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Haydn and The Creation in Buda, March 1800

János Malina

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Abstract

The performance of *The Creation* in the Royal Castle of Buda on 8 March 1800 under Haydn’s direction has been discussed previously in the Haydn literature. The aim of this article is to complete the picture with a couple of interesting details, including a contemporary color drawing of the venue of the event, the resultant effects of the production in Hungary, the connections of this visit with another meeting of the imperial couple and Haydn at Eszterháza a few months later, the correction of a widespread mistake in Haydn’s biography (with the help of a handful of Hungarian Hussars) and a hitherto unknown Latin epigram glorifying Haydn.

I. The 8 March 1800 Performance

The performance of *The Creation* in the Royal Castle of Buda on 8 March 1800 under Haydn’s direction has been discussed previously and at some length by Pohl, Landon and other Haydn scholars. Still, it is worthwhile to have another look at one of the first performances of the oratorio outside Austria, and complete the picture with a few less familiar details.

The Buda performance of *The Creation* belonged to a series of events to celebrate the marriage of Joseph, the Palatine of Hungary, to Grand-Duchess Alexandra Pavlovna Romanova, the daughter of the Russian Tzar Paul I, the previous autumn. The young couple now officially occupied its residence in the palace. The most substantial reports of the concert were published in two Viennese papers: the *Wiener Zeitung* (in German) and the *Magyar Hirmondó* (*Hungarian Herald*, in Hungarian). Furthermore, the *Preßburger Zeitung*, the German language newspaper of the nearby Hungarian city of Preßburg (in Hungarian Pozsony, now Bratislava in Slovakia), also reported on the event.¹

¹ Landon also refers to press releases published as far away as London and St. Petersburg.
Landon builds his account on the report of *Wiener Zeitung*. I wish to proceed from a very similar text published in *Magyar Hirmondó* on 18 March 1800, quoted below in exact translation, which includes some details missing from Landon’s account.

In Buda, the evening of 8th March, i.e. the evening preceding the birthday of the Archduke Palatine, was remarkably commemorated by the Imperial Duchess: ushering her dear Husband into the hall of their dwelling palace where the nobility of Buda and Pest had already convened in force, and whose [the hall’s] various pleasant illuminations included a series of lustrous letters—on both sides, in longish oval form—projecting the following brief Inscription, very obviously revealing a double sense, into the eyes of the illustrious Assembly: **HARMONIE PARFAITE** (Perfect harmony or Unity). To honour the beauteous Unity between the M. Couple even more intensely, that majestic composition was sung and played, which unites the notes in such a delightful way, i.e. THE **CREATION** by Haydn, which had been requested specifically for that occasion by the Imperial Duchess. Beyond the regular musicians, there were numerous [performers] cultivating singing and music to their own pleasure, acting as instruments in the execution of the endeavour of MR. HAYDN to [his] utter satisfaction.²

The report in *Wiener Zeitung*, published one day later, is almost identical, except for a few minor details.³ The German newspaper emphasizes that the performance was a birthday surprise organized by Alexandra Pavlovna, who was 16½ years of age. Furthermore, the sentence omitted in Landon’s report of the newspaper account describes more clearly the style and arrangement of the gleaming inscription: “The hall was handsomely and tastefully illuminated, and in the oval curves of lights, each light had attached an illuminated transparent letter, spelling ‘Harmonie’ on one side of the hall, and ‘Parfaite’ on the other side.” *Wiener Zeitung* also explicitly mentions not only Haydn’s own satisfaction, but the acclaim of all those who were present.

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² *Magyar Hirmondó*, vol. 9 no. 22 (18 March 1800), 370. Syntactical weaknesses of the first, endless sentence are in the original.

³ *Wiener Zeitung*, vol. 48 no. 23 (19 March 1800), 857.
The performance cannot have been such a big surprise for Palatine Joseph, for the Magyar Hirmondó had already announced the event two weeks earlier. Even if he had not read that paper himself (he did in fact read Hungarian), it is hard to imagine that the plans of the concert could have been concealed from him. Nevertheless, the somewhat more concise report in the Preßburger Zeitung (again, published on 18 March, although dated four days earlier) also mentions the astonishment of the Palatine.

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4 The throne-room of the Royal Palace in Buda, the venue of the performance on 8 March 1800, was severely damaged in World War II, but it was restored later in a simplified manner. It now houses the collection of late medieval and early Renaissance winged altar pieces of the Hungarian National Gallery.

5 Magyar Hirmondó, vol. 9 no. 18 (4 March 1800), 294-5.

II. Additional Information about Haydn and the Royal Couple

Haydn and the royal couple met again in Hungary a few months later, this time accompanied by Prince Nikolaus II Esterházy. As Landon informs us in his Haydn monograph,\(^7\) based on another report of the *Preßburger Zeitung* (14 November 1800), the Prince invited the couple to a hare and pheasant hunt to Eszterháza on 31 October, and while the men were out in the forest, Princess Maria Esterházy (born Maria Josefa Hermenegilde von Liechtenstein) entertained Her Highness, and probably numerous other ladies of the company (the hunt was followed by a banquet for 60) “with a select concert, which was led by the famous princely Kapellmeister Haydn and rendered magnificent by his performance on the forte-piano.”\(^8\) What is interesting here is that in these circles the invitation and presentation of Haydn seems to have been the responsibility of the aristocratic ladies. Unfortunately, Maria Pavlovna died less than five months later, on 16 March 1801, due to complications during childbirth, so these same people probably never met again as a group.

Hungarian publications mention some further details connected with Haydn’s visit. According to these sources, the royal couple stayed in Vienna between their wedding in St. Petersburg and their taking up residence in Buda in February. As both of them were music-lovers, they personally sought out Haydn during that stay. The rehearsals of *The Creation* were held in the Castle Theatre of Buda, a building which still stands but with an entirely different interior.\(^9\) Haydn is said to have paid personal visits to his soloists and to some of the other Hungarian musicians.

The oratorio was given again on 6 April in Buda, and three days later in Pest, apparently with more or less the same performers. We do not know who directed these performances. The composition quickly reached Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca, Romania), the centre of the cultural life of Transylvania.

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\(^8\) *Preßburger Zeitung*, vol. 37 no. 91 (14 November 1800), 1004-5.

\(^9\) Beethoven and the horn player Punto gave a concert two months later in this same theatre as part of the festivities celebrating the imperial couple.
This rare excursion of Haydn as a conductor offers a good opportunity for rectifying an old misunderstanding in the Haydn literature regarding the mysterious Padua visit of Haydn before he travelled to Buda. C. F. Pohl suggests this visit, referring to the paragraph in the 4 March issue of *Magyar Hirmondó* mentioned above. This paragraph starts with the statement that “Yesterday that renowned Doctor and Director of Music, Haydn, left *from here* for Buda, in order to obey the command of Her Imperial Duchess the Palatine’s Consort, and let his superb musical piece known as *The Creation* be sung and played on the birthday of our Palatine which will be on 9 March” (author's emphasis). The continuation of the paragraph and the next paragraph is basically an advertisement of the newly published score of *The Creation*, to which the news about the forthcoming Buda performance is an introduction. Pohl’s assumption regarding the phrase “Haydn left Padua on 17th February for Ofen” from the *Magyar Hirmondó* is based on a double misinterpretation of the text which actually does not say that. Pohl assumes that the report quoted above was dated from Padua because two paragraphs earlier the dating “From Padua on 17 February” is stated. This misinterpretation is echoed by Landon. But if we accept that the words “Yesterday . . . left from here” are related to that dating, we deduce that Haydn must have left Padua on the 16th, on which day, as Pohl himself remarks, he met Straton in Vienna. This is an even more striking contradiction than a departure on the 17th.

But two paragraphs later the notion that the date refers to the departure from Padua is disproven. The news from Padua reports on the hero’s death of the Hungarian medical officer General Liptay, who was buried in Padua. However, the next paragraph deals with the heroic resistance of a group of twenty Hungarian Hussars against the attack of French cavalrymen fivefold superior in number, in Zöhlingen, near Speyer along the Rhine, which had actually occurred in the previous November. It is obvious that this event cannot have been reported to Vienna from Padua, as it is also entirely unrealistic that the advertising of Haydn’s edition of *The Creation* had to have been done by a military correspondent of the paper in Padua. So, mostly due to a

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11 *Magyar Hirmondó*, vol. 9 no. 18 (4 March 1800), 292.

12 Landon, 543.
handful of valiant Hungarian Hussars, we can be sure that Haydn left Vienna for Buda on 3 March, the day preceding the date of the newspaper issue. Consequently he may have started the rehearsals on 5 March.

One last interesting note is the Latin epigram glorifying Haydn printed as a conclusion of the music advertisement in *Magyar Hirmondó*, having been “made to the honour of Mr. H A Y D N by a brave Poet”:

Sol idem atque alius semper nitidusque juventa
    Almum sic orbi fertque refertque diem.
Ut veteres pariterque novae vivuntque placentque
    Symphoniae mundo quas tu Musa parit
Tempus et invidiam Vix Dîs cedentia monstra
    Vicisti numeris docte Josephe tuis.

(The sun, which is always the same but always something else, shining youthfully, brings and brings again the nourishing daylight for the earth, as the symphonies, both old and new, which are born by your Muse, live and please the world. You have triumphed, learned Joseph, with your numbers over time and envy, monsters who hardly have respect even for gods.\(^{13}\))

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\(^{13}\) *Magyar Hirmondó*, vol. 9 no. 18 (4 March 1800), 295. English translation by Miklós Földváry.
III. Works Cited


*Magyar Hirmondó*, vol. 9 nos. 18 and 22 (4 March and 18 March 1800.). Vienna: 1800.

