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Karel Burian – the Guest of Budapest (1913–1924)

Abstract | In the present article the last third of Karel Burian's career is discussed, not only because it is perhaps a less known period of Burian's biography, but also because it is closely connected with Hungarian culture. In these years he appeared in Budapest as a regular guest of the Royal Hungarian Opera mainly as a Wagner singer but also in French, Italian and Hungarian operas, and celebrated his thirty-year jubilee as an opera singer also in Budapest. After a chronological overview, certain special aspects of Burian's Hungarian activity are examined, e.g. his Hungarian naturalization (the so called 'Hungarian divorce') and the political context of his appearances at the end of the First World War.

Keywords | Karel Burian – First World War – Hungarian divorce – Hungary – Naturalization – Opera, Scandals – Richard Wagner

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1 Introduction¹

Even today, the name of the Czech *Heldentenor* Karel Burian sounds familiar not only in his native land, but also among the opera lovers in Hungary. Despite the fact that it was required to sing in Hungarian on the stage of the Royal Hungarian Opera, the most successful Wagner tenor of the first quarter of the 20th century in Budapest was a foreign singer: Karel Burian. In the present article I discuss the last ten years of his career, not only because it is perhaps a less known period of Burian's biography, but also because it is closely connected with Hungarian musical culture.

In 1913, the zenith of Burian's artistic career and reputation was already behind him. In the past years he had travelled a great deal between cities and theatres in Europe and in the United States and had earned a lot of money with his guest appearances.² He had made a sizeable number of recordings of opera excerpts and songs for several recording firms.³ From 1911 on, he had published a series of recollections in the journal *Smetana* about the most important moments of his career,⁴ and the publication of some of these writings in the first volume of his memoirs can

¹ This study is a largely extended version of the relevant chapters of my unpublished DMA Thesis entitled *Karel Burian és Magyarország* [Karel Burian and Hungary] (Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music, 2012). A brief summary of the thesis, focused on performance analysis, was published in Hungarian and in English in 2013. This study differs from them both in its extension and content. All of the citations are translated by me. The spelling of the name of Karel Burian varied in the contemporary Hungarian press, it was usually written in Hungarian, as Burián (or Burrián) Károly. I offer my thanks to Ágnes Lux for her help with the English text.

² See Burian's letter to Johannes Reichelt in his chapter "Karl Burrian. Um die Tragik verwöhnter Heldentenöre," in Johannes Reichelt, *Erlebte Kostbarkeiten* (Dresden: Verlag Wodni & Lindecke, 1941), 347.

³ I compiled Burian's discography (Appendix 2 of my DMA Thesis) and identified recently his last Pathé recording in the article "Musicologists and Librarians Working Together: The *Lendület* Archive and Research Group, Budapest," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 61/2 (2014): 152–162.

⁴ Klára Kolofíková: "Burian, Karel" [last modified January 13, 2010], in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí* (Praha, 2010), accessed June 19, 2015, http://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mndictionary&action=record_detail&id=7049.

be considered as retrospection.⁵ Perhaps Burian also treated the year 1913 as a turning-point. He published a short summary of his career in a German-language journal of Budapest under the title *Aus meinen Lehr- und Wanderjahren*, paraphrasing Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.⁶ His companion, a married lady from Dresden called "Marschenka" by Burian, also died in 1913 in the USA.⁷ He bought an estate in Senomaty where he could retire and relax in the summer.⁸ And, although he was still considered a world star, he was not, in fact, that any more. He was still a very successful singer but there were also some scandals surrounding him, not to mention his escape from Dresden,⁹ the problems of his marriage,¹⁰ his disrepute based on his capricious cancelling of advertised performances.¹¹ And – according to Kutsch and Riemens – his voice quality also weakened around 1913.¹² Perhaps this chequered career engendered his desire for a calmer and quieter life and his settling in Senomaty and Budapest. In summary, he went through almost all of the events mentioned in his biographies, which deal with his great successes from before 1913 in much more detail. The period after 1913 is generally unknown and the biographical studies are also incomplete and dissenting.

With the exception of the Hungarian lexicon articles,¹³ the fact that Burian appeared in Budapest regularly between 1913 and 1924 is only mentioned in the article by Klára Kolofiková in the new online edition of *Český hudební slovník*.¹⁴ The Burian article of the *Großes Sängerlexikon* by Kutsch and Riemens only mentions that he appeared in Budapest in the season 1923–1924.¹⁵ In his article, Paul Wilhelm stated that Burian preferred the city of Budapest, but he did not give more information on that,¹⁶ while the author of the longest English article about Burian, James Dennis, mentioned only "Wagner concerts in Budapest in 1915".¹⁷ Further literature does not mention his presence in Budapest. According to Einhard Luther,¹⁸ Bohumír Štědroň,¹⁹ Jürgen

⁵ Karel Burian, *Z mých pamětí*, Vol. 1 (Praha: Melantrich, 1913). As far as I know, no further volumes have been published.

⁶ Karl Burrian, "Aus meinen Lehr- und Wanderjahren," *Budapester Fremdenblatt*, 22 February 1914.

⁷ For a detailed but very ironic and sometimes incorrect description about the relationship between Burian and Marschenka and about the death of Marschenka see Leo Slezak, "Karl Burian und Prager Freunde," in Leo Slezak, *Mein Lebensmärchen* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983), 161–167.

⁸ Josef Bartoš, *Karel Burian* (Rakovník: Výbor pro jubilejní oslavy v Rousínově, 1934), 36.

⁹ See, for example, "Burian, Karl" in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*, Personenteil Bd. 3 hrsg. von Ludwig Finscher (Kassel, Stuttgart, Weimar: Bärenreiter, Metzler, 2000): col.1298–1299; col.1299.

¹⁰ Burian's wife, Františka Jelínek, has not been a member of the Hofoper in Dresden since 1906, later their relationship deteriorated.

¹¹ Einhard Luther, *Helden an geweihtem Ort. Biographie eines Stimmfaches. Teil 2 Wagnertenöre in Bayreuth (1884–1914)* (Trossingen, Berlin: Edition Omega Wolfgang Layer, 2002), 351.

¹² Karl Josef Kutsch and Leo Riemens, *Unvergängliche Stimmen. Sängerlexikon* (Bern, München: Francke Verlag, 1975), 103.

¹³ Aladár Schöpflin (ed.), *Magyar színművészeti lexikon. A magyar színjátszás története. I. kötet* [Hungarian Theatrical Lexicon Vol. 1] ([Budapest:] Országos Színészegyesület és Nyugdíjintézete, [1929]), 250–251; Bence Szabolcsi and Aladár Tóth (eds.), *Zenei Lexikon. A zenetörténet és zenetudomány enciklopédiája. Második, pótlással bővített kiadás*, Vol. 1 [Musical lexicon] (Budapest: Győző Andor, 1935), 138–139.

¹⁴ Kolofiková, "Burian, Karel".

¹⁵ Karl Josef Kutsch and Leo Riemens, *Großes Sängerlexikon*. 3, erweiterte Auflage. Bd. 1 (Bern und München: K. G. Saur, 1997), 510.

¹⁶ Paul Wilhelm, "Carl Burrian," *Record News* 4/7 (March 1960): 243.

¹⁷ James Dennis, "Karel Burian," *The Record Collector* 18/7 (July 1969): 155.

¹⁸ Luther, *Helden an geweihtem Ort*, 365.

¹⁹ Bohumír Štědroň, "Burian Karel," in *Československý hudební slovník osob a institucí*. svazek prvý A–L, ed. by Gracian Černušák, Bohumír Štědroň and Zdenko Nováček (Prague: Státní hudební vydavatelství, 1963), 155–156.

Kesting²⁰ and the article in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, after 1913 he only appeared in Czech Theatres (Plzeň, Brno, Olomouc, Ostrava, České Budějovice, the German Theatre in Prague, etc.). Some further lexicon articles do not mention his activity after 1913 at all.²¹ Obviously, James Dennis did not have access to the Hungarian sources when he wrote in his study that “War time news is scanty.”²² In the following subchapters I will discuss Burian’s presence in Hungary not only chronologically after 1913, but also from several particular points of view. These facts can not only widen the picture about a great singer and make his biography even more complete, but also deepen our knowledge of his personality.

2 Karel Burian in Hungary, 1913–1924

Burian was present in the operatic culture of Budapest from 1900 to his death. In the theatrical season 1901–1902 he was a member of the Royal Hungarian Opera and created the main roles in the Hungarian premières of *Tristan und Isolde* by Richard Wagner, *Onegin* by Piotr Tchaikovsky and *Fedora* by Umberto Giordano. At the end of the season he broke his contract and left Budapest for Dresden. He came back to Budapest in 1907 as a guest singer, and returned regularly for three or four performances every year. He appeared not only in the repertoire operas, but also, for example, in the revival of *Der Evangelimann* by Wilhelm Kienzl in 1912.

From 1913 onwards, Burian had a special contract at the Royal Hungarian Opera as a “regular guest.”²³ He was engaged for a pre-defined number of performances which had to take place over a period of some months, and his contract was renewed from period to period.²⁴ This contract was advantageous for both the Opera and Burian: on the one hand, mainly after the outbreak of the First World War, but also due to his often cancelling, Burian would not get another offer for a longer contract with such favourable terms at other theatres. On the other hand, it was worth having a famous singer, a “star” in the ensemble of the Royal Hungarian Opera which did not have a real Wagner tenor after 1914. Burian was regarded as almost an ordinary member of the Opera; for example, it happened that he was asked to cover for a member of the Opera.²⁵

Although Burian’s last performances in Vienna were in September and even in October 1913, on the basis of the list of his performances and the press articles it is obvious that the first contract period as a “regular guest” began in September 1913.²⁶ He planned a three-month holiday at the turn of 1913 and 1914 to appear at guest performances in London, New York and Prague, but from these only the London guest performances came about in February 1914.

²⁰ Jürgen Kesting, *Die grossen Sänger* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2008), 192.

²¹ For example, Desmond Shawe-Taylor, “Burian, Karel,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second Edition. Vol. 4, ed. by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001): 624.

²² Dennis, “Karel Burian,” 155.

²³ “Burrián Károly szerződése” [Károly Burrián’s contract], *Budapest*, 27 June 1913.

²⁴ Unfortunately, none of these contracts survived.

²⁵ 28 November 1915, in the role of Faust.

²⁶ “Burrián Károly szerződése” [Károly Burrián’s contract], *Budapest*, 27 June 1913. I compiled the – still incomplete – list of Burian’s performances on the basis of playbills (Budapest, Vienna, Dresden, Hannover and Munich) and literature (Prague, Bayreuth, London, New York, etc.).

2.1 New and failed roles

As a “regular guest” of the Royal Hungarian Opera Burian enjoyed exceptional treatment. Although he should have learned new roles, he appeared only in his former roles until November 1916. The reason for this could have been that the management of the Opera decided that the regular performance of the Wagner repertoire – which would have been impossible without Burian – was more important than him learning and performing new roles. He appeared 70 times in the Opera over 18 months between September 1913 and May 1916.²⁷ 71% of these performances (50) were that of operas by Wagner. Most of the performances of *Lohengrin* and *Die Walküre*, and all of that of *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan und Isolde* were billed with Burian. It shows the lack of Wagner tenors in Budapest that if he cancelled a performance, the management changed the programme to another opera,²⁸ or Georg Anthes, a retired tenor singer of the Opera, had to cover for him.²⁹

As a Wagner singer, Burian had a number of very successful and memorable performances between 1913 and 1924 in Budapest. For example, the two performances of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* on 8 and 23 April 1914, were among Burian’s greatest performances there. The role of Hans Sachs was sung by Fritz Feinhals. The press critics were enthusiastic: “It is not an everyday phenomenon to see the name of Feinhals and Burian together on the playbill. [...] Feinhals was a splendid Hans Sachs: his powerful baritone managed the exhausting role with ease. Burian sang Walther beautifully; his pianos were greatly refined. The third act duet of the two great artists caused such a sensation that it was applauded at the end of the piece by the audience.”³⁰

After the outbreak of the First World War, the Royal Hungarian Opera did not open its doors until 21 March 1915. At that time Burian appeared as a guest singer at the German Theatre in Prague,³¹ but only ten days later, on 15 April, he sang the role of Tristan in Budapest in a new way for the Hungarian audience: in German. The reason is simple: according to an old unwritten rule which might have stemmed from the 1840s, it was not allowed to sing in German on the Hungarian (National) stage.³² The first time the audience of the Royal Hungarian Opera could listen to a singer singing in German occurred on 8 April 1915, when Alexander Kirchner, a guest singer from Berlin, did not know the role of Lohengrin in Italian. In order for *Lohengrin* to be performed, the Minister of Culture had to allow singing in German at the Royal Hungarian Opera.³³ After that date, Burian also had the possibility to sing in German at the Opera in Budapest.

In the season of 1916–1917 Burian appeared in several new roles at the Royal Hungarian Opera. Although *Götterdämmerung* by Richard Wagner had been planned to be performed already in the 1902–1903 season with Burian in the role of Siegfried,³⁴ he sang that for the first time in Budapest only on 4 November 1916. It was his first appearance of the season; his voice

²⁷ He stayed in Budapest from September 1913 to May 1914, in April 1915 and from October 1915 to May 1916.

²⁸ For example, on 6 November 1913, when *Madama Butterfly* was performed instead of *Lohengrin*.

²⁹ For example, on 23 May 1914, in the role of Siegmund.

³⁰ “Operaház” [Opera], *Budapesti Hirlap*, 9 April 1914.

³¹ Pamela Tancsik, *Die Prager Oper heißt Zemlinsky. Theatergeschichte des Neuen Deutschen Theaters Prag in der Ära Zemlinsky von 1911 bis 1927* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau, 2000), 424 and 426.

³² Edit Mályuszné Császár, “A rendi Nemzeti Színháztól a polgári nemzet színháza felé (1849–1873)” [From the National Theatre of the estates toward a theatre of the bourgeois nation], in Miklós Hofer et al., *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve* [150 years of the National Theater] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1987), 54. – Burian also sang his Wagner roles in Budapest in Italian until the spring of 1915.

³³ (–Idi.) [Izor Béldi], “Németül énekeltek a m. kir. Operaházban” [It was sung in German at the Royal Hungarian Opera], *Pesti Hirlap*, 9 April 1915.

³⁴ (–Idi.) [Izor Béldi], “Az operaház jövő szezonzja. II.” [The next season of the Opera], *Pesti Hirlap*, 19 June 1902.

was relaxed and he was allowed to sing in German.³⁵ In the same season he also appeared in a jubilee performance: the hundredth night of *La Bohème* by Giacomo Puccini at the Royal Hungarian Opera on 29 April 1917.

On 24 May 1917 the Opera was offering the world première of a Hungarian opera: *Othello mesél* [Othello Recounts] by Jenő Sztojanovics. It was by no means a success, ran for only three nights, with Burian in the title role each time. Sztojanovics's opera received very bad reviews. The journalist of *Népszava* wrote that “this ‘opera’ is a poor patchwork both in text and music. [...] No matter how beautiful is the voice of Burian, he is incapable of making water spring from a rock, and his noble art is doubly downgraded in this work.”³⁶ In contrast to the opera, Burian was generally praised, especially as he sang in Hungarian: “Of the main roles, Károly Burián took on the rather passive part of Othello. He sang with clear Hungarian pronunciation and a disposition of rare brilliance.”³⁷

The Hungarian audience looked forward to listening to Burian in new roles. The next occasion of such a performance was in April 1918, in *Samson et Dalila* by Camille Saint-Saëns. The bill on 2 April, 1918 which advertised that performance, attracted a full house to the Opera. As Samson, Burian had great success; as one of the critics wrote: “His rich voice soared impressively and with fresh power in the effective crescendo of the music by Saint-Saëns; his unique singing and acting ability compensated his not too emphatic figure.”³⁸

His short figure might have been much more appropriate to his next new role: he sang Loge for the first time in Budapest on 16 May 1920, in a highly spectacular production of *Das Rheingold*. The critics wrote primarily about the stage invention of Jenő Kéméndy – which made the Rhine Maidens more effective –, with only some words about the singers. Consequently, we do not know too much about Burian's singing, except from the critic of the *Népszava*, who wrote that “A prominent element of the performance was the interpretation of Burian, who sang Loge, the fire-god of the Germanic legend with a sonorous voice, with youthful verve and a perfect grasp of Wagner.”³⁹

On 30 December 1921, Burian celebrated his thirty-year jubilee as an opera singer in the role of Tristan in Budapest. Burian himself said to a Hungarian journalist in an interview that he considered Budapest so important in his career that he would like to celebrate his jubilee there in that role, which was created there by him.⁴⁰ *Tristan und Isolde* also had a jubilee that year, namely, it had been in the repertory for twenty years. Before the performance, Government commissioner Gyula Wlassics Jr. read out the gratulatory letter of the Minister of Culture and greeted Burian on the stage.⁴¹ At the celebration, the director of the Opera, Rezső [Raoul] Máder and, on behalf of the ensemble of the Opera the baritone singer, Viktor Dalnoki, greeted Burian, and it shows the popularity of the tenor singer, that a member of both the boxholders and of the regular customers of the 3rd floor was given the chance to say a few words after the performance.⁴² In his answer, Burian pointed out that, out of the performers of the *Tristan* première twenty years

³⁵ h. e. [anonymous author's shortcut], “Operaház” [Opera], *Budapesti Hirlap*, 5 November 1916.

³⁶ ni. [anonymous author's shortcut], “Othello mesél” [Othello Recounts], *Népszava*, 25 May 1917.

³⁷ “Othello mesél” [Othello Recounts], *Alkotmány*, 25 May 1917.

³⁸ k. e. [anonymous author's shortcut], “Operaház” [Opera], *Pesti Napló*, 13 April 1918.

³⁹ B. [anonymous author's shortcut], “Operaház” [Opera], *Népszava*, 18 May 1920.

⁴⁰ [without title] *Az Ujság*, 25 December 1921. – I have found no sign of any other city marking the jubilee. This is unlikely anyway, as Burian no longer appeared in Dresden or America. The online archives of Prague National Theatre make no mention of it.

⁴¹ (–Idi.) [Izor Béldi], “Burian jubileuma” [Burian's Anniversary], *Pesti Hirlap*, 31 December 1921. For the text of the gratulatory letter of the Minister of Culture see “Karl Burians Jubiläum,” *Pester Lloyd*, 31 December 1921.

⁴² (–Idi.) [Izor Béldi], “Burian jubileuma”.

before, only he and the conductor István Kerner were still active.⁴³ Burian expressed his thanks in Hungarian for the almost endless applause at the end of the first act.⁴⁴

It was an irony of fate that the Hungarian audience had the possibility to hear Burian in his most famous and successful role, Herod in *Salome* by Richard Strauss, only at the end of his career and only two times. The critic for *Nemzeti Ujság* provided a sensitive description of Burian's rightly world-famous interpretation: "Burián performed the eager-eyed, weak, softened tetrarch, afraid of wind and blood, with splendid artistry. His movements, indecisive haste, and swings between fear and love portrayed with perfect fidelity the frailty of Herod caught between pain and desire."⁴⁵ Unfortunately, these two *Salome* performances were in the last Budapest season of Burian; he appeared in the season of 1923–1924 only once, as Siegmund on 26 September 1923. According to our recent data, it was his last performance in a complete opera not only in Budapest, but also in his life.

Apart from operatic performances, Burian also appeared in Budapest as a concert singer. It is remarkable that 19 of his known 24 Hungarian concert appearances took place in the years after 1913. The programmes of these recitals included, besides art songs, a strikingly numerous number of operatic arias and ensembles from operas in which he never appeared in the Royal Hungarian Opera. Only the concert audience had the possibility to listen to extracts from *Rienzi*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Der Freischütz*, *Tosca*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Werther*, *Aïda*, *Otello* (Verdi), Goldmark's *Merlin*, Mascagni's *Lamico Fritz* and Smetana's *Dalibor* and *Hubička*. His song repertoire in Budapest included, besides songs by Wagner, Mahler and Richard Strauss, songs by Czech composers. He sang Jindřich Jindřich's *Liebesträume* and *Verwelkte Blüte* as a Hungarian première on 27 November 1921, with the piano accompaniment of Miklós Gutmann, and *Erinnerungen I-III* by František Neumann was also very likely performed for the first time in Budapest by him. Burian also appeared in Budapest in concerts with his brother Emil Burian and with his son Richard Burian.⁴⁶

Certain abortive plans also need to be mentioned alongside the performances by Burian. The Hungarian press repeatedly reported on the revival of the most emblematic Hungarian national opera, Erkel's *Bánk bán*, with a new cast with Burian in the title role, sung in Hungarian and planned to be premièred in October 1913.⁴⁷ He actually borrowed the score from the library of the Opera in August 1913,⁴⁸ but this première did not come about. The revival of *Bánk bán* was held on 13 April 1914, with Béla Környei in the title role; Burian never sang the role of *Bánk bán*.

Bánk was not the only role which was announced with Burian but never performed by him, at least in Budapest. *Notre Dame* by Franz Schmidt, a Hungarian-born composer, was premièred in Budapest in December 1916, with József Gábor in the role of Gringoire. However, the role of Gringoire was advertised with Burian even one month before the première.⁴⁹ *Notre Dame* was performed only five times with the same cast, even though the press stated that Burian also learned the role. *Toldi szerelme* [Toldi's Love] by Ödön Mihalovich – the director of the Music Academy at the time – was planned to be revived in the 1918–1919 season. On 24 May 1918 Miklós Bánffy, the intendant of the Royal Hungarian Opera, wrote a letter to Burian in which

⁴³ "Burian ünneplése. A mai Trisztán-előadás" [Celebrating Burian. Today's Tristan performance], *Az Ujság*, 31 December 1921.

⁴⁴ (-ldi.) [Izor Béldi], "Burian jubileuma".

⁴⁵ R. M. [anonymous author's shortcut], "Operaház" [Opera], *Nemzeti Ujság*, 18 March 1923.

⁴⁶ "(A két Burian)" [The two Burians] *Pesti Hirlap*, 3 January 1922.

⁴⁷ Sándor Hevesi Dr., "Az Opera jövő hetéről" [The next week of the Opera], *Pesti Napló*, 14 September 1913; "Az Operaház munkaterve" [Plans of the Opera], *Egyetértés*, 24 August 1913.

⁴⁸ See page 8 of the old casting book of the Royal Hungarian Opera (Archives of the Hungarian State Opera).

⁴⁹ "Az Operaház első bemutatója" [The first première of the Opera], *Színházi élet* V/40 (12–19 November 1916): 33.

he asked him to sing the role of Toldi in that revival in Hungarian.⁵⁰ Burian did not appear in Budapest in the 1918–1919 season at all, however. In 1920, on the occasion of Fritz Feinhals' guest appearances, Verdi's *Otello* was advertised with Karel Burian in the title role and Feinhals as Iago, but the performances had to be cancelled because of a minor accident of Burian's: at a performance of *Carmen* Elza Szamosi, the singer of the title role, pushed him too strongly in the heat of the moment at the quarrel in the last scene, and Burian's leg got injured.⁵¹

2.2 "Burián-Dalnoki Károly", a Hungarian citizen

There is a strange statement in the Burian article of the old *Hungarian Theatrical Lexicon*, which is not mentioned in any other biographies of Karel Burian: "[in 1913], in order to receive Hungarian citizenship, [Burian] let himself be adopted by Béni Dalnoki, the former great buffo of the Opera."⁵² This act was mentioned in the press in 1913 and 1914, later in some obituaries in the Hungarian press,⁵³ but was later forgotten. One could doubt the reality of this sentence, but Burian himself verified that in his testament dated 17 June 1920 in Budapest with the following words: "I remonstrate that, on account of the warrant no. 212673/1913 of the Ministry of Home Affairs, I made the oath of allegiance in Budapest in the presence of the mayor, consequently I am a Hungarian citizen."⁵⁴

But why was Hungarian naturalization so important for Burian? It was more than a courtesy to the Hungarian audience. Its background was a well-known legal institution, or rather a loophole, called 'Hungarian divorce'.⁵⁵ By the early 20th century, divorce was not allowed in all of the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, only in Hungary and if the parties were Hungarian citizens. This was the reason for the Hungarian naturalization of many foreign citizens. It shows the obvious popularity of the 'Hungarian divorce' that it was incorporated into 20th century statutory interpretation manuals as well.⁵⁶

The process of naturalization had strict conditions, including, among others, ones which were in all probability not valid for Burian; for example, the person had to be put down into a register of a Hungarian locality, had to have been living in Hungary for five years without interruptions and had to be registered as a taxpayer in Hungary.⁵⁷ But exactly the same conditions were

⁵⁰ See the typed copy of the letter from Miklós Bánffy to Karel Burian on 24 May 1918 in Arisztid Valkó, comp., *Adatok az Operaház történetéhez 1* [Notes toward the history of the Opera House, Vol. 1] (Manuscript, Budapest, 1975), 71–72. (Institute of Musicology, RCH HAS).

⁵¹ "(Hirek az Operaházból)" [News from the Opera] *Budapesti Hirlap*, 22 May 1920; "Burrian balesete" [Burrian's Accident] *Az Est*, 23 May 1920.

⁵² Schöpflin, *Magyar színművészeti lexikon*, 250.

⁵³ See [Izor Béldi], "Burrian-adomák" [Burrian anecdotes], *Pesti Hirlap*, 27 September 1924.

⁵⁴ "Ich schicke voraus, dass ich zufolge Bescheid 212673/1913 des Ministeriums des Innen in Ungarn, den Staatsbürgereid zu Händen des Bürgermeisters in Budapest geleistet habe, somit ungarischer Staatsbürger bin." Handwritten testament of Karel Burian, deposited at the royal notary Lajos Band on 17 June 1920. Budapest City Archives, HU BFL – VII.269 – 1920 – 557.

⁵⁵ For the history of the "Hungarian divorce" see the publications of Sándor Nagy, especially "Osztrák válások Erdélyben, 1868–1895. Otto Wagner 'erdélyi házassága'" [Austrian divorces in Transylvania 1868–1895. Otto Wagner's "Transylvanian marriage"], *Fons* 14/3 (2007), 359–428.

⁵⁶ István Szász: "Nemzetközi magánjog. 73. §. Az örökbefogadás" [International civil law. 73. §. Adoption] in Károly Szladits, *A magyar magánjog. Általános rész. Személyi jog. Első rész* [Hungarian civil law] (Budapest: Grill Károly, 1941), 471.

⁵⁷ Dezső Márkus Dr.: *Magyar Magánjog Mai Érvényében. Törvények, rendeletek, szokásjog, joggyakorlat. I. kötet. Jogforrások. Személyjog. Családjog. Második, javított kiadás* [Hungarian civil law today...] (Budapest: Grill Károly, 1905), 54.

disregarded if the applicant had himself adopted by an older Hungarian citizen.⁵⁸ According to the register of the notary dr. József Kiss, Burian and Dalnoki appeared in the notarial office on 5 and 6 November 1913.⁵⁹ It was not compulsory to assume the adoptive's name,⁶⁰ but it seems that Burian did so, as he signed his testament as “Karl Burian-Dalnoki” and had a bank account in Budapest under the name of Károly Dalnoki.⁶¹

The surviving Hungarian probate files record Burian dying as a Czech citizen.⁶² As he wrote his Hungarian testament in June 1920 as a Hungarian citizen, he must have asked for the Czech citizenship after that date. Even in 1921 he was still mentioned as a Hungarian citizen in a short article in a Hungarian theatrical journal, but this source is a less conclusive proof than his hand-written testimony.⁶³

2.3 Scandalous performances

It is always hard to read scandalous news about a great artist like Karel Burian, even if it is well known that he was famous not only for his excellent voice, but also for his capriciousness, alcoholism and womaniser habits.⁶⁴ He was involved in a number of scandals in Budapest as well, mainly in his later years, and journalists, who were avid for sensations mainly in the years of and after the World War, jumped at these occasions to write high-profile reports.

It is not clear whether Burian did it consciously or because of his capriciousness or laziness, but if he felt his voice was not in good enough condition, he immediately cancelled his performance. Moreover, in 1908, he called off his first appearance in Budapest as Rodolfo in *La Bohème* by Giacomo Puccini the morning of the performance, but in the afternoon still undertook to sing.⁶⁵ After 1913 he cancelled advertised appearances so often that the press began to poke fun at this in reviews. When he first sang Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*, the *Pesti Hirlap* critic wrote, “Wonders never cease...! Burrián's appearance was announced for Saturday in *Götterdämmerung*, and, lo and behold, Burrián actually appeared. Despite the fact that it was announced, he sang after all.”⁶⁶

As he knew that the Opera depended on his appearances, he even dared to threaten to resign from the Opera because of the casting of the revivals of *Fedora* in May 1922 and *Salome* in the spring of 1923.⁶⁷ In the former case, he even had a concert agency organize a farewell concert for

⁵⁸ See the supplement to Act L/1879, § 8, then in force.

⁵⁹ Budapest City Archives, HU BFL – VII. 186. – Register [for 1913 and 1914], Volume 7, 408. Unfortunately, the files themselves have not survived.

⁶⁰ Kálmán Csorna Dr., “Rokonság. 22. §. Rokonsági kapcsolatok. 5. Az örökbefogadás” [Relationship ... adoption]. In: Károly Szladits, *A magyar magánjog. Második kötet. Családi jog.* [Hungarian civil law] (Budapest: Grill Károly, 1940), 308.

⁶¹ See the Hungarian notarial probate documents of Burian, Budapest City Archives HU BFL VII. 179. – 1930 – 011. 6.

⁶² Budapest City Archives, HU BFL – VII. 12. b. – 1929 – 416515, 6.

⁶³ “Burián,” *Magyar Szinpad*, 25 October 1921.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Michael Scott, *The Record of Singing*, Vol. 1: to 1914 (London: Duckworth, c1977), 200; Dennis, “Karel Burian,” 155; Reichelt, “Karl Burrian. Um die Tragik,” 337–339, etc.

⁶⁵ “Opera,” *A Nap*, 11 February 1908.

⁶⁶ “(M. kir. Operaház)” [Royal Hungarian Opera], *Pesti Hirlap*, 5 November 1916.

⁶⁷ “Burián az idén már lép fel az Operában” [Burián not appearing again at the Opera this year], *Pesti Napló*, 11 May 1922; and “Burián éneкли Heródest a Saloméban” [Burián will sing Herod in Salome], *Új nemzedék*, 7 December 1922.

him.⁶⁸ The Opera could not continue, of course, without the presence of Burian, and Burian by then could not return to other theatres where he had broken his contracts. This was the reason why a journalist from *Pesti Hírlap* wrote that “we do not consider so tragic the farewell words of the singer and the farewell of Lohengrin, sung at the end of the concert.”⁶⁹

James Dennis stated in his article that Burian sang Lohengrin so drunk in Budapest that he could not board the boat drawn by the swan and asked his colleagues on stage: “What time does the next swan leave?”⁷⁰ This is first of all not even true as it did not happen with Burian in Budapest but with Leo Slezak in America and not because he was drunk.⁷¹ It is true, however, that in a performance in 1918, Burian sang the title role of *Lohengrin* drunk at the Royal Hungarian Opera.⁷² Burian’s alcoholism was mentioned repeatedly, and also incorrectly, in the Hungarian press; for example, at his last *Tristan* performance in Budapest (20 January 1923), when he had to cancel the performance after the first act, because of a throat haemorrhage. As some of the critics mocked him in their reviews, assuming that he drank not only the elixir in the first act, but also other kind of drinks, director-in-chief Ferenc Mihályi had to declare in the press that “Burian was not drunk, but he was so weak physically and in such a weakened mental state that I had to accept that he could not continue singing the extremely long and exhausting role.”⁷³

History also caused several scandals at the Opera, and Burian could not avoid some of them. On 5 April 1920, during the duet of Wotan and Fricka in the second act of *Die Walküre*, a group of approximately 30 anti-Semitic youths burst into the auditorium yelling against Lajos S. Rózsa, who sang the part of Wotan. The performance came to a halt and could not be finished: part of the audience improvised a counter-demonstration for Rózsa and the police pushed out the demonstrators. Rózsa declared in the press that “It felt good that my friend and colleague Károly Burrian showed full solidarity with me.”⁷⁴ All that is known for certain concerning Burian’s behavior at the performance is his advice that the performance should come to an end. According to the press articles, his solidarity consisted of “announcing he would never appear at the Opera House again.”⁷⁵

After the end of the First World War, Hungarian journalists sometimes associated Burian’s appearance with the tension between Hungary and the Republic of Czechoslovakia. In January 1920, when Burian returned for the first time to Budapest after the First World War, Izor Béldi wrote in *Pesti Hírlap*: “The Czech Burian was highly celebrated tonight at the Hungarian National Opera. [italics in the original article!]”⁷⁶ The news about Burian’s accident, namely the case when he drank lye,⁷⁷ also received a political connotation in the Hungarian press. The newspaper *Nemzeti Ujság* published a highly ironical report with a criminal title “The Czechs have poisoned Karel Burian.”⁷⁸ According to them, Czech waiters poured poison into Burian’s

⁶⁸ 19 May 1922, in the Grand Hall of the Academy of Music.

⁶⁹ “(Burián búcsuhangversenye)” [Burián’s farewell concert], *Pesti Hírlap*, 20 May 1922.

⁷⁰ Dennis, “Karel Burian,” 162.

⁷¹ Walter Slezak included it in his memoirs, see Walter Slezak, *Wann geht der nächste Schwan?* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971), 211.

⁷² “Burián tegnap részegen énekelt Lohengrint” [Burián sang Lohengrin drunk last night], *Magyar Estilap*, 17 April 1918.

⁷³ “Két Tristan egy este” [Two Tristans a night] *Világ*, 21 January 1923.

⁷⁴ “Nagy botrány az Operaházban” [Great scandal at the Opera House], *Az Ujság*, 6 April 1920.

⁷⁵ “Rózsa Lajos az Operaház megzavart előadásáról” [Lajos Rózsa on the interrupted performance at the Opera House], *Az Est*, 7 April 1920.

⁷⁶ (–Idi.) [Izor Béldi], “(Nemzeti operaház)” [National Opera], *Pesti Hírlap*, 22 January 1920.

⁷⁷ Bartoš, *Karel Burian*, 47.

⁷⁸ “(Burrián Károlyt megmérgezték a csehek),” *Nemzeti Ujság*, 26 November 1920.

glass. Their reason was the singer's friendship with the Hungarians, the friendship of which they deduced from the singer's frequent performances in Budapest. The ironical allusions to Burian's well-known alcoholism and many cancelled performances are obvious.

2.4 Burian's death and probate in Hungary

News of Burian's death on 25 September 1924 reached the newspapers of Budapest quickly. A lengthy obituary appeared the next day in the newspaper *Világ* with remarkably accurate biographical information.⁷⁹ It even mentioned Burian's last letter written to Budapest, apparently to his tenor colleague Béla Környei. The Opera House could not be represented at the funeral, but a requiem was celebrated the following Friday at the Terézváros Parish Church,⁸⁰ where the ensembles of the Opera performed the funeral march from *Götterdämmerung* and the Pilgrims' Chorus from *Tannhäuser* under the conducting of István Kerner.⁸¹

Burian's probate in Hungary dragged on for long years; the probate files were dated in 1929⁸² and on 6 May 1930.⁸³ His musical "heritage" was also significant in Hungary. This might have been on the one hand a result of Burian's successes and guest appearances in Budapest that Béla Környei, the most famous Hungarian tenor singer of that period, could not become a real Wagner hero. He sang the title role of *Lohengrin* only four times in 1910 without any success and appeared later mainly in Italian and Hungarian roles. On the other hand, it can also be considered the impact of Burian, and partly that of Georg Anthes, whereby an extremely talented generation of Hungarian Wagner tenors arose after 1913. Zsigmond [Sigismund] Pilinszky, Tannhäuser of the 1930 and 1931 *Festspiele* in Bayreuth, had his début at the Royal Hungarian Opera on 20 December, 1913. He consequently learned almost every great Wagner tenor role and had his début as Erik in 1914, as Siegmund in 1918, as Lohengrin in 1919, as Tannhäuser in 1925 and as Siegfried in 1927. After 1928 he became more successful in Berlin as a member of the Städtische Oper and the Kroll-Oper, from where he was invited to Bayreuth as well. Another great Hungarian Wagner tenor was Zoltán Závodszy, the first Hungarian tenor who could appear in every Wagner tenor role. He had his début in 1920 as Heinrich in *Tannhäuser*, later sang many smaller roles by Wagner, and after 1926 the roles of Erik, Siegmund, Parsifal, Loge, the two Siegfrieds, Tannhäuser and Walter von Stolzing. He was capable of singing even Tristan, a role which had been without an appropriate performer since the death of Burian.

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⁷⁹ "Burián Károly meghalt" [Károly Burián died], *Világ*, 26 September 1924.

⁸⁰ "Burián Károly halála" [Death of Károly Burián], *Az Ujság*, 27 September 1924.

⁸¹ "Gyászmise Burián lelkiüdvéért" [Requiem for the soul of Burián], *Az Ujság*, 30 September 1924.

⁸² Budapest City Archives, HU BFL – VII.12.b – 1929 – 416515.

⁸³ Budapest City Archives, HU BFL – VII.179 – 1930 – 011.