Musicologica Olomucensia 38 – 2026/1
DOI: 10.5507/mo.2026.007

CC BY SA

The Operas of Smetana and Other Czech Composers on the Stage of the Croatian National Theatre (1870–1902) and their Importance in the Formation of the National and Slavic Repertoire[1]

Vjera Katalinić / vjkatalinic@gmail.com
Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb, Croatia
ORCID: 0000-0001-7230-7990

Abstract

In 1870, the Zagreb National Theatre was able to establish its Opera Department. Previously, only itinerant companies performed these popular works, mostly in Italian or German. Thus, Ivan Zajc (1832–1914), who had been brought from Vienna to serve as the new opera director, had to develop not only the ensemble but also to establish the standard operatic repertoire in Croatian, as well as to compose national operas himself. Even though he was an admirer of Verdi (Zajc studied composition in Milan) and favoured the Italian operatic repertoire, he was aware that Slavic operas of quality were important for his programmatic aims. Already in 1873, Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* was performed with great success. The new staging of this piece took place in 1894 (after the 1889–1894 period, during the first closure of the opera), and in the next year Smetana's *The Kiss* and *Dalibor* were performed for the Zagreb audiences. Besides, comic operas by V. Hřimalý and V. Blodek were performed as well. In the paper, the conditions surrounding the staging and performances of these operas will be discussed, as well as the reception of the critics and audiences and the atmosphere of the Croatian and Slavic enthusiasm surrounding the theatre.

Keywords

Croatian National Theatre; Opera; Smetana; National and Slavic Repertoir

[1] This work was fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project IP-2020-02-4277 "Institutionalization of Modern Bourgeois Musical Culture in the 19th Century in Civil Croatia and Military Frontier" (MusInst19).

"The opera *Prodana nevjesta* [*The Bartered Bride*], which was performed for the first time on Saturday 18th and for the second time on Tuesday 21st October [1873], was received with some coolness by the audience. This reticence can be explained by the fact that our audience was too accustomed to Italian music to immediately adapt to the sound of North Slavic music. We are convinced that this opera, if heard several times, will warm the hearts of the audience, as was already shown by the second performance, where not only the sextet was repeated, but other numbers were also greeted with lively applause."[2]

These few lines are extracted from a long review of the first performance of *Prodana nevjesta* by "Miroslav Smetana" (his first name being translated from the German version "Friedrich") written by the Croatian musicologist Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (1834–1911), the founder of Croatian musicology and ethnomusicology,[3] and published in two issues of the Zagreb German daily *Agramer Zeitung*.

The First Operatic Era 1870–1889 and Performances of Czech Operas

The drama department of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb was founded in 1861, operettas had been performed there since 1863 and in 1870 its opera department commenced its turbulent existence. The composer Ivan Zajc (1832–1914) was invited from Vienna to assume the role of director with a threefold task: to establish the opera ensemble, to create the standard operatic repertoire (to be sung in Croatian) and to compose national operas. As a musician trained in Milan, who achieved his first success in Vienna as an operetta composer, Zajc favoured the Italian repertoire. Thus, during his two-decade directorship (1870–1889), Verdi was the most frequently performed composer, with nine operas staged in Zagreb, followed by Donizzetti with four, etc. Zajc fulfilled his task as a composer and seven of his operas were also staged, alongside operas by two other Croatian composers: Vatroslav Lisinski (1819–1854) and Đuro Eisenhuth (1841–1891). Zajc was also fond of Meyerbeer's operas which, in addition to Verdi, had influenced his compositional style. Thus, during this period, until the first closure of the opera department in 1889 (due to financial

[2] Franjo Ks. Kuhač, "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana," *Agramer Zeitung*, October 30, 1873, 1.

[3] An excellent survey of Kuhač's bio-bibliography can be found in Grozdana Marošević and Sanja Majer-Bobetko, "Kuhač, Franjo Ksaver," in *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024)*, *online edition* (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2024), https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/kuhac-franjo-ksaver. However, some collective volumes and articles dealing with Kuhač's oeuvre, as well as his early correspondence have been published. The publication of Kuhač's correspondence is planned to be continued within the series "Izvori i dokumenti o glazbi" [Sources and documents on music] of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and Croatian Musicological Society. Some of Kuhač's digitized materials can be found on a web page named after him, on https://kuhac.znameniti.hr/.

reasons,[4] but also because of the theatre being damaged in the 1880 earthquake), a typical opera repertoire was staged. The first non-Croatian Slavic opera staged in the Zagreb National Theatre was Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, which was staged eleven times in the 1873/74 season. In his review, Kuhač stated:

> The opera *The Bartered Bride* has a right to a long life in our repertoire and we hope that in the future the management will take journalists' wishes into account more quickly and will soon bring us another North Slavic opera, such as the romantic opera *Halka* by the Polish composer Moniuszko, which has been praised so highly. The management will only increase its merit by doing so, as perhaps by implementing this proposal it will contribute the most to learning to appreciate our own operas.[5]

The opera board, accountable to the Croatian Parliament which financed its acitvities, was not particularly quick to respond to the demands of music professionals and other critics. Namely, a few days after Kuhač's review, Ladislav Mrazović (1849–1881),[6] a Zagreb lawyer and secretary to the cultural society Matica hrvatska, published his own review of Smetana's work in the Croatian cultural weekly *Vienac*, in which he also suggested some Slavic operas that should be included in the theatre's repertoire. He listed following pieces with their first performances:[7]

by Czech composers:
Vojtěch Hřímalý: *Zakletý princ* [*The Enchanted Prince*] (1872)
Vilém Blodek: *V studni* [*In the well*] (1867)

[4] It seems that "inappropriate savings" have degraded the opera production and thus, the interest in the theatre radically diminished. An interesting description of this situation is given by Stjepan Miletić, *Hrvatsko glumište* (Centar za kulturnu djelatnost Saveza socijalističke omladine Zagreba, 1978), 22–23.

[5] Franjo Ks. Kuhač, "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana," *Agramer Zeitung*, October 24, 1873, 2.

[6] The review is signed with *l. m.* and based on the author's activities and biographical information, was most likely written by Ladislav Mrazović. As a lawyer, he studied in Zagreb, Prague, and Vienna. For more on his life and work see in Slavko Batušić, "Mrazović, Ladislav," in Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–*1950*, vol. 6 (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1875), 399.

[7] "[…] i nadamo se, da će se kazališna uprava svojski pobrinuti, da se više slavenskih opera uvede u naš repertoir. Da bude upravi lakše tražiti, spomenut ćemo tu nekoliko opera: češke: *Zaklety princ* od Rimalog, *Ve studni* od Blodka; *Lejla i Vlasta* od Bendla; *Svatojanske proudy* od Rozkošnog; *Drahomira*, *Templari na Morave* i. t. d. i. t. d.; poljske: *Halka*, *Verbum nobile*, *Flys* od Moniuška, *Pazowie królowy Marii* od Dunieckog; ruske: *Askioldova mogila*, *Ruslan i Ljudmila*, *Zizn za carja* od Glinke i *Rognjeda* od Sjerova" (l. m. [Ladislav Mrazović], "Hrvatska opera," *Vienac*, November 1, 1873, 703).

Karel Bendl: *Lejla* (1868)
Josef Richard Rozkošný: *Svatojanské proudy* [*St John's Rapids*] (1871)
[Karl Schebor]: *Drahomira*[8] (1867)
[Karl Schebor]: *Templáři na Moravě*[9] [*The Templars in Moravia*] (1865)

by Polish composers:
Stanisław Moniuszko: *Halka* (1858)
Stanisław Moniuszko: *Verbum nobile* (1861)
Stanisław Moniuszko: *Flis* (1858)
Stanisław Duniecki: *Paziowie królowej Marysieńki* [*Die Pagen der Königin Marie*][10] (1864)

by Russian composers:
Mikhail Glinka: *Руслан и Людмила* [*Ruslan and Ludmila*] (1842), *Жизнь за царя* [*Life for the Tzar*] (1836)
Alexander Serov: *Рогнеда* [*Rogneda*] (1863–65)
[Alexey Verstovsky]: *Аскольдова могила* [*Askold's grave*][11] (1835).

It is obvious that both reviewers, especially the latter, were well informed about the contemporary Slavic repertoire. Already when Smetana's opera was announced, it was said albeit with some caution that "We hope that this new opera will be well received by the audience, because, although the content is quite shallow and without wit, the music is beautiful and characteristic."[12] However, the theatre board,[13] and probably also Zajc as the opera department director,

[8] Mrazović did not mention the composer's name. The author was identified as Franz Schebor's op. 4 in Franz Stieger, *Opernlexikon: Titelkatalog*, vol. 1 (Hans Schneider, 1975), 354.

[9] Also identified as Franz Schebor's op. 3 in Franz Stieger, *Opernlexikon: Titelkatalog*, vol. 3 (Hans Schneider, 1975), 189.

[10] The title of the opera was incorrectly written as *Pazowie królowy Marii*; it was identified by the lists of Franz Stieger, *Opernlexikon: Komponistenkatalog*, vol. 1 (Hans Schneider, 1977), 292.

[11] Identified (as A. N. Werstofsky) after Stieger, *Opernlexikon: Titelkatalog*, vol. 1, 113. Mrazović wrongly attributed this opera to Glinka.

[12] "Nadamo se, da će ta nova opera ući općinstvu u volje, jer premda je čin dosta plitak i bez dosjeta, glazbe je krasna i karakteristična." (August Šenoa, "Narodno kazalište," *Vienac*, October 18, 1873).

[13] The Theatre Board, normally comprising 4–7 members, experienced strong fluctuation of its membership, presidents and directors. In 1873, the president was Ivan Vardian, the drama director was Josip Eugen Tomić, while Ivan Zajc was responsible for the opera department. By the end of the 1880s, the influence of the Theatre Board faded away, and the Government's commissioners played the most important role in the theatre management, until Miletić took it over as the first intendant. Cf. Nikola Andrić, *Spomen-knjiga Hrvatskog zem. kazališta pri otvoranju nove kazališne zgrade* (Tiskarski zavod "Narodnih novina", 1895), 55–56.

showed only a modest understanding of the demands of both reviewers and after eleven performances – all of them during the same season[14] – no further operas by Smetana were performed in this period (i.e., until the first closure of the opera department in 1889). Nevertheless, two operas from Mrazović's list were staged in 1885: Vojtěch Hřimalý's comic opera in three acts *Zakletý princ* [*The Enchanted Prince*][15] and Vilém Blodek's one–act *V studni* [*In the well*]. A few performances during the same season and rare lukewarm reviews left no lasting impression on Zagreb audiences.

The Second Operatic Era 1894–1902 and Performances of Czech Operas

The reopening of the opera department of the Zagreb National Theatre was marked by some specific events and changes. Firstly, it was the time when the discussions about the need for the new theatre building, which lasted for some 20 years, were finally concluded: the location for the new edifice was determined, the contract with Hellmer and Fellner company was signed on 5 January 1894, and the construction of the new theatre building began in May 1894.[16] The first new operatic season started on October 16th, 1894, still in the old building, with the famous Zajc opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski*. The 1895/96 season opened in the newly constructed theatre. The new opera ensemble consisted of Croatian and Slavic singers, with the already existing string section and the musicians of the 53rd Infantry Regiment band. The "Slavs" among the singers were mostly from Prague: the tenor Hofer,[17] the baritone Emanuel Kroupa[18] and the soprano Anka

[14] For the repertoire distribution and policy of the Zagreb National theatre see Vjera Katalinić, "Opera and Operetta in the Late Nineteenth-Century Zagreb National Theatre: Composers, Librettists, and Themes – A Comparison," in *Musical Theatre as High Culture?*, eds. Vjera Katalinić, Stanislav Tuksar, and Harry White (Hrvatsko muzikološko društvo, 2011), 75–95.

[15] The reviewer in *Narodne novine* criticized Hřimalý's shallow plot and music without any wit (Jelenčić, "Začarani princ," *Narodne novine*, January 21, 1885, 5).

[16] Andrić, *Spomen-knjiga Hrvatskog zem. kazališta*, 15. Stjepan Miletić gave even more precise dates: on May 22nd, 1894 (Miletić, *Hrvatsko glumište*, 37).

[17] Rikard Hofer (actually Richard Figar, 1866–1921) was, besides Ernesto Cammarota, the first tenor of the Zagreb opera in the 1894 to 1900 period. For R. Hofer, see Marija Barbieri, "Hofer, Rikard," in *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024), online edition* (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2025), https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/hofer-rikard.

[18] Kroupa (1857–1924) was in Zagreb only for two seasons (1894–1896) but was engaged for some important roles, such as Nikola Šubić Zrinski in the Zajc opera of the same title; see Marija Barbieri, "Kroupa, Emanuel," in *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024), online edition* (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2025), https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/kroupa-emanuel.

Matoušková as well as a soubrette Miroslava Housová,[19] who performed in the operettas. It seems that they learned Croatian much faster than other foreign singers and therefore, the operas could be sung in Croatian.[20]

Secondly, for the first time the old-fashioned Theatre Board was dissolved and a new professional intendant was appointed on February 11th, 1894. It was Stjepan Miletić who took over this job only after a sort of "grand tour" of European theatres,[21] during which he explored administrative practices and technical equipment, as well as the repertoire, styles of acting, directing, and stage organization of the theatres. He also wrote about his impressions of the Národni divadlo in Prague, which was already familiar to him due to his sojourn there in 1889/90,[22] pointing to it as the "centre of the Czech national life."[23] With his taking over the office, the national theatre entered the new, modernized phase of its existence. Miletić had a free hand in the management, and full responsibility for his work; only the Viceroy (*Ban*) stood above him.[24] Miletić's artistic ideal was to create an "eminently Croatian artistic institution," a temple of education; to create a national theatre in Zagreb that would be a centre for the Slavic South, in the same manner as Národni divadlo in Prague was for the Czechs, i.e., an artistic centre with a national identity in the repertoire, language and style.[25]

After some 10 days Zajc's *Zrinjski* was followed by Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*.

> Admittedly, this opera was sung many years ago on the stage in Zagreb, but only now, after its great success in the Vienna "International Acting Exhibition," has it become relevant again. Therefore, I hastened to perform it in Zagreb, where

[19] Miroslava Housa (Housová, Slava), (1875–1913) was the "pillar" of the Zagreb operetta between 1894 and 1899 (when she got married and left the stage); see Ivona Ajanović-Malinar, "Housa, Miroslava" in *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024), online edition* (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2025), https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/housa-miroslava.

[20] Miletić, *Hrvatsko glumište*, 80.

[21] He started his trip in February 1894, to Ljubljana, Graz, Vienna, Prague, Lvív, through German theatre cities to Brusseles, Paris, through Italian theatres "from Genoa and Milan all the way to Palermo," and returned to Zagreb by the end of May; cf. Miletić, *Hrvatsko glumište*, 71. He describes these theatres and their equipment quite extensively (Miletić, *Hrvatsko glumište*, 41–69).

[22] Ibid., 42–45.

[23] Ibid., 43.

[24] However, this "full responsibility" cost him his health and fortune and he resigned after five seasons (in April 1899). He described his attitudes in a two-volume issue of *Hrvatsko glumište* [Croatian theatre] in 1904. It has been re-edited by Nikola Batušić as one-volume publication in 1978 (as already cited earlier).

[25] Ibid., 90.

> it was a great success. There, the new Czech members of our opera were in their element, and the main credit for the success goes to them.[26]

Miletić pointed out the importance of the ballet in this opera, which achieved great success. For the performance on December 17th, 1894, new ballet scenes were prepared by the newly engaged choreographer and ballet-master Otokar Bartík[27] "according to the original version in the National theatre in Prague," performed by the dancers from Prague, Berlin and Budapest with immense success. The guest director Josef Šmaha (1848–1915) from Prague was wellcomed as well.[28] From this moment on, *The Bartered Bride* was one of the pillars of the Slavic repertoire; over the following eight years, until the second closure of the opera in 1902, it was performed 34 times.

However, Miletić did not forget his task of staging other Slavic operas. One of these resulted from the collaboration between the National theatre and the Musikverein's school: their students performed "the lovely opera" *In the Well* [*V studni / U studencu*] by Blodek, mostly as members of the choir, together with soloists from the theatre, and the review focused mostly on the participants' performance.

Finally, in 1895, two further Smetana operas were staged: *Hubička* [*Poljubac/ The Kiss*] and *Dalibor,* but their presence on the Zagreb stage was limited to only three to five performances until the second closure of the opera in 1902. Tchaikovsky's *Евгений Онегин* [*Evgenij Onegin*], staged in 1897, fared slightly better, with eight performances, but *Пиковая дама* [*Pikovaya dama/ The Queen of Spades*], in contrast, was performed quite often – 13 times between 1898 and 1902.[29]

---

[26] "Ova opera pjevala se je doduše već pred mnogo godina i na zagrebačkoj pozornici, ali je tek sada nakon velikog svog uspjeha u bečkoj 'međunarodnoj glumišnoj izložbi' postala opet aktuelnom. Stoga sam se i u Zagrebu požurio s njezinom predstavom koja je polučila velik uspjeh. Tu su novi češki članovi naše opere bili u svom elementu, te glavna zasluga za uspjeh ide njih." (Miletić, *Hrvatsko glumište*, 112).

[27] Otokar Bartík (1868–1936) stayed in Zagreb just one season and staged a few performances here, *Coppelia* being one of them (Davor Schopf, "Prvi baletni ansambl," *Vijenac*, November 10, 2016, https://www.matica.hr/vijenac/592/prvi-baletni-ansambl-26182/ as well as Davor Schopf and Mladen Mordej Vučković, "Jela i Na plitvička jezera, prvi hrvatski baleti," *Baleti.hr*, https://baleti.hr/index.php?p=article&id=2644).

[28] "Vom Nationaltheater," *Agramer Zeitung*, December 15, 1894, 3; S—n. [Souvan], "Kunst-Chronik," *Agramer Zeitung*, December 18, 1894, 7.

[29] Katalinić, "Opera and Operetta," 89.

Reports on Czech Operas as a Platform for Explicating National Aspirations

Let us return to the first performance of Smetana's hit in 1873. How did Mrazović establish his list of Slavic operas? As a broadly educated lawyer and patriot who had studied in Zagreb, Prague and Vienna, he must have come across relevant data in books and newspapers about the more or less contemporary composers, since the majority of these works had been premiered during the 1860s.

On the other hand, Kuhač was even better informed about Slavic music (even though in his review he pointed only to *Halka*): at that time, during the 1870s, he was in extensive correspondence with the Czech singer, music teacher and critic František Pivoda (1824–1898; then co-editor of the journal *Hudební listy* with the composer Josef Richard Rozkošný) and Maks Konopásek (1820–1879) in Lvív, who – at least for a while – shared Kuhač's negative attitudes towards the German background of Slavic composers as did Kuhač. Yet, later, they both diverged from Kuhač's rather extreme views.[30] A few days before the Zagreb performance, Kuhač wrote to the editorial board of *Hudební listy* and asked them to send him the reviews of *The Bartered Bride* that were published in Prague journals, mentioning that: "I am certainly in a position to pass judgment on the work itself, but I am content to hear other opinions and am happy to cite the favorable opinions of other journals."[31] Franjo Ksaver Kuhač left an immense oeuvre with some 2,500 (mostly) south-Slavic folk songs, a series of monographs, essays, reviews with historiographic, ethnomusicological, theoretical, and analytical topics. He also established Croatian music terminology and proposed some

[30] More on the correspondence between Kuhač, Pivoda, and Konopásek, cf. Michaela Freemanova, "Between Prague, Zagreb and Lwów: *Franjo Ksaver Kuhač and His Czech Fellow-Supporters," in Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (1834–1911). Glazbena historiografija i identitet / Music Historiography and Identity*, eds. Vjera Katalinić and Stanislav Tuksar (Hrvatsko muzikološko društvo, 2013), 139–150. On Konopásek, also see Luba Kijanowska-Kamińska and Olena Paris, "Galicyjska wersja panslawizmu czeskich badaczy Lwowa w ujęciu Eugena Cehelskiego," *Edukacja muzyczna* 11 (2016): 119–132. However, the authors did not mention Konopásek's relations to Kuhač.

[31] "Am 14. d. m. wird in Agramer Nationalteater zum ersten mal Smetanas *Prodana nevjesta* (in kroatischer sprache) gesungen. Ich würde Ihnen, löbliche redaktion, ser verbunden sein, wenn Sie mir sobald als möglich, einige ausfürlichen kritiken über dieses werk einsenden würden, und dies sowol die rezensionen der Hudebny listy, als die der Politik, oder sonst eines journals, in welchem (überhaupt die erste aufführung) dieser oper besprochen wurde. Ich bin wol im stande über das werk selbst ein urteil abgeben zu können, höre aber recht gerne andere meinungen, und bin gern bereit mich auf das günstige urteil anderer journale zitirend zu berufen." Kuhač's letter no. 81 to *Hudební listy*, on October 10th, 1873; manuscript of the third book of Kuhač's letters, in preparation for print [III, 81]. It should be noted here that Kuhač was – at that time – using the so–called Grimm's orthography, therefore the nouns were written without capitals etc. For more information on the correspondence and this orthography see Sara Ries, "Franjo Ksaver Kuhač u mreži svojih korespondenata" (PhD diss, University of Zagreb, 2022), 29–32.

(rather radical) reforms of the musical schooling system, recommending that it be based not on traditional western music theory, but on the characteristics of folk music and a Slavic-national basis. Although Kuhač underwent some modifications of his cultural, and thus political ideas (although he never belonged to any political party), according to his correspondence of almost 3,000 letters, it seems that during the 1870s he was quite close to the Pan-Slavic ideas of the Mlado-Čehi (Young Czechs).

It is not known whether Kuhač received any reviews from Prague. However, some two weeks after the Zagreb premiere of *The Bartered Bride*, in the already mentioned essay that he published in *Agramer Zeitung*, he heavily criticized the plot of this popular Czech opera as preposterous, hollow, even stupid, similar to some German *Singspiels*, which is not good for the promotion of the Slavic idea: "[…], the choice of such a subject damages the reputation of the Slavic nation, which is still a young nation on the stage and whose advantages have not yet been made known to the world in this way as those of older musical nations."[32] On the other hand, Kuhač praised the music:

> Thousands and thousands of sound images are reproduced with photographic accuracy from Bohemian folk tunes and therefore appear as fresh, lively and in their own way original tunes.
>
> The music is characteristic throughout and some numbers of the opera are of a very special beauty. The pearl of this one is indisputably the sextet, which in and of itself can be considered a masterpiece of vocal writing.[33]

However, the orchestration – which is excellent and demonstrates Smetana's professional approach – is more German than Slavic. Paraphrasing Otto Jahn, Kuhač argues that "It would be a real blessing if a composer came along who did not care about the instrumentation and the musical forms of the Germans and Italians, but who would make Slavic music instead."[34]

---

[32] "[…] so schadet die Wahl eines solchen Sujets dem Ansehen der slavischen Nation, die auf der Bühne noch ein junges Volk ist und deren Vorzüge auf diesem Wege der Welt noch nicht so bekannt gemacht wurden, wie jene der älteren Musikvölker." Cf. Kuhač "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana," October 24, 1873, 1.

[33] "Tausend und tausend Tonbildchen sind der böhmischen Volksweise mit photograpischer Genauigkeit nachgebildet und erscheinen deßhalb als frische, lebendige und in ihrer Art originelle Weisen. Die Musik ist durchwegs charakteristisch und einige Nummern der Oper sind von ganz besonderer Schönheit. Die Perle davon ist unstreitig das Sextett, das an und für sich als ein Meisterwerk des vocalen Satzes gelten kann." Cf. Franjo Ks. Kuhač, "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana," October 24, 1873, 1.

[34] "Es wäre ein wahres Glück, wenn jetzt ein Componist käme, der sich um die Instrumentation und um die Musikformen der Deutschen und Italiener nicht kümmern, dafür aber **slavische** Musik

Finally, the third person to be mentioned, who was familiar with Czech literature and music, was August Šenoa (1838–1881), the famous Croatian writer whose father (a bishop's confectioner in Zagreb) was of Czech origin.[35] Šenoa also spent some of his law student years in Prague during the early 1860s owing to the scholarship given him by Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905), the famous Bishop of Djakovo and a pro-south-Slavic and nationally oriented politician.[36] There, Šenoa established his reputation as a journalist through a series of socio-political reports and essays from Prague (one of the feuilletons was named *Praški listovi* [*Prague leaflets*]) published in the Zagreb (Croatian) daily *Pozor* in 1862–1863.[37] After returning to Zagreb, he was active not only as a city official, artistic director of the theatre (1868–1870), drama consultant (1873) and vice-president of the Matica hrvatska (1877–1881) but also as a writer and theatre critic, as well as translator: it was his translation of *The Bartered Bride* libretto that was performed on the Zagreb stage. Besides the social criticism of contemporary relationships in rural and urban centres and historical topics in his romanticist novels and short stories and other writings, he spoke from the standpoint of the National party, i.e., a moderate nationally oriented group that demanded an independent Croatian federal unit within the Habsburg Empire, and a better position for Croatia after the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise in 1868, without any major Pan-Slavic strivings. In his socio-political ideas, Šenoa was close to many contemporary nationally oriented Croats, as were Ivan Zajc and some members of the Zagreb *Musikverein*, who were thus opponents of Kuhač's radical ideas, articulated in his published papers as well as in his letters to Pivoda and Konopásek. Because of the ideological opposition within the *Musikverein*'s school, Kuhač left his teaching position, devoting himself as a freelancer only on his research which cost him and his family a fortune.

Conclusions

The Zagreb National Theatre (and here we are dealing with its opera department) was founded with the intention to present Croatian operas and enable Zagreb audiences to hear the canonical repertoire from the international spectrum.

machen wurde." Cf. Kuhač, "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana," October 24, 1873, 1.

[35] Ankica Šunjić, "Šenoa, August," in *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024)*, *online edition* (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2024), https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/senoa-august.

[36] Data on the famous Bishop can be found in "Strossmayer, Josip Juraj," in *Hrvatska enciklopedija*, *online edition* (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2013–2024), https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/strossmayer-josip-juraj.

[37] Upon his return to Zagreb (in 1866) he was active as a member of the editorial board in *Pozor* until its abolishment in 1867.

Although the nominal intention was the presentation of Slavic repertoire, that repertoire was overshadowed by Italian and German operas and operettas. During the first operatic period Verdi's operas dominated the programme, while five of Wagner's operas occupied this position in the second period.[38]

The Slavic repertoire included mostly works by Czech composers (Smetana, Blodek, Hřimalý), and only one Russian composer (Tchaikovsky), thus Smetana was the favourite with three operas, and *The Bartered Bride* was the most performed among all of the Slavic stage works.

The gap of 20 years between the two stagings of *The Bartered Bride* did not consign Smetana into oblivion. An examination of the repertoires of various music societies and military bands points to his regular presence on their programmes, especially around the dates of the productions of his operas in the theatre.

The question of reception of Slavic works, again, mostly of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, points to some issues that strongly differ from the first to the second period under consideration. Most importantly, in the second period, musical, dramatic, and staging-related aspects were almost exclusively presented, while the contextualization of these works within the political moment took place only during the first period, especially during the 1870s. Two reasons can be offered here for this discrepancy.

The first one is related to the political context – the 1870s were the years following the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise, when the Croatian national issue still had to be strengthened. The striving for Slavic unification was present in the programmes of nationally oriented political parties and the interest in becoming acquainted with Slavic culture was stronger than the political bonds. Namely, the citizens of Zagreb were familiar with the Czech conflicts between the Young and Old Czechs, and Young-Czech policy was not at all inclined toward the Croats, but favoured the Serbs and largely drew on information from their chauvinistic journal *Srbobran*.[39] Therefore, some protests against such policy can be found in the Zagreb press. In matters of culture, especially music, there were no such attitudes. Following this policy, Kuhač was the most radical as he stated:

> Slavic composers should not use the means of effect common to other nations in grateful piety, but should avoid them; even more, they should protest vigorously against everything that is not common Slavic property, and this primarily because

[38] Katalinić, "Opera and Operetta," 91, 93.

[39] Zdravka Zlodi, "Hrvati i slavenski svijet u 19. stoljeću," in *Temelji moderne Hrvatske. Hrvatske zemlje u „dugom" 19. stoljeću*, eds. Vlasta Švoger and Jasna Turkalj (Matica hrvatska, 2016), 680–685.

> through permanent protest we can not only preserve the originality of our music, but also raise it to a height not yet imaginable.[40]

By contrast, during the second operatic era (1894–1902), Croatia experienced a certain well-being due to a rather peaceful political situation. The Slavic element was only part of the general strategies of the political solution of the Slavic question within or outside the Monarchy. Therefore, the international culture was the focus of everyday life, and the Zagreb theatre was mostly compared with Munich, Vienna and – especially – Graz. Although Miletić had declaratively included his Slavism in his theatre engagement, and succeeded to stage more Slavic pieces than in the previous period, it was received differently because of the general Pro-European atmosphere.

Here we come to the second point: during the first operatic period (1870–1889), there were no professional music critics apart from Kuhač. And Kuhač was strongly aware of the Slavic question, dealing with folk music collecting and promoting the Slavic style in music. He was aware that Smetana and his compatriots whose operas were performed in Zagreb, were educated on the German basis, but he still balanced his critique with benevolence in order to promote Slavism in general. During the second operatic period (1894–1902) his public activity was still pro-Slavic, but he did not enter polemics dealing with specific Slavic opera productions. On the other hand, at this time some professional reviewers with musical training were hired, especially in the Zagreb German-language press, such as the theatre critic of Slovene origin Ivan Souvan, educated in Graz,[41] Hugo Bresnitz (on whom I did not find any data) and, above all, Ernest Schulz[42], who had come from Prague and found his new homeland in Zagreb. They all insisted on artistic and repertoire issues when dealing with musical life in general, demanded a high level of performance and greeted excellent guest appearances as a valuable means of educating of the audience.

However, the picture given here reflects the Slavic presence on the Zagreb operatic stage still within the Monarchy. The radical change in the direction

[40] "Die slavischen Tonkünstler sollten nicht die bei andern Nationen gangbaren Effectmittel in dankbarer Pietät ausnützen, sondern ihnen ausweichen; ja noch mehr, die müßten gegen Alles, was nicht slavisches Gemeingut ist, energische protestiren, und das vornehmlich deßhalb, weil wir durch einen permanenten Protest nicht nur die Originalität unsere Musik bewahren, sondern diese bis zu einer jetzt noch nicht geahnten Höhe steigern können." (Kuhač, "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana," October 24, 1873, 1–2).

[41] Nikola Batušić, "Souvan, Ivan," in *Leksikon Marina Držića* (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža and Dom Marina Držića, 2015), https://leksikon.muzej-marindrzic.eu/souvan-ivan/.

[42] On their reviews in German press cf. Jelena Vuković, "Glazbeni život Zagreba od 1890 do 1920 u orisu glazbene kritike na njemačkom jeziku" (graduation thesis, University of Zagreb, 1998).

of collaboration with other Slavic peoples in all fields would occur only after World War I.

Bibliography

Encyclopaedias and lexicons

"Strossmayer, Josip Juraj." In *Hrvatska enciklopedija*, *online edition*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2013–2024.

Ajanović-Malinar, Ivona. "Housa, Miroslava." In *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024)*, *online edition*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2025.

Barbieri, Marija. "Hofer, Rikard." In *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024)*, *online edition*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2025.

Barbieri, Marija. "Kroupa, Emanuel." In *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024)*, *online edition*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2025.

Batušić, Nikola. "Souvan, Ivan." In *Leksikon Marina Držića*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža and Dom Marina Držića, 2015.

Batušić, Slavko. "Mrazović, Ladislav." In *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*, vol. 6. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1875.

Marošević, Grozdana and Sanja Majer-Bobetko. "Kuhač, Franjo Ksaver." In *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024)*, *online edition*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2024.

Šunjić, Ankica. "Šenoa, August." In *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024)*, *online edition*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2024.

Books and articles

Andrić, Nikola. *Spomen-knjiga Hrvatskog zem. kazališta pri otvoranju nove kazališne zgrade*. Tiskarski zavod "Narodnih novina," 1895.

Freemanova, Michaela. "Between Prague, Zagreb and Lwów: Franjo Ksaver Kuhač and His Czech Fellow-Supporters." In *Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (1834–1911): Glazbena historiografija i identitet / Music Historiography and Identity*, edited by Vjera Katalinić and Stanislav Tuksar. Hrvatsko muzikološko društvo, 2013.

Katalinić, Vjera. "Opera and Operetta in the Late Nineteenth-Century Zagreb National Theatre: Composers, Librettists, and Themes – A Comparison." In *Musical Theatre as High Culture?*, edited by Vjera Katalinić, Stanislav Tuksar, and Harry White. Hrvatsko muzikološko društvo, 2011.

Kijanowska-Kamińska, Luba, and Olena Paris. "Galicyjska wersja panslawizmu czeskich badaczy Lwowa w ujęciu Eugena Cehelskiego." *Edukacja muzyczna* 11 (2016): 119–132.

Miletić, Stjepan. *Hrvatsko glumište*. Centar za kulturnu djelatnost Saveza socijalističke omladine Zagreba, 1978.

Ries, Sara. "Franjo Ksaver Kuhač u mreži svojih korespondenata." PhD diss., University of Zagreb, 2022.

Stieger, Franz. *Opernlexikon: Titelkatalog*, vol. 1. Hans Schneider, 1975.

Stieger, Franz. *Opernlexikon: Titelkatalog*, vol. 3. Hans Schneider, 1975.

Stieger, Franz. *Opernlexikon: Komponistenkatalog*, vol. 1. Hans Schneider, 1977.

Vuković, Jelena. "Glazbeni život Zagreba od 1890 do 1920 u orisu glazbene kritike na njemačkom jeziku." Graduation thesis, University of Zagreb, 1998.

Zlodi, Zdravka. "Hrvati i slavenski svijet u 19. stoljeću." In *Temelji moderne Hrvatske. Hrvatske zemlje u „dugom" 19. stoljeću*, edited by Vlasta Švoger and Jasna Turkalj. Matica hrvatska, 2016.

Newspapers

"Vom Nationaltheater." *Agramer Zeitung*, December 15, 1894.

Jelenčić. "Začarani princ." *Narodne novine*, January 21, 1885.

Kuhač, Franjo Ks. "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana." *Agramer Zeitung*, October 24, 1873.

Kuhač, Franjo Ks. "*Prodana nevjesta.* In drei Acten von Friedr. Smetana." *Agramer Zeitung*, October 30, 1873.

l. m. [Ladislav Mrazović]. "Hrvatska opera." *Vienac*, November 1, 1873.

Schopf, Davor. "Prvi baletni ansambl." *Vijenac*, November 10, 2016.

S—n. [Souvan]. "Kunst-Chronik." *Agramer Zeitung*, December 18, 1894.

Šenoa, August. "Narodno kazalište." *Vienac*, October 18, 1873.

Online sources

Schopf, Davor, and Mladen Mordej Vučković. "Jela i Na plitvička jezera, prvi hrvatski baleti." *Baleti.hr*.