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Prokopovych, Markian

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Celebrating Hungary?

Johann Strauss and the Press in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna and Budapest

(Author Accepted Manuscript version)

Abstract (207 words): Prepared by almost half a century of ‘Magyar mania’ in Vienna, the 1885 world premiere of Johann Strauss’ ‘Hungarian’ operetta *Der Zigeunerbaron* in the Theater an der Wien surpassed even the most optimistic expectations. However, while a number of Hungarian dignitaries also attended the premiere, the reception showed a discrepancy in how the two nominally ruling nations of the Habsburg Monarchy saw the operetta’s merits and what it actually celebrated. What to the Viennese seemed full of exotic colour evoking historical memories and the local ‘Wienerisch’ element was for Hungarians an occasion to seek recognition in the imperial capital. The reception in the Budapest Opera House two decades later in 1905 and in Vienna’s Hofoper in 1910 further accentuated this difference. While Strauss’ work remained immensely popular among the public, it provoked different – though equally heated – discussions in the press on the nature of music culture, the place of the opera house in it, and the importance of local and national traditions however understood. This article contrasts the premieres, aiming to distinguish the features of Austria-Hungary’s celebratory culture that, on one hand, served to reconfirm existing loyalties and sentiments and, on the other, provided for an impressive degree of flexibility to accommodate very different agendas and practices.

In recent decades, Johann Strauss’ ‘Hungarian’ operetta *Der Zigeunerbaron* [Gypsy Baron, 1885] became subject of a number of studies in the wake of new revisionist scholarship on the Habsburg Empire. Scholars from Péter Hanák to Moritz Csáky to Camille Crittenden emphasized its profoundly reconciliatory role in the political and cultural climate

of the late Austria-Hungary, and argued that it not only contributed to the emergence of shared popular culture but was, at the same time, a product of that very culture.¹ Though undoubtedly true, this interpretation takes its roots in the history of the creation of *Der Zigeunerbaron* in a specific point of time, political constellation and cultural context that followed the 1867 Austrian-Hungarian Compromise, but it does not look closely at the intricacies and divergences of its reception history. In a similar vein, the monumental ten-volume edition of Strauss' correspondence edited by Franz Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk in Briefen und Dokumenten* generated major revision in our understanding of the composer's personality, its historical significance in late Austria-Hungary and beyond, and the complicated local, imperial and international background behind the creation of works such as *Der Zigeunerbaron*.² In the light of what we now know about Strauss it appears highly unlikely that he would consciously wish for his work to be a reflection upon issues beyond the musical sphere or genre, or as Strauss' early biographer H. E. Jacob put it, to

¹ Camille Crittenden, *Johann Strauss and Vienna. Operetta and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 2006), 288; Moritz Csáky, *Ideologie der Operette und Wiener Moderne. Ein kulturhistorischer Essay zur österreichischen Identität* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 1996), 78; Péter Hanák, 'The cultural role of the Budapest-Vienna operetta', in *Budapest and New York. Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870–1930*, ed. by Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (New York, 1994), p. 215. Also see János Kárpáti, *Képes magyar zenetörténet* (Budapest, 2011), pp. 206-20.

² *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk in Briefen und Dokumenten*, ed. by Franz Mailer, Vol. 1-10 (Tutzing, 1983-2007). Among other early biographical works that became subject to revision was also Ignaz Schintzer's *Meister Johann. Bunte Geschichten aus der Johann Strauß-Zeit*, 2 Vols (Vienna, 1920), which now appear to have deliberately misrepresented the historical events central to Strauss' biography.

compose a work that would serve as a symbolic ‘reconciliation between the two halves of the Empire, between Austria and Hungary’.³ As Mailer’s edition amply demonstrates, Strauss’ concerns rarely went beyond the mundane issues of entrepreneurship, personal life, the musical profession and the tastes and expectations of the Viennese public, thereby leaving an important aspect of the Hungarian reception beyond its scope of analysis.

The reception of this extraordinarily successful work, which both in Vienna and in Budapest was surpassed in popularity possibly only by *Die Fledermaus* [The Bat, 1874] in Strauss’ musical career, had roots in a number of earlier events in the history of the genre, the composer’s life and the complexities of the Austrian-Hungarian reconciliation in the late nineteenth century. Importantly, it also reflected upon the nature of Habsburg celebratory culture, which hid complex political agendas and meanings behind its uniform façade of pomp and respectability. *The Zigeunerbaron*’s crucial underlying political message, that of Austrian, i.e. imperial, hegemony over the Monarchy’s other peoples, might have suited the political elites in both capitals of the Monarchy at the time of its creation. But as the time went by at least some within the broader public, as I argue in this paper by relying on Viennese and Budapest press reports, became increasingly uncomfortable with both the underlying message and the way it was woven into a seemingly harmless plot of an operetta. The peculiarity of the Hungarian, as opposed to the Viennese, reception puts our understanding of *Der Zigeunerbaron*, its publics, as well as the concepts of cultural supremacy, Habsburg loyalty and cultural nationalism in a more complex light.⁴

³ H. E. Jacob, *Johann Strauss - Father and Son – A Century of Light Music* (New York, 1940), 314.

⁴ Crittenden, *Operetta and the Politics*, 170. On the reception history of *Der Zigeunerbaron* worldwide, see Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera, 1579-1940* (London, 1978), 1118-9.

Historical and musicological scholarship explored in detail the nature of the emergence and development of specifically Viennese genre of operetta, its importance for the non-Viennese population of the Monarchy as well as the relevant aspects of Strauss' biography. It would suffice to say that at the time when the Theater an der Wien and the Carltheater grew into major commercially viable operetta stages that catered for a specific urban stratum in Vienna, their Budapest counterparts the Comedy Theatre (*Vígszínház*), the Popular Theatre (*Népszínház*) and the Hungarian Theatre (*Magyar Színház*) had a much more complex symbolism. In Hungary, similar to several other regions of Central Europe, operetta theatres were constructed under government protection in much more prestigious locations than in Vienna or elsewhere in Western Europe and were therefore part of the national project.⁵

Strauss visited Pest and later Budapest on a number of occasions and quickly became the public's favourite, not the least because of what was perceived as his more progressive political views in contrast to those of his father.⁶ By siding with the revolution in 1848 Strauss seemed to have if not embraced, at least acknowledged the Hungarians' strive for representation within the empire, as well. His polka '*Éljen a Magyar!*' (Opus 332), composed in 1869, was dedicated to the Hungarian nation and even included a quotation from the '*Rákóczi March*,' the formerly forbidden work that had a deeply symbolic association with 1848 Hungary – but the significance of which went back to the years of the Rákóczi uprising

⁵ Peter Polonyi, 'Adaptating and Equalization,' in *Das Musiktheater um die Jahrhundertwende. Wien-Budapest um 1900*, ed. by Reinhard Farkas, with a preface by Moritz Csáky, Veröffentlichungen der Österreichischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft 'Wien-Budapest um 1900' 1 (Vienna, 1990), p. 25.

⁶ Crittenden, *Johann Strauss and Vienna*, p. 87.

in the eighteenth century.⁷ It would be difficult to find a better candidate for the sympathies of the Hungarian public, who remembered the crushing of the 1848 Budapest revolution bitterly, while the political elite concentrated on reconciliation and rapprochement after the 1867 Compromise, and for whom entertainment and waltzes remained essential attributes of leisure as late as 1900.

In the early 1880s, Strauss visited Hungary on a number of occasions of both professional and personal nature. On 30 November 1882, he came to Budapest to attend the premiere of his operetta *Der lustige Krieg* [The Merry War] in the Pest German Theatre, and was accompanied for the first time by his future third wife, Adele Strauss (nee Deutsch). The Hungarian press kept their discrete distance from the personal affairs of the Viennese maestro on that occasion, reporting only that Strauss expressed his interest in ‘Zigeunermusik’ [Gypsy music], promised to arrange the premiere of his new operetta that would become known as *Eine Nacht in Venedig* [One Night in Venice] in Budapest, and even spoke of a possibility to write a ‘Hungarian operetta’.⁸ A few months later, in February 1883, Strauss conducted the performance of *Der lustige Krieg* in Budapest, attended a soiree at the Hungarian politician and industrialist Gustáv Tarnóczy, at which he met Franz Liszt and singer Ilka Pálmay, and spent an entire day discussing the possibility of a new musical work in collaboration with Mór [Maurus] Jókai, one of Hungary’s most prolific and influential writers in the second half of the nineteenth century. After taking part in the Hungarian revolution of 1848 and being a political suspect during the years of Neoabsolutism, Jókai took an active part in politics after the 1867 Compromise. A member of parliament for several decades and a strong supporter of the Liberal administration of Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza, Jókai became an influential

⁷ Markian Prokopovych, *In the Public Eye. The Budapest Opera House, the Audience, and the Press, 1848-1918* (Vienna, 2014), 43, 85, 213-14.

⁸ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 150-51.

public figure, editor and publisher. This was the first time when the idea to put Jókai's novel 'Saffi' to music was recorded.⁹ As would soon become evident, however, Strauss' visits to Hungary had another, altogether different, reason: he and Adele were trying to explore the possibility of acquiring Hungarian citizenship with the aim of changing religion and marrying according to the so-called 'Siebenbürger Ehe' [Transylvanian marriage] – as a Catholic with a living wife Strauss could neither divorce nor marry again in Austria. Though these plans never came to fruition, they do demonstrate, in retrospect, that Strauss' engagement with Hungary was dictated by reasons that the Hungarians preferred not to mention but which the Viennese press found an excellent subject of critique and mockery.¹⁰

The Hungarian elites' endorsement of *Der Zigeunerbaron* signalled that in their lifestyle and manners, but also their institutions and aspirations, they had never given up the symbolic game of outdoing Vienna. It was Jókai's explicit request, for example, that *Der Zigeunerbaron* would be finished in time to coincide with the 1885 Budapest National Universal Exhibition [*Budapesti országos általános kiállítás*], and that a simultaneous premiere would be staged on that occasion in Vienna and Budapest. By taking up a specifically Hungarian subject, the Waltz King seemed to be playing on this kind of sentiment and showed signs of appealing to this very public. His fondness of Hungarian music was genuine and was also expressed on several occasions.¹¹ At the same time, the fact

⁹ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 160-62.

¹⁰ The satirical newspaper *Der Floh* even published a caricature on Strauss in Hungarian attire that presented the composer under the Magyarised name of 'Strucz János' (Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 164-68).

¹¹ See, for example, his letter to Géza Zichy, the intendant of the Budapest Opera House, concerning Strauss' later opera *Ritter Pásmán*, from 11 July 1891, quoted in Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 5, pp. 208-209.

that Strauss never took the idea of the simultaneous premiere seriously enough signifies that his main target had always been the Viennese public.¹² It was to this public that he had promised, on more than one occasion: ‘einmal ungarisch zu kommen’ [to come out Hungarian at one point].¹³ The Hungarian motifs had, however, only occasional appearance in Strauss’ work. Soon after the success of *Der Zigeunerbaron*, he was already eager to make sure that in the next operetta, *Simplicius*, due service to his true musical language, ‘dem Wienerischen Genre’ [to the Viennese genre], was paid.¹⁴ To understand *Der Zigeunerbaron* and the specific character of its rather divergent reception in the Hungarian capital to that of Vienna, it is important therefore to understand its Viennese background and context first.

[Figure 1] ‘Magyarien in Wien’ [Magyaria in Vienna], *Der Floh*, 25 October 1885, p. 1. Satirical drawing of operetta singers Antonie Hartmann and Otilie Collin in Hungarian costumes.

¹² Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, p. 233.

¹³ ‘Theater und Kunstnachrichten’, *Neue Freue Presse*, 25 October 1885, p. 6. Also see Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, p. 267. Another context that seems to have been more influential was the possibility of acquiring the Vienna citizenship in connection to Strauss’ 40th anniversary of creative life. See Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 243-68, 280.

¹⁴ ‘Habe ich im Zigeunerbaron dem ungarischen Rhythmus Rechnung tragen müssen – so war ich diesmal dem Wienerischen Genre (aus Absicht) zu huldigen – eifrigst besrebt. Es muß auch einmal etwas Wienerisches in meiner Bühnenarbeit auftauchen’ (Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 4, p. 82).

Jacob starts his account of the history of *Zigeunerbaron*'s creation from a note on what can only be understood as the geographical and cultural proximity of Hungary in the Viennese mind.¹⁵ He recounts an anecdote of how Hungarian gentry behaved in the Prater which for him reveals a number of features of the Viennese stereotype of a Hungarian: excessive high spirits, strength, the love of horses, the love of a bet and the love of display in front of women – a little exotic, likeable, and a little comical. This Hungarian stereotype and the whole urban folklore that Vienna created around the image of Hungary is an important factor in understanding Strauss' decision to pick the topic. No matter how embarrassing this would have been to those who fitted the stereotype – and there were plenty of them either in Hungary or just beyond Vienna city limits – they made an ideal subject for jokes and hence also for a successful operetta:

Just outside the gates of Vienna this Hungary began: with her aristocracy, her horses, her plains and her fiery wine. Hungary, where life was so bold, so closely related to a laughing death. How the Viennese loved this country, whose language they could never learn. [...] Hungary was strangely hot and cold, like its red pepper pods. [...] Extravagance was Hungary's key-note. In 1848 the whole nation – bourgeois, peasant, and aristocracy – had spent itself on an ideal. [...] It was the land of horse trainers, of bold men and beautiful women, the land of that successful policy that had wrested democracy and a constitution from the Imperial house. With enthusiastic sympathy Vienna looked forward to the sunrise that seemed to be coming to dazzle them from the East.¹⁶

¹⁵ Jacob, *Johann Strauss - Father and Son*, pp. 307-10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Recent scholarship on Strauss suggests that, rather than concerning himself with any of these sentiments, his approach to composing was motivated by pragmatic considerations, artistic rivalry and the need to cater to the interests of the public. Nevertheless, the subsequent Viennese reception of *Der Zigeunerbaron* was prepared by the decades of such ‘Magyar mania’ in the Habsburg capital. At the same time, *Der Zigeunerbaron* was an important landmark in Hungarian cultural history: the libretto was written by Vienna-based Hungarian journalist Igaz [Ignác] Schnitzer, who adapted and translated into German the original novel by Jókai. Schnitzler’s and Jókai’s involvement in the making of the operetta is well documented in Mailer’s edition.¹⁷ Apart from championing the idea of a simultaneous premiere – something that would re-emerge later with Strauss’ much less successful work, opera *Ritter Pásmán* [Knight Pazman]¹⁸ – Jókai also gave Schnitzer, and later Strauss, numerous suggestions and advice, going into such detail as to make sure that the costumes were faithful to eighteenth-century Hungarian fashion.¹⁹ During the premiere, he sat in the auditorium together with his wife, celebrated Hungarian actress Róza Laborfalvi, and

¹⁷ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 160, 222-327.

¹⁸ The failure to implement the idea with *Ritter Pásmán* was due to the change of the intendant in the Budapest Opera House from Gustav Mahler to Géza Zichy. See Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 5, pp. 59, 82, 86, 130, 196-97, 207-209. On the differences in Mahler’s and Zichy’s intendantships, see Prokopovych, *In the Public Eye*, pp. 127-47.

¹⁹ The reasons for Theater an der Wien’s receptiveness to such historical detail might have been its director Franz Jauner’s admiration of the historically accurate performance that in the German-speaking world was represented by the innovative and profoundly influential Meiningen Ensemble.

numerous other Hungarian writers and singers also attended: among them, Pálmay and Lajos Dóczy, with whom Strauss would collaborate later.

Obscured by the Viennese press' gossip about 'Transylvanian marriage' and other sensational aspects of Strauss' private life was a bigger issue that concerned the engaged public in the Habsburg capital. Numerous contradictory reports on whether the maestro was writing a comic opera or an operetta, and whether the premiere was to take place in the Hofoper or in Theater an der Wien, seemed to have contributed to the atmosphere of tense anticipation. Several in-between solutions, such as *Singspiel* and *Spieloper*, were also suggested.²⁰ This confusion, the traces of which can be found not only in the ambiguous nature of the final work but also in the subsequent discussion, had its origins in the divergent agendas of the key persons involved in the making of *Der Zigeunerbaron*. The original idea, purported by Jókai and congruent with the plans for a simultaneous premiere in the two opera houses in the two capital cities, was an opera. While Jókai's and the Hungarian elite's aims were mainly representational, other actors pursued their own agendas. Franz Jauner, Vienna's brilliant yet controversial theatre director who was held responsible for the disastrous fire of the Burgtheater and was now appointed the director of Theater an der Wien, lobbied for his new venue. Jauner was Strauss' long-term collaborator who also had Schnitzer, the author of the libretto, on his side. One of the most important music critics in the German-speaking world Eduard Hanslick considered the text of Jókai's novel unfit for an opera. Strauss' own attitude changed over time: while he never considered the simultaneous premiere as a viable proposition, his opinion changed from the preference to the Hofoper to eventually deciding on the Theater an der Wien.²¹ Once that decision was made, Jókai did not pursue the idea of a simultaneous premiere in the two cities any further.

²⁰ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 170, 211, 223-29, 285-86, 307.

²¹ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 223-24, 273-75.

The final plot of the operetta fitted perfectly with the idea of the political rapprochement in which Hungary's exoticism was comfortably reconciled with loyalty to Vienna. The main protagonist, Sándor Barinkay, is the son of a political refugee banished from Hungary. As a result of a recent amnesty he is allowed to return to his homeland and given back his family estate in the Bánát region. However, the land, devastated by the wars with the Ottomans, is deserted and poor Gypsies camp there. Barinkay falls in love with the Gypsy girl Saffi, who in the end turns out to be a descendant of the last pasha of Temesvár and to have grown up in the Buda Castle. After having discovered that Saffi is socially superior to him, Barinkay rejects her. However, a buried treasure is discovered after Saffi sees it in her dream and Barinkay, now wealthy, a 'Gypsy baron', is united with her. At this moment, war with Spain erupts and Barinkay, overwhelmed by patriotic feeling, resolves to donate his fortune to the war effort, and enrolls in the army together with the Gypsies of his estate – to fight for Austria. The last scene is set in Vienna, when he returns victorious and ennobled, and takes Saffi as his wife. The plot, therefore, had all the necessary elements that the Viennese associated with Hungary, along with the seemingly simple political message and subject matter fit for an operetta.

The Viennese reception surpassed even the most optimistic scenarios at the world premiere in the Theater an der Wien on 24 October 1885: *Die Presse* even reported that, 'Logenbillette erreichten eine Notirung, welche man seit den Zeiten der Sarah Bernhardt nicht mehr erlebt hatte, und Sitzplätze wurden um das Vier- und Fünffache ihres ursprünglichen Werthes ohne besondere Schwierigkeiten an den Mann gebracht' [Box tickets reached such quotes that have not been heard of since the times of Sarah Bernhardt, and seat tickets would be swindled [...] at quadruple and quintuple of their original price].²² In Jacob's

²² 'Theater- und Kunstdnachrichten. "Der Zigeunerbaron" von Johann Strauß (Erste Aufführung im Theater an der Wien)', *Die Presse*, 25 October 1885, p. 19.

account, ‘there was a *Carmen* atmosphere in the theatre. The public was tense with anticipation. Half a century of Magyar mania had prepared the way for this. When it was over the audience sobbed, raved, screamed’.²³

Strauss’ correspondence shows that he made sure the premiere was as spectacular as possible: the stage was open to the maximum, all the way to the ‘Papageno-gate’, and Jauner was once again true to his postulates of the historically accurate decorations and costumes. Prior to the premiere, he had specifically travelled to Győr, a city in Western Hungary to purchase ‘an original Gypsy carriage’, an old mare and ‘true rags’, to be used as costumes of the Gypsy camp. Numerous horses featured during the performance, as well, and it was a matter of course to Jauner that Barinkay would entry on a *Lippizaner*, the Habsburg breed.²⁴ Despite the visually spectacular staging, the majority of the Viennese papers concentrated primarily on the musical qualities of the new work, its stylistic ambiguity between operetta and opera and on how it fitted the Viennese tradition.²⁵ Acknowledging that a certain tribute to Hungarian melodic legacy had been made by including a *csárdás* and ‘das schöne ungarische Werberlied, eine magyarische Original-Melodie’ [the beautiful Hungarian recruitment song, an original Magyar melody], *Die Presse* nevertheless saw the operetta solely in terms of its contribution to the Vienna:

[...] daß die Wiener Gesellschaft in Johann Strauß nicht nur das mit dem Frohsinn seiner melodischen Begabung alle Welt erfreuende und anregende Landekind, sondern in ihm auch den schaffensstarken Vater der modernen Wiener Operette ehrt und schätzt [...]. Strauß hat mit seinem [...] neuen Opus [...] einen weiteren

²³ Jacob, *Johann Strauss*, p. 317.

²⁴ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 300-303.

²⁵ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 310-11.

gewichtigen Stein zu der Siegessäule herbeigetragen, welche die Wiener Schule auf dem Grabe der nach-offenbachischen Operette aufgerichtet hat' [The Viennese society venerates and treasures in Johann Strauss not only a compatriot that delighted the world with the cheerfulness of his melodic talent, but also the creatively potent father of modern Viennese operetta. With his new opus [...] Strauss laid another weighty stone to the victory column which the Viennese school erected on the grave of the post-Offenbach operetta].²⁶

The discussion of the degree to which Strauss' new work was truly *Wienerisch* also had its precursor. Part of the making of the image of Strauss as a Viennese composer, for which Schnitzer was chiefly responsible was the composer's purported ability to integrate the local element into a classical composition. As Schnitzer would later write, 'Man schätzt an dem Komponisten Johann Strauss mit recht Empfindung, Innigkeit und Treuherzlichkeit im Ausdruck und dabei jene Noblesse in der Form, die nicht selten an Klassiker des Liedes wie Schumann und Schubert gemahnen, und man findet es gerade darum umso auffälliger, daß derselbe Mund mitunter auch den musikalischen Jargon der Vorstadt zu sprechen pflegt' [One appreciates composer Johann Strauss for the perceptiveness, intimacy and faithfulness of expression and therefore the refinement of the form that is not infrequently reminiscent of the classics of the song such as Schumann and Schubert, and one finds it all the more striking that the same mouth sometimes speaks the musical jargon of the suburb].²⁷ 'Wir sahen den wienerischsten aller Wiener Komponisten mit magyrisch verschnürten Walzern, mit Märschen und Polkas erscheinen, die uns in Kalpak und Dolman zuerst gar wunderlich

²⁶ 'Theater- und Kunstnachrichten', *Die Presse*, 25 October 1885, pp. 19-20.

²⁷ Strauss' engagement with the Schrammel quartet in 1885 seems to have cemented this image. See Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 262, 277-78.

anmuthen' [We saw the most Viennese of all Viennese composers emerge with waltzes laced the Hungarian way, with marches and polkas, which in busby and dolman appeared whimsical to us], echoed ironically the *Neue Freie Fresse*, and went on to conclude in a rather outspoken act of cultural appropriation:

Aber nicht lange währt die Maskerade, bald bricht die Wiener Mundart des Meisters siegreich durch, und so bleibt der 'Zigeunerbaron' eine österreichische Operette, obgleich nur der letzte Act im Schatten des Stephanthurmes spielt. Sollte sie aber jenseits der Leitha als gemeinsame Angelegenheit [...] reclamirt werden, so beantragen wir, des lieben Friedens halber, den Ungarn einige Dialoge des Textbuches zu überlassen und uns die Musik zu behalten [But the masquerade does not last long, [and] soon the master's Viennese dialect breaks victoriously through, and so the *Zigeunerbaron* remains an Austrian operetta, even if only the last scene takes place in the shadows of St. Stephen's. Should it be claimed as a shared property ... beyond the Leitha, [however], we [would] request, for peace sake, to let the Hungarians have some dialogues from the libretto and to leave the music to us].²⁸

Vienna understood the Austrian-Hungarian cultural symbiosis in very specific terms and with its rather notorious sense of sophisticated cultural arrogance. In the view of the *Wiener Zeitung*, for example, while *Der Zigeunerbaron* remained 'ein österreichisch-ungarisches, man könnte sagen ein gemeinsames Bühnenwerk' [an Austro-Hungarian, one could say a common stage work], there was no doubt to whom the operetta actually belonged in the first place: 'Alles in Allem hat Strauß Wien, und wieder Wien zuerst, ein Schatzkästlein voll Frohsinnsmusik gereicht' [All in all, Strauss handed Vienna, and foremost

²⁸ 'Theater und Kunstnachrichten', *Neue Freue Presse*, 25 October 1885, p. 4.

Vienna a treasure-box full of cheerful music].²⁹ The irony of the situation, however, was that while the Viennese celebrated the empire, their own local colour, and the love of entertainment that they saw as specifically Viennese, the Hungarians would not be deterred and celebrated themselves in a very different vein, as to them *Der Zigeunerbaron* symbolized recognition, even if a light-hearted one, by the imperial capital. Even the *Fremdenblatt* acknowledged this difference: ‘For Hungary, last night’s event meant the acquisition of a national opera, and Strauss should prepare himself today for the storm of enthusiasm with which the hot-blooded Magyars will celebrate him... What Hungarian composer surpasses him?!’³⁰ Hungarian papers were even more outspoken on this matter.

The first premiere of *Der Zigeunerbaron* outside Vienna took place in Budapest a month after the world premiere, on 27 November 1885, when the work was performed in German, and half a year later, on 16 March 1886 in Hungarian, in the Popular Theatre. In the meantime, Strauss made a few final modifications to the script in early 1886, including the important addition of the Rákóczi March. While the Viennese papers reported positively on the changes, its inclusion proved even more decisive to the success of the Budapest premiere that year and later on. On 23 February 1886 the operetta was already celebrating its 100th performance in the Theater an der Wien, at which Jókai and Schnitzer were also present.³¹ In 1894, the fiftieth jubilee of Strauss’ creative life was celebrated with great pomp in both Vienna and Budapest, and *Der Zigeunerbaron* was the main item on the programme. Strauss himself conducted during the Budapest premiere, and both Hungarian and Viennese

²⁹ ‘Theater an der Wien’, *Wiener Zeitung*, 25 October 1885, p. 4.

³⁰ Quoted in Crittenden, *Johann Strauss and Vienna*, p. 205.

³¹ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 3, pp. 324-327.

newspapers were full of praise.³² Once again the Hungarian elites seized their chance to appropriate Strauss for their own political purposes: in a statement poorly disguised as praise for Strauss' mastery, Count Albert Apponyi, at that point the leader of the oppositional National Party (*Nemzeti Párt*) and later speaker of the Hungarian Parliament and Minister of Education, wished that 'man die Ungarn in Wien immer so verstünde, wie Strauss sie verstehe' [that Hungarians would always be understood in Vienna as Strauss understood them]. Strauss was presented with numerous wreaths decorated with Hungarian tricolour bands in the course of the evening.³³ Only a few months later, on 10 March 1895, Strauss' other work, by then his most popular and celebrated operetta, *Die Fledermaus*, premiered in the Budapest Opera House. Looking at the Hungarian reception of *Der Zigeunerbaron* in light of this earlier premiere reveals several features of Strauss' 'Hungarian' operetta in an even sharper light.³⁴ Four years later, Strauss died in Vienna. The sense of grief for the waltz of the good old times certainly played its role in the reception of Strauss' work in the early twentieth century in Budapest and elsewhere – though in a different vein in Vienna.

Six years after Strauss' death, twenty years after its Viennese premiere, and five years before it would be performed in the Viennese Opera House, *Der Zigeunerbaron* made it to the stage of the Budapest Opera House on 27 May 1905 – much to the joy of the local public. As *Pester Lloyd's* chief critic August Beer put it succinctly, 'Es war eine lustige Contrebande, welche selbst die strengsten kritischen Grenzwächter lächelnd passiren ließen' [it was a cheery contraband, which could make even the most strict and critical border guards

³² See Ferenc Brodszky, *Johann Strauss életének krónikája* (Budapest, 1966), 128-29. Also see Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 7, pp. 298-301.

³³ Mailer, *Johann Strauss: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 7, p. 300.

³⁴ Prokopovych, *In the Public Eye*, pp. 203-5.

smile].³⁵ In fact, this was an attempt by the Opera administration to compete with the Popular Theatre and other commercially minded music enterprises that have successfully played Strauss earlier. The premiere was preceded, however, by an important incident in the history of the Budapest Opera House that in a no less symbolic way indicated the continuing presence of the very Hungary that became the subject of Strauss' operetta, and the Hungary that the progressive press and others dissatisfied with the last thirty or so years of local politics chose as a target of their attacks.

A series of scandals shattered Hungarian politics after the notorious 'election with a handkerchief' (*Zsebkendőszavazás*) on 18 November 1904 and the subsequent elections that finally ended the thirty-year rule of the Liberal Party. István Keglevich, the notorious former intendant of the Opera House, the National Theatre, and the Comedy Theatre, was among those in the midst of the public scandal, as was the former Prime Minister István Tisza – the son of Kálmán Tisza, likewise a former prime minister who appointed Keglevich to the intendant's position in 1886, and himself a highly controversial politician. The spending of public money on pensions offered to representatives of the former aristocratic and liberal political elite became a matter of public dispute on the pages of local dailies.³⁶

[Figure 2] 'A mulátság végén' [At the end of entertainment], *Bolond Istók*, 30 April 1905, p. 7. Satire on István Keglevich.

Apart from authoritarian methods of directorship and overspending, Keglevich's intendantship was remembered, and widely condemned, for the choices in the repertoire. Yet

³⁵ A. B. [August Beer], 'Der "Zigeunerbaron" im Opernhause', *Pester Lloyd*, 28 May 1905, p. 8.

³⁶ See further Prokopovich, *In the Public Eye*, pp. 206-208.

on 29 May 1905, the second day of *Der Zigeunerbaron* in the Opera House, Keglevich lay dead as an outcome of an aristocratic duel that resulted from a quarrel with Károly Hentz, the leader of the Popular Party (*Néppart*). The duel dominated the local dailies. It would not be an exaggeration to call the event, as many of them did, a ‘bloody sensation’.³⁷ The coincidence of timing was deeply symbolic: Keglevich was the quintessential embodiment of the ‘old Hungary’ of Kálmán Tisza and his unilateral ruling style. He seemed to have embodied all the best and the worst that stood behind that past history brought to a logical end.

And yet, ironically, Keglevich’s death also put a symbolic end to the Hungary that was the subject of Strauss’ operetta. In essence, he also embodied the Hungary that Vienna knew, loved and laughed at: an autocrat, a soldier, a money waster, a colourful, explosive, and arrogant character, and a deeply loyal Habsburg subject. With him, nearly twenty years of Budapest theatre life was vanishing for good – and that was an occasion to celebrate rather than mourn. The sheer absurdity of a conflict that would have been considered ridiculous had it not had a fatal outcome highlighted, in vivid strokes, the continuing presence in the public realm of this ‘old Hungary’ with its aristocratic values, habits and lifestyle – and, at the same time, signalled the beginning of its end. Just as the gentlemen in the Liberal Party no longer decided on how the country should be developing, so their men no longer dominated the affairs of Budapest’s main cultural institution.

In this context, a justification for performing *Der Zigeunerbaron* in the Hungarian capital’s major music institution was needed and it was found in a different sort of patriotism that further highlighted how the operetta’s complex messages could be further appropriated for new political purposes: ‘Nálunk a Cigánybárót nem csupán a cigányok juttatták diadalra, nem azoknak köszönhetette sikerét a magyar földön. Bennünket más szempontból is érdekelt a

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 217-220.

bécsi keringőkirály, a német operette atyamesterének ezen kiváló alkotása. Hazafias örömünk is telhetett ebben a műben. Nemcsak azért, mert magyaros a tárgya, a cselekvény színhelye és a szereplők jórésze, hanem mert Jókai génuszának varázsa nyilatkozott meg abban [In Hungary it was not only Gypsies who transmitted *Der Zigeunerbaron* to victory, its success on Hungarian soil is not due to them. ... We could also feel patriotic in this work. Not only because its subject, the scenery and most of the protagonists are Hungarian, but because the enchantment of Jókai's genius manifests itself there].³⁸ A much more socially inclusive but, at the same time, ethnically exclusive vision of the Hungarian nation seemed to be emerging in the discussion, the one quite different to Jacob's depiction of a flamboyant Hungarian aristocrat in the Prater that Vienna admired and laughed at half a century earlier. But while there was no place in this new nation for divisive figures of opinionated noblemen such as Keglevich, Strauss' bowdy protagonist Barinkay seemed to be still welcome there.

The audience was enthusiastic and almost all the main songs were repeated, which resulted in the performance lasting until 11 o'clock.³⁹ Many concluded that there could not have been a better place to stage the operetta than the Opera House, and the tickets were naturally sold out in advance.⁴⁰ In fact the demand was so high that, in one instance at least, it led to conflicts at the cashier. The fact that the Budapest public has fully internalized and appropriated *The Zigeunerbaron* as part of its cultural tradition was readily visible in the attitude of the majority of the audience:

³⁸ 'A Cigánybáró az Operában', *Pesti Hírlap*, 28 May 1905, p. 18.

³⁹ B. G., 'Der Zigeunerbaron im Opernhause', *Budapester Tagblatt*, 28 May 1905, p. 8.

⁴⁰ A. B. [August Beer], 'Der 'Zigeunerbaron' im Opernhause', *Pester Lloyd* 28 May 1905, p. 8.

Das elegante Publikum, welches sich heute zur Premiere einfand und unser glänzendes Opernhaus nahezu vollständig füllte, plagten keinerlei musikästhetische Skrupel. Es genoss in vollen Zügen die liebenswürdigen Offenbarungen des genialen Meisters der Töne und feierte Reminiszenzen. Spricht es nicht am beredtesten für den inneren Werth dieser ‘Operette,’ dass die Zuhörer von heute eigentlich zu keiner Premiere erschienen sind, sondern ein ihnen längst bekanntes, liebes Werk von neuem hören wollten! Von neuem und in womöglich künstlerisch werthvollerer Besetzung, als sie uns Operettenbühnen zu bieten im Stande sind! [The elegant public that showed up today for the premiere and almost fully filled our splendid Opera House was untroubled by any musical or aesthetic scruples. It enjoyed to the full the amiable revelations of the celebrated master of music and brought back reminiscences. Does it not speak of the inner worth of this ‘operetta’ that the listeners did not, in fact, come to a premiere but wished to listen to a long familiar, favourite work renewed!]⁴¹

And while far from all newspapers were that positive, the premiere thus initiated a longer discussion on the nature of the Opera House as an institution, its identity, and the place of operetta in its repertoire. In an overwhelming celebratory spirit that followed the premiere and was further enhanced by Keglevich’s death, this larger discussion, which had haunted and would continue to haunt the Budapest Opera House for decades, nevertheless did not influence the reception of *Der Zigeunerbaron* in a negative way. Even those critical of the performance, such as, for example, *Budapesti Hírlap*, admitted that the interest of the public was unprecedented and its expectations fully satisfied. Others concluded that, while Strauss’ work undoubtedly had a Hungarian flavour, the Budapest premiere had enhanced it with a skilful performance of the ‘Rákóczi March’ in the second act:

⁴¹ –dö, ‘Der Zigeunerbaron’, *Neues Politisches Volksblatt*, 28 May 1905, p. .

Ein eigenartiger Vorzug der Musik liegt in ihrem ungarischen Charakter, der durch den Schauplatz, die Personen bedingt war. [...] Durch weite Strecken der Partitur pochen laut und voll die nationalen Rhythmen und für die Budapester Ausgabe wurde überdies mit der Einfügung des gesungenen Rákóczimarsches im zweiten Finale die ungarische Note noch intensiver betont. Strauß hat sich mit überraschender Sicherheit in das ihm fremde Element hineingefunden [A peculiar advantage of this music lies in its Hungarian character, conditioned by the scenery and the protagonists. [...] National rhythms pulse through long stretches of the score in a loud and ample manner and, above them, through the insertion of the ‘Rákóczi March’ in the second final act of the Budapest performance, the Hungarian note was even more intensely accentuated. Strauss has come to terms with the foreign to him element with surprising certainty].⁴²

Whereas Strauss was no stranger to the ‘Rákóczi March’, and while modifying the original script and introducing local references on stage had been a practice in the Opera House previously, the use of the ‘Rákóczi March’ was not. A traditional tune associated with the Rákóczi uprising, it provoked a heated discussion on several occasions previously but now it appeared that the formerly forbidden, subversive Hungarian revolutionary song was part of the legitimate musical heritage of the Dual Monarchy and could even be played in the opera.⁴³ It is only logical that those who agreed with the operetta’s original political message would, along with *Pester Lloyd*’s Beer, see this as a highly successful musical enterprise and

⁴² A. B. [August Beer], ‘Der “Zigeunerbaron” im Opernhause’, *Pester Lloyd*, 28 May 1905, p. 8.

⁴³ Prokopovych, *In the Public Eye*, pp. 213-14.

a worthy addition to the Opera House's repertoire. Along with Beer, the journalist of Budapest's leading German-language newspaper, the opera audience indulged in the familiar text and melodies that had by then become so recognizable but that in their memories went back to the earlier performances of 1885:

Durch diese Musik rollt ungarisches und Wiener Blut in pikanter Mischung. Und ein starker Tropfen Zigeunerblut, der sie noch um einen Grad interessanter färbt, [...]
Dazwischen gibt es prickelnde Musik, [...] Altvertrautes, das längst im Ohre festsetzt, wie beispielsweise [...] der prächtige Schatzwalzer, der flotte ungarische Huldigungschor. [...] Der dritte Akt, dürftiger in der Auslese, wurde mit der Ballettmusik aus 'Ritter Pazman' effektiv ausgeschmückt. Sie fügt sich zwanglos in dieses Wiener Schlußtableau. Zuerst eine Polka voll neckischer Zierlichkeit, dann ein *Andantino grazioso*, eigentlich eine langsame Mazurka von noble Zuschnitt. Es folgt ein Walzer theils heiter-kapriziös, theils elegant geschwungen und endlich ein Csárdás mit einem stimmungsvollen elegischen 'Lassu' und einem moussierenden 'Friss' [Through this music Hungarian and Viennese blood spin in a spicy mixture. And a strong drop of Gypsy blood added to it, which colours them interestingly to a further degree. [...] In between there is tingling music[,] ...a [f]amiliar [one], the one that stuck in the ear long ago, such as [...] the magnificent treasure waltz, [and] the brisk Hungarian [...] chorus. [...] The third act, more meagre in [music] selection, was effectively embellished with the ballet music from *Ritter Pazman*. It fitted naturally into this final Viennese tableau. First, a full Polka of mischievous elegance, then an *andantino grazioso*, which is actually a slow mazurka of noble layout. There follows

a waltz, partly carefree and capricious, partly swinging elegantly, and finally a *csárdás* with a charming elegiac *adagio* and an effervescent *fresco*].⁴⁴

In admiring this *Auslese*, Beer echoed some of the excited reports from the Viennese premiere two decades earlier – a lucky combination of colours and musical traditions, even if the Viennese traditionally undermined the merits of the libretto itself or the significance and authenticity of the Hungarian tunes – but drew different conclusions from those that they did. For the majority of the Budapest public have always understood *Der Zigeunerbaron* as their own, and the dawn of the modern era that seemed to be taking the old Hungary away filled them with a sense of pride that they felt the Viennese musical genius had bestowed upon them.

Nothing would be more different than a sentiment – or rather a resentment – that emerged among the Viennese audience at the premiere of *Der Zigeunerbaron* in the Hofoper in 1910. Whereas in Budapest the public has clearly learned to appreciate the presence of operettas in the Opera House (something that had to do also with a somewhat different role the operetta, and the operetta theatres as institutions played in the national agenda in Hungary), in Vienna in 1910 the main discussion still was whether and to what degree it was appropriate to stage Strauss in the Opera House in the first place. Ironically, the issue at stake remained very similar in both cities and centred on the old question about the nature of the Opera House as an institution and its ability to reach out to the broader, less elitist public in the twentieth century. The *Neue Freie Presse* argued rather cautiously for the Opera House's inadequacy for such a task:

⁴⁴ A. B. [August Beer], 'Der "Zigeunerbaron" im Opernhause', *Pester Lloyd*, 28 May 1905, p. 8.

Die Vorstellung, mit Liebe angefaßt, sorgfältig herausgeputzt und mit ersten Sängern besetzt, hat reichen Beifall geweckt; im zweiten Akt ereignete sich der seltene Fall, daß das Publikum die Wiederholung eines Chores erzwang und auch Saffi und Barinkay ihr Duett zweimal singen ließ. Dirigent, Chor, Orchester und Sänger schienen mit wahren Behagen in die Musik einzutauchen [...]. Ihr, der Musik, mögen sich auch weit die Pforten des Hofoperntheaters öffnen dürfen; der Text freilich, insbesondere so weit ihn die derb-drastische Figur des guten Schweinezüchters Zsupan breit beherrscht, muß sich schon ein wenig in das Haus zwängen [The performance, lovingly handled, thoroughly perked up, and filled with first-class singers, has aroused rich applause; in the second act the rare event occurred that the audience demanded the repetition of a chorus, and also had Saffi and Barinkay sing their duet twice. The conductor, chorus, orchestra, and singers seemed to dive into the music with real pleasure [...]. It is to [...] the music [that] the doors of the Court Opera may also open wide; the text, however, especially in as far as it is dominated by the ruddy figure of the good pig breeder Zsupan, will still need to squeeze in a little to enter the house].⁴⁵

A day later, Vienna's leading music critic Julius Korngold echoed those sentiments in the same newspaper in a feuilleton dedicated to the premiere, emphasizing once again that it was the music, and not the libretto, that had a true value in the operetta: 'Textlich ergeben sich Hindernisse. Nicht leicht für Zsupan, sein Borstenvieh im Operntheater zu züchten; sein grelles Magyarisch-Deutsch will ebenso gewöhnt sein, wie die drastische, derbkomische Darstellung von Zigeunertum und Zigeunersitten. Aber immer wenn der Dialog ein wenig herabstimmt [...] kommt eine Musiknummer, die mit einem Schlage das Niveau hebt' [There

⁴⁵ 'Hofopermatinee. "Der Zigeunerbaron"', *Neue Freie Presse*, 27 December 1910, p. 9.

are obstacles in the text. It is not easy for Zsupan to breed his drift of swine in the Opera Theatre; his garish Magyar-German would be as habituated there as a drastic, bowdy portrayal of Gypsies and their customs. But whenever the dialogue diminishes a little, comes a music number and lifts the *niveau* with a stroke].⁴⁶ But even in terms of music there was no way for Korngold that *Der Zigeunerbaron* would ever compare to *Die Fledermaus*: ‘Eisenstein und Rosalinde, das wienerische Paar, trennt von Barinkay und Saffi, dem ungarischen, mehr als das Temperament und Nationalcharakter. [...] Im “Zigeunerbaron” herrscht eine gedämpftere Fröhlichkeit, der ungarische Lokaltone beschwert den Strauß’schen Rhythmus, und die Laute der Empfindung verflachen wiederholt im Sentimentalen’ [Eisenstein and Rosalinde, the Viennese couple, are separated from Barinkay and Saffi, the Hungarian one, by more than just temperament and national character. ... A more subdued gaiety rules in ‘Zigeunerbaron’, the Hungarian location weights Strauss’ rhythm down, and the voice of creation is repeatedly flattened in sentimentality].⁴⁷

Acknowledging the merits of the performance that in his opinion still permitted the spirit of an operetta to enter the empire’s main Opera House, Korngold concluded with the statement about Vienna’s unfaltering musical superiority. Somewhat conveniently forgetting that Budapest had by then become an operetta centre on its own right, and that the many operetta composers currently working in Vienna were actually Hungarian, he stated that ‘das hat gewiß seinen Grund darin, daß man gegenwärtig in Wien noch immer mit mehr Talent Operetten macht als anderwärts; daß aber die Operette heute Wiens wichtigsten Kunstexportartikel darstellt, muß nachdenklich stimmen’ [this is certainly due to the fact that in Vienna there are still more operettas composed with talent than elsewhere; but on

⁴⁶ Julius Korngold, ‘Feuilleton. Hofopertheater (Zur Aufführung von Strauß’ “Zigeunerbaron”’, *Neue Freie Presse*, 28 December 1910, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

reflection one must state that the operetta is now Vienna's most important artistic export article, as well].⁴⁸ In a similar fashion, Max Graf, another respected Viennese music critic, imagined encountering his 'acquaintance' Zsupan in the Opera House on the day of the premiere:

Du trittst zwar breitbeinig auf, wie du es von der Puszta her gewohnt bist, aber ich merke doch, du fühlst dich ein wenig befangen, dein Gelächter ist nicht so voll wie sonst und du greifst öfters verlegen nach deinem borstigen Schnurrbart [...]. Nein, Zsupan bacsi, du bist hier, wo du bei dreifachen Preisen Sensation machen sollst, gewiß nicht an deinem richtigen Ort, und wir wollen einander bald in einem Operettentheater aus vollem Halse anlachen [You appear as you are accustomed to from the old days in the puszta, with your spread legs, but I note that you feel a little confused, your laughter is not as bursting as previously, and you pick your bristly moustache more often, embarrassed [...]. No, uncle Zsupan, here where you should be making a sensation at tripled prices you are certainly not in your right place, and we would soon like to laugh at each other from the top of our voices in an operetta theatre].⁴⁹

Although not all Viennese newspapers were that dismissive, even those who appreciated the effort and thought to highlight the positive aspects of the premiere, such as the *Wiener*

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁹ Dr. Max Graf, 'Theater und Kunst. Hofoper. Zum erstenmal: "Der Zigeunerbaron"', Operette von Johann Strauß', *Neues Wiener Journal*, 27 December 1910, p. 11.

*Zeitung*⁵⁰, struggled to find a place for Strauss' work that was not only perceived as too bowdy, but also, ironically, as too Hungarian, in the Vienna Opera House. Perhaps the most succinct was the verdict of the art and theatrical journal *Der Humorist*: 'Gehört der "Zigeunerbaron" in die Hofoper? Diese Frage wurde in letzter Zeit oft gestellt. Die Aufführung gab darauf die Antwort. Sie lautet: "Nein!"' [Does 'Der Zigeunerbaron' belong to the Royal Opera House? This question has been often asked lately. The premiere provided an answer: "No!"]⁵¹

[Figure 3] Strange Harmony [To the reinstatement of the Fejérváry cabinet]

Bolond Istók, 22 October 1905.

Despite its supposedly light genre and subject matter, Johann Strauss' *Zigeunerbaron* was a musical work of complex symbolic meaning but its overarching celebratory narrative allowed a variety of distinct political and cultural sentiments to appeal to its diverse publics at the time when these publics were increasingly growing apart. The analysis of the differences between the operetta's Viennese and Budapest reception provokes us to rethink the magnitude of the operetta's reconciliatory potential. Although undeniably popular in both capitals of the Dual Monarchy, its seemingly simple plot and political message was perceived differently by these divergent publics as time went by. For the Viennese *Zigeunerbaron* was an operetta full of local (i.e. Viennese) dialect, imbued with self-evident political message that glorified of the empire and its capital city, was a product of their metropolitan cultural milieu and provided a chance to amuse oneself on the occasion. For Hungarians it provided

⁵⁰ 'Theater, Kunst und Literatur. (Hofopertheater)', *Wiener Abendpost. Beilage zur Wiener Zeitung*, 27 December 1910, p. 3

⁵¹ 'Theater und Kunst (Hofoper)', *Der Humorist*, 1 January 1911, p. 2.

an opportunity to celebrate the recognition of their history and culture, even if a light-hearted one, in and by the Viennese public – and increasingly also a musical work that belonged to their national tradition. Put simply, while Hungarians appreciated *Der Zigeunerbaron* the most for its Hungarian colour even at the 1885 Vienna premiere and later at home as well, the Viennese prized it *the least* for it. As the Viennese and Budapest audiences applauded to waltzes laced ‘the Hungarian way’, their critics competed over Strauss’ legacy and its true political allegiances over his grave. Certainly the audiences of 1885 were very different from those of the early twentieth century. As the opera houses of Austria-Hungary modernized, professionalized and adapted to the growing competition from other entertainment institutions each in their own way, their audiences transformed into more attentive and critical ones. The Viennese and Budapest press reported on this change in the magnitude of detail. The death of former intendant István Keglevich in Budapest certainly inspired a critical rethinking of the legacy of the ‘old Hungary’ that he represented, the Budapest press abhorred and the Viennese appreciated and liked to laugh over. But the divergence of the Budapest 1905 and Vienna 1910 premieres went deeper into the complex set of messages which Strauss’ operetta directed at its different publics. The richness of critical interpretation in both cities highlights the nature of the celebratory culture of the late Habsburg Monarchy that, on the one hand, served to reconfirm existing imperial loyalties and national sentiments and, on the other hand, provided for an impressive degree of flexibility to accommodate very different celebratory agendas and practices. However, while in Strauss’ lifetime it was still possible to envelop these agendas and practices with imperial pomp and jubilant laughter, in the first decade of the twentieth century that effort seems to have become increasingly subdued, discordant and half-hearted.