

## ON MUSIC EDUCATION AT THE CISTERCIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL OF EGER IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

© László Kovács  
(Apor Vilmos Catholic College)

[kovlac@chello.hu](mailto:kovlac@chello.hu)

*Cistercian Order has cherished a prominent role in the educational system of Eger since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Apart from the troubled waters of history, this order has greatly improved the quality of secondary education both in town and its vicinity. The relationship between the Order and the so-called "unusual studies", music and singing in particular, is to be discussed hereby.*

**Keywords:** music education, history of education

In Catholic secondary schools in general, church chorals used to be taught meticulously. However, the Cistercian Secondary School of Eger has presented a great example of regular music education. The first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. history of music education at the Cistercians dates up until 1851, since in 1852, with the beginning of Ferenc Zsaskovszky's professional career at our institution, music education became richer and more comprehensive.<sup>1</sup> Zsaskovszky proved to be a superb performing artist-teacher with substantial expertise in the field. The latter is tangible in the view of his further professional commitments both in arts and sciences, since he took various positions, such as the 'golden prize winner archdiocesan conductor of Eger, teacher trainer at the archbishop's institute, member of the Prague Music Society, the Sophia Singing Academy and the Salzburg Mozarteum. Besides, he was a member of the master composers' and teachers' society of the Papal Music Academy of Rome since 1868 as well as an instructor of music at the Cistercian High School.<sup>2</sup>

Zsaskovszky provided double classes each week for the volunteering students of music since 1855. This very influential artist teacher did all his best for quality improvement. He obtained sheet music notebooks in order to enable his students to learn the skills of reading and writing sheet music. Proving this development, in 1854 his students were able to play four-voice pieces of music. In 1855, the choir earned the director's benevolence and respect by presenting three songs dedicated to the celebration of his name day. On 29 May, 1856, on the occasion of the Zircabbey's visit, a four-voice salutary song was sung by the choir of already seventy members. This special greeting was such a success that the director was asked to have a new organ devised, with the help of which the choir could achieve an even more impressive artistic impact. The twenty-four variant new organ was created

---

<sup>1</sup> Bárdos Kornél: Eger Zenéje 1687-1887. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987, 143. p.

<sup>2</sup> Értésítő 1853/54

by Lajos Moóser of Salzburg, for the prize of 5450 Ft. The organ consists of 1372 pipes and was first presented to the public on Resurrection Day in 1859.<sup>3</sup>

Since the academic year of 1856/57, the choir has participated in the school festivities on a regular basis. Later on, for the sake of professional quality, the beginner and advanced members were regrouped into two assemblies, of which the first was lead by Endre Zsaskovszky, Ferenc's brother, while the advanced group was instructed by the latter. Endre Zsaskovszky was also a highly qualified musician and held a number of significant positions, too, like second conductor and organist of the Eger Archdiocese, the archbishop's teacher training institution's teacher, fellow of the Prague Music Assembly as well as the Salzburg Mozarteum, and last but not least, second instructor at the Cistercian Secondary School.<sup>4</sup>

Singing has become so popular by 1959/60, that some 125 students enrolled. The director gave out a prize of one silver coin each year for the two best singers in order to motivate them as well as to show his support for "elevating souls and religious ethics."<sup>5</sup>

Between 1852-1880, Ferenc Zsaskovszky worked for the secondary school, while Endre Zsaskovszky worked here between 1857-1868. Both of them were superb composers, too, and many of their music pieces can be found in the institution's bulletins.<sup>6</sup> All of their music pieces are remarkably well-prepared and based on a profound knowledge of the theory and practice of playing music. Without going into further theoretical considerations, it seems obvious that they always took into consideration the special features and opportunities provided by children's voice. They elaborated their pieces bearing in mind that those cannot be too challenging to child members of the choir. Therefore, they not only enabled the singers to achieve success at their performances, but also greatly satisfied their audience.

With the support and instructions of director Juhász, the Zsaskovszky brothers created a song book of four-voice pieces for young Hungarian singers, that follows the tradition of old Hungarian and Latin ecclesiastical music. They started their regular singing educational endeavors on the basis of their so-called *Eger Singers' Fraternity*.<sup>7</sup>

One can clearly see in the curricula appearing in the Bulletins that this fraternity has served the young singers well.<sup>8</sup> To study the so-called new (non-archaic) songs, the requirements were classified in a grade system in which there were two 'grade classes.' In the first one beginners learned, while in the second the more advanced learners had their classes.

The lessons to learn were regulated as follows:

1. *Grade Class*: 2 classes per week (1 since 1883). Basic theory of music notes; notes classification (series applied on two, three and four children voices). Practice. *Eger Singers' Fraternity*. By Ferenc and Endre Zsaskovszky. *Young Bard*, I-III. By *ibid*.
2. *Grade Class*: 2 classes per week. Singing and music practice, in bigger mixed and men's choir. *Eger Bard* I-IV. –*Harmonia, a Selection of Serious and Light Songs. Palestrina, the Pearls of Ecclesiastical Choirs*. By *ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> Értésítő 1858/59 26-27 p.

<sup>4</sup> Értésítő 1857/58

<sup>5</sup> Igazgatói napló 216 p.

<sup>6</sup> Értésítő 1857/58 - 1875/76

<sup>7</sup> Nagy Béni dr. (1914): Az egri Főgimnázium története Eger. 157. p.

<sup>8</sup> Értésítők 1865-től

Endre Zsaskovszky's position was taken over by Ignác Szabó (1868-1893), who pursued music education not as a layman but as a representative of the clergy. He also dealt with composing music, having some of his pieces published in the Bulletin, too. However, the previous row of numerous publications somewhat dropped after 1875. The choir presents music at a high quality further on with the help of a harmonium<sup>9</sup> as well, having many concerts and a positive reception, even four special fund raising concerts for the school library, with great success.<sup>10</sup>

In 1890, the management of ecclesiastical, and after three more years the secular music, was taken over by Henrik Saád, Cistercian teacher, who led the assembly until the end of the century (1898). As a proof of his productive work, since 1893/4 even the daily masses were conducted in a four-voice choir fashion. The sources underline the relevance of Millennial ecclesiastical and worldly celebrations where the high artistic merit of the performances was often valued greatly.<sup>11</sup>

Henrik Saád was followed by Aurél Küzdi, another Cistercian teacher, between 1898-1910. His teaching career presented a major improvement in musical education, turning singing into a real art. He was demanding not only with his students but also with himself, as regards to quality work. He participated in the Strassburg International Music and Singing Conference, where he incorporated international experiences into his own professional knowledge. He spent the longer summer breaks with visits to Regensburg and Leipzig, where he studied voice creation and singing technique with the help of famous masters.

The National Cecilia Assembly held a congress in Eger in October, 1902, that at the same time gave ground to a great ecclesiastical concert, too. The Eger Cistercian Choir was a major success there, which appeared in contemporary magazines as follows: "the clear intonation, superb dynamics and astonishingly precise presentation of the youth choir was a general surprise."<sup>12</sup>

On 7 December, 1904, on the Fiftieth Anniversary of Immaculate Conception held in the chapel of the institution, another widely respected concert was held.<sup>13</sup> In 1906, they participated in a concert at the Minorite Church with four pieces of music.<sup>14</sup>

The row of successful events continued in 1909. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Pope Pius X.'s professional activities, a commemoration was given with the contribution of a military assembly. Songs of a glorified mass were presented. The nicest criticism of the ecclesiastical performances: "where religious music is represented by such performers, the cause of *musica sacra* is certainly ensured."<sup>15</sup>

The above events and positive reception proves that outstanding results can only be achieved with the help of skilled and dedicated teachers, students as well as a supportive institutional background.

---

<sup>9</sup> Értesítő 1876/77 105. p.

<sup>10</sup> Tanácskozmányi jegyzőkönyvek 1883. febr. 16. 1884. febr. 10. 1885. máj. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Tanácskozmányi jegyzőkönyv 1897. ápr. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Zenelap 1902. okt. 15. sz. In.: Nagy Béni dr. (1914) 215. p.

<sup>13</sup> Tanácskozmányi jegyzőkönyv 1904. dec. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Értesítő 1905/06. 107. p.

<sup>15</sup> Értesítő 1908/09. 96-97. p.

The results of singing education have greatly contributed to the launch of youth musical performances beginning in 1903. On the stage located in the school gym, the first of such presentations held on the occasion of the papal jubilee of Leo XIII., a scene from the second act of Kienzl's musical drama entitled "The Bible Man" was presented.<sup>16</sup>

The next year, in April 1904, a renewed stage was the venue of a three-act Biblical play entitled "Joseph in Egypt". This was written by Aurél Küzdi, on the original basis of Etienne Henri Mehul's Biblical opera, and music was provided by the Eger Infantry Assembly. The performance was an outstanding success, while most of the local media underlined the achievements of the writer-conductor Aurél Küzdi. "He translated the piece, taught the choir, lead the rehearsals, directed the play, the choir and the assembly, all in all, he was the master and soul of the whole idea as well as of its practical workout."<sup>17</sup>

Later on the Bulletin also praises the production which enriched the reputation of the secondary school, too. It is claimed here that "the open-minded, well-educated and enthusiastic public attracted to our institution on the one hand has obtained a great artistic pleasure, on the other hand, the delight stimulated in the hearts of the participating young actors elevated their spirits as well."<sup>18</sup> Due to its success, the play was re-staged in 1910. The main rehearsal welcomes the directors of the educational district, who were having their annual meeting at that time in Eger. Appraisal was again ensured.

The row of performances continued the next year, too. In April, 1905, a four-act Biblical play entitled "The Prodigal Son" is staged. Its written by is Dr Flóris Madarász, another Cistercian teacher, while music, i.e. preface, a grandiose choral and individual singing sections, was composed by Aurél Küzdi.<sup>19</sup>

"Zrinyi, the Poet", a Hungarian historical drama by Pius Kovács was presented in March, 1906. The rich musical part was selected by Aurél Küzdi from Ferenc Erkel's operas entitled *László Hunyadi* and *Bánk Bán*. The play depicts Zriny first as a child who is an enthusiastic follower of the people of the Csáktornya fort, and who seeks their appraisal, then as a well-educated youngster returning from Italy, and finally, as a noble man who is faithful to his king forever.<sup>20</sup>

In March, 1907, on the occasion of the returning of the prince's ashes, a new two-act drama entitled "Rákóczy in Eger" by Dr Flóris Madarász was staged by the Eger secondary school students. The play presents the year of 1704, when Bishop István Telekessy welcomed Rákóczy in Eger. The oeuvre of the so called Kuruc Era is depicted by the figure of a bard on stage.<sup>21</sup> The musical sections were compiled by Aurél Küzdi again, incorporating the feature melodies of the Kuruc Era as well as some abstracts from Earl Géza Zichy's opera entitled "Nemo".<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Értésítő 1902/03. 120-121. p.

<sup>17</sup> Hevesvármegyei Hírlap 1904. ápr. 21. sz. In.: Nagy Béni dr. (1914). 216. p.

<sup>18</sup> Értésítő 1903/04. 99-103. p.

<sup>19</sup> Értésítő 1904/05. 129-130. p.

<sup>20</sup> Értésítő 1905/06. 106-107. p.

<sup>21</sup> Nagy Béni dr. (1914) 217. p.

<sup>22</sup> Értésítő 1906/07. 131-132. p.

The following year, 1908, comprised two significant anniversaries. On the one hand, there was the 900 years' birth anniversary of Prince Imre, the son of King Stephen I. and patron of the Hungarian youth, on the other hand there was a celebration commemorating the fiftieth anniversary in ecclesial office of Ödön Vajda, the Abbey of Zirc, the chief curator of the institution and a former dedicated instructor of national history. A number of glorious scenes from Hungarian national heritage were presented on this occasion, namely, a three-act juvenile drama entitled "Prince Saint Imre" by Dr Pius Kovács. The musical production of this play is also Aurél Küzdi's work, based on abstracts from Verdi's *Traviata* and *Aida*, Erkel's *Bánk Bán* and last but not least Kinzl's "The Bible Man".<sup>23</sup>

In April, 1912, a three-scene play entitled "The Hunyadis" is performed, which was also written by Pius Kovács and the music created by the new secular teacher of the school, Dr Alajos Kalovits. All the related work of preparing the performance, instructing and directing the players as well as the costume design was done by the writer himself.<sup>24</sup>

The series of musical performances based on the outcomes of singing education has obtained a tangible and significant good reputation for the school. The experiences stimulated the teachers to continue their work as well as to prepare new pieces.

The pedagogical and methodical results derived from the performances are visible, too. The preparatory work enabled the teacher to provide education on ethnics, cooperation, inner discipline and will power.

Since various historical subjects had also been turned into musical performances, they had an equally important impact on students' understanding of national culture and protecting the heritage of our past. They gave a sense of achievement for them as well, since desirable and achievable aims were targeted for them this way. The singing and prose parts of the plays developed the students' aesthetic sensibility, attachment to arts, moreover their memory way expanded, too. The challenge of the presentations motivated them to a continuous practice both on musical and literary fields, in addition, it meant fun and entertainment besides the daily routine of learning and work.

As regards to the teachers, they also had to face various challenges that they could only take with high professional skills, preparation, constant practice and a maximum of their devotion to the common cause. These tasks demanded a real talent in music and writing, along with a relaxed pedagogical and artistic atmosphere. Nevertheless, the results manifested in the development of the students were undeniable.

The first record of music as a subject can be found in 1866.<sup>25</sup> With the director's consent, students had music rehearsals in a classroom on Sundays. Some 26 students could enroll for regular music education in 1872/3, while they were divided into beginner and advanced groups in the course of two classes per week. Among the so-called special studies we can find the lesson plan of 1877, containing the following items:<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Értésítő 1907/08. 9-13. p.

<sup>24</sup> Értésítő 1911/12. 107-109. p.

<sup>25</sup> Tanácskozmányi jegyzőkönyvek 1866. máj.

<sup>26</sup> Értésítő 1877/78, 56. p.

1. *Grade Class* with parallel A and B classes, 2 classes per week. Subject: the parts of the violin and the fiddlestick; posture and the rules of holding the violin and arms; music notes studies, bow exercises on untouched strings with the help of fingers, etc.
2. *Grade Class* 2 classes per week. Subject: preparatory course on alto, viola, violoncello and contrabass; an introduction to their pegs and notes, exercises in different tessituras. Following the two-month preparatory studies, the new choir learns some minor pieces.

It is visible, that the learners are grouped according to their skills and previous studies into beginner and advanced groups.

In the secondary school only sting instruments were instructed with the help of hired specialists and not by instructors of literary music. The following teachers were hired:<sup>27</sup>

*József Opelt*, secular, a member of the Archdiocesan Faculty, a teacher of the second grade at the high school's music section. *Alajos Podhola*, secular, a member of the Archdiocesan Faculty, a teacher of the Grade I.A class at the high school's music section. *Ferenc Cochola*, secular, a teacher of the Grade I.B class at the high school's music section.

According to the 1879/80 Bulletin, due to the low number of students enrolling for music subjects, for a short period music as a subject is suspended and then it is back in 1883. Since then, Hugó Hirsch, a secular teacher and conductor, member of the Archdiocesan Faculty, becomes the music instructor of the high school, who although was a non-experienced teacher, yet he proved to be very enthusiastic in directing the ones who wished to learn.<sup>28</sup> According to the curriculum, two groups, a beginner and an advanced one, were organized in a 2-class per week schedule, but this year only limited to string organs.<sup>29</sup>

The next year the curriculum was enlarged with complete Grade I and II Classes.<sup>30</sup>

1. *Grade Class* 2 classes per week. Based on Károly Huber's *Violin Studies*: music notes studies; posture and the rules of holding the violin and fiddlestick; a detailed knowledge of the instrument. So-called "beat drills" for left and right hand. Exchange signs: note rows, an explanation of the relevant terminology. Drills in the different tessituras. The trillas. Chromatic scales. Double grab. 12 duets.
2. *Grade Class*, Eight frequent, in first tessitura. The two tessituras with different drills. Rehearsing 24 etudes. Introducing the viola and the violoncello. According to Kummer's "Studies". Theoretical explanations based on Lohbe's "Minor Harmony". (These requirements still meet the ones applied nowadays.—the author)

The results, mostly due to the decrease in the number of students, are somewhat lagged behind those of the choir, perhaps that is the reason why in 1885 instrumental music education is cancelled for a short period of time.

Since 1891, in a smaller circle, under the leadership of the secular teacher Ferenc Cochola, instrumental music education is revived with the formulation of a 12-14 member assembly.

---

<sup>27</sup> Értésítő 1877/78, 45. p.

<sup>28</sup> Értésítő 1883/84, 41. p.

<sup>29</sup> Értésítő 1883/84, 53. p.

<sup>30</sup> Értésítő 1884/85, 53. p.

However, the real impetus still did not come for two decades. In the 1907/8 academic year student who had previously had some music education, formulated a *youth music circle*, with the support of the director of the secondary school. It aimed at providing quality entertainment for the young. In their meeting they presented various pieces of music and discussed some other ones. The following year they had an opportunity to present themselves in public at the ceremonial meetings of the school literary society and at the academic year opening and closing celebrations.<sup>31</sup>

The assembly continuously developed under the direction of secular teachers Antal Herovits and Alajos Zoltán. The society had increasing membership enrollments, not only among the string instrument players, but also among the wind-instrument players in remarkable numbers. Since 1910, each year they presented their knowledge to the public which reacted very supportively.<sup>32</sup>

Instrumental music education has proved to be slightly unbalanced in the respective time period, however, one can clearly detect the flourishing of vocal music. A row of appraisals goes to the choir and its conductor, stimulating further on both music and its devoted audience. Cistercians probably knew the idea of a remarkable representative of the Italian Baroque, Caccini, according to which "the wonderful nature of music lies in the miracle of harmony." This very harmony was found in the communal act of playing music and this particular harmony is the main attraction for all the secondary school students who year by year join the choir. This is the very stimulation for outstanding achievements as well as for the creation of a moving sound effect. Obviously, success was achieved by regular and diligent practicing. For that purpose, the school has ensured the supportive background, since two double classes were there from grade one to eight for singing, learning and playing music, and occasionally even more if needed. This number of classes highly exceeds that of nowadays and we can only hope that music education will be reintroduced in our secondary grammar schools and restored into its proper position that the experience of previous centuries would justify.

---

<sup>31</sup> Értésítő 1907/08. 100. p.

<sup>32</sup> Értésítő 1909/10. 76-77. p.; 1910/11. 59-60. p.; 1912/13. 53-54. p.

## References

- BÁRDOS, K. (1987): *Eger zenéje 1687-1887*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó.  
*Ciszterci Rend Egri Kath. Főgimnáziumának Értesítői* (Értesítő...) 1851/52-1913/14.
- KOVÁCS, L. (2005): A ciszterci rend egri főgimnáziumának története a XIX. század közepéig. *Módszertani Közlemények*, XLV. 1. 37-44. p.
- NAGY, B. (1914): *Az egri Főgimnázium története*. Eger.  
*Tanácskozmányi jegyzőkönyvek*. Heves Megyei Levéltár VIII-53/1, 4, 56, 73, 127, 128, 137, 195.