perspective of transnational encounters in Pest during the 1830s and 1840s—at a time when

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nemzeti színház műsora 1837–1964”, in *A Nemzeti Színház*, edited by Székely György (Budapest: 1965), pp. 153–270.

14. <[https://www.oszk.hu/en/music\\_collection](https://www.oszk.hu/en/music_collection)> (last accessed 16 February 2025): The Theatre Music Collection of the National Széchényi Library in Budapest preserves the musical material of stage productions from the repertoire of municipal and rural theatres dating from around the 1830s, including the historical sheet music collections of the Népszínház (National Theatre), the Nemzeti Színház (National Theatre) and the Magyar Királyi Operaház (Hungarian Royal Opera House). The Collection of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute preserves artefacts, playbills, pictures, photographs and other related documentations in large quantities.

15. In his monograph *Schodel Rozália*, Tibor Tallián discusses Donizetti's performances and operas, but from the perspective of Rozália Schodel's operatic roles.

16. However, there may have been an enquiry from the National Theatre in Pest to Donizetti to write a “Hungarian opera”, which was never realised. Donizetti mentions this in a letter dated March 1843 addressed to Michele Accursi: “Volevano a Pest un opera Ungherese – anco là, a monte”, in *Studi donizettiani*, 1 (1962), no. 101, pp. 94–96, here p. 96.

17. *Donizetti und seine Zeit in Wien*, edited by Michael Jahn (Vienna: Der Apfel, 2010); CLAUDIO VELLUTINI, “Donizetti, Vienna, cosmopolitanism”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 73/1 (2020), pp. 1–52; CLAUDIO VELLUTINI, “Italian opera in Vormärz Vienna: Gaetano Donizetti, Bartolomeo Merelli and Habsburg cultural policies in the mid-1830s”, in *Italian Opera in Global and Transnational Perspective. Reimagining Italianità in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Axel Körner and Paulo M. Köhl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 96–112.

Donizetti's career is mostly associated with his position in the imperial capital Vienna. The repertoire performed in Pest's German and Hungarian theatres will take centre stage, as does the competition and interaction their respective productions were subject to.

#### OPERA BETWEEN NATIONAL AND COSMOPOLITAN IDEAS (1837–1847)

It was a correlation and, admittedly, a coincidence: the first Donizetti premieres and the opening of the first Hungarian-language theatre in Pest overlapped and were therefore closely connected with each other. Taken together, they brought a new impetus to the city's operatic life and challenged the institutional standing of the German and Hungarian theatres—one firmly established, the other new, following long and arduous political lobbying. There was fierce competition for having a full house, since both theatres aspired to acquire a leading cultural position in the city and gain a reputation equal to other theatrical centres within the Habsburg Empire. Therefore, following the latest trends and performing works that were played elsewhere on European stages was not just a question of prestige, but also had more existential implications, raising the question whether the citizenry would be willing to support two leading theatres. Although Donizetti's works were performed in both theatres, the circumstances of their respective productions (especially during the first few seasons of the Hungarian Theatre) differed considerably.

Pest's German Theatre was situated on what today is Vörösmarty square (Figures 2a–b). It was an imposing three-storey building, able to accommodate 3500 spectators.<sup>18</sup> With these numbers the new theatre surpassed anything that had existed previously in the city, or in the Empire's eastern crownlands. The Rondellentheater, which had functioned as a permanent venue between 1774 and 1812, on the other side of the Danube in Buda, had a capacity of merely 500, with just eighteen boxes. Even the Royal German Theatre (Königlich deutsches Theater)—Joseph II had decreed in 1783 to convert the former Carmelite Church on the Buda Castle hill into a theatre—only had 1200 seats.

After it was ceremonially opened, Pest's German Theatre became, in the words of Jolán Kádár, “a vehicle of cultural values” and provided audiences in Pest and Buda a portal that connected them with major operatic centres else-

18. See the prize question “Miképen lehetne a Magyar játékszín Budapestén állandóan megalapítani?” [How can the Hungarian theatre in Budapest be permanently established?], in *Magyar játékszíni jutalmazott feleletek* (Buda: Magyar Tudós Társaság, 1843) with 19 submitted and 18 accepted answers; GRAF ISTVÁN SZÉCHENYI, *A Magyar játékszínről* [On the Hungarian theatre system] (Pest: 1832).



Figures 2a–b  
Exterior and interior views of the German Theatre in Pest (Königlich-Städtisches Theater, 1812–1847), H-Bn, TR 2.520.



where in Europe.<sup>19</sup> This central cultural function was embodied by the famous actors and singers who accepted invitations to perform on the stage of this new august building. Its opening offered a prominent occasion for dynastic representation. Initially planned to coincide with the birthday of Emperor Francis I on 12 February 1812, the opening ceremony had to be brought forward by three days, because that year the birthday fell on Ash Wednesday. Prestigious commissions were meant to mark the occasion, including August von Kotzebue's works *König Stephan oder Ungerns [sic] erster Wohltäter* and *Die Ruinen von Athen*, accompanied by Ludwig van Beethoven's music.<sup>20</sup> In terms of its repertoire and performance practices, which included both plays and a variety of musical genres, the German Theatre orientated itself towards the Theater in der Josephstadt or the Theater an der Wien. The theatre's size and the artistic capacity of its ensemble were in line with what could be found in Vienna's suburban theatres.<sup>21</sup> Operatic productions mainly took place in German, with occasional exceptions. After a premiere with *Anna Bolena*, which failed to achieve a favourable reception and ended after a short run, Donizetti had his breakthrough at the German Theatre with a performance of *Der Liebestrank*. The ensuing frenzy around Donizetti (see Table 1) only ended when a fire destroyed the theatre in 1847, causing irreparable damage to the institution's cultural and political prestige.

19. "But even in the most difficult years, despite all the imbalances in standards, this German theatre was a transmitter of cultural values, and a link that connected the audiences of Pest and Buda to Europe; it made theatre a necessity for them [for both cities] here. No one has ever mentioned this merit". "De a legmostohább években is, minden színvonalbeli egyenetlenség ellenére is kulturális értékek közvetítője volt ez a német színészet s ez is egy kapocs, amely Pest és Buda közönségét Európához fűzte; szükségletté tette itt a színházat számára. Ezt az érdemét soha senkisé [sic] említette". KÁDÁR, *A pesti és Budai német színészet története*, pp. 102–103.

20. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN, *Musik zum Festspiel-Nachspiel "Die Ruinen von Athen" von August von Kotzebue für Sopran, Bariton, Bass, Chor und Orchester* op. 113. The librettos are kept in the Széchényi National Library in Budapest: H-Bn SZT SZL Rest BP 1812.02.09. (Theatre Collection); H-Bn 208.437/2; 206.756/2 (General Collection). Cf. ROBERT GRAGGER, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur in Ungarn. Von Maria Theresia bis zur Gegenwart*, 1, *Vormärz* (Wien–Leipzig: Buchdruckerei und Verlagsbuchhandlung Carl Fromme, 1914), p. 9; MÁRIA RÓZSA, "August von Kotzebues Stücke für die Eröffnung des königlich-städtischen Theaters in Pest", in *Kotzebue International*, <<https://doi.org/10.58079/qn0r>> (last accessed 22 November 2024).

21. TALLIÁN, "Opern dieses größten Meisters der Jetztzeit", p. 1. Tallián points out that the German versions of international operas performed in Pest were in the vast majority originally produced at the Theater in der Josephstadt or the Theater an der Wien. Cf. TIBOR TALLIÁN, "A Nemzeti Színház zenekara Erkel Ferenc idejében [The Orchestra of the National Theatre under Ferenc Erkel]", in *Erkel Ferencről, Kodály Zoltánról és korukról*, edited by Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Püski, 2001), pp. 26–40.

Table 1

Donizetti's operas at the German Theatre (Königlich-Städtisches Theater) in Pest until the fire of 1847.

TITLE (ORIGINAL)	PERFORMANCE TITLE	FIRST PERFORMANCE	LAST PERFORMANCE	NUMBER OF PERFORMANCES
<i>Anna Bolena</i>		29.08.1833	05.06.1840	6
<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	<i>Der Liebestrank</i>	30.07.1838	11.09.1846	48
<i>Belisario</i>		03.11.1838	22.06.1846	28
<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	<i>Lucia von Lammermoor</i>	13.01.1840	17.01.1846	26
<i>Linda di Chamounix</i>	<i>Linda von Chamounix</i>	10.09.1842	28.02.1846	19
<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>	<i>Lucretia Borgia</i>	07.01.1843	24.09.1846	18
<i>Gemma di Vergy</i>		12.06.1843	14.06.1843	2
<i>Maria di Rohan</i>		04.01.1845	04.09.1845	6
<i>La Fille du régiment</i>	<i>Marie, die Tochter des Regiments</i>	09.04.1844	04.03.1846	15
<i>Dom Sébastien, roi de Portugal</i>	<i>Dom Sebastian von Portugal</i>	03.06.1846	07.11.1846	9
<i>Parisina</i>		25.01.1847		1

Across town, the Hungarian Theatre in Pest opened on 22 August 1837. After several decades of cultural and political debate, it relied heavily on the politically charged loyalties of its audience.<sup>22</sup> This allegiance was based on the cultural-political promotion of the Hungarian language, an issue tied to broader questions of Hungarian national identity. A central cultural-political aim of the theatre's foundation was to raise the Hungarian language to a "European lev-

22. JÓZSEF BAJZA [first director of the Nationaltheaters 1837–1838], *Szózat a Pesti Magyar Színház ügyében* [Proclamation on the situation of the Pest Hungarian Theatres] (Buda: 1839), p. 5: "The number of those among us who mask their lack of patriotism with a fondness of art is not small; they go to German theatres despite being Hungarians, because they say that there the [artistic] perfection is higher". "Nem kicsiny közöttünk azoknak a száma is, kik hazafiútlanságokat művészet szeretetével palástolják; német színházakba járnak magyar létökre, mert, úgy mondanak, ott a tökély magasabb fokán áll". Cf. WOLFGANG BINAL, *Deutschsprachiges Theater in Budapest. Von den Anfängen bis zum Brand des Theaters in der Wollgasse 1889* (Graz–Vienna–Cologne: Böhlau, 1972), *Theatergeschichte Österreichs*, 10, *Donaumonarchie*, Heft 11, pp. 168–169.

el”, comparable to the role other national vernaculars played in the European theatre industry. This meant that transnational connections and cosmopolitan ideas, as represented by the theatre’s ambition to produce great works of European opera, were inseparable from national and linguistic aspirations. As a consequence, a permanent building for an exclusively Hungarian-language theatre in Pest was considered a momentous step to meet these expectations, but it remained a potentially risky experiment, as it was difficult to foresee whether the Hungarian language would hold up to the ambition of establishing itself as an idiom of operatic production. Initially the theatre was not run as a state institution, but as a joint stock company under the control of the city council in the then predominantly German-speaking city. Only in 1840 was it placed under state administration and renamed as Hungarian National Theatre.<sup>23</sup>

After its opening, the new playhouse had to quickly offer a fashionable repertoire, similar to that performed on major opera stages elsewhere in Europe.<sup>24</sup> The Hungarian premiere of *L’elisir d’amore* (*Szerelmi bájtal*) became the theatre’s first Donizetti opera, premiered on 7 November 1838.<sup>25</sup> This production was followed by the Hungarian premieres of *Gemma di Vergy*, *Lucrezia Borgia*<sup>26</sup> and *Il borgomastro di Saardam*, produced in quick succession over the following year. The first Hungarian-language performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* took place on 4 August 1846. Following the revolution of 1848, during the years of passive resistance against Habsburg rule, Donizetti’s creative output seems to have reached its peak at the Hungarian Theatre (see Table 2). His operas formed by far the largest section of the repertoire (18 premieres in total), comparable only to Verdi in the second half of the

23. Pest Hungarian Theatre took the name National Theatre on a symbolic occasion, the premiere of the first opera composed by Ferenc Erkel, *Mária Bátor* on 8 August 1840, and at the end of the year the institution was granted the status of a national theatre. Cf. *A Nemzeti Színház százéves története*, 2, *Iratok a Nemzeti Színház történetéhez* [The centenary of the National Theatre, 2, Documents on the history of the National Theatre], edited by Jolán Kádár Pukánszky (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1938), pp. 136–140; *Magyar Színháztörténet 1790–1873* [History of the Hungarian Theatre 1790–1873], edited by Ferenc Kerényi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 284–285.

24. For a detailed description of the written and musical sources of the Pest Hungarian Theatre see: ADÉL HORVÁTH, *A Pest-Budai zenés színháztörténet forrásai. A Várszínház és a Pesti Magyar Színház előadásai 1833–1840 között* [The sources of musical theatre in Pest-Buda. Performances of the Castle Theatre and the Pest Hungarian Theatre 1833–1840], Master Thesis (Budapest: Liszt Academy of Music, 2013); cf. *A Magyar Színháztörténet forrásai* [Sources of Hungarian Theatre history], 3 vols., edited by Géza Staud (Budapest: Színháztudományi Intézet, 1962).

25. H-Bn MM. 13.533: Hungarian libretto, transl. Sámuel Filep Deáki, manuscript, 1838, 41 fols., 23 cm; Handwriting of Sándor Gillyén; H-Bn, ZBK 84/4, manuscript score.

26. H-Bn MM. 13.559: Hungarian libretto, transl. István Jakab, manuscript, 1839, 36 fols., 28 cm.; H-Bn, ZBK 80/a, manuscript score.

nineteenth century. The sheer volume of his works, as well as the number of performances, seem to have played a decisive role in the theatre's financial and artistic prosperity. These productions were successful with the public, often ensuring full houses and surpassing those of the German Theatre in Pest. This suggests that for the Hungarian nation, identification with Italian opera counted as an even more important signifier of national identity compared to the public of the German Theatre that situated itself within a larger context of cultural production. Archduke Albrecht (1817–1895), who assumed the role of civil and military governor of Hungary in 1851, is said to have been actively involved in the Hungarian Theatre's programme decisions. Following the model of the Viennese Court Theatre, the archduke's role demonstrates the Habsburgs' active contribution to giving the Hungarian nation a new post-revolutionary identity that responded to its national as well as to its imperial and European aspirations.<sup>27</sup>

Table 2

Performances of Donizetti's operas in the Hungarian (later National) Theatre in Pest until the opening of the Royal Opera House 1884.

TITLE (ORIGINAL)	PERFORMANCE TITLE	FIRST PERFORMANCE	PREMIERE / RENEWAL / NEW PRODUCTION
<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	<i>Báj-ital</i>	07.11.1838	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Filep Sámuel Deáki)
<i>Gemma di Vergy</i>		30.07.1839	Hungarian language premiere (transl. István Jakab)
<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>	<i>Borgia Lucrezia / Borgia Lucretia / Borgia Lucretzia</i>	31.08.1839	Hungarian language premiere (transl. István Jakab)
<i>Il borgomastro di Saardam</i>	<i>A saardami polgármester</i>	13.11.1839	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Károly Lengy)
<i>Marino Faliero</i>		25.04.1840	Hungarian language premiere (transl. István Jakab)
<i>Roberto Devereux</i>		22.03.1841	Hungarian language premiere (transl. István Jakab)

27. Cf. LILI VERONIKA BÉKÉSSY, "Celebrating the Habsburgs in the Hungarian National Theater, 1837–67", *Musicologica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (3 April 2021), special issue: *Exploring Music Life in the Late Habsburg Monarchy and Successor States* <<https://www.musau.org/parts/neue-article-page/view/102>> (last accessed 3 February 2025).

<i>Belisario</i>	<i>Belizár</i>	19.05.1841	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Ferenc Gyergyay)
<i>La regina di Golconda</i>	<i>Golcondai királynő</i>	29.10.1842	Hungarian language premiere (transl. József Szerdahelyi)
<i>La Fille du régiment</i>	<i>Az ezred lánya</i>	14.03.1844	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Béni Egressy)
<i>Linda di Chamounix</i>	<i>Linda</i>	12.11.1844	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Béni Egressy)
<i>Don Pasquale</i>		10.01.1846	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Béni Egressy)
<i>Dom Sébastien, roi de Portugal</i>	<i>Dom Sebastian</i>	15.06.1846	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Béni Egressy)
<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	<i>Lammermoori Lucia</i>	04.08.1846	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Béni Egressy)
<i>Maria di Rohan</i>	<i>Rohan Mária</i>	11.08.1847	Hungarian language premiere (transl. József Szerdahelyi)
<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>	<i>Borgia Lucrezia / Borgia Lucretia / Borgia Lucretzia</i>	12.11.1849	renewal
<i>Belisario</i>	<i>Belizár</i>	17.09.1850	renewal
<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>	<i>Borgia Lucrezia / Borgia Lucretia / Borgia Lucretzia</i>	07.09.1853	renewal
<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	<i>Báj-ital</i>	01.06.1854	renewal
<i>Dom Sébastien, roi de Portugal</i>	<i>Dom Sebastian</i>	01.08.1855	new production
<i>Dom Sébastien, roi de Portugal</i>	<i>Dom Sebastian</i>	19.02.1856	renewal
<i>Don Pasquale</i>		30.03.1857	new production
<i>Linda di Chamounix</i>	<i>Linda</i>	02.10.1858	new production
<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	<i>Báj-ital</i>	11.12.1858	renewal
<i>Belisario</i>	<i>Belizár</i>	29.12.1860	new production
<i>Don Pasquale</i>		23.01.1862	renewal

<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>	<i>Borgia Lucretia / Borgia Lucretia / Borgia Lucretzia</i>	22.11.1862	new production
<i>La Favorite</i>	<i>A kegyencnő</i>	03.04.1869	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Gusztáv Böhm)
<i>Dom Sébastien, roi de Portugal</i>	<i>Dom Sebastian</i>	18.12.1869	new production
<i>Don Pasquale</i>		22.10.1874	new production
<i>La Favorite</i>	<i>A kegyencnő</i>	11.08.1877	new production
<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>	<i>Borgia Lucretia / Borgia Lucretia / Borgia Lucretzia</i>	07.12.1878	new production
<i>Deux hommes et une femme (Rita)</i>	<i>Rita</i>	04.03.1880	Hungarian language premiere (transl. Ede Kuliffay)

In addition to Donizetti's works, twenty works of *opera seria* by other composers were performed at the Hungarian Theatre during the first five years of its existence (until February 1843). *Grand opéra* also made for an important section of the repertoire, including productions of Spontini's *La Vestale* (*Veszta szűze*, 26 June 1838), Daniel Auber's *Gustave III ou Le Bal masqué* (*Bál-éj*, 26 February 1839) and *La Muette de Portici* (*Portici néma*, 14 August 1841), as well as Halévy's *La Juive* (*Zsidó hölgy*, 6 August 1842) and Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (*Ördög Róbert*, 15 February 1843).<sup>28</sup> Within this series of *grands opéras*, Donizetti's *Dom Sébastien* (*Dom Sebastian*) was performed for the first time on 15 June 1846.<sup>29</sup>

This overview of the repertoire indicates that both institutions kept in step with operatic developments in Vienna during the final decade prior to the revolution, with its suburban theatre programmes serving as a point of reference for Pest and for the interest in Donizetti's works. In some cases, Donizetti's operas premiered simultaneously in Vienna and Pest. Even the imperial capi-

28. TALLIÁN, "Opern dieses größten Meisters der Jetztzeit", p. 4.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5, 7. Tallián analyses Meyerbeer's reception in Pest. On the Hungarian stage, French *grand opéra* was performed with varied success, reflecting the ensemble's artistic abilities. Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* (*A próféta*) was first performed with great success on 12 June 1850.

tal had only seen seven of Donizetti's operas before 1836, of which only *L'elisir d'amore* was an indisputable success. At the same time, there remained a large variability as to the quality of production between what was performed at the Hungarian Theatre and on the Viennese stages.

Donizetti had been eager to gain recognition in Vienna, and from 1835 he expressed his interest in writing an opera specifically for the city.<sup>30</sup> Achieving this goal, however, took several years and was not realised until 1842 with the performance of *Linda di Chamounix*, which became his greatest success in Vienna.<sup>31</sup> In reconstructing the Viennese chapter in Donizetti's biography, Caludio Vellutini points to an important factor that played in the composer's favour.

Reconsidering Donizetti's systematic attempts to become involved in Vienna's operatic life [...] it provides a case study for understanding the extent to which ideas of operatic *italianità* underpinned the transnational dissemination of opera even at times when—and despite the fact that—national ideologies had come to dominate the local discourse on it. [...] Such ongoing interest in *italianità* was a crucial component of Austrian cultural politics.<sup>32</sup>

This continuing interest in *italianità*, in Vienna and throughout the Habsburg monarchy, can in part be explained by the circumstances of what music historiography refers to as an “unspectacular” period in Viennese musical life.<sup>33</sup> The last two decades before the revolution of 1848, when the Rossini fever had subsided, and Beethoven and Schubert were both dead, left a vacuum in musical life that could only be filled with Italian opera, on as well as off stage in concerts and in the salon. Moreover, these circumstances, characterised

30. VELLUTINI, “Donizetti, Vienna, cosmopolitanism”, p. 1. This happened in connection with the changing repertoire policy of the Kärntnertortheater. From 1835, the new impresario Bartolomeo Merelli organised two operatic seasons with Carlo Balocchino: “The period from April to June was dedicated exclusively to Italian operas, performed in their original language (the Italian season), while the rest of the year constituted the so-called German season, which was devoted to an international repertoire of German, French, and Italian works, all of which were performed in German”. Cf. ODO ABERHAM – ALFRED GÄNSTHALER, “‘Vienna è bella bella bella’. Donizetti's Wiener Korrespondenzen”, in *Donizetti und seine Zeit in Wien*, pp. 51–112.

31. On the negotiation of the Viennese commissions: WILLIAM ASHBROOK, *Donizetti and His Operas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 160–162; GABRIELE DOTTO, “Historical introduction”, in GAETANO DONIZETTI, *Linda di Chamounix*, critical edition by Gabriele Dotto (Milan: Ricordi, 2005), pp. XXXI–XXXII; VELLUTINI, “Donizetti, Vienna, cosmopolitanism”.

32. VELLUTINI, “Italian opera in Vormärz Vienna”, p. 97.

33. *Ibid.*

by the long-term financial consequences of the Napoleonic wars,<sup>34</sup> required a political reorientation that included the reorganisation of the Court Theatre (Hoftheater) and a restructuring of Viennese operatic life.<sup>35</sup>

A comparable change of circumstances was underway in Pest during these same decades. The gradual transformation of the city's cultural-political role within Hungary, and within the Empire, and a shift in the linguistic configuration of the city's population shaped public debates on the idea of a Hungarian cultural policy, including the debates in the Diet of Hungary (Parlamentum Generale).<sup>36</sup> This general sense of reorientation was accelerated by a catastrophic flood that heavily affected the health of the city's and the nation's finances. In 1838, the Danube burst its banks and devastated Pest, necessitating a substantial reconstruction that significantly altered the cityscape.

Within the context of changing operatic fashions, these volatile financial circumstances and the unsettled political climate in Hungary influenced Donizetti's reception in Pest. Moreover, his appointment as *Kammercapellmeister und Hofcompositeur*, discussed in more detail in Michael Walter's contribution to this special issue, impacted the use of aesthetic categories associated with national designations such as "German" and "Italian" music, a fact also reflected in Maszlagi's article. As Vellutini points out, Donizetti shaped "the image of Vienna as the capital of a multinational empire" and consequently his musical reception was associated with "ideas about what it meant to be Viennese".<sup>37</sup> Just as in Milan and Paris, Donizetti's efforts to satisfy the tastes of Viennese audiences illustrate the reciprocity of this dynamic. During the 1830s, a similar process took place in Budapest. Donizetti's operas became a laboratory of experiments about what makes a musical language "Italian", "German" and more generally "European", and how Hungary relates to this. What should be regarded as "Hungarian" in aesthetical and compositional terms emerged as a productive site of negotiation between national, transnational and imperial identities. Donizetti's skill to adopt and reproduce different musical styles, embedded with national significance, stood for a compositional practice that was born as a direct response to the tastes of his public in Paris, Milan or Vienna, or now Budapest. Often criticized by the press, this

34. On the effects of the Napoleonic wars on musical life in Europe see AXEL KÖRNER, "Music, power, and changing semantics of time in the long nineteenth century", *Chigiana*, 52, *Musica e Potere nel lungo XIX secolo*, edited by Fabrizio Della Seta and Massimiliano Locanto (Lucca: Lim, 2022), pp. 25–38.

35. VELLUTINI, "Italian opera in *Vormärz* Vienna", pp. 100, 104.

36. *Reformkori országgyűlések színházi vitái (1825–1848)* [Theatrical debates in the Diet of Hungary of the Hungarian Reform Era (1825–1848)], edited by Miklós Bényei (Budapest: Magyar színházi intézet, 1985), p. 39.

37. VELLUTINI, "Donizetti, Vienna, cosmopolitanism", p. 2.



practice resonated with audiences all over Europe and was a cornerstone of his popularity. Ultimately, he succeeded in writing opera in a cosmopolitan idiom—as also highlighted in Maszlagi’s short biography—a skill deeply rooted in his training as a composer and his own biographical background.<sup>38</sup> In what follows, three case studies will help to sketch out the practical implications associated with the production of Donizetti’s operas on Pest’s stages.

#### TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS: THREE CASE STUDIES

1. As suggested above, Donizetti’s operas played a significant role in the cultural-political formation of operatic life in Pest before the revolution of 1848, serving as a vehicle to draw symbolic or real connections with other operatic stages in Europe. Producing Donizetti’s operas became an instrument to financially sustain Pest’s theatrical institutions, a fact especially relevant for the Hungarian Theatre, but it also served to bring the city’s theatres into line with the professional performance standards known from the Empire’s other centres of operatic life. This development, however, did not proceed unchallenged. A striking example of the obstacles met during the production process occurred during the first full season of the Hungarian Theatre with its premiere of Donizetti’s *Szerelmi bájtal* (*L’elisir d’amore*).<sup>39</sup> Before its arrival in Pest, Donizetti’s *melodramma giocoso* had provided a guaranteed success across European stages, making it a firm favourite among theatre agents and audiences.<sup>40</sup> It was therefore no surprise that the Hungarian Theatre would include it as part of its opening operatic season.

In May 1838, the Hungarian Theatre’s first prima donna, Rozália Klein Schodelné, brought the score from Vienna to Pest, and her husband, János Schodel, commissioned a translation from Filep Sámuel Deáki (Figure 3a).<sup>41</sup> Instead of commencing rehearsals immediately, however, she and the theatre’s music director Ferenc Erkel (1810–1893) decided to schedule a performance of Gaspard Spontini’s *La Vestale* (*Vésztaaszűz*), partly because they had already begun working on the production. At the time, duties between the theatre director Miklós Udvarhelyi (1792–1864) and Erkel in terms of programme decisions and scheduling rehearsal plans were not yet clearly delineated at the Hungarian Theatre.<sup>42</sup> A consequence of the organisational disarray was that on 30 July 1838 the opera was premiered at the German Theatre (see Table 1), and the Hungarian Theatre

38. Cf. also Maszlagi’s argument: “Donizetti Cajetán élete”, *Zenészeti Lapok*, 3/2, pp. 10, 12.

39. The production process is documented in the musical material relating to the premiere: H-Bn, ZBK 84.

40. On the opera’s early success see ASHBROOK, *Donizetti and His Operas*, p. 73.

41. TALLIÁN, *Schodel Rozália*, pp. 63–69.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 63. The first documented delineation of the two positions dates from 1865.

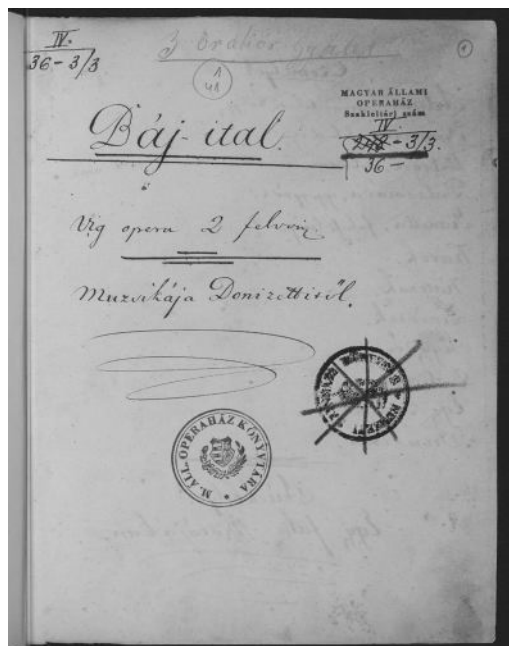


Figure 3a

GAETANO DONIZETTI, *Báj-ital* (*L'elisir d'amore*), cover of the prompt book, 1838, H-Bn, SZT MM 13.533.

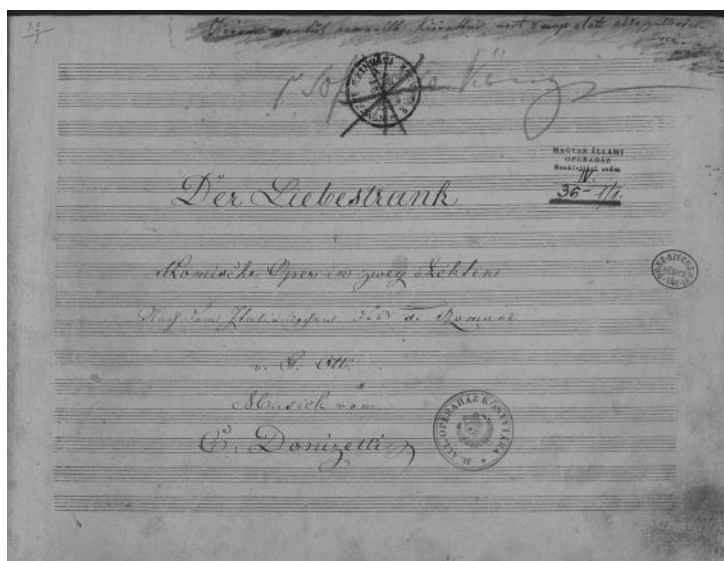


Figure 3b

GAETANO DONIZETTI, *Liebestrank*, score, cover page, short handwritten notice by Ferenc Erkel, H-Bn, ZBK 84/a.

missed a prestigious opportunity to raise its profile, locally and internationally. The production at the Hungarian Theatre would have to wait until November (Table 2). Erkel's frustration and regret is succinctly preserved in a handwritten note on the first page of the National Theatre's score: "Please get it out earlier from now on, because you can have it ready in 8 days. Erkel" (Figure 3b).

Apart from the missed opportunity, the example reveals the extent to which a small group of soloists was able to influence the theatre's programming. It also shows the different modes of repertoire acquisition, which in these early years was not yet consistently planned and implemented by the theatre management. For instance, over the following months and years the Schodels arranged to acquire several new scores for production at their theatre and announced their acquisitions in the newspaper *Honművész* [Homeland Artist] thus showing their familiarity with the latest successes on the Viennese stages.<sup>43</sup> In 1839, they bought scores of Donizetti's operas *Marino Faliero*, *Gianni di Calais*, *Roberto Devereux*, *Otto mesi in due ore*, and *Il borgomastro di Saardam*, with the intention of having these works produced in Pest.<sup>44</sup> Although in this instance the investment was agreed with the management in advance,<sup>45</sup> it shows the agency of individual singers at the theatre and their impact on its management.<sup>46</sup>

43. Literary, art and fashion magazine published in Pest between 1833 and 1841. The *Honművész* enthusiastically supported the establishment of the Hungarian Theatre of Pest. Its theatre reviews were mainly concerned with the acting and the politics of the programme, while the debate between József Bajza and János Garay (1836) aimed to clarify aspects of theatre criticism. Cf. *Hungarian Theatre Encyclopedia*, <<https://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02139/html/sz10/268.html>> (last accessed 15 February 2025). *Honművész*, 6 (1838), p. 629.

44. TALLIÁN, *Schodel Rozália*, p. 82.

45. *Ibid.*

46. The current state of research is reflected in the satirical inscription on the cover of the main inventory book of productions. It reads "BÁNYA" [MINE] in capital letters, pointing to its dusty and neglected condition: after hours spent with the materials, one gets dusty hands, as if coming out of a mine. This short descriptive inventory was used at the Hungarian National Theatre. It was then transferred to the Budapest Royal Opera House at the institution's opening in 1884. In addition to the names of the composers of each opera, the inventory contains a list of the types of musical material preserved at least the scores, piano scores, choral parts and instrumental parts. The collection finally came to the Hungarian National Library in 1981, where it is preserved as part of the Theatre Collection (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Színháztörténeti Tár, A Nemzeti Színház és az Operaház régi kottatárának anyaga). To date, none of the material of "international composers" has been systematically studied. Questions regarding (a) critical-philological issues, regarding cuts and different versions of works; (b) the process of translation; and (c) performance traditions need to be examined from the ground up. For the purpose of this article, dates and names appearing in the performance parts have been used to date the extensive range of scores, orchestral, choral and soloist voice parts. Additional information has been drawn from prompt books and piano arrangements. For an initial overview of the preserved musical sources, see: HORVÁTH, *A Pest-Budai zenés színháztörténet forrásai*, pp. 64–67 (table).

2. The Hungarian Theatre was the first and for a long time the sole institution for the production of dramatic and operatic genres in Hungarian language. Nevertheless, the theatre's productions took place within a truly multilingual artistic environment, as documented in the musicians' notes in the performing material, which appear in different languages. French and Italian make an appearance, but German predominates. Furthermore, so-called *Einlagen-Arien* were regularly inserted in the productions to allow foreign stars to perform at the theatre in the languages they were more comfortable with. Despite this multilingual environment, typical of most theatres at the time in Habsburg Europe, issues around language arose occasionally. Illustrative is a prompt book for a performance of *Belisario*.<sup>47</sup> In this case, Donizetti's *tragedia lirica* was (at least partly) performed in Italian. As the document shows, the stage assistant seemingly tried to overcome his own linguistic difficulties with a "creative innovation", writing out the original Italian text, but using Hungarian phonetics to help him pronounce the Italian words correctly. This odd orthographic spelling shows, however, no consequent phonetic rearrangement. It only reduces some words that are presumably difficult to pronounce (Figures 4b–c):

Act I, Scena II, Irene: || p. 1 [without page numbering]

(Corri amica)

[...] voliam **szulla szponda**

All[']amplesszo del forte che arriva.

Ve['] pei trivi **dsia** [i.e. già] il popolo innonda,

Odi il **szuon** della calca **fesztiva**.

Delle trombe **frammisztó** allo **szquillo**

Del trionfo **dsia** [i.e. già] l[']inno intuon[ò].

**Szalutando** l[']augusto **vesszillo**

Che il terror || fra i nemici port[ò] || p. 2 [without page numbering]

[...]

La man terribile, del vincitor[e]

Di baci fervidi io coprì[ò].

E, al sen stringendomi del **dsenitor** [i.e. genitore],

Rapita in **esztászi** – d[']**ámor száro** [i.e. sarò].

Un pianto tenero **forsze** lyi [i.e. gli] accenti

**Szul labro** [i.e. labbro] tremulo mi trencher[à].

Ma quelle lagrime fieno eloquenti;

Ma quel **szilenzio** tutto dir[à]!

The purpose was duly noted on the prompt book's title page: "sült magyar sűgónak való olasz sűgókönyv", which playfully translates as "an Italian prompt book for a dummy Hungarian stage assistant" (Figure 4a).

47. H-Bn, ZBK 69 h.

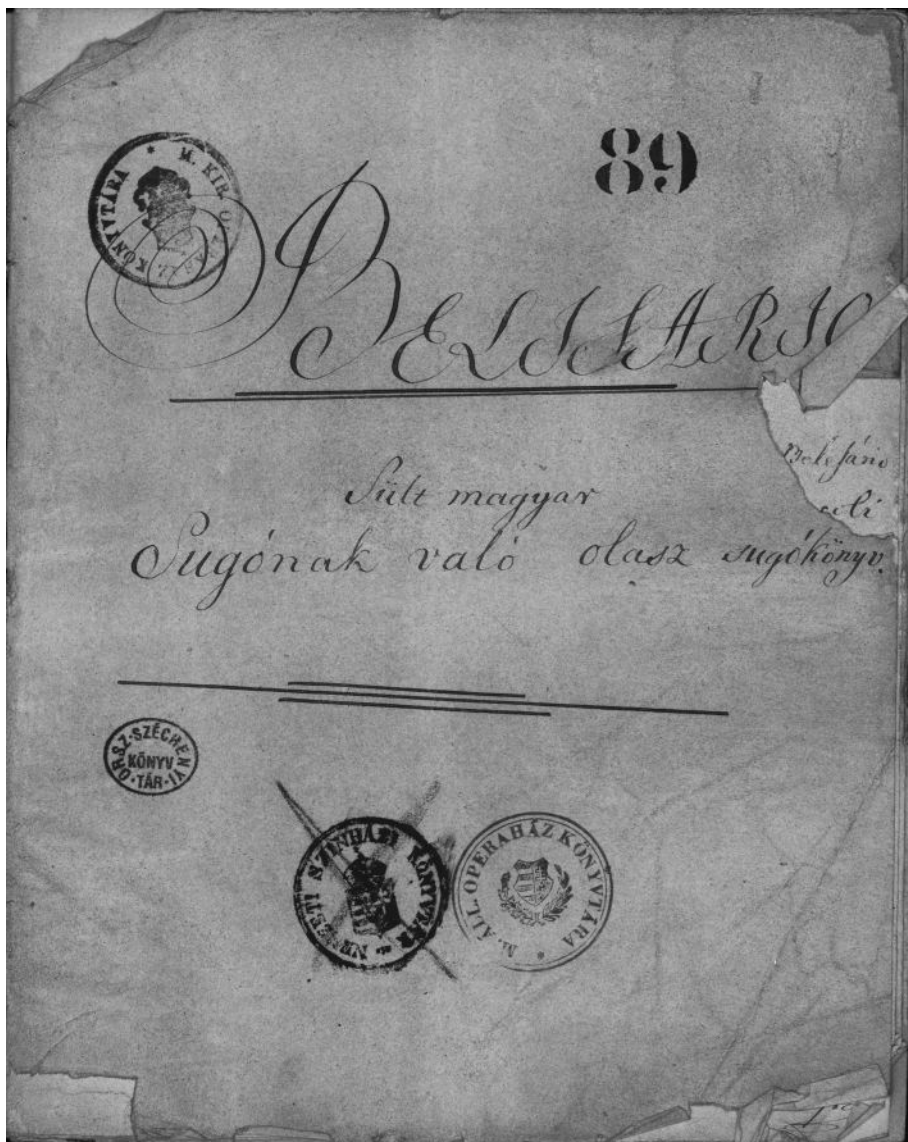


Figure 4a

GAETANO DONIZETTI, *Belisario*, second cover page of the prompt book, H-Bn, ZBK 69 h.

MAGYAR ÁLLAMI  
OPERAHÁZ  
Buklejtári szám  
II  
87-3

*Első Felvonás.*

*Senátorok. Nép.*

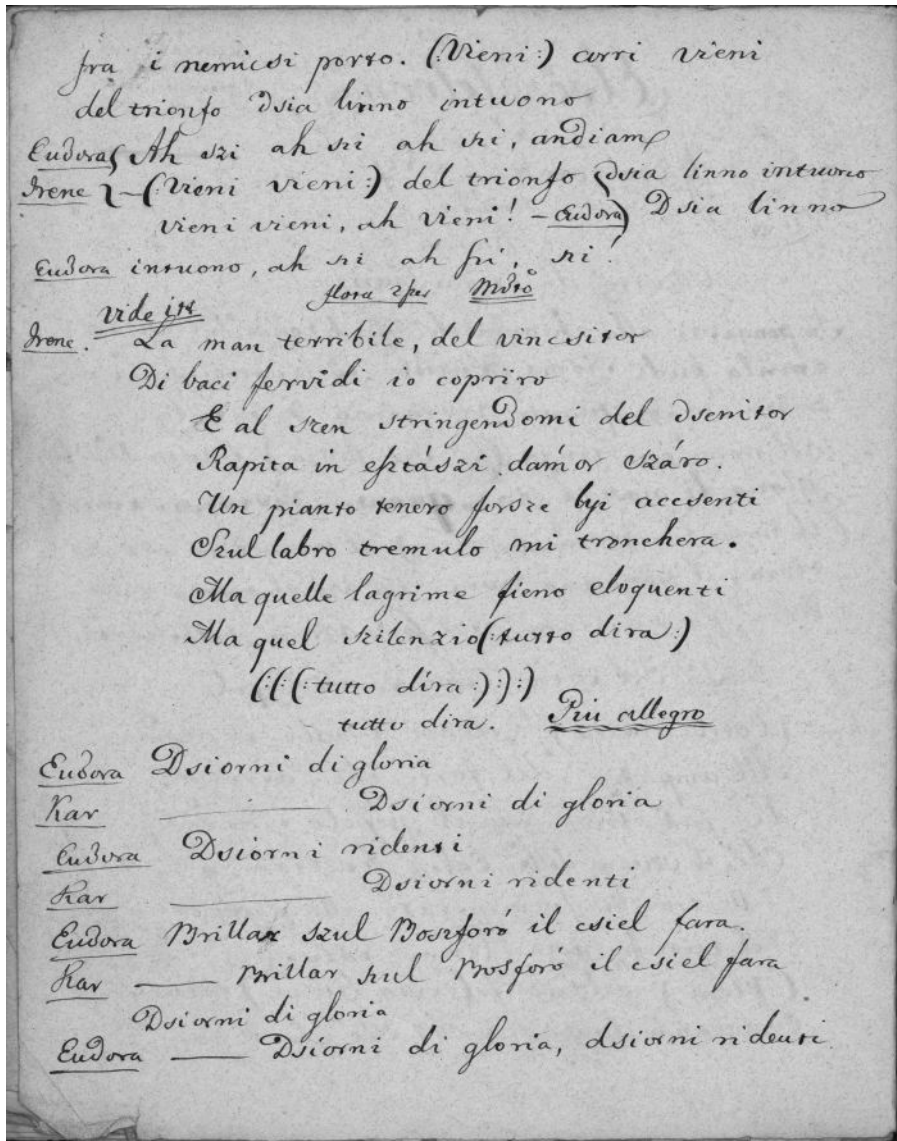
*Banda.*  
*Kar.*

*Czerto di eterni lauri*

*Imponga'ssi alla chioma del prode onde Viranzio  
emula fudi Roma. Inviato Belisario, gloria di  
nostra età: » quanto vivranno i secoli  
Il nome tuo vivra, (fi vi vivra.) Inviato Belisario  
gloria di nostra età: » quanto vivranno i secoli  
(il nome tuo vivra:) (vivra:) il nome tuo vi vi  
vivra, il nome tuo vivra vi vi il nome tuo  
vivra, fi vi vivra, vi fi vivra. (elpiledek)*

*2.<sup>a</sup> del Irene Eudora. Hölgyek.*

*Irene (Corri amica:) voliam stella spionda  
All'amplesso del forte che arriva.  
Ve, pei trivi via il popolo inonda,  
Odi il suon della calca festiva. »  
Delle trombe frammisato allo squillo  
Del trionfo sia linno intuono.  
(Vieni) del trionfo (sia linno) intuono,  
Calutando languito vesillo che il terror*



Figures 4b-c

GAETANO DONIZETTI, *Belisario*, prompt book, pp. 1-2, partial Hungarian orthography for the Italian text as language support, H-Bn, ZBK 69 h.

The example points to issues of translation practice more generally. A preliminary observation of the repertoire at Pest's Hungarian Theatre suggests that Donizetti's Italian operas were mostly translated from the original Italian libretto but occasionally contained German text passages. As the German sections are not fully and consistently written out, these passages were probably not used in the actual performance—and therefore not sung in German—but served as a bridge between the Italian and the Hungarian versions, as an aide to help singers follow what they were supposed to perform. In contrast, Donizetti's French operas were generally translated from their German versions, with the librettos and scores acquired in Vienna. The choral parts prepared for the Hungarian National Theatre, however, usually contained only the Hungarian text—with some exceptions where they incorporated German or occasional Italian sections. These examples show that performing Donizetti in Habsburg Europe was never simple and always required complex linguistic operations: a price theatres, singers and audiences were obviously prepared to pay.

3. The confluence of different languages in operatic culture seems to have been a familiar experience not only in the Hungarian theatre, but also in Pest's wider cultural milieu. As theatregoers visited both institutions, they compared productions and developed preferences. *Honművész* documented the performances of both theatres between 1837 and 1841, demonstrating that readers of the Hungarian periodical retained an interest in the ongoing at the German Theatre. In August 1840 the magazine paid tribute to the anniversary of the Hungarian Theatre's opening in 1837, while also offering detailed reports of proceedings in both theatres.

Hungarian Stage:

PEST, on August 21, *Fidelio*, grand opera in 2 acts [...]. Although Italian opera [Donizetti's *Liebestrank*] was performed in the German Theatre, our National Theatre had such a large audience that there only a few seats were left empty, and only in the balcony. Mrs. Schodelné in the title role again proved herself a great artist, received a resounding applause and was repeatedly called back on stage. It was a pity that Mr Váray (Rocco) was hoarse today.

On the 22nd (the anniversary of the opening of this theatre), *The Family of Mizbán*<sup>48</sup> (original drama in 3 acts, with 1 act prelude; written by Szigligeti [Ede]) was performed to a very large audience.

On the 23rd *Bál-éj* (*Ball-Night*) grand opera in 5 acts by Auber (translated by Szerdahelyi) [*Gustave III, ou Le Bal masqué*], was performed on our stage be-

48. EDE SZIGLIGETI, *Micbán családja. Eredeti dráma 3 felvonásban, előjátékkal, amely először adatott a pesti magyar színpadon, 1840. máj. 30-án* (Pest: 1840); *Miczbán családja*, historical drama (play) in three acts.



fore such a large audience that (with the exception of a few empty boxes) we have not seen such a crowded audience in this house for a long time. Today Mr. Stöckl, as a guest, took part in the dances. The whole performance, still retaining its long-standing interest, was received with great favour. Luiza Eder appeared again in the role of the page Oscar, and was kindly received. Ribbing was performed by Mr. Egressy.

*Peleskei notary* was advertised for the 24.<sup>49</sup> The present fare seems to be a particularly favourable income to our national stage, and we find that it is attended with excellent interest of locals and foreigners of all languages.<sup>50</sup>

As was customary, the Hungarian Theatre combined the international repertoire with Hungarian works and hosted a wide range of different theatrical genres. The popularity of Beethoven and Auber are no great surprise, however the specific mentioning of the wider appeal of Hungarian works both with audiences beyond the city and linguistic boundaries are noteworthy. The magazine, which was committed to supporting Hungarian-language theatre, might not have been entirely objective in its assessments of the performances' success. Yet its impartiality at least stretched to reporting the achievements on the German stage.

#### German Stage:

PEST, on the city stage, on 21 August, the reprise [second performance] of the Italian *L'elisir d'amore* was given. It was not attended by as large an audience as the first time; but on the following day (22 August), when Donizetti's opera *Borgia Lucretia* [*Lucrezia Borgia*] was given on this stage for the first time, and by Italians, the theatre was sold out; and although the Italian *Lucretia* was far from providing the experience seen on our national stage, the excellent performance of Mr Bezzi (Gennaro) and of the choruses had a good effect on the audience. The role of Maffio Orsini was played by Signora Cassiani, who was most popular in the drinking song [*Trinklied*]. The fine-voiced Mr Polonini (Alfonso) repeated his aria à la polacca after a prolonged applause. Among the German singers who took part today were Rötzer (Gizella), Donua (Jeppo) and Saag (Ascanio). This opera was again announced for the 25th.<sup>51</sup>

These reports suggest that in Pest going to the theatre was a transnational cultural practice, as well as point to institutional links between the two theatres. These in particular call for further investigation to fully understand the boundaries between different nationalities and languages in Pest's operatic life. Both institutions formed independent entities and functioned as

49. JÓZSEF GAÁL, *Peleskei nótárius* (comedy).

50. *Honművész*, 69 (27 August 1840), p. 559.

51. *Ibid.*

separate communicative spaces, but they shared repertoires and performers. This included a national icon like Ferenc Erkel, who began his career as conductor at the German Theatre, before moving to the Hungarian National Theatre.

These examples raise the issue whether Donizetti's works were perceived differently when they were performed in German or in Hungarian. Such questions, however, are difficult to assess. Contemporary press coverage can only serve as an imperfect guide. Its focus was mostly on the quality of the performers, the interest productions evoked among local or foreign guests, always with particular attention to reactions from prominent members of the audience. Other common topics of discussion were financial issues or the production's general artistic achievements. Therefore, it remains unclear to what extent the use of a particular language in a production shaped the possible understanding of the works' political implications, and whether it impacted on the evocation of national sentiments, imperial consciousness or cosmopolitan ties.

#### THE VERNACULAR AND HUNGARIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY WITHIN HABSBURG EUROPE

From the late 1820s, the topic of Hungarian-language theatre, including operatic performances, was repeatedly raised in parliamentary debates. The foundation of a Hungarian Theatre as a central national institution was decidedly political as demonstrated by the following contribution to parliament on 17 February 1836.

Since there is no educated nation in Europe that is in need of a theatre without a national language, explains the long nurtured desire of the nation that, a permanent theatre should be built in our country, suitable to the nation's ornament, [...] to be built according to a plan which will be seen to be the most suitable ornament for such a national undertaking, the most suitable to new and finer tastes, and the most suitable for the artistic development and the permanent existence of the institution [...].<sup>52</sup>

52. "Mi végett is a nemzet ama régolta nevelt kívánságát, hogy midőn Európának egy művelt nemzete sincsen, mely honi ajkú színház nélkül szűkölködne, hazánkban is valahára egy állandó s a nemzet díszének megfelelő színház épüljön [...] oly terv szerint leendő felállítására, mely egy nemzeti vállalatához illő dísznek, az új s finomabb ízlésnek leginkább megfelelőnek, és az intézet művészeti fejlődésének és állandó fennmaradása céljának elérhetésére legalkalmasabbnak fog tapasztalni [...]". *Az 1832–36. évi országgyűlés írásai* [The protocols of the Diet of Hungary 1832–36], vol. 6, pp. 245–246, in *Reformkori országgyűlések színházi vitái*, p. 39. The protocol only mentions a general statement without naming the representatives.

With a similar intent, the newly established Hungarian Academy of Sciences had set a prize question on “How to establish the Hungarian theatre in Budapest on a permanent basis?”<sup>53</sup> The Academy received nineteen responses, which turned the matter into a subject of public debate.<sup>54</sup> These political and institutional debates, took place in the context of wider cultural and literary efforts to further develop the Hungarian language.<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that until 1844 Latin had remained as the official language of the Hungarian state administration.<sup>56</sup> To respond to modern national sentiments, however, more works of Hungarian literature were published, European classics were translated, and modern editions of old documents and manuscripts were produced in Hungarian. As part of this linguistic flurry of activity the National Theatre was supplied with a new repertoire in Hungarian, drama as well as opera, Hungarian and foreign in origin. As part of these efforts, from 1832 onwards, every year the best tragedy and the best comedy performed in Hungarian at the theatre received a prize of 100 gold pieces.<sup>57</sup>

A central reason for the establishment of the Hungarian-language theatre, therefore, was the “elevation” of the Hungarian language to the linguistic and literary standards of other European languages.<sup>58</sup> As a speaker in the parliamentary debate of 17 February 1836 opined, “the greater cultivation of the Hungarian language being among the most fervent desires of the nation, everything that can be expected to promote this goal becomes a worthy object

53. Cf. “Miképen lehetne a Magyar játékszín Budapestén állandóan megalapítani?” [How can the Hungarian theatre system in Budapest be permanently established?], in *Magyar játékszíni jutalmazott feleletek* (Buda: Magyar Tudós Társaság, 1843) with 19 submitted and 18 accepted answers.

54. GRAF ISTVÁN SZÉCHENYI, *A Magyar játékszínről* [On the Hungarian theatre system] (Pest: 1832).

55. TIBOR TALLIÁN, “‘Az operában ki gyönyörködik?’ Irodalmi adalékok a magyar operai művelődés történetéhez” [“Who delights in opera?” Literary additions to the history of Hungarian operatic culture], in *Zenatudományi dolgozatok 2000. Szabolcsi Bence emlékére*, edited by Márta Sz. Farkas (Budapest: MTA Zenatudományi Intézet, 2000), pp. 117–168.

56. On 13 November 1844, Emperor Ferdinand ratified the Act II of 1844, which made Hungarian the official language of the Kingdom of Hungary.

57. FERENC SZABOLCS, *A nemzeti játékszín eszméje. A magyar és a német irodalomban* [The idea of national theatre. In Hungarian and German literature] (Budapest: 1938).

58. These efforts mirrored the promotion of the Czech language in Habsburg Bohemia. See AXEL KÖRNER, “National movements against nation states. Bohemia and Lombardy between the Habsburg Empire, the German Confederation, and Piedmont-Sardinia”, in *The 1848 Revolutions and European Political Thought*, edited by Douglas Moggach and Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 345–382, p. 349.

of concern for the [political] parties”.<sup>59</sup> For the participants in these debates, national identity was tied to the realisation of a linguistic ambition. Therefore, the production of opera in Hungarian, irrespective of its origin, was seen as part of this “national agenda”. In other words, Donizetti operas, performed in Hungarian, shaped the idea of what it meant to be Hungarian in a multinational empire.

Meanwhile, debates on the use of Hungarian on stage underwent a qualitative shift in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the Compromise of 1867 serving as a dividing line. Language policies became increasingly more radical in the Empire’s Hungarian part, as summarised by a poem published on the occasion of the closing of the last German Theatre in Budapest, on 16 September 1880:<sup>60</sup>

The tyranny of language reigns in the land of the Magyars;  
intolerance throughout the whole beautiful realm;  
does freedom’s stronghold — which made all equal  
lie within the laced garment of splendour?  
But there you shackle humanity in chains,  
to hospitality you deal the deathblow.  
By what name should one call such actions?  
Who can recognise the Hungarian people in this?<sup>61</sup>

Eluding easy translation, the German poem laments the increasing intolerance towards Hungary’s multilingual and cosmopolitan heritage. Linguistic coercion reigns, hospitality is dead. Returning to Pest’s operatic life around 1848, the city’s cultural communicative spaces were decidedly transformed by the opening of the Hungarian Theatre. At the same time, however, the analysis of its repertoire and surrounding debates, points to the need of moving beyond national categories: Italian opera, as well as imperial politics of culture, had the potential of promoting the cause of Hungary’s linguistic revival. Cristina Magaldi has argued for “critical explorations and the questioning of bor-

59. “A honi nyelvnek a nagyobb kimívelése a nemzet legforróbb kívánságai közé tartozván, minden, amitől e célnak előmozdítását reményelni lehet, a Karok gondoskodásának méltó tárgyává válik”. *Reformkori országgyűlések színházi vitái*, p. 39.

60. JAKOB PERL OSTLAND, *An die deutschfeindlichen Ungarn. Eine Epistel geschrieben bei Schließung des deutschen Theaters in Budapest am 16 September 1880* (Vienna: Verlag von T. Rosner, 1880), no. 8, 8 pp. [poem], here: stanza 3.

61. “Der Sprachenzwang herrscht im Magyarenlande, | Unduldsamkeit im ganzen schönen Reich; | Liegt denn im schnürverzierten Prachtgewande | Der Freiheit Hort – der alle machte gleich? – | Die Menschheit aber schlägt ihr dort in Bande, | Der Gastlichkeit gebt ihr den Todesstreich. | Wie soll solch Handeln man mit Namen nennen? – | Wer kann daran das Ungarvolk erkennen?” I would like to thank Quirin Lückbe for providing the English translation.

ders—of culture attachments, identities, and aesthetic stances—to suggest that shared spaces of cultural belonging allow for alternative thinking, imaginations beyond the local, and multifaced and multidirectional artistic creativity”.<sup>62</sup> In this sense, opera served as an art form that always crossed geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Donizetti’s fortunes in Budapest between 1838 and 1847 offer a striking example of this fact, irrespective of the symbolic importance associated with the premiere of Ferenc Erkel’s first Hungarian grand opera, *Mária Báthori* on 8 August 1840. Both Donizetti and Erkel formed part of a “tapestry” of operatic culture that simultaneously spoke to national, imperial and cosmopolitan identities.

Unlike in Vienna or Milan, Donizetti never accepted a commission to compose an opera specifically for Pest. The first performances of his operas in Hungary, however, became a laboratory for exploring opera’s role in the cultural and political formation of the Hungarian nation and its future capital city. The musical versatility of Donizetti’s works helped to establish a generation of well-trained singers, thereby enabling (Buda-)Pest to measure its emerging operatic life against that of the empire’s other cultural centres.<sup>63</sup> In terms of compositional styles, the extent to which Ferenc Erkel—as conductor and composer—absorbed Donizetti’s works in forging a distinctively “Hungarian” national opera remains subject to further inquiry.

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62. CRISTINA MAGALDI, “Cosmopolitanism and music in the nineteenth century”, in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935321.013.62>> (last accessed 16 February 2025). Magaldi refers here to REBECCA L. WALKOWITZ, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), Kindle edition, p. 5.

63. TALLIÁN, *Schodel Rozália*, p. 82.

*Abstract*

The article discusses the reception of Gaetano Donizetti's operas in (Buda-) Pest between 1837 and 1847, a formative period in the development of the city's cultural landscape and in Hungary's national self-definition within Habsburg Europe. Productions of Donizetti's operas within the institutional and cultural-political context of Pest's German and Hungarian theatres show how these works became a site of negotiation between national, transnational, and imperial identities. Three case studies sketch the circumstances of staging Donizetti (*L'elisir d'amore*, *Belisario* and *Lucrezia Borgia*) at Pest's Hungarian Theatre during its first operatic seasons. They demonstrate the challenges of multilingual encounters, and the fluidity of linguistic and artistic boundaries (in terms of operatic repertoires, performers and audiences) in the context of Pest's competitive theatrical landscape, where the newly founded Hungarian Theatre vied for prominence alongside the established German institution. The examples illustrate how Donizetti's music facilitated Pest's alignment with European operatic trends, while also contributing to Hungary's evolving cultural identity. Ultimately, Donizetti's role in Pest underscores the city's dual aspiration—its cosmopolitan determination within the Empire and its emerging national consciousness.