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Review of the art institutions associated with Károly Somossy in terms of communication

Abstract

This paper is an edited version of my thesis defended at Károli Gáspár Reformed University, Faculty of Arts Administration and Arts Management. I undertake the task of examining the communication of the entertainment institutions created by Károly Somossy, a highly influential figure of the time, from the time of the Compromise to the turn of the century after the Millennium celebrations (1867–1903). In my paper, I will explore the importance of communication, PR and marketing in the modern sense of the term, the tools were available for this, who used them and how, how much audience appeal they had, and whether it is plausible to say that the printed press was the most important communication tool of the period and, if so, how it was used by the entertainment industry. The research method I chose was to compare the popular press products of the time, the advertisements and advertising concepts of the various art institutions, after clarifying the basic concepts of communication. I have preserved the spelling of the period in the quotations. For reasons of space, I compare the data and communication of the largest and best documented institution, the Somossy Nightclub (Mulató)¹ and the

¹ Since there have been several Somossy Orpheums over the decades, it is important to note that although our greatest operettas were performed in the former New Somossy Nightclub, later the Király Theatre, I am

Budapest Operetta Theatre, which still operates these days in the same building. This is the building which, for almost ten years, from 1894 until Somossy's death in 1903, defined our understanding of nightlife, entertainment and amusement, and paved the way in Hungary for the uneducated child of the muses, operetta, to take off on its world-conquering journey.

Keywords: Károly Somossy, Budapest Operetta Theatre, PR, marketing, communication, entertainment industry, theatre

Somossy and his art institutions

The now almost forgotten 'godfather' of the entertainment industry, from the time of the Compromise over one hundred and fifty years ago until the turn of the century after the Millennium celebrations (1867–1903), was Károly Somossy (1828–1903), also known as the emperor of life. According to the available data, he created the name '*Pesti Broadway*' ('Broadway of Pest') (Buza 2020, 126), his influence is embedded in the stones and walls of Budapest, and although most of his buildings and works have disappeared like the ill-fated gamblers of the happy peacetime, his memory and undeniable merits live on with us night after night in our theatres, plays and operettas throughout the Hungarian capital. Just as Russian literature emerged from Gogol's *Cloak*, so, in fact, the modern Hungarian entertainment industry emerged from Somossy's tailsuit, or more stylistically from his top hat, who, although he did not invent anything that had not existed before, nevertheless, with his own methods and vision, developed and established to perfection several genres of entertainment, which later became the originals in Hungary and served as an example for Europe. Many tried to copy his ideas that wore immense elegance and style, but as the era came to an end and new genres and customs emerged, they could not keep up with the pace, and many failed. Among them Somossy himself, whose downfall in his twilight years was compounded by the fact that, at the turn of the century, he was no longer able to recognise the rule he had followed throughout his life: that the world is always changing and that, to remain successful, we must change.

relying on the data of the Budapest Operetta Theatre at Nagymező Street 17, because this institution is still in operation and we have comparable data.

The concept of communication

But before I get into the communication of the entertainment industry art institutions associated with Károly Somossy, let's look at the concept of communication. In the dictionary of foreign words and expressions (Bakos 2002, 41), the term has four meanings. The Latin form of the word is *communicatio*, -onis n Meaning: 1. disclosure 2. performance, surrender 3. *ret* to communicate ideas to listeners. In Horányi 1977, 5, *communication is lat* 1. information, (news) communication, 2. *inf* the communication and exchange of information by means of some device or signalling system (language, gesture, etc.), 3. *rarely* communication, connection, transport, contact. The meaning of communication can be understood as a process of communication based on the mutual exchange of information.

Based on the above definitions, we can state that communication is a two-way process and requires a sender to encode and transmit the message and a receiver to decode and interpret this message. The more effective the communication, the easier it is to interpret the message. But what makes communication effective and what is its purpose? In all cases, it is to convey the message as clearly and concisely as possible, facilitating mutual understanding between sender and receiver. Other objectives may include conflict resolution, social, professional and personal development, enhancing cooperation and building relationships.

In general, four types of communication are distinguished, however, they can be of different types. By type, communication can be verbal or non-verbal, visual or written. In this paper I will deal with the latter two. Verbal communication (Bányász 2008) is ancient to humans, dating back some 40,000 years, fast and direct, devoid of tools, with speech as its basic form, sound as its perceptual form, bound in space and time, open and loose in structure, with a poorer vocabulary, less information and message, and the listener's feedback can shape further text formation, and in all cases accompanied by non-verbal signs (mimicry, gesticulation). Types: face-to-face or mediated communication. We also include language, tone of voice, volume and pace of speech. "Non-verbal communication is the set of analogue linguistic codes that accompany verbal communication. It is characterised by the fact that it is not always an intended communication, but can be learned and controlled. Its perception is not conscious, there is no agreed system of signs, but its use is determined

by socialised rules and conventions. Regardless of this, it is culture-specific. In contrast to the communal nature of verbality, it is more personal and difficult to decode and misunderstand" (Kővágó 2009, 155–156). Types of verbality include posture (body language), facial expression, touch, eye contact and gestures. Written communication dates back to 6000–5000 BC, it is slow and indirect, instrument-intensive, unlimited in space and time, has a closed and bound structure, more time for precise expression, rich vocabulary, can convey a lot of information but no direct feedback, accompanied by few non-verbal signs. This can be any written medium, newspaper, blog, e-mail, article, book, etc. In the case of visual communication, the information channel allows the message to communicate visually to the recipient through graphic elements, which can be illustrations, pictures, colours, etc. It can be expressed through drawings, posters, electronic media, television or internet communication.

PR, marketing and advertising

According to the digital textbook of the Károli Gáspár Reformed University (Sepsi and Lázár 2013), the concept of PR is the art and practice of building trust. "The Hungarian Public relations Association's definition, adopted at its 1993 General Assembly, is 'the organisation of an organisation's communication'.² The textbook does not consider PR as a separate science, but considers it part of the science of management and organisation. For marketing and PR, he considers the *Kotler model* (see Kotler 1998) to be valid, where marketing and PR are separate sets with a common intersection.

According to the textbook mentioned above, marketing briefly means 'the profitable satisfaction of needs', and the authors cite the American Marketing Association's definition of marketing as an organisational function and process that creates, communicates and conveys value to customers and cultivates customer relationships in ways that benefit both the organisation and its stakeholders. "Turning market information outside the company into an internal

² "PR is a system of activities that deals with the relationship between an audience and an organisation [...]. It assumes the building of bilateral (feedback) relations, adapts to the interests of society, shapes and, if necessary, modifies the behaviour of the organisation and its employees [...]. The purpose is to create an image in people's minds—an 'image'—that is desirable and conveys recognition. Because whatever you believe is valuable, you demand it, you pay for it, you vote for it [...]. There is no analogous Hungarian equivalent, but its technical terms can be: public opinion forming, public relations, public relations management, public relations building, etc." See Sepsi and Lázár 2013.

resource through market research, competitive analysis and understanding consumer needs. The object of marketing can be a product, service, good, intellectual product, idea, idea, political personality or celebrity.³

The concept of advertising is most precisely defined in *Act XLVIII of 2008 on Essential Conditions of and Certain Limitations to Business Advertising Activity*.⁴ Accordingly, "advertising is any communication, information or representation intended to promote the sale or otherwise use of a good or service or, in connection with that purpose, to promote the name, trade mark or activities of an undertaking or to increase the recognition of goods or services."⁵

Communication between dualism and the turn of the century in the Kingdom of Hungary and the capital

After the fall of the War of Independence in 1848/1849, the Habsburg court declared martial law in the interests of national defence, in which the idea of freedom of the press did not fit. The era of neo-absolutism dawned, in which press affairs were managed directly from the Burg and the Austrian press law was taken as a basis. The most important of these was the 1852 press regulations. The fact that the military courts exercised jurisdiction over the press can rightly be seen as a complete repression of the press. The royal decree of June 1865 again entrusted the administration of press affairs to the Council of Governors. After the restoration of constitutionality, the Andrassy government re-enacted the 1848 law, which received a lot of criticism for its numerous shortcomings. In 1868, the Council of Ministers stated that "the situation in the press relations can be considered abnormal because of the absence of our laws."⁶

3 Ibid.

4 *Act XLVIII of 2008 on Essential Conditions of and Certain Limitations to Business Advertising Activity*. Online access: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0800048.tv> (last visited: March 29, 2024).

5 General advertising rules, what constitutes advertising? Online access: <https://reklamjog.hu/reklamszabalyok/altalanos/mi-minosul-reklamnak> (last visited: March 29, 2024).

6 The Criminal Code of 1878 further complicated the question of press regulation, as it repealed the misdemeanour provisions of the Press Act and placed them in the system of criminal law, so by the end of the century a rather fragmented regulation had developed, which later caused a lot of confusion of interpretation and concepts. In the 1880s, Kálmán Tisza wanted to reform the laws governing the press, but he was unsuccessful, although there were some improvements in certain details, such as the Code of Criminal

The governments of dualism saw it as their strategic task to boost culture and education, where illiteracy was a serious problem. According to the statistics available (T. Kiss 2013, 11–42), 68.7 percent of the population over the age of six in 1869 and 58.8 percent in the 1880s could not read and write, although this figure had fallen to 41 percent by the 1900s. It is therefore clear that getting any kind of written or printed marketing or press product to the public with such numbers was very difficult. However, these statistics refer to the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. To get a more complete picture, we must also look at the statistics of the capital of the last quarter of the century, which fortunately show a much more favourable picture: 21.4% of the Hungarian native-speaking population in Budapest were illiterate in 1880, 24.3% in 1890 and 20.5% in 1900 (Áfra Nagy 1930, 111). At these rates, there was a good opportunity to effectively communicate the combined impact of written PR, marketing and advertising.

As early as the Middle Ages, in the 12th century (especially in France), wine tasting was a common trade, with wine tasters typically forming groups, shouting around the city and offering free wine tastings. In fact, they can be seen as the forerunners of the later proclaimers and pedlars. With the spread of book printing, written advertising, which mainly promoted the low price of books, became more important. Advertising in the modern sense of the word became popular with the appearance of newspapers, weeklies, magazines and wall stickers. The first printed advertisements were artistically framed announcements, and after their mass dissemination, the press and street advertising can be considered the main carriers of advertising. Print newspapers were given a new impetus by the war of independence. This was the time when such prestigious newspapers as *Budapesti Híradó*, *Pesti Divatlap*, *Honderü*, *Pesti Napló*, *Vasárnapi Ujság*, *Budapest Hírlap*, *Magyar Sajtó*, *Pesti Hírnök*, among others, were published, *Idők Tanuja*, *Esti Lapok*, and *A Hon*, as well as the only fiction daily, *Hölgyfutár*, and the two most famous mock newspapers, *Üstökös* and *Bolond Miska*. (After the defeat of the War of Independence, the censorship allowed only one press product, the *Pesti Napló*, and in 1852 new daily newspapers were gradually allowed to appear.)

Procedure, which abolished the right to anonymity and allowed the author to be investigated even by means of a search warrant, and reduced the powers of the jury in favour of the court system, and the Industry Act introduced restrictions on advertising, but real press reform was yet to come until István Tisza's second premiership (1913–1917). See Koltay and Nyakas 2017.

The term *fake news* exploded into the public consciousness in 2017, when it was chosen as the word of the year.⁷ Today we consider a hoax that contains a deliberately published falsehood to be a fake news story, which has the clear purpose of disinformation, and therefore should not be confused with misinformation without propaganda. A hundred and fifty years ago, there was a lot of this kind of misinformation in the newspapers, because journalists didn't bother to check their information, so they usually copied it from each other. Thus it was that a lot of rumours, legends and fake news about Károly Somossy came to light; some of them may have been deliberate, but also a mixture of gossip and laziness. At the end of his life, Somossy spent his last days in total poverty at Nagymező útca 32, opposite his former orpheum. He rented a room from a laundress, the widowed Illésné Klein, which he shared with several others. Yet the news spread in the newspapers that he had been in a poorhouse, and then that he had died there. These reports were later largely corrected (perhaps at the request of relatives). In December 1902, the *Pesti Napló* wrote about the Germanised Somossy who had moved to a poorhouse:

"A careworn, snow-white, soldier from forty-eight, Károly Somossy, moved into the blanket-covered bed of the poorhouse yesterday. Somossy, who, among his other roles, also played a role in the defence of the homeland and freedom... Then with the army, his Hungarianism disappeared all around him, because this old man, who had retreated into a poorhouse, had a great part to play in the fact that Budapest is still more German than it should be."

The paper *Magyar Génius* published an obituary of him on 8 March 1903, stating that he died in the poorhouse:

"...The public knows a lot about the last years of the king of the night. How the Nagymező Street and the Király Street nightclubs went bust was reported in the newspapers. He would not have gone broke or recovered quickly had he not grown old. 'If I can no longer love and burn,' said the

⁷ See Flood, Allison. 2017. "Fake news is 'very real' word of the year for 2017." *The Guardian*, November 2. Online access: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/nov/02/fake-news-is-very-real-word-of-the-year-for-2017> (last visited: March 18, 2024).

seventy-year-old old man, ‘what’s the use of money?’ And he gave up. He grew old physically, mentally. He sometimes stumbled into the orpheum and watched the new stars with the feeling of a flagellant. It was not misery that tormented him, but the thought that he could no longer hire the merry, frivolous fairies for his orpheum, for himself. And he died—in the poorhouse.”

It is typical of these contemporary news stories that they do not report facts, but tell stories. The journalist tells the story in a way that makes us feel as if we are there, at the scene, usually with a pathos, heartfelt embellishment, a colourful plot, exaggerated writing. In the print press, Somossy can only be read in his advertisements or his requests for correction, he has not made any statements as a private person. This was probably a conscious decision on his part: he did not even allow his own stars and celebrities whom he discovered to speak in front of the press, thus increasing interest in the unknown. The quotation from him in the article was most probably merely in the mind of a journalist with a vivid imagination. The above examples show how difficult it is to reconstruct after all this time what really happened, because some of what is written is true, and the rest is pure fiction for the sake of hype.

The life of Károly Somossy

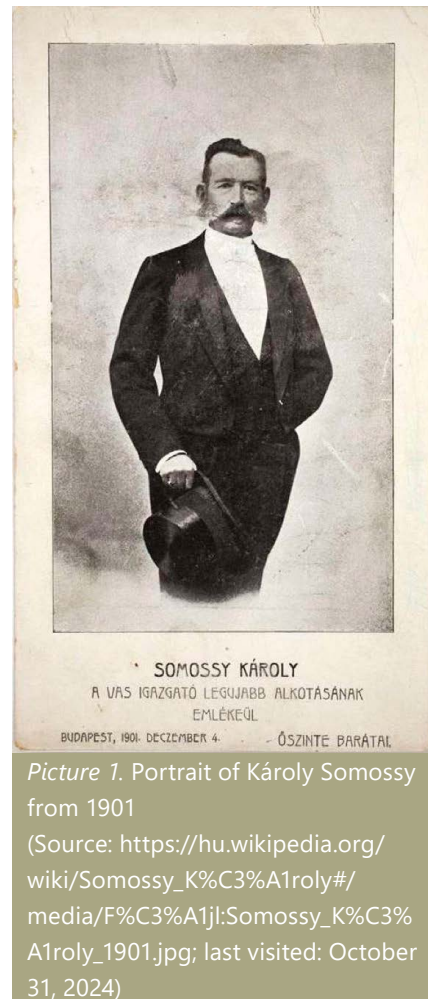
The encyclopaedias are wrong both about his birth and death,⁸ the former being “guessed” for 1837, the latter for 1902. In fact, he was born in Győr on 14 April 1828,⁹ named Carolus Singer. He was educated as a tailor, then became Klapka’s recruiting officer and chaplain in the war of independence,¹⁰ and later fought in the siege of Buda. In 1866, he first worked for Wilhelm Car-ré’s circus and then became deputy general manager of the Derssin Circus. In 1874, he was a foreman at the German Renz Circus, but this probably refers to guest appearances in Hungary. He rents the Korona Café (Crown Café) on the corner of Régi posta Street and Váci Street, and transforms the previously run-down premises into a glittering, glamorous interior never seen before.

8 See <https://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/ABC13280/14014.htm> (last visited: March 15, 2024).

9 According to a priestly record on his marriage certificate of 1857.

10 Rajna, Ferenc. 1923. „A pesti éjszaka királya”. *Világ*, August 5, 9.

At this time he also ran several cafés, such as the Boulevard and the Singer, and in 1869 he built the German Theatre in Gyapjú Street (he also obtained a concession to run theatres), and for a time he rented the Hermina Theatre in Hermina Square (in today's Hajós Street, next to the Hungarian State Opera House), and turned his attention to the nightclubs and music clubs.¹¹ He became the operator of such popular places of the time as the Anker Saal (Golden Anchor) in Hajós Street, the Beleznay Garden on the corner of today's Rákóczi Road and Puskin Street, the Carlé Varieté on the Károlyi Barracks (the building of the former Merlin Theatre is on the site), the Eldorado in Király Street 57 (Valero House) and the Tüköry's Neue Welt on the site of today's Vígszínház. He made huge fortunes, failed many times, but always stood up and started again. In Nagymező Street, he first started his business at No. 20, then acquired the plot at Nagymező Street 17 from the newspaper publisher Zsigmond Bródy, and later connected the plots at Mozsár Street 3–5 to it. Among his greatest undertakings was the First Metropolitan Orpheum, built in 1894 by Austrian architects Fellner and Helmer, the only surviving building from Somossy's legacy. He did not economise, the construction and equipment costs cost more than HUF 1 million forints (Molnár Gál 2001), while the cost of the Royal Hungarian Opera House, built in the neighbouring street with state money, amounted to HUF 2,261,200. The spectacular scenery was com-



Picture 1. Portrait of Károly Somossy from 1901

(Source: https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somossy_K%C3%A1roly#/media/F%C3%A1jl:Somossy_K%C3%A1roly_1901.jpg; last visited: October 31, 2024)

¹¹ Derived from the German word *Sängerei*, it was also used in Hungarian as 'song hall' (*dalcsarnok*). See Konrád 2013, 171.

plemented by amazing show politics, Somossy brought the biggest stars of the world to Budapest, and for about ten years Nagymező Street became the European centre of the entertainment industry, more famous than the Ronacher in Vienna or the Folies Bergère in Paris. At the height of his success, however, he couldn't stop and invented an entertainment district called Konstantinápoly in Budapest in Lágymányosi Bay. This venture surpassed all previous ones, it was considered the largest entertainment district in Europe in the period of the millennium, and it was the largest in Europe, entertaining forty thousand people at a time in the marshy area between the then under construction Szabadság Bridge and Rákóczi Bridge, where the architects (Lipót Kellner and Kálmán Gerster) dreamt up a replica of Constantinople (today's Istanbul) with mosques, a replica of the Hagia Sophia, theatres, cafés, winding little streets, orchestras, shops and bazaars. Both businesses went bankrupt because the Buda complex was competing with Somossy's own orpheum, cannibalising his income. He started a new business, bought the old Rémi nightclub at Király Street 71 and opened the New Somossy Nightclub, the last one, in December 1901. He built this business too on loans, using his own daughters as dummy while he ran the business from the background. After a while, advertisements appeared in various trade magazines and newspapers that no one should work with Károly Somossy because he was insolvent. Fed up with a series of scandals, the police closed the establishment, and thus the fate of the family was sealed. Somossy's body could not bear this last failure, and he died alone, penniless, in front of his orpheum in Nagymező Street, on 2 March 1903.

'Nightclub quarters' in Budapest

At the beginning of modernisation, in the middle of the 19th century, with industrialisation and the development of factories, the whole of Europe underwent a major change. The unification of Pest, Buda and Óbuda in 1873 saw an explosion in population, and the simultaneous rise of bourgeoisie and urbanisation changed the relationship between people and their environment. Unlike before, leisure time, various forms of entertainment and other written and unwritten rules of bourgeois culture were created. The citizens of Pest were almost driven out into the rich and spacious public squares by the cramped housing conditions and the lack of electric lighting (Gyáni 1996). The genre of cultured and less cultured entertainment was developed, with cafés, nightclubs,

orpheums, casinos and theatres opening up, offering a variety of entertainment to the curious public. The cafés became the centre of social life, where citizens discussed daily events and had access to a wide range of press products. The hierarchy was also observed between different places, e.g., the trash places were considered a lower order than the genre of the variety shows (Zsigmond 2015). These new forms of entertainment changed all previous traditions, as from then on, entertainment became not only the privilege of the aristocracy and the elite, but also the merchants, the tradesmen or even the maids could participate as spectators in the various ‘performances’. In fact, since the success of the most famous ‘song hall’, the *Kék Macska* (Blue Cat), orpheums and nightclubs have opened one by one, offering entertainment from a set table, in German, with short sketches, dance numbers, couplets and chansons. The word ‘orpheum’ itself, according to the Hungarian etymological dictionary (*Magyar etimológiai szótár*) means a musical entertainment nightclub, a take on the German *Orpheum*, which comes from the name of Orpheus, the legendary singer of the ancient Greek sagas.¹²

The difference between the entertainment venues that opened during the era of dualism can be observed primarily by looking at the quality of the programmes they offered to the general public. Thus, the bars, cabarets, orpheums, nightclubs, music clubs, chantants, breties, in fact, differed only in their programme, although the official police licence was only granted to song halls, so in fact all places of entertainment were considered to be such. The biggest difference, however, was the quality of the prostitution present in the individual places. The presence in the orpheums and dance halls was understandably subdued, but in the bars and nightclubs more room was given to lewd morals. The largest and most obscure nightclub was the *Blaue Katze* (Blue Cat; first called Feuchtinger’s Song Hall after the owner) at Király Street 15 (1855). Here they sang German-language couplets. The city’s most infamous and seedy street was known to all at the time. Before the construction of the Sugárút (now Andrásy Road), this street was the main route (2.5 kilometres long) to Városliget (City Park) (formerly Városerdő – City Forest). According to (the writer) Gyula Krúdy (who lived in the Pekáry House), this was the most Pestian street at that time. There were plenty of places of entertainment

¹² See *Magyar etimológiai szótár*. Online access: <https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/search/?list=eyJmaWx0ZXJzJjogeyJNVSI6IFsiTkZPX0xFWF9MZHp29ub2tfRjE0RDMiXX0sICJxdWVyeSI6ICJvcmlldW0ifQ> (last visited: March 16, 2024).

and bars there. The Fekete Macska (Black Cat) music club, the 'Chat Noir' at Király Street 9, the Mandl-Nightclub at Király Street 39, on the floor of which there was a red-lamp hotel, the Tátra Nightclub at Tátra Street 77 and the Vörös Macska (Red Cat) at No. 47, in the Pekáry House. At the beginning of Király Street stood the Orczy House, with the Orczy Café and the Flora Hall, which officially served as a dancing school, but in fact provided girls for the solvent gentry. Across the street, on the site of the Anker Palace, stood the Gyertyánffy House, including the Herzl Café. On the corner of Kazinczy Street is the Berger Cellar, owned by Málcsi Berger and the birthplace of Budapest's couplet, known in the slang as 'berzseráj'. The Dobler Bazaar and the nightclub called Etablissement Armin were located at number 16.¹³

The fundamental change with which Somossy burst into the Budapest nightlife was quality and elegance compared to the previous frivolous, torn-skirted, pub-style trash places. In his novel *A vörös postakocsi* (The Red Stagecoach), Gyula Krúdy writes that Károly Somossy taught Budapest to party (Krúdy 2008, in the chapter "A bécsi nők Pesten" ["Viennese women in Pest"]). I thought that these infamous places, deeply despised during the day, but frequently visited at night, did not advertise themselves, as word of mouth spread about the attractions they offered to a mostly male audience. I was wrong. In 1887, the *Neues Pester Journal* advertised in large print the highly successful performance of *Egy éj Athénban* (A Night in Athens) at the Kék Macska (Blue Cat), a brothel of brothels. Interestingly, it does not give any details, no location, no time. I can only deduce one thing from this: that at that time everyone knew what time the shows started and where to go if you wanted to have fun. (Apart from the ads in *Pester Lloyd* and the *Neues Pester Journal*, I could not find any other platform where they advertised.) In 1885, the chief of police banned the owner of the house from Budapest for good because of her scandalous lifestyle and the scandalous reputation of the

13 And these were just the main venues on Király Street, but we should not forget the other nearby nightclubs either, although there are a few that were established after the turn of the century. Without claiming completeness: the Pruggmayr (later Herzmann), the Mehádia, the Wekerle Nightclub, the Wertheimer Orpheum (Népszínház St.), the Admiral (Magyar St.), the Tabarin, the Imperial (Vilmos császár Road), the Capri (Podmaniczky St.), the Fodor (József Boulevard), the Friedmann Orpheum (later Kristálypalota [Crystal Palace]), Paulay E. St.), the Kék Egér ([Blue Mouse], Teréz Boulevard), the Steinhardt Orpheum (Rákóczi Road), the Trocadero (Tátra Orpheum), the Walhalla (Király St. 23.), the Foliès Caprice (Révay St. 18.), the Jardin de Paris (Erzsébet királyné Road), the Parisienne (Rákóczi Road 63.), the Pavillon Mascotte (Palais de Danse, Paulay E. St.), and the longest-lived one is the Royal Orpheum (Erzsébet Boulevard). See *Magyar színházművészeti lexikon* entry 'orpheum'. Online access: <https://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02139/html/sz18/50.html> (last visited: March 28, 2024).

Berger Cellar.¹⁴ In the case of the Flora Hall, I found no advertisements, but plenty of news about police actions and the withdrawal of industry rights.¹⁵ There are also no paid newspaper advertisements about the *Neue Welt*, i.e., the Újvilág (New World) orpheum, of which Somossy was also the director for a time in the 1970s. However, there are many complaints, and it also draws attention to another phenomenon: the importance of street and public advertising and wall stickers. On the second page of *A Hon* of 21 October 1870, there is an editorial entry in which the journalist laments the proliferation of German-speaking nightclubs.¹⁶

Presentation of the Somossy art institutions and analysis of their communication

Cafés

Singer café (1862–1866)

The Singer Café was Somossy's first major foray into the hospitality industry. To give an idea of the kind of place on the corner of Hajós Street and today's Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Road, here is a report by Rudolf Szentesi (József Kiss), a reporter of the time who published under a pseudonym: "...at night the most disorderly parties are held, where the army of lewd ladies, having appeared, becomes a scene of immorality and scandal" (Buza 2020, 123). There are newspaper reports of fights, patrols, where the owner is threatened—fined 100 forints, and if they break the ban again and prostitute women are found in the café, the business is closed.¹⁷ The *Pesti Napló* reports¹⁸ that the café was closed in 1866 for this reason.

¹⁴ *Pesti Hírlap*, August 15, 1885, 6.

¹⁵ *Pesti Hírlap*, May 2, 1886, 8.

¹⁶ "'Neue Welt Orpheum grosse Vorstellung', 'Neues Herculanum', 'Varietes Actien-Theater', 'Kindertheater', 'Concert Saal', 'singspiel-halle', 'Damen-Kapelle', 'senger-gesellschaft', 'Grosse Volkssanger-Vorstellung' and another ten or so folk singing societies, all of which maintain themselves in the capital of Hungary, of course, as being German. Then there is the 'Fürst's neues Theater zum goldenen Anker', to whom the city allowed the erection of a song hall, which he however christened 'new theatre', against which the city council protested. We won't even mention the German advertisements of private individuals.—On a corner there is a small, white billboard, hiding modestly, so that no one will see it. The inscription reads 'National Theatre, Coriolanus'—Rejoice, Germania! Die deutsche Zunge reicht so lang!" (*A Hon*, October 21, 1870.)

¹⁷ *Pesti Hírnök*, January 12, 1865, 3.

¹⁸ *Pesti Napló*, March 30, 1866, 3.

Its literary memory is preserved in the book written by József Kiss in 1874, where the virtuous poor girl turned café prostitute is killed by the murderous count with a poisoned cigarette in the middle of the Singer café (Bevilaqua Borsody and Mazsáry, 1935). No advertisements or further commercials could be found.

Korona Café (Crown Café) (1866–1870)

A café had been operating at the junction of Váci Street and Régi posta Street since 1786 (Szalai 1973), but it gained real fame when Somossy took over in 1866,¹⁹ and his shop, with its wooden panelling, marble tables, plush armchairs, velvet-cushioned chairs, huge gold mirrors and gas lighting, which was then considered modern, was a forerunner of elegant cafés. The place had a double function: on the one hand, it served as a literary meeting place where the most famous poets and writers met in the evenings (e.g., Krúdy dreamt of one of his heroes, Fridolin, the ‘hunchbacked marquer’), while in the secret rooms behind the doors and mirrors, huge card battles and illegal games took place.²⁰

With good business sense, Somossy focused on the euphoria over the Compromise. The crown, as a royal-imperial jewel, rhymed well with his sympathy for the Habsburg monarchs, so he requested to change his name from Singer to Somossy, in keeping with the Hungarianising fever of the Hungarian citizens, and received permission from Franz Joseph.²¹ In 1867, on coronation day, he named the establishment *Első Magyar Korona Kávéház* (The First Hungarian Crown Café) and inaugurated it with great ceremony. The choice of the location was also a great idea, as the Régi Posta Street was the busiest street in Pest, from where the four- and six-horse coaches set off to all parts of the country, and everyone who came to the capital arrived here. According to the daily *Napi Magyarország*, under the leadership of Károly Somossy, the café openly

19 Palóczi, Edgár. 1913. “A Korona kávéház”. *Pesti Hírlap*, September 25, 33.

20 A legend was known at the time, which was later written by Ferenc Rajna, Somossy’s son-in-law, in the newspapers: “When Prince Charles of Hohenzollern went to Bucharest to take his new throne, he passed through Pest. This is where the brave soldiers of Ghikas and the Cantacuzenes spotted him. Somossy hid the young king from his determined pursuers. But they somehow sniffed out the king’s hideout and spent a few days inspecting the Korona Café. They watched the two billiard players play for hours in boredom. They finally got tired of lurking in vain and left without ever coming back. And the two billiard players were Somossy and the future King Carol, whom Somossy had so disguised that his future loyal subjects could not recognise him. However, they would not have spared him a friendly stab or a humane bullet. By the fourth day Somossy had driven the king out of Pest. Free of charge. For nothing.” (Rajna, Ferenc. 1923. „A pesti éjszaka királya”. *Világ*, August 5, 9.)

21 Court Decree No. 14 746, *Sürgöny*, October 30, 1866, 1.

adopted the national flag.²² When it comes to advertising, the Korona Café is worth mentioning not only for its own marketing, but also for what it meant to the neighbouring shops: there are countless advertisements referring to the café.²³ I could not find any other commercials or newspaper advertisements in the case of the Korona Café, and I assume that there was most probably no need for them.

Boulevard Café (1870)

The history of the Boulevard Café (Váci Boulevard 24, District 5) is lost in obscurity, I could not find any early advertisements, there are later ones, but only after the turn of the century, when it was already owned by Ármin Garai (Goldhammer). Apart from a couple of police reports, and the fact that it became a meeting place for sparkling water vendors in 1912,²⁴ there is no more news or publicity about it. In 1871, a new café owner advertises in *Pester Lloyd* in German: J. Mahler, who claims to have had the premises completely renovated and offers the utmost comfort to its visitors.²⁵

Circus and variety

Wilhelm Carré's Circus (1855–1859)

Wilhelm Carré, born in 1817, originally performed as a rider in Ernst Renz's circus, but later founded his own circus and toured extensively in the Balkans. In 1887 he built the Royal Theatre Carré circus in Amsterdam, which is now a theatre. Somossy met the Carré family in the 1860s and worked as their secretary. Their guest appearances in Hungary took place in 1855, 1856 and 1859, and

22 M. E. 2000. "A kávéház kultusza a magyar irodalomban". *Napi Magyarország*, January 22, 25.

23 "The Society of Merchant Youths in Pest has moved its accommodation from George's Day to the second floor above the Korona Café in Váci Street." – "For the forthcoming festivities it offers its richly supplied, selected, most elegant crystal glass sets of excellent quality, of the most elegant shape and grinding, and also its finest glassware for lighting from the first-rate Czech factories. Respectfully, the glass and mirror warehouse of Henrik Giergl, Váci Street 15, next to the Korona Café." – "Miksa Hatschek optician's shop. Since George Day, it has existed in Váci Street, next to the Korona Café." – "Against secret diseases and their serious after-effects, after many years of experience, according to the method of the world-famous Kleord (former teacher from Paris), with assured success, orders the physician F. Sugár. Home: Pest, Váci utca 15, next to the Korona Café." (*Vasárnapi Ujság*, April 28, 1867, 205; *Pesti Napló*, 29 May, 1867, 4; May 21, 1867, 4; November 22, 1867, 4.)

24 See https://ejf.hu/sites/default/files/DN/DanubiusNoster_kulonyszam2019.pdf (last visited: March 14, 2024).

25 *Pester Lloyd*, August 26, 1871, 6.

Somossy most probably took part in all of them. The circus has consciously promoted itself. Their advertisements were published in German, mainly in the daily newspaper *Pester Lloyd*, where they drew the attention of the public to the demonstrations and attractions of the group, which usually consisted of seventy riders and fifty horses.²⁶ The advertisement is always signed ‘Director Wilhelm Carré’, emphasising that the circus director himself is addressing the public. The performances were held in the Beleznay Garden (once located on the corner of Rákóczi Road and Puskin Street), which was later rented by Somossy and operated as an orpheum with great success.

*The Renz Circus of Vienna (1870–1874)*²⁷

The famous Renz Circus, founded by the German Ernst Jacob Renz (1815–1892), regularly set up its famous tent on the former Stephans Platz, now Klauzál Square, from 1870, usually entertaining audiences with a hundred performers and eighty horses. Somossy put together the show, which has been performed with great success for years. This is where the novelty begins—which, according to legend, was invented by Somossy—to turn the performances into plays, so that the circus stunt is retained, but in theatrical guise. This is how *Hamupipóke* (*Cindarella*), the most famous show was born.²⁸ I found German-language advertisements in *Pester Lloyd*: they advertise an unprecedented show and wonderful fog images with the fantasy name ‘*brillante magische Soirée Fantastique*’.²⁹

The Deressin Circus in Cluj-Napoca (Koložsvár) (1872–1873)

The biographical descriptions mention the Deressin Circus in Prague next to Somossy’s name, so it was difficult to untangle the reality from the distorted and changed news. József Deressin’s riding school was founded in Cluj-Napoca (Koložsvár), and when it is introduced, József Deressin signs the advertisements as the director of the Turkish Imperial Riding School, and the company is not even referred to as the Deressin Circus, but as *Cirque Français*. In 1872, their performances in Pest are banned because the police consider the stage and auditorium a fire

²⁶ *Pester Lloyd*, February 6, 1859, 3; December 21, 1855, 4.

²⁷ *Fővárosi Lapok*, July 7, 1874, 668.

²⁸ *Internationale Artisten-Revue*, March 10, 1902, 1.

²⁹ *Pester Lloyd*, October 24, 1868, 6.

hazard.³⁰ The family business first appeared at Nagymező Street 20 in 1873 with the character dancer Mari Schumann and the *gymnast* Mr. Csali, and concluded with the Fire Queen (Tűzkirálynő), madame director Derssin, on her own horse.³¹ Mention is made of the unrivalled transportable riding arena and circus, which can be erected in forty-eight hours, the lodge structure is made of iron, and was built in Pest for 20 thousand forints.³² Since Somossy was active in Pest at this time, it is likely that there was some kind of collaboration between him and the Derssin Circus on his own property.

Carlé Varieté – Károly Barracks (1871–1877)

According to contemporary accounts, Somossy was the secretary and the soul of the shows. The song hall inside the Károly Barracks, which can hold around two thousand people, was a huge success and was also the birthplace of the first variety theatre. It was here that Somossy experimented with the recipe that would become the basis of his later success: stunning performances with spectacular show elements. The advertisements say: the most beautiful and spectacular performances are also for families. Although the available pictures show illegible advertisements, it is clear that there are ten large billboards on the side of the building advertising various shows. It is reasonable to assume that if they were there before, they were advertising the current shows on this platform.³³ International performers, an 8 o'clock start, with shows ending after midnight. The Carlé group was presented as coming from the Crystal Palace in London.³⁴ They performed under several names: Carlé Truppe, Carlé Varieté, Carlé Orpheum.

Nightclubs

Anker Saal (1868–1875)

Various parties and balls used to be held in the Golden Anchor Hall (Arany Horgony terem) at Hermina Square 6 (now Hajós Street). Somossy created the first variety theatre in the country in this place, besides the soirées and balls

³⁰ *Magyar Polgár*, October 17, 1872, 3.

³¹ *A Hon*, January 4, 1873, 3.

³² *Ellenőr*, March 16, 1873, 3.

³³ See the Fortepan community photo archive: <https://fortepan.hu/hu/photos/?id=82327> (last visited: March 10, 2024).

³⁴ *Egyetértés*, April 4, 1877, 4.

(Molnár Gál 2001). He had already tried his hand at variety³⁵ with the Carlé brothers, but here he perfected the compilation of the show. Newspaper commercials also contain cross-references to each other, e.g., *A Hon* in 1868 states: "Every Wednesday and Saturday during the whole carnival season there is a great masquerade ball in the 'Golden Anchor' hall, Hermina Square 6. Read more on the big wall stickers. The rooms are rented out for social balls, parties and circles at a discount."³⁶ It was here that Somossy discovered Pál Linzer, sometimes credited as conductor, sometimes as choreographer or actor, but he is credited with inventing the special masquerade ball where the ladies have nothing on except the masks covering their faces. This fact is somewhat tempered by the fact that I also found a lot of charity events, including toddler nursery and events for children. Many dances and balls were advertised in the newspapers.

Eldorado (1871)

Under the name Eldorado, Somossy opened a nightclub at Király Street 57, in the old Valero House, owned by the owners of the Valero silk factory. I did not find any commercial or advertisement about the institution.

Neue Welt (1873)

In the sixties, Pest started on the bumpy road to becoming a metropolis. But there were not many places to go out, so if you wanted to spend money like that, you had to go to Vienna. The architect Sándor Tüköry wanted the elite to spend their wealth in his art institutions at all costs, so he created his nightclub on the site of the Vígszínház, called Neue Welt (New World [Újvilág]). As this was considered a very infamous neighbourhood, he paid/hired the local thugs to guarantee the safety of his guests. It is likely that Somossy's previous experience at the *Két Pisztoly (Two Pistols) Inn*³⁷ also contributed to his success as manager of the *Újvilág* for a time. *Pesti Napló* writes about the institution's advertising

35 According to *A magyar nyelv értelmező szótára*, a variety is "an entertainment place where singers, dancers, actors and artists perform light and light-hearted comic scenes and numbers." See <https://mek.oszk.hu/adatbazis/magyar-nyelv-ertelmezo-szotara/szotar.php?szo=VARIET%C3%89&offset=32&kezdobetu=V%20lv%20%C3%A9rtelmez%C5%91%20sz%C3%B3t%C3%A1ra> (last visited: October 30, 2024).

36 *A Hon*, January 5, 1868, 4.

37 After the defeat of the war of independence, Somossy worked as a waiter at the *Két Pisztoly (Two Pistols) Inn*, which was next to the National Museum, in today's Kálvin Square. It was demolished in 1874.

practices: “The entrepreneur of the *Újvilág*, in order to make a little reclamation of his premises, advertises on large wall stickers that tomorrow, 17 October, he will hold a splendid masquerade ball in honour of the visiting pole travellers, to which the named guests have also arrived. Some business companies often resort to this kind of advertising to attract the public; but in the present case it is no mere gimmick; the travellers have indeed promised to appear...”³⁸

Etablissement Somossy Nightclub I. (1889–1893)

Although the advertisements ran under this name until 1899, I thought it important to distinguish between the buildings. Somossy opened the institution at Nagymező Street 17 in 1894, which has since been known as the Budapest Operetta Theatre, and earlier as the *First Metropolitan Orpheum (Első Fővárosi Orfeum)*. A number of novelties appear in the advertisements, including the indication of offices and telephone numbers, the name of the director-owner, details of the show and the name of the orchestra of the winter garden and its lead violinist are also mentioned. The stars are usually highlighted in a black frame, the more famous names (see Cecilia Carola) in capitals. The shows are displayed in a clearly visible way, with an exact start time and date. Sometimes they also inform the reader about ticketing options.³⁹ Many advertisements have survived in German and Hungarian.

Etablissement Somossy Nightclub II. (1894–1901)

With this institution, we have reached the most perfect version of the entertainment industry complexes developed earlier. The Somossy Nightclub contained everything that was the luxury entertainment of the time for the aristocracy and commoners. The electric lighting, the magnificent interior, the rich show proved that over the decades Somossy has learned everything about the art of entertainment and hospitality.⁴⁰

These few years were the most dazzling and successful period of Somossy’s life, which could have been the crowning achievement of his career, had he been more skilful with money. It was at this time that charity balls and events came

³⁸ *Pesti Napló*, October 17, 1874, 2.

³⁹ *Pesti Napló*, January 1, 1896, 14.

⁴⁰ After Somossy’s bankruptcy in 1899, restaurateur Ferenc Albrecht tried to run the place under the name Somossy Nightclub, Somossy kept him as artistic director, then Imre Waldmann took over the operation in 1901 and renamed it the Fővárosi Orfeum (Metropolitan Orfeum).

into fashion, to which Somossy devoted his time, energy and money. There are many advertisements in the newspapers, thousands more than before in archives and databases promoting various productions and stars.⁴¹ Most of the objects and advertising, in the form of brochures, programme leaflets, table-top programme menu cards, etc., date from this period. In the Theatre History Collection of the National Széchényi Library I found programme leaflets with Somossy's figure and rich drawings. In a clever way, he not only promotes

ETABLISSEMENT SOMOSSY MULATO

Főrendező: Kőszeghy Jenő. Igazgató-tulajdonos: **SOMOSSY KÁROLY** Kárnagy: Rosenzweig Vilmos.

Budapest, péntek 1896 szeptember 4. Budapest, Freitag den 4. September 1896

I. RÉSZ — I. ABTHEILUNG.

1. Induló Riedeltől Vilmos főherczeg induló Marsch v. Riedel

2. Nyitány Sappétól Pajkos diákok Ouverture v Sappé

3. Bécsi szubrette **A DELE MORAW** Wiener Soubrette

4. **SZEMANOVICS A.**
Trapez-equilibrista — Trapez-Equilibrist

5. Dalénekesőgő **LOUISE RÜCK** Liedersängerin

6. **A hölgyzászlóalj — Das Frauenbataillon**
nagy katonai daljáték, előadják Bogdány k. a., Rück, Müller, Sussin, Trau urak, a teljes operette- és balletszemélyzet.
grosses militärisches Ausstattungs-Singspiel, darstellt von Fri Bogdány, den Herren Rück Müller, Sussin, Trau, dem ges. Operetten- u. Balletpersonal.

II. RÉSZ — II. ABTHEILUNG.

7. **Rehden báróné Baronin v. Rehden**
A jelenkor legelső és legmerészebb műlovarnéje „Monte-Christo”, „Hamlet” iskolaióvakkal és „Csárdás” ágaskodóval, melyek közül minden előadásban kétféle lovat gáltatik.
Die erste u. kühnste Schulleiterin der Gegenwart, mit ihren Schul Pferden „Monte-Christo”, „Hamlet” und dem Steiger „Csárdás”, von denen je zwei in jeder Vorstellung gewitten werden.

8. **„VICHINSKAJA”**
orosz hölgy-kvintett — russisches Damen-Quintett

9. **THOMPSON EPHR. ÁZSIAI ELEFÁNTJAI**
a) Akrobaták és gúllák b) Elefántok zenekara. c) Elefántok mint teher-hordók d) A sodrony-kötéltartók e) A kuglizó cimborák
EPH. THOMPSON'S ASIATISCHE ELEFANTEN
a) Akrobaten und Pyramiden, b) Ein Elefanten-Orchester c) Elefanten als Träger, d) Die Draht-Halter, e) Die lustigen Kegelbrüder.

10. **3 Soeurs Hermandez**
Gymnasztikák a trapezen.
Gymnastikemien auf d. Trapez.

11. **EDISON VITASCOPIA**
Élőfényképek színes kivitelben.
Lebendige Photographie in Farben.

12. **ZÁRO-INDULÓ — SCHLUSS-MARSCH**
Az előadás kezdete fél 9 óraker, vége 1 óraker
Anfang der Vorstellung halb 9 Uhr, Ende 1 Uhr.
Minden vasárnapon — ünnepen két előadás.
Jeden Sonn- und Feiertag zwei Vorstellungen.

Picture 2. Leaflet of the Etablissement Somossy Mulató, from 1896 (Photo: Property of the author)

41 Arcanum, Digitális Tudománytár. Online access: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/search/results/?list=eyJxdWVyeSI6ICJURVhUPShcmV0YVJsaXNzZW1lbnQgc29tb3NzeSBtdWxdFx1MDBmM1wiwSBEQVRFPFSgXODk0LTAxLTAxLS0xOTAxLTAxLTAxKSIsICJzb3J0IjogkRBVEUifQ&per_page=20 (last visited: March 28, 2024).

his own show, but also gives space to the appearance of other companies. So it is possible to read about cheap food and stationery, photographers, a specialist in pipe cutting, the services of the 'most offerable' men's clothing company, a dentist or original Singer sewing machines while flipping through the programme leaflet. The Somossy Nightclub communicated directly with the public through the programme leaflets and through advertisements in the newspaper. Postcards, signed photographs and music scores for prima donnas also became increasingly popular at this time.

The institutional PR treatment of the time was considered special, as Somossy did not allow his stars to make any statements. While there are many reports and personal experiences of the celebrities of the era, there are none of the stars of Somossy Nightclub. Why? Because Somossy's tactic is that the less fans know about them, the greater the mystery and excitement, the more he can increase curiosity. Nowadays it is the other way round: who does not advertise themselves do not really exist. Part of the PR was that Somossy could only be seen with his legendary walking stick, tails and top hat. Sending his clothes to Vienna and London to be laundered was a standard for him. Exquisite elegance, perfection of appearance and taste have become as much a part of the marketing of the building as the people who work in it. Another effective weapon of communication was the use of buffet dames. These beautiful girls, usually from the poorer classes, dressed in magnificent gowns and behaved like distinguished women in the winter garden of the orpheum. They were excellent conversationalists, knew how to eat caviar and were good in judging expensive champagnes. The most famous buffet dames were Mariska Récsi, Mici Schwarz, Stefi Bauer, Klára Ward, Klára Hédidédi, Irén Schenk, Thekla and Emilia Turcsányi (i.e., the infamous Elza Mágnás).

Constantinople in Budapest (Konstantinápoly Budapesten) (1896)

I am convinced that the establishment of Little Constantinople in the Lágymányos Bay was Somossy's idea, although in 1896 officially the first company was still established without him. Warned to be careful by the Ancient Buda Castle fiasco (he was not put in charge of the entertainment centre), he officially stayed out of the bureaucratic maze, preferring to pull the strings from behind the scenes. After a bad first year, by 1897 he was officially a tenant of the place, but he still couldn't pull off his otherwise fantastic plan, which was based on poor foundations. The use of the logo appeared in advertisements: a five-pointed

star in a Turkish crescent. The show description highlights the attractions, the famous performers and the entrance fee. As this area is fairly far from the city centre, four lines are devoted to describing the approach. It was possible to get there by boat, 'electric train' and omnibus.⁴²

New Somossy Nightclub (1901–1902)

The last attempt of the multiply failed and multiply successful director was the construction of a nightclub at Király Street 71. With all his strength, he took the plunge once more, but now only as artistic director, leaving the leadership on paper to his two daughters. Of course, he was still in control, a choice made for the sake of credibility. The first descriptions and reviews were very good, but later the company went into a debt spiral and became insolvent within a few months. Artists and foreign performers were so angry with the Somossy family that they sent out paid advertisements warning everyone not to work for Somossy even by chance, because he did not pay the performers after the shows. This fact, and the fact that they could no longer buy police permits, was enough for the police to close the place down, sealing the family's fate for good. The newspaper commercials⁴³ that can be found are almost identical to those of the earlier Somossy orpheums. It is important to mention that after the fall, the closed down nightclub was taken over by László Beöthy (1873–1931), a journalist and theatre director, who opened the Király (King) Theatre less than a year later, which achieved worldwide success with productions of *A víg özvegy* (The Merry Widow), *Csárdáskirálynő* (The Csárdás Queen), *János vitéz*, *Mágnás Miska*, *Leányvásár* (The Girl Fair), *Sybil*, *Luxemburg grófja* (The Count of Luxembourg), *A bajadér* (The Indian Dancer), *A montmartre-i ibolya* (The Violet of Montmartre) and *Gül Baba* (Kellér 1960).

Orpheums

Orpheum (1870–1872)

Simply called the Orpheum, it was the first iron-framed nightclub that Somossy had in Nagymező Street, although it was still on the plot at number 20, where the Mai Manó House is now located. The institution must not have been doing

⁴² *Pesti Hírlap*, July 26, 1896, 22.

⁴³ *Pesti Hírlap*, December 3, 1901, 20.

too well, because a year later Somossy's belongings in the orpheum were auctioned off.⁴⁴ *Pesti Napló* wrote about the place in 1870.⁴⁵

Summer Orpheum (1884)

For a year in 1884, it advertised its summer orpheum under this name at Nagymező Street 17.⁴⁶ The advertisements are the usual ones, the name is a bit confusing, because an orpheum of the same name was opened in Hunyadi Square in 1878.⁴⁷ However, Somossy's new marketing idea remained in the newspapers, with the newspaper *Nemzet* writing in 1886 that: "Permission is granted to K. Somossi to erect an advertising lamp-post at the corner of Andrassy Boulevard and Gyár Street."⁴⁸ So, on the corner of today's Andrassy Road and Jókai Square, Liszt Ferenc Square, he had a privately owned advertising pillar erected, on which he could place posters of his own business. This way, the crowds coming from the busy Andrassy Road and the Oktogon, as well as from the Opera, can also be informed about the latest shows.

Neues Orpheum – Beleznay Garden (1872–1878)

The Beleznay Garden stood on a plot of land on the corner of today's Rákóczi Street and Puskin Street. It takes its name from the Beleznay Palace in the garden, and after the family died out, the entrepreneurs who rented the castle were

44 *Ellenőr*, April 19, 1871, 3.

45 "The newly opened summer premises of the 'Orpheum' in Nagymező Street, just a few steps from the Terézváros church, are not the last among the entertainment venues in Pest. The layout of the room is exemplary and pretty. The first courtyard is for the non-paying public, with stairs leading down to the left and right into the second courtyard. To the right and left of the entrance stairs are covered premises, to allow the public to take refuge in case of sudden rainfall. Where these covered halls end, in the middle of the courtyard is the orchestra area, followed by the auditorium and dining area, which is calculated for 150-200 tables, and opposite the entrance is the pretty stage. There are 12-12 lodges on the right and left of the audience, on a higher ground. Each of these lodges consists of arbours with liane. There is a table set up in each arbour. The lighting is sumptuous but not glaring, the food is good and not expensive compared to other similar places, and the entertainment is highly varied. A company of more than fifteen members performs small comedies, then the four Swedish sisters sing their national songs, then young Crosby shows his daredevil skills, standing on a pole for 20 minutes, firing pistols and drinking beer, then the actors, singers and power artists start again. The intervals are filled by a military band. The director has contracted a ballet company of 40 members, which will begin performances of the ballet entitled *Irma* on Saturday this week. In 8 days, the ballet will be followed by an 8-member French theatre company, so they have made sure there is enough variety." (*Pesti Napló*, August 17, 1870, Annex to issue 161.)

46 *Egyetértés*, July 3, 1884, 7.

47 *Egyetértés*, May 23, 1878, 4.

48 *Nemzet*, August 25, 1886, 3.

able to hold events there from 1828 onwards. The converted ballroom could accommodate two hundred people, and an outdoor stage was set up in the garden, which was later converted into a variety theatre and rented by Somossy as director. He referred to the Beleznay Garden as the Neues Orpheum on the posters that could be found, and placed his own portrait on the upper-central part, surrounded by ornate designs, with his name written underneath as 'Director K. Somossy'. The stars were listed according to the programme schedule, some of them with their names framed or, in the fashion of the time, surrounded on both sides by black palms, the index finger marking the star's name. Almost all of the newspaper advertisements for the art institution are in German, which may well reflect the target group Somossy was trying to reach.⁴⁹

Első Fővárosi Orpheum (First Metropolitan Orpheum) (1887–1893)

Somossy changed the name of his institutions for a number of reasons. The new names were mainly used to build up his own 'brand', but sometimes the director who had fallen into the credit trap had to set up a new company while the previous one was being auctioned off. He realised that with a catchy name, success is more convincing, thus adding the adjectives 'metropolitan' and 'first' to the name of the former orpheum, he established the famous institution on the plot of land at Nagymező Street 17, true, it was still an iron-structureed summer theatre. The new building was later renamed the Somossy Orpheum, although advertisements still referred to the institution by two names until 1896, probably to give readers time to get used to the change. In their advertisements, they do not give an address, but they are keen to show that they are prepared both for the winter and summer seasons. The performers are highlighted in bold, with a brief description of the special performances.

Theatres

Deutsches Theater, the German Theatre on Gyapjú Street (1869–1889)

After the German Theatre of Pest City burnt down in 1847, a temporary wooden theatre (Nottheater) was built on what is now Erzsébet Square, but there was a growing demand for the German-speaking population to have their own the-

⁴⁹ *Neues Pester Journal*, June 19, 1878, 10.

atre in Pest. Somossy wanted to build a variety theatre,⁵⁰ and was granted the necessary permission to hold theatre performances.⁵¹ In the end, probably for financial reasons, he passed the building to a joint stock company,⁵² which continued the construction and opened the German Theatre in 1869, with a capacity of two thousand people. Here, Somossy could gain a lot of experience in the art of theatre-making. Newspaper advertisements are quite ordinary, with the name of the German Theatre highlighted, the address "gyapju utczában" (in Gyapjú Street) underneath, the date and title of the performance, and the start time of the performance.⁵³ The theatre perished in 1889.

Hermina Theatre (1883–1884)

This theatre was not founded by Somossy, but in 1883 he acquired it and converted it into a winter orpheum, while the building at Nagymező Street 17, which was already in operation at the time, was used as a summer orpheum. In 1884 this winter orpheum was acquired from him by József Pruggmayr, who continued to run it. In the advertisements, it happens that the commercials of the two art institutions are placed below and above each other, so Somossy thought it important to point out that both orpheums will continue to operate in the same place.⁵⁴

Stars, language issues, show politics

In her essay,⁵⁵ Gyöngyi Heltai writes that the phenomenon of the prima donna as a kind of cultural construct was shaped by the theatre industry just in the change. Librettists have often sought to parody popular performances and

50 Hungaricana Közgyűjteményi Portál (Public Collection Portal). Online access: <https://maps.hungaricana.hu/hu/BFLTervtar/10390/?list=eyJxdWVyeSI6ICJclnNvbW9zc3kgalx1MDBIMXJvbHlclij9> (last visited: March 28, 2024).

51 *Budapesti Hírlap*, March 20, 1932, 4.

52 *Pesti Napló*, August 19, 1869, 2.

53 *A Hon*, October 8, 1881, 4.

54 "In order to avoid possible mistakes and disappointments, I have the pleasure to inform the honourable public that my winter and summer premises will be located at Nagymező utca 17... Károly Somossy, director." (*Egyetértés*, October 8, 1884.)

55 Heltai, Gyöngyi. 2014. "Primadonna-paradigma: Blahától az 'isteni Zsazsáig és Carola Cecíliától a Honthy-féle Cecíliáig". *Metszetek* 3(1): 82–116. Online access: https://epa.oszk.hu/04500/04590/00030/pdf/EPA04590_metszetek_2014_01.pdf (last visited: October 29, 2024).

prima donnas in their productions. So two standing stars existed at the same time: Lujza Blaha and Cecilia Carola. One is the sophisticated person, who had the whole of Pest and Europe at her feet, but performed mostly in German, and the other is the impeccable model of Hungarian theatre and morality: Mrs Blaha. Cecília Carola, the star of Somossy Nightclub, has been the subject of hundreds of scandalous articles, eagerly describing which prince or millionaire the prima donna flirted with, or which other nightclub she spent the night in after her performance. These rumours only added to the myth of the unknown, beautiful woman as an idol, and Carola's suitors were all turned away, so that millionaires, such as Mihály Lazarovich, squandered a significant part of their fortunes on her,⁵⁶ an aristocrat from Bačka, Maxi Lindenbaum, a linen merchant, Elek Chernaházi Bod,⁵⁷ a landowner, the son of the Russian millionaire Miklós Protopopov⁵⁸, the son of the Romanian Prime Minister, Viktor Sturdza⁵⁹ or even Prince Edward of Wales.⁶⁰

The language issue also caused a problem increasingly frequently. In 1894, the opening ceremony of the Somossy Nightclub was in Hungarian, the speech was written by Jenő Heltai, the orchestra played a Hungarian overture, and yet there were times when riots broke out in the audience. In 1895, e.g., on 20 August, after the singing of the *Himnusz* and the *Szózat* in the Somossy Nightclub, Cecilia Carola sang in German throughout the evening. The audience started shouting: "In Hungarian, in Hungarian!", and Carola was forced to start a few Hungarian songs, and then the crowd calmed down. In 1900, the daily newspaper *Hazánk* wrote in its Literature and Art column, that the actors' association threatened to expel any actor who performed in an orpheum. "Every nightclub is obliged to compose half of its show from Hungarian songs. But the actors' union punishes an actor who works in an orpheum with expulsion, loss of pension rights and the loss of all their rights. The consequence of this is that the Hungarian numbers in the orpheums are terribly bad, a real disgrace to the Hungarians. Thus the actors' association is the brake on Hungarianisation, and instead of serving the national cause, it is pushing things with its Spanish-like pride to the point

56 *Magyarország*, January 13, 1935, 34.

57 *Pesti Napló*, October 7, 1906, 13.

58 *Pesti Napló*, July 20, 1905, 14.

59 *Békés Megyei Közlöny*, June 14, 1904, 3.

60 *Hétfő*, November 23, 1942, 4.

where, e.g., Ős-Budavára is preparing to hire a German couplet singer from Vienna this summer, with the reasoning that the National Actors' Association will prevent them from employing Hungarian couplet singers."⁶¹

Despite the fact that there is no written proof of Károly Somossy's Jewish origin, the newspapers (with the titles 'pro-German' and 'Jew') take it as a fact that he does not want Hungarian-language performances in his nightclubs, although this is factually untrue. At this time, attacks of an anti-Semitic nature had already started to be launched against him.⁶² Somossy was a thoroughbred businessman, playing what was in greater demand. He didn't realise in time that there was a need for Hungarian-language shows (which the competition had already realised), and this was probably a fatal mistake on his part.

For decades, Károly Somossy has shaped the development of variety and entertainment. The competition has not failed to copy and catch up with his shows of indescribable richness and imagination, one of which I would like to highlight: an advertisement in the *Nemzetközi Művészeti Szemlé (International Art Review)*⁶³ advertises several performances in German, and the name of the

61 *Hazánk*, January 16, 1900, 7.

62 "A Hungarian of Jewish religion! Hungarian Jew! Well, my God, there is that, just like there is the German, the Czech, the Serb or the Oláh with Hungarian sentiments. Perhaps more than an Oláh with Hungarian sentiments, but incomparably less than a Hungarian *Zipser*. And just as I cannot believe that the time will come when there will be only Hungarians in the realm of Saint Stephen, I similarly don't believe that a Jew from Ung County, Maramures or Budapest will in time become a good Hungarian. Well, why? I don't know either, but the average Jew is not Hungarian in their speech, thought and sentiment. For you complain that the Jews of Pest keeps speaking German among themselves, at home and in social life. They read German books, they reads German newspapers, their prayer book is German, and their purchase market is Vienna, i.e., Wien... And I maintain, and many people, especially foreigners, say with me, that Budapest has a wholly Jewish character. And I say that among the few people who visited the Barabás exhibition, none of them was Jewish. On the contrary, nine-tenths of the audiences at the Múcsarnok's musical Thursdays and the Folies-Caprice and Somossi are. Apropos, Somossi! Did you read about the fight in the orpheum the other day? As if that were the incident that characterises our Jews. One man stands up and protests against the German performance (I assume that Mr. Frank-Faragó is also Jewish), and the others shout him down and beat him up. And the next day, in the same room, during a performance by the same company, the same thing happens again, and there are not fifty or a hundred thousand people in Budapest who take revenge for this attack on the company, its employees and the audience. Oh yes! I readily admit that we have Jews who are fully Hungarian in sentiment, among them statesmen, politicians, scientists, excellent artists, writers and other eminent persons, who have become fully Hungarian in heart and soul; but our Jewry will still never be Hungarian. And there are a number of times and occasions when, with full conviction and due consideration, I would let all these excellencies go, if only we did not have any Jews..." (*Alkotmány*, January 2, 1900, 6.)

63 "Accessible through the International Theatre and Arts Bureau: *Artilleria Rusticana* – Burlesque Operetta (parody) in one act. Text: K. Somossy, music: Wilhelm Rosenzweig. *A nagy kalifa* [The Grand Caliph] – a spectacular operetta in one act. Text: K. Somossy, Music: Wilhelm Rosenzweig. *Giardinetto* – Large potpourri with great splendour. Compiled by Somossy and Rosenzweig. *Spiritiszták* [Spiritists] – Burlesque operetta

place: Budapest Orpheum. At that time, it was a disgrace for a journalist and writer to give their name to an orpheum show. This is why the text of these performances, i.e. the libretto, was written under the name of Károly Somossy, while they were all written by his son-in-law, Ferenc Rajna (Reiner) (1861–1933), so the great successes were—officially—achieved by Somossy.⁶⁴ When Somossy was just not thinking about new operettas, ballets or dance and live images, he was not afraid to use the latest achievements of the time. Its new song hall had electric lighting for the first time in Hungary, a telephone line was used in the building, and in 1896, for the first time in the country, films were shown in the winter garden. Károly Somossy acquired the rights to show the device in the Monarchy, and four months after the premiere of the Lumière brothers, a film was shown in Hungary at the Somossy Nightclub... “The animatograph! The latest photo-electronic marvel. It reproduces every living scene in motion—a mirror of real life. It can be seen daily from 10 a.m. until late in the evening in the winter garden of the Somossy Nightclub café. Entrance fee 1 crown.”⁶⁵

After Károly Somossy set foot on Nagymező Street, theatrical premises started to mushroom in the area. The list of old and new theatres⁶⁶ on this street alone is a good indication of how much this theatre district has been and still is bustling with life. In the last hundred years, several performances have been produced that evoke his figure and the world of the old orpheums.⁶⁷

in one act. Text by K. Somossy, music: Wilhelm Rosenzweig. *A női zászlóalj* [The Women's Battalion] – a great military show with singing, dancing and a dazzling spectacle. Text: K. Somossy, music: W. Rosenzweig. Performed at the Budapest Orpheum, with fantastic effects, it remains one of the most sought-after shows.” (*Nemzetközi Művészeti Szemle*, February 5, 1893, 16.)

64 Rajna, Ferenc. 1932. “Ahol a régi Pest mulatott”. *Budapesti Hírlap*, March 20., 4.

65 *Budapesti Hírlap*, April 28, 1896, 15.

66 List of theatres, cinemas, orpheums in Nagymező Street: Jardin d’Hiver, Renaissance Theatre, Radius Cinema, Vigaszínház, Youth Theatre, Petőfi Theatre, National Theatre, Metropolitan Operetta Theatre, Thália Theatre, Arizóna Theatre, Művész Theatre, Mikroszkóp Stage, Somossy Orpheum, Budapest Operetta Theatre, Tivoli Theatre, Moulin Rouge, Pavillon Mascotte, Municipal Cabaret, Tarka Theatre, Vörös Malom (Red Mill), Budapest Café, Arizona, Budapest Dance Palace, Kálmán Imre Theatre, Edison Mozgó, Turán Cinema, Terv Cinema, Tivoli Cinema, Tivoli Light Play House, Tinódi Cinema, Radnóti Theatre.

67 Works depicting the figure of Károly Somossy and his Orpheum: *Régi orfeum* (Old Orpheum), premiered in 1932 in the Metropolitan Operetta Theatre (text: Jenő Faragó and István Békeffy, music: Lajos Lajtai, director: Vilmos Loránth), in which Hanna Honthy played Cecília Carola and Tivadar Bilicsi played Károly Somossy. The operetta *Egy boldog pesti nyár* (A Happy Pest Summer) was completed in 1943, with music by Dénes Buday, Mihály Eisemann and Szabolcs Fényes, and the libretto is the work by László Szilágyi and Attila Orbók. Directed by: Vilmos Tihanyi. Hanna Honthy is back again as Cecília, the old orpheum, which played itself at the Municipal Operetta Theatre, came to life. In 1950, Fővárosi Varieté (Municipal Variety) presented the play *A sziget rózsái* (The Roses of the Island), in which Teri Fejes played Cecília Carola; the sumptuous world

The competitors and the failure

While the greats were copying each other's shows, Somossy also put himself on the European entertainment industry map for the simple reason that his impresarios brought him the best and brightest stars, giving him considerable competitive strength to the Ronacher and Danzer's Orpheum in Vienna, the Moulin Rouge, the Folies Bergère and the Alcazar in Paris, the Apollo Theatre and the Wintergarten in Berlin, the Tivoli in Copenhagen and the Empire in London, not to mention the famous circuses, because Somossy featured wrestlers, performers, animal and animal acts, equestrians, singers, magicians and transformational artists, and thus competed even with the Ciniselli, Renz, Wulff, Herzog, Barokaldi, Beketow and Krone circuses.

Encouraged by the huge success, the owners of the other 'music clubs', and song halls did not stand idly by, and more and more orpheums and nightclubs, including the Herzmann Orpheum, were built, the Hungarian Orpheum, the Imperial Nightclub, the Oroszy Orpheum, the Jardin d'Hiver, the Parisienne, the Foliès Caprice, the Dobler Bazaar, the Walhalla Orpheum, the Kék Macska (Blue Cat), the Berger Cellar and the Mandl Nightclub. Interestingly, Oroszy (elsewhere Oroszi) was Antal Somossy's house poet, but he made so much money that he started his own business and built the building of the present Uránia National Film Theatre, the Oroszy Caprice. According to the story, behind the beautiful mirrors and walls were secret doors that the dancing ladies who worked there opened to entertain the wealthy guests⁶⁸ in the adjacent building, where the University of Theatre and Film Arts now stands. In the same way, the Herzmann Orpheum fought a fierce battle with Somossy, brought revue stars and tap dancers from Paris, its director wore a dark grey 'Franz Joseph', with a top hat, patent leather shoes and two-carriage coach, because he wanted to resemble the 'emperor of the night'

of the orpheum and the millennium came to life again. Music: Tibor Polgár, Szabolcs Fényes, directed by: Ernő Szabolcs. In 1954, Imre Kálmán's Békeffy–Keller transcription of the *Csárdáskirálynő* (Csárdás Queen) was performed, in which the Archduchess Cecília (Anhilte) is revealed to have once been a chansonnette herself. The play thus clearly referring to Cecília Carola and to the fact that the venue could once again be the Somossy Nightclub. The role was again played by Hanna Honthy, and she scored a huge success. On 17 November 2023, *Az Orfeum mágnása* (The Magician of the Orpheum) was premiered in two acts. Text: János Dénes Orbán, music: Péter Pejtsik. Károly Somossy was played by Attila Dolhai, Cecília Carola by Diána Kiss, directed by: Yvette Bozsik.

68 Molnár Gál, Péter. 1995. "A kalábriász parti". *Budapesti Negyed* 2: 73–90. Online access: <https://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00003/00007/molnar.htm> (last visited: October 29, 2024).

in everything, who slowly lured all Herzmann's stars to Nagymező Street 17. Herzmann went bankrupt and eventually died in the poorhouse.⁶⁹ The theatres often took joint actions against Somossy, because he performed full-length plays, operettas and ballets in his orpheum, and since he did not have a licence to do so, he posed competition with all other theatres. Yet the police did not intervene, a fact that was quite often bitterly expressed by the people concerned in the newspapers.

Somossy failed a lot with his performances and income from restaurants, nightclubs and orpheums, but he always managed to get up after a failure or found a generous friend to bail him out. His constant creativity and ideas pushed him to achieve new goals, but he was never financially secure. This is why it could happen that auctions were almost a daily occurrence in the Somossy family. Dozens of entries can be found on how and when Károly Somossy's movables, café equipment and shares, registered at various addresses, were auctioned off over his head. And he could start all over again. Never discouraged by failure, he started to gamble more and more, and produced more and more income. He sensed the *'zeitgeist'* of the moment and made the most of it. I am convinced that two factors played a role in Somossy's downfall. One is his unquenchable gambling obsession, the other is the changing zeitgeist, which decades earlier he had been able to grasp with a good sense. As the turn of the century approached, the demand for Hungarian-language performances grew in the rapidly expanding Budapest. Somossy has always made sure that there are some Hungarian words in the orpheum (bilingual programme leaflets, posters, etc.), but apart from that he has not addressed the issue. If he had spearheaded the initiative, he might have successfully carried his business into the next century. Meanwhile, the much celebrated and adored ideal of womanhood has also undergone major changes. Whereas the eighties and nineties were all about the Amazonian, more corpulent woman, by the turn of the century men were infatuated with a different kind of lady. The era of Cecilia Carola type prima donnas was slowly coming to an end. The combination of these factors meant that Somossy could not avoid failure in the end.

This is how the *Vendéglősök Lapja* reported the Orpheum's bankruptcy: "We already considered the German orpheums an almost indescribable stigma, and suddenly—quite unexpectedly—their main nest, the Somossi one—closed

⁶⁹ *Magyarság*, July 9, 1924, 4.

up the business because a good Hungarian orpheum had attacked in Ó-Budavár [Ancient Buda Castle].⁷⁰ Around 1901, he could no longer realistically assess the risk was worth taking in starting a business. He borrowed money from his own employees, who still believed in the legendary manager and were happy to lend him money, to build his new nightclub. The nightclub was completed at Király Street 71, the stars were signed on, but there was not enough money to run it on a daily basis. This was particularly embarrassing because Somossy made his two daughters the managers of the nightclub, but they were really just dummies, he was running everything from the background (the court later acquitted the two Somossy girls on this ground). When he could no longer afford to pay the staff, the performers or the licences, the police closed the doors of the nightclub for good and the place was locked up. From then on, endless court cases began, the two girls were captured, Somossy fell ill and never got up again. The staff working for the family could run after his money. To show how respected the Somossy family was, the advertisement of the Municipal Orpheum in the *Magyar Nemzet* is a good example: "The proceeds from tomorrow's performance on Friday will go to the Somossy grandchildren."⁷¹ The same in the daily newspaper *Magyarország* with the addition: "Overpayments are gratefully accepted by the committee collecting the income." Everyone saw and empathised with the tragedy and tried to help. This is a particularly a big thing from the former Somossy Nightclub (then already the Municipal Orpheum), which was also a competitor to the New Somossy Nightclub. Imre Waldmann, the director, has demonstrated his humanity. The Budapest Artists' Association founded by Somossy, Cecilia Carola (100 crowns) and the *Internationalis Loge* in Berlin (32 crowns) donated money for the funeral of Károly Somossy, because the family was so impoverished that they could not pay even for it.

⁷⁰ *Vendéglősök Lapja*, August 5, 1897, 4.

⁷¹ *Magyar Nemzet*, March 14, 1902, 15.

Communication and programme policy of the Budapest Operetta Theatre

It would be difficult to list the innumerable changes that took place in the field of communication in the last one hundred and fifty years. While the basics are similar, the importance of relations with the audience, internal and external PR, and marketing strategies is more important than ever in a fiercely competitive theatre world. The hundred year old Operetta Theatre is striving to meet the challenges of the modern age and is present on many platforms, in the media, online and in print. The former closed system is over, the stars of the theatre can appear in other theatres, but there is a trend in who are playing the main roles these days. Attila Dolhai, Zsolt Homonnay, Barbara Bordás, Diána Kiss, Péter Laki, Szendy Szilvi, Zoltán Kiss, Attila Bardóczy, Mónika Fischl, and the previously undeservedly neglected Nikolett Füredi, Gábor Dézsy Szabó and Veronika Nádasí are living their heyday. The website is clean and well laid out, although the excessive use of black gives a slightly sombre impression, arousing a sense of sadness. There is a certain perceptible anachronism in the programme planning (the choice of old and new pieces), in the use of logos (similarity with the logo of the Academy of Music), and in the naming of the National Song Theatre (at the end of the 19th century so was the naming of the Hungarian State Opera House). The site offers access to the most popular social media platforms, communication and barrier-free access are also easy to overview. With the complete redesign of the website, the memory of the successes and performances of the previous management has almost completely disappeared, and now only the then and current staff of the company and the few plays running are a reminder of the twenty-three years since the theatre's reconstruction. The theatre offers several types of season ticket (Premier+, János Sárdy, Romantika, Somossy Károly season ticket), gift vouchers and a frequent regular viewer card (Operett Gold Club, which offers various discounts) for the 2023/2024 season. In terms of show politics,, the selection is mixed, with a few old plays still running at the time of writing the paper, such as *Szépség és a Szörnyeteg* (*Beauty and the Beast*, 2005), *Mágnás Miska* (*Miska Mágnás*, 2002), *Lili bárnónő* (*Baroness Lili*, 2005), *Jövőre, Veled, Itt!* (*Next Year, With You, Here!*, 2005) and *Virágot Algernonnak* (*Flowers for Algernon*, 2015), there are also hit plays that have been withdrawn but staged and re-staged, such as *Csárdáskirálynő* (*Csárdás Queen*, 2019, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky), or

Marica grófnő (Countess Marica, 2020, directed by Bozsik Yvette). In the field of musicals, they put on well-established and successful plays, such as *Hegedűs a háztetőn* (*Fiddler on the Roof*, 1964, current premiere: 2021), *La Mancha lovagja* (*Man of La Mancha*, 1965, current premiere: 2020), *Jekyll és Hyde* (*Jekyll and Hyde*, 1990, current premiere: 2022) and *Monte Cristo grófja* (*The Count of Monte Cristo*, 2011, current premiere: 2023). They also perform classics, such as Pongrác Kacsóh's *János vitéz* and Ferenc Lehár's *A mosoly országa* (*Land of Smiles*) or Jenő Huszka's operetta *Mária főhadnagy* (*Lieutenant Maria*). Periodically, seasonal productions are also performed, such as Tchaikovsky's *Diótörő* (*Nutcracker*) ballet, or *Veszedelemes viszonyok* (*Dangerous Affairs*), based on a letter novel with a historic background, directed by Csaba Kiss, with music by Adrián Kovács and text by Péter Müller Sziámi. With nearly twelve thousand subscribers, the theatre's YouTube channel is a very popular one, still featuring old footage from the last twenty years of the institution. A theatre competition for primary and secondary school groups to make creative videos called 'Tiétek a színpad!' ('You have the stage' was launched, and YouTube was the primary channel for connecting with audiences during the pandemic. Attila Dolhai's and Tibor Cári's musical drama about the tragedy of Trianon, entitled *Szétszakítottak* (*Torn Apart*), was created for the video sharing site, featuring the actors and singers of the theatre. The Instagram channel has nearly fourteen thousand followers and produces a wide range of ads and spontaneous test photos, the selection is quite mixed, probably several people manage the content. The content on the official Facebook page is almost identical to the Instagram content, but there are already one hundred and twenty-seven thousand followers. There are usually close to a hundred likes and comments on posts that are updated several times a day. (By the way, neither the Instagram nor the Facebook page links on the website work, so it's probably just a temporary error.) The theatre's 2023 budget report is not available on the website, but that of 2022 is there. On this basis, the theatre's total revenue for 2022 amounts to HUF 6,470,534,822, of which the budget revenue is HUF 1,597,637,815, the central, managing body subsidy is HUF 4,297,526,427, plus the use of the previous year's balance of HUF 575,370,580.⁷² The theatre could therefore operate with a subsidy of nearly HUF 5 billion during the 2022/2023 season. Two of these were staged: *Mária főhad-*

⁷² Source: Éves_költségvetési_beszámoló_2022._szöveges_indoklás.pdf (operett.hu) (last visited: October 15, 2024).

nagy (Lieutenant Maria) directed by Zsolt Homonnay, and *Monte Cristo grófja* (*The Count of Monte Cristo*) written by György Szomor.

For the new production (*Az Orfeum mágusa* – The Magician of the Orpheum), a statue of Károly Somossy was erected at the main entrance of the theatre in 2023.

My conversation with the theatre's marketing department revealed that the Budapest Operetta Theatre is actively using most of the advertising platforms that are known and available today. Print materials include public advertisements, giant billboards, roll-ups, stop boards, but they also appear in the printed press, magazines and in their own print materials. In response to today's challenges, current events are advertised on LED walls at the main entrance, and digital print materials are also shown inside the building on these special 'displays'. The theatre builds its cast on the basis of triple cast, as has been the practice in recent years: all three main characters appear on posters and advertisements, so that the audience can see who is playing in the performances. Actors are often sent to give interviews and reports, typically on the television programme entitled *Mokka* and other talk shows. The theatre now also offers actors the opportunity to present themselves on the website, with their own interface where they can display their CV and any other information they wish. The theatre's main communication channel is Facebook (it has the largest number of followers there), as the audience of the Operetta Theatre is largely older and Facebook is typically used by older people, at least not predominantly young people. And on their own website, they communicate official news and announcements.

Conclusions

At the end of the 19th century, the most important medium of communication was not only the printed press, but also street advertisements and posters, which could appear anywhere on advertising pillars, omnibuses, company signs, carts and even on the walls of houses. Károly Somossy may have been an innovator in many respects, but he had a similar vision of marketing to his competitors. The difference was that he had the brightest stars performing, and he was not afraid of introducing unconventional novelties, which is how he was the first to present the moving image to the Hungarian audience a few months after the Lumière brothers' premiere in Paris. We also saw that

he had an advertising column erected near the Oktogon to spread the word about his nightclub to a wider audience. When necessary, he hired omnibuses and boat trips to give the esteemed audience easier access to his facilities. He has been conscious in the marketing and advertising work. Newspaper advertising was usually concentrated in the capital, with only occasional news and advertisements in rural papers. It is also a fact that the bigger and bigger attractions, the 'Somossy facilities' started to 'cannibalise' each other after a while. So it was surely a mistaken decision for him to run the more than nightclub with a capacity of two thousand and create the Constantinople in Budapest (also known as Little Constantinople), which in its heyday was able to entertain forty thousand people, because in the meantime many other new art institutions were being built, not to mention the Ancient Buda Castle complex in the heart of the city, where tens of thousands of people could also spend their nights. There was too much supply in the rapidly growing Budapest and not enough demand. The administration activity of Károly Somossy had some errors in terms of personal and institutional PR. When he used his cane to beat a lawyer complaining about the theatre's operation in the street and threatened him, or when he was summoned to court for selling the exclusive rights to sell tickets to several contractors at the same time, or when he sued a prima donna who refused to go on stage (who fought back and won), all show that his violent temper sometimes overrode the image of a sober, thoughtful director, and that this did not reflect well on him or his institution. True, neither did his constant debts and his constant running away from creditors. There is no doubt, however, that his life's work, created through decades of hard work, enabled the flourishing and golden age of genres such as operetta and musicals, which later brought Hungary worldwide fame and huge success.

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