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Karel Burian and Hungary

This article is an extract of the author's 2012 DLA dissertation entitled *Karel Burian és Magyarország* [Karel Burian and Hungary] (hereafter DLA dissertation), for which Anna Dalos was the research director.

Biographies of Karel Burian,¹ one of the greatest tenors of the 20th century's first two decades, underline his Wagner interpretations (notably Tristan), his years in Dresden and New York, and above all his hugely successful creation of the role of Herod in the Dresden world première of Richard Strauss's *Salome*.² The Czech tenor's popularity vied with that of Enrico Caruso. Insofar as his personality could be assessed during the research, he comes over as a Bohemian in both senses, and also a sensitive, even touchy singer, who did not hesitate to write an ironic text about Caruso to a couplet and record it, yet was deeply offended if he felt any remark had been made about his own short stature. That touchiness and whimsicality could lead also to many unexpected breaches of contract.³

The career of Karel Burian falls into three parts. The first ended in the summer of 1902, when he broke his contract in Budapest. It had been marked by frequent switches from theater to theater and steadily increasing success. The second lasted from 1902 to 1913. He became world famous soon after he arrived in Dresden, and the short decade that followed his appearance in the *Salome* première can be taken as the height of his career. His guest appearances in New York, London, Paris and Bayreuth placed him among the greatest of his age. The third period began in 1913, after his final visit to America. Thereafter his performances received increasing numbers of bad notices in the press. The musical life of Budapest was a component of all three of those periods, and his career as a singer can be traced clearly in the Hungarian press of the time.

¹ For an accurate account of Burian's life, see K. J. Kutsch und Leo Riemens, *Großes Sängerlexikon*, 3rd expanded edition, vol. I (Bern and Munich: Saur, 1997), 509–510. See also DLA dissertation, 24–42.

² On the *Salome* première and Burian's part in it see William Mann, *Richard Strauss. Das Opernwerk* (Munich: Beck, 1967), 43.

³ Burian was notorious for his frequent cancellations. See Einhard Luther, *Helden an geweihtem Ort. Biographie eines Stimmfaches, 2: Wagnertenöre in Bayreuth (1884–1914)* (Trossingen/Berlin: Omega Wolfgang Layer, 2002), 353.

In 1913, Burian took Hungarian citizenship, having the Opera House tenor Béni Dalnoki adopt him to that end.⁴ Budapest stage and other publications reported that he was still to be billed at the Royal Hungarian Opera as Károly Burián, as it was not compulsory to assume the adoptive parent's name – that depended on the adoption contract.⁵

The Budapest probate papers record him as dying as a Czech citizen,⁶ but he stated in his will, written in German and sworn on 17 June 1920, that he was a Hungarian citizen.⁷ Furthermore, Burian was styled in two bundles of inheritance papers as Károly Dalnoki or Károly Burian-Dalnoki, and signed himself and kept his Budapest bank account as such.⁸

Although the Hungarian press mentioned Burian's Hungarian divorce case at the time of his death,⁹ there is a later reference only in one source to his having become involved in litigation with his wife in 1913–14.¹⁰ Thereafter the case was largely forgotten.

1. Burian in Hungary

Karel Burian made his Budapest début at the Royal Hungarian Opera on 3 June 1900 in the title role of *Tannhäuser*; as a young tenor from the Stadttheater in Hamburg. He was an immediate success. A few days later the *Budapesti Hírlap* wrote,

⁴ *Magyar színművészeti lexikon. A magyar színjátszás története* [Hungarian Theatre Lexicon. History of Hungarian stage performance], ed. by Aladár Schöpflin, vol. I ([Budapest]: Országos Színészegyesület és Nyugdíjintézete, [1929]), 250. Naturalization was easier if the applicant had himself adopted by an older Hungarian citizen. See the supplement to Act L/1879, § 8, then in force.

⁵ Dr. Csorna Kálmán, "Rokonság. 22. §. Rokonsági kapcsolatok. 5. Az örökbefogadás" [Kinship. § 22: Ties of kinship. 5. Adoption], in Károly Szladits, *A magyar magánjog, 2: Családi jog* [Hungarian civil law, vol. 2: Family law] (Budapest: Grill Károly, 1940), 308.

⁶ Budapest Főváros Levéltára [Budapest Capital City Archives, hereafter BFL], VII. 12. b. 416515/1929, 6.

⁷ "Ich schicke voraus, dass ich zufolge Bescheid 212673/1913 des Ministeriums des Innen in Ungarn, die Staatsbürgerheit zu Händen des Bürgermeisters in Budapest geleistet habe, somit ungarischer Staatsbürger bin." BFL, VII. 269. 557/1920, 3.

⁸ [Anonymous], "A tenorista válópöre. Burián Károly a felesége ellen" [The tenor's divorce case. Károly Burián v. his wife], *Világ* V/4 (4 January 1914), 13. "Hungarian divorce" was a well-known legal institution by the early 20th century, when not all lands in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy allowed divorce. Hungary did so if the parties were Hungarian citizens. It became common for divorcees to take citizenship purely for that purpose. On this see Sándor Nagy, "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.

⁹ See [Izor Béldi], "Burrian-adomák" [Burrian anecdotes], *Pesti Hírlap* 46/202 (27 September 1924), 10.

¹⁰ Josef Bartoš, *Karel Burian* (Rakovník: [n. a.], 1934), 38.

Mr Burrián is a Wagner singer of excellent taste, brought up in the stage traditions of Hanover and Hamburg. He is a true tenor. [...] an intelligent, serious performer, who carefully shapes the role he depicts and is also conversant musically with all the demands of the Wagner style.¹¹

The *Budapesti Napló* review reveals something of his acting and concept of the role:

Everything he does has its reason – and everything he does is justified. He acts and sings every note; every little change of tempo also serves as characterization.¹²

On 10 August 1900 Burian signed a five-year contract with the Royal Hungarian Opera that would come into force in the fall of 1901.¹³ His first appearance of the 1901–1902 season was on 17 September in the title role of Wagner’s *Lohengrin*. He appeared at the Opera altogether 52 times in the season, in operas by Wagner (*Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Die Walküre*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Tristan und Isolde*), Leoncavallo (*I Pagliacci*), Bizet (*Carmen*), Tchaikovsky (*Onegin*), and Giordano (*Fedora*).¹⁴ The season seems to have been rearranged around him. There had been press notices of the world première of Jenő Huby’s opera *Moharózsa* [The Moss Rose] with Burian as Flamen,¹⁵ of *Samson and Delilah*, *Werther*, *Dalibor*, and the Hungarian première of *Tosca*, as well as revivals of *Götterdämmerung* and of an opera by Ödön Mihalovich,¹⁶ but these did not materialize.

The biggest event in the 1901–1902 season was the Hungarian première of *Tristan und Isolde*,¹⁷ which had deep effects on musical life in Budapest, including the young composers Bartók and Kodály.¹⁸ In line with a curious performance practice in Hungary, the Czech Burian sang Tristan in Italian, while Italia Vasquez, though of Italian origin,

¹¹ [Anonymous], “Operaház” [Opera House], *Budapesti Hírlap* 20/152 (5 June 1900), 7.

¹² -ly, “Operaház”, *Budapesti Napló* 5/152 (5 June 1900), 7.

¹³ Burian was contracted to the Prague National Theatre until the fall of 1901. The Hungarian State Opera have a certified copy of his Budapest contract. The text is in Appendix 4 of DLA dissertation.

¹⁴ A list of Burian’s Budapest appearances appears in Appendix 1 of DLA dissertation.

¹⁵ Huby was insisting on Burian, but the singer turned down the lead in the end: Anonymous, “A Moharózsa ügye” [The Moss Rose affair], *Magyarország* 9/41 (16 February 1902), 10. The première eventually took place in the 1903/04 season. Huby had come to know Burian in the latter’s period in Hanover, where he had sung in the local première of *Le Luthier de Crémone*.

¹⁶ [Anonymous], “Az opera szezonja”, *Budapesti Hírlap* 21/244 (1901. szeptember 5.), 8. and [Anonymous], “Burrián Károly szerződése az Operánál”, *Egyetértés* 35/193 (1901. július 16.), 4.

¹⁷ With the following cast: Karel Burian (Tristan), Italia Vasquez (Isolde), Dávid Ney (Marke), Mihály Takáts (Kurwenal), Mimi Berts (Brangäne), Bernát Ney (The Steersman), Jenő Déri (A Young Sailor), József Gábor (A Shepherd). The conductor of the première was István Kerner.

¹⁸ See e.g. Bartók’s letter to his mother, the widowed Mrs. Béla Bartók (Budapest, 19 May 1902) in *Bartók Béla családi levelei* [Family letters of Béla Bartók], ed. by Béla Bartók Jr., co-ed. Adrienne Konkoly Gombocz (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1981), 65. On Kodály see Béla Balázs, *Napló* [Diary] 1903–1914, vol. I (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1982), 142, dated 26 November 1905.

joined the rest of the cast in singing *Isolde* in Hungarian.¹⁹ The critics vied to demonstrate their familiarity with Wagner style. They compared the singers and orchestra, and even the production and sets to Bayreuth and backed their claims to authority with frequent references to other foreign performances.²⁰ Burian was almost universally praised. Aurél Kern evaluated his production in relation to the role:

[...] of the two main performers, the lyrical hero is really Tristan, the man. In the piece he is passive throughout, almost a sorrowful figure. This was not felt for a moment with Burrián. He is a hero through and through, with an ancestral Teutonic greatness.²¹

There was cause for criticism, apart from the use of Italian, only in Burian's physique, which was not exactly suited to a heroic tenor. According to János Csiky,

His expressive singing and staggering portrayal quite disguised the shortcomings of his physique, which was no mean feat beside Mme. Vasquez. He excelled especially in the third act. His fevered vision sent shudders through the audience.²²

The critics of the *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* and *Pester Lloyd* picked out the same scene,²³ in relation to which the opinion of Márkus Miksa is interesting:

[Burian] was initially sparing with his voice, but from the second act we were able to hear it in its full beauty.²⁴

It appears from the reviews that the second act pleased the audience less than first and the third.²⁵ One reason could have been the love duet, which lasted more than three-

¹⁹ Dating right back to the separation of the Royal Hungarian Opera from the National Theater was the unwritten rule that the German language could not be heard on the Hungarian stage. See Edit Mályuszné Császár, "A rendi Nemzeti Színháztól a polgári nemzet színháza felé. (1849–1873)" [From the National Theater of the estates toward a theater of the bourgeois nation], in Miklós Hofer, Ferenc Kerényi, Bálint Magyar, et al., *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve* [150 years of the National Theater] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1987), 54. It was on 8 April 1915, at the beginning of the short season of the Great War that the minister of culture allowed German-language singing at the Opera House, as the guest replacement in the title role of *Lohengrin*, Alexander Kirchner, only knew it in German. (–Idi.) [Béldi Izor], "Németül énekeltek a m. kir. operaházban" [It was sung in German at the Royal Hungarian Opera House], *Pesti Hírlap* 37/98 (9 April 1915), 9.

²⁰ Miksa Márkus mentioned unspecified foreign experiences: "Tristan és Izolde", *Magyar Hírlap* XI/329 [30 November 1901], 2. The *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* critic cited performances in Dresden, Munich and Vienna: Mj., "Königl. Ung. Oper", *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* 25/330 [29 November 1901], 6.

²¹ K[ern] A[urél], "Trisztan és Izolde", *Budapesti Hírlap* 21/329 (29 November 1901), 3.

²² Csiky János, "Tristan és Izolde", *Magyar Szó* II/283 (29 November 1901), 2.

²³ "Großartig war er im 3. Akt, wo er seinen Schmerz, seine Sehnsucht, seinen Todeskampf mit den größten Steigerungen dargestellt hat..." Mj., "Königl. Ung. Oper." *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* 25/330 (1901. november 29.), 6–7. "Sein Meisterstück war die große Szene am Krankenlager." August Beer, "Tristan und Isolde", *Pester Lloyd* 48/287 (1901. november 29.), 3.

²⁴ Márkus Miksa, "Tristan és Izolde", *Magyar Hírlap* 11/329 (29 November 1901), 1–2.

²⁵ Ibid.

quarters of an hour, according to the critic of *Budapest*.²⁶ August Beer noted also that the orchestra drowned out the singers several times in the scene,²⁷ while Márkus found that Mimi Berts' "Slightly sharp-toned voice devoid of feelingful magic interfered with the poetic tone".²⁸ Apart from that, there were the language problems mentioned, which may have lost the performance some verve in the second act, whereas Burian's performance in the third held the audience's attention to the full, the critics noted.

Between his Wagner appearances in December 1901, Burian had also to appear in several concerts. He was a guest at the Lipótváros Casino on the 14th, and at a recital of teaching staff at the Academy of Music on the 20th. The student Béla Bartók also appeared at these, as a soloist at the first and accompanying Jenő Hubay at the second.²⁹

In the 1901–02 opera season, the two other Hungarian premières – of *Onegin* (the first Russian work to join the Opera House repertoire) and of *Fedora* – received less press attention than *Tristan und Isolde*. Burian as Lensky, according to the *Politisches Volksblatt* critic, played the fiery youth quite in the spirit of the original Pushkin poem.³⁰ Armand Erdős commented on his clear pronunciation of the Hungarian text.³¹ In the Hungarian première of Giordano's *Fedora*, which followed on 27 May 1902, Burian sang Loris Ipanov with perfect pronunciation, and "positively enchanted the audience".³² Four further performances of it followed in the short remainder of the season. He also appeared once more in *Lohengrin*, before commencing on 12 June 1902 a holiday that was to be "extended over almost three months".³³

As the season drew to a close, it appeared from the opera-season summaries in the daily papers that Burian filled to general satisfaction the post of heroic tenor in Wagner's operas. Planned for the following season were new roles in *Götterdämmerung* and *Fra Diavolo*, and Hungarian premières of *Dalibor* and *Tosca*. Furthermore, *Pesti Hirlap* said, Burian would like to sing the roles of Assad and Florestan in that season as well.³⁴

Burian was a guest singer on three occasions at the Dresden Hoftheater in June 1902.³⁵ Then exactly a month after the news that he was taking three months' holiday

²⁶ (–rfi), "Tristán és Izolde", *Budapest* 25/329 (29 November 1901), supplement 1–2.

²⁷ Beer, "Tristan und Isolde".

²⁸ Márkus, "Tristan és Izolde".

²⁹ Béla Bartók Jr., *Bartók Béla műhelyében* [In Béla Bartók's workshop] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1982), 102–103; Géza Moravcsik, *Az Országos M. Kir. Zene-Akadémia Évkönyve az 1901/1902-iki tanévről* [Royal National Hungarian Music Academy Yearbook for 1901–02] (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1902), 8.

³⁰ "Er sang und spielte diesen jungen Feuerkopf ganz im Geiste der Originaldichtung und fand noch das meiste Interesse." –dó, "Eugen Onegin", *Politisches Volksblatt* 28/30 (31 January 1902), 6.

³¹ Erdős Armand, "Onegin", *Egyetértés* 36/30 (31 January 1902), 4–5.

³² Gergely István, "Fedora", *Budapesti Napló* 7/144 (28 May 1902), 11.

³³ [Anonymous], "(Burrián Károly)", *Magyarország* 9/140 (13 June 1902), 10.

³⁴ (–ldi) [Béldi Izor], "Az operaház jövő szezonja. II." [The coming season at the Opera, II], *Pesti Hirlap* 24/166 (19 June 1902), 6.

³⁵ The dates and productions: 16 June 1902: *Carmen*; 17 June 1902: *Pagliacci*, 19 June 1902: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. (Based on data in the Dresden Opera's Historical Archives.)

came word that he was breaking his contract with the Royal Hungarian Opera and contracting himself with his wife to Dresden instead. The reason seemed to be simple: Budapest had not made a contract with his wife, while Dresden was offering one to them both.³⁶ The newspaper gave as a second factor that Dresden's terms were far more favorable.³⁷

Burian's breach of contract put the Royal Hungarian Opera in a difficult position. Only in the 1903–04 season could his place really be filled, when Rezső Máder signed up the internationally famous Wagner tenor Georg Anthes. He was a well-trying, good-looking singer of German origin, with great acting qualities and several years' experience. He won over the critics on his first appearance.³⁸

The press seized the opportunity of Anthes' arrival to flash their swords at Burian, the contract-breaker, as Anthes had left Dresden just as Burian signed on there. Journalists returned regularly to the question of whether Anthes had left Dresden because of Burian.³⁹ Indeed it was said in *Alkotmány* that "Burrián fled from us to Dresden and pushed out Anthes, who in turn fled to us".⁴⁰ This construction can still be found in most modern literature on the matter, but it emerges from the Dresden archives' 1902 opera house file that Anthes first signed a contract for America, while Burian was acquired to fill the place of Ejnar Forchhammer, who left Dresden for Frankfurt in the summer of 1902, and his wife to fill that of Teréz Krammer, who had left for Budapest in January 1902.⁴¹

The Budapest papers regularly compared Anthes' singing with that of Burian, but neither emerged from the comparisons as an absolute winner. Anthes might be "more intelligent",⁴² "nobler",⁴³ or even "more scholarly"⁴⁴ than Burian, but despite the general praise for his voice, almost all critics felt he was past his singing prime. Several

³⁶ [Anonymous], "Tenorista-krízis az Operában" [Tenor crisis at the Opera], *Magyarország* 9/166 (13 July 1902), 9.

³⁷ Burian's initial salary at Dresden was 24,000 marks a year (Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Dresden, 10711. Ministerium des Königlichen Hauses Loc. 44 Nr. 31. Acta, das königliche Hoftheater betreffend. 1902. 78).

³⁸ "In György Anthesz [sic], whose début today was eagerly expected, we made the acquaintance of highly intelligent singer of rare talent, with a splendid physique, who won over our audience at a stroke." [Anonymous], "Operaház", *Budapesti Hírlap* 23/258 (20 September 1903), 13.

³⁹ [Anonymous], "Mader Rezső Milánóban" [Raoul Mader in Milan], *Magyarország* 10/169 (17 July 1903), 13.

⁴⁰ [Anonymous], "Anthes bemutatkozása" [Anthes' début], *Alkotmány* 8/223 (20 September 1903), 7.

⁴¹ Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Dresden, 10711. Ministerium des Königlichen Hauses Loc. 44 Nr. 31. Acta, das königliche Hoftheater betreffend. 1902. No. 859/02, 81st numbered page. Anthes performed several times more in Dresden (e. g. on 26 August and 1 September) and may have received his New York invitation then.

⁴² [Anonymous], "Anthes bemutatkozása".

⁴³ [Anonymous], "Operaház", *Budapesti Napló* 8/257 (20 September 1903), 11.

⁴⁴ [Anonymous], "Anthes bemutatkozása".

noted that Burian's voice, compared with Anthes', was "of feelingful beauty"⁴⁵ and "warm".⁴⁶

Burian, after his breach of contract, returned to Budapest only in 1907, as a world-famous singer,⁴⁷ but then came almost annually until his death, initially for shorter smaller guest appearances, as his life as a performer by then was already divided between several cities, notably Dresden and New York. However, he appeared from time to time in new roles,⁴⁸ and his presence ensured that Wagner remained in the repertoire, as *Tristan und Isolde* was usually on the program for his returns.

In January 1909 the press fomented rivalry between Anthes and Burian once more when Andreas Dippel, administrative manager of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, invited Anthes to appear in America again.⁴⁹ The papers added that Anthes was leaving Budapest because he felt sidelined by the frequent guest appearances of Burian.⁵⁰ Anthes may have had reason to be offended that the contract-breaching tenor was being held in higher esteem than he, who had been a reliable member of the company for years. The situation was heightened by an article in the *Pesti Napló* containing overall criticism of the singer then appearing as a guest in America. According to the article, the extremely high fees for American appearances led singers (Anthes and Burian were among those cited by name) to demand higher pay in Europe as well.⁵¹ Could there have been somebody in the background for whom a journalist was prepared not to take sides in a conflict between the two tenor stars so often compared? If so, it would certainly be Béla Környei, who had made his Opera House debut on 17 November 1908.⁵² The Hungarian première of Eugen D'Albert's opera *Tiefland* brought him such

⁴⁵ [Anonymous], "Operaház", 11.; [Anonymous], "A Lohengrin", *Magyarország* 10/227 (22 September 1903), 13.

⁴⁶ a. k. [Károly Antalik?], "Magyar Kir. Opera" [Royal Hungarian Opera], *Hazánk* 10/223 (22 September 1903), 9; [Anonymous], "Az új hőstenor" [The new heroic tenor], *Egyetértés* 37/257 (20 September 1903), 4.

⁴⁷ Curiously, his guest appearance in 1907 came right before Caruso's Budapest appearance and failure. On this see Iván Kertész, "Caruso bukása Budapesten a korabeli sajtó tükrében" [Caruso's failure in Budapest in the press at the time], in Stanley Jackson, *Caruso*, transl. by Mária Borbás (Budapest: Gondolat, 1976), 409–435; Andrew Farkas, "Caruso and Budapest", *The Record Collector* 28/11–12 (April 1984), 245–66.

⁴⁸ 1908: Puccini, *La Bohème* – Rodolfo; Wagner, *Siegfried* – title role; 1911: Gounod, *Faust* – title role; 1912: Kienzl, *Der Evangelimann* – Matthias Freudhofer. For a full list of his parts see DLA dissertation, 142.

⁴⁹ [Anonymous], "Anthes Amerikában" [Anthes in America], *Az Ujság* 7/7 (9 January 1909), 10.

⁵⁰ [Anonymous], "Anthes kivándorol. Tenor-háboru" [Anthes emigrates. Tenor war]. This is a falsely recorded cutting in the Memorial Archive at the Hungarian State Opera given as from the 14 January 1909 number of *Az Ujság*. There is no such article in the January issues of the paper.

⁵¹ [Anonymous], "Conried és Hammerstein" [Conried and Hammerstein], *Pesti Napló* 60/11 (14 January 1909), 12.

⁵² Környei had been in the Király Színház company since 1905. *Magyar Művészeti Almanach. V. évfolyam* [Hungarian Arts Almanac, 5th Year], ed. by Henrik Incze (Budapest: published by editor, 1905), 246.

success as Pedro that “he was celebrated as much as Burrián was after his performance of Tristan”.⁵³ His voice made a very good impression as well:

He has, along with a congenial personality and the strength of a heroic tenor, the high range of a lyric tenor.⁵⁴

In Környei the Hungarian press thought it had found “the first Hungarian Wagner tenor”.⁵⁵ Each new role he took was praised by critics and audiences alike. It meant that a new, successful tenor had joined Burian and Anthes on the Opera House stage, and for press and public alike, Környei had the big advantage that he was Hungarian and so sang faultlessly in Hungarian.

The waves made in the press subsided, and both Burian and Anthes departed in the spring of 1909 for America. Burian did not return to Budapest until September 1910, yet Béla Környei failed to become the first Hungarian Wagner tenor after all. His only Wagner role in his time at the Opera House was the title role of *Lohengrin*, which he sang four times, not with unqualified success.⁵⁶

On 13 October 1911, Burian sang the title role in Gounod’s *Faust* for the first time in Budapest, but the critics thought his performance was rigid and artificial in the lyrical parts, such as the *cavatina*.⁵⁷ These poor reviews heralded a two-year period of negative receptions. This rigidity may have been a disguise for fatigue or vocal problems.⁵⁸ From 1912 onward Burian received ever more press criticism, and comparisons with Anthes or Környei were regularly in his disfavor.

His fatigue derived on the one hand from overwork. He had been spending his life for years doing guest performances in Dresden, New York and other cities. In 1912–13, he was a contracted member of the Vienna and Boston companies and also a regular guest at the Metropolitan. Houses where he appeared as a guest took full advantage: in Vienna in November 1908, for instance, he sang in four different Wagner operas in a week.⁵⁹ At the turn of 1908 and 1909, he was appearing in a different city almost every

⁵³ Imre Kálmán, “A hegyek alján” [*Tiefland*], *Pesti Napló* 59/276 (18 November 1908), 10.

⁵⁴ “Er hat neben der sympathischen Persönlichkeit und der Kraft eines Helden Tenors die hohe Stimmlage des lyrischen Tenors.” D. b., “Tiefland”, *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* 32/276 (18 November 1908), 3.

⁵⁵ Kálmán, “A hegyek alján”.

⁵⁶ For more see Ferenc János Szabó, “(Gibt es eine) Helden Tenor-Tradition in Ungarn(?). Von Carl Burian bis Béla Környei”. Online: <http://www.gramophone-anno.eu/article.php?id=20> (8 May 2010).

⁵⁷ [Anonymous], “Operaház”, *Pesti Napló* 42/244 (14 October 1911), 11; [Anonymous], “(M. kir. operaház)”, *Pesti Hírlap* 33/244 (14 October 1911), 6.

⁵⁸ Vocal tiredness and overwork are apparent also in his July 1911 recording of part of *Meistersinger*: The Gramophone Co., Matrix No. 2257c.

⁵⁹ Luther, *Helden an geweihtem Ort*, 358.

other night.⁶⁰ Nor is it clear whether he had got over his 1911 break with Dresden, although the letter published by Reichelt shows no sign of any feelings of failure.⁶¹

That Burian had recovered by the 1913–14 season is clear, for example, from a *Walküre* review: “Burian, the eternal canceler, had not been for years in such splendid form as this. [...] [His] success tonight recalled his great triumphs of old.”⁶² By then he was no longer visiting America or Vienna or his estate near Prague, but had settled in Budapest.

From 1913 Burian was under contract to the Opera House as a “regular guest”.⁶³ The anonymous correspondent of *Független Magyarország* surmised that Burian had ended his Vienna contract due to “the notable Czech demonstrations”,⁶⁴ which is possible as there had been protests in Vienna over the dissolution of the Czech provincial assembly.⁶⁵

Afer 1913, his appearances in Budapest periodically fell victim to offence he had taken. In May 1914 it was excessive demands on his voice.⁶⁶ Later he threatened to resign over the casting of revivals of *Fedora* in May 1922⁶⁷ and *Salome* in the spring of 1923.⁶⁸ It is typical of his theatricality that a farewell concert was even announced in 1922.⁶⁹ Ultimately the Opera could not do without a performer of Burian’s quality, and Burian could not by then return to other houses where he had broken his contracts.

⁶⁰ Budapest, 29 December 1908: *Carmen*; Vienna, 4 January 1909: *Siegfried*; Dresden, 7 January: *Aida*; Vienna, 9 January, *Götterdämmerung*; Dresden, 11 January: *Tristan und Isolde*; Vienna, 12 January: *Pagliacci*; Dresden, 13 January: *Der Evangelimann*; Vienna, 15 January: *Meistersinger*; Budapest, 17 January: *Siegfried*. His next performance was then *Tannhäuser* in New York on 5 February 1909.

⁶¹ Johannes Reichelt, “Karl Burrian. Um die Tragik verwöhnter Heldenentore”, in *Erlebte Kostbarkeiten* (Dresden: Wodni & Lindecke, 1941), 346–348.

⁶² k. j., “Operaház”, *Pesti Napló* 65/10 (11 January 1914), 16.

⁶³ [Anonymous], “Burrián Károly szerződése” [Károly Burrián’s contract], *Budapest* 37/151 (27 June 1913), 12. The contracting principle of a “constant guest” was poorly defined. It was probably taken to mean that a theater agreed with a celebrated singer under more favorable conditions for regular guest appearances over several months. See DLA dissertation, 78–81.

⁶⁴ [Anonymous], “Burrián Budapestben” [Burrián in Budapest], *Független Magyarország* 13/203 (28 August 1913), 10.

⁶⁵ Domestic conflicts since 1908 prompted the Austrian government on 26 July 1913 to dissolve the Czech assembly as unworkable. See the Bohemia entry in *Magyar Nagylexikon* [Great Hungarian Encyclopedia] 5, ed. by László Élesztős (Budapest: Magyar Nagylexikon, 1997), 805; *Csehország a Habsburg-Monarchiában. 1618–1918. Esszék a cseh történelemről* [Bohemia under the Habsburg Monarchy 1618–1918. Essays on Czech history], ed. by László Szarka (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989), 209.

⁶⁶ According to a statement by Dezső Vidor, secretary of the Opera House: [Anonymous], “Burián távozik az Operától. Fölbontották a szerződését” [Burián leaves the Opera. Contract ended], *Budapest* 38/117 (19 May 1914), 13. Burian’s reply appeared in [Anonymous], “Burián és az Opera” [Burián and the Opera], *Budapesti Hírlap* 34/117 (19 May 1914. május 19), 14.

⁶⁷ [Anonymous], “Burián az idén már nem lép fel az Operában” [Burián not appearing again at the Opera this year], *Pesti Napló* 73/106 (11 May 1922), 8.

⁶⁸ [Anonymous], “Burián énekli Heródest a Saloméban” [Burián sings Herod in *Salome*], *Új nemzedék* 4/279 (7 December 1922), 7.

⁶⁹ On 19 May 1922 in the main hall of the Academy of Music.

He canceled advertised appearances so often that the press began to poke fun at this in reviews. When he first sang Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*, the *Pesti Hírlap* critic wrote,

Miracles can still happen.... Burrián announced his appearance in *Götterdämmerung* on Saturday, and lo, what came to pass? Burrián actually appeared. Despite the fact that it was announced, he sang after all. Furthermore, he played Siegfried very stylishly and artistically....⁷⁰

On May 24 1917 – less than two weeks after the first performance of Bartók’s pantomime ballet *A fából faragott királyfi* [The Wooden Prince] –, the Opera was offering another world première of a Hungarian work and a second Opera première for Jenő Sztojanovics: his opera *Othello mesél* [Othello Recounts], which was by no means a success. There was general praise, however, for Burian, singing in Hungarian again:

Of the lead roles, Károly Burián took on the relatively passive part of Otello. He sang with clear Hungarian pronunciation and a disposition of rare brilliance.⁷¹

Othello mesél ran for only three nights at the Opera House, with Burian in the title role each time.⁷² It was not the first time he had given evidence of sympathy for Hungarian composers, for he had also agreed to appear in Budapest for the centenaries of Franz Liszt and Róbert Volkmann, for the first singing the Liszt setting of Psalm 13, conducted by Siegfried Wagner (Royal Hungarian Opera, 24 October 1911), and for the second (People’s Opera,⁷³ 16 April 1915) a first Budapest performance of the Mahler song “Revelge”, of which he made soon after the first ever Mahler sound recording.⁷⁴

As the years went by, Burian gave increasing numbers of Budapest concert performances. Although several sources state that he had been a well-known concert singer earlier,⁷⁵ it is worth noting that 18 of his hitherto-known 23 concert appearances in

⁷⁰ [Anonymous], “(M. kir. Operaház)”, *Pesti Hírlap* 38/308 (5 November 1916), 11.

⁷¹ [Anonymous], “Otello mesél”, *Alkotmány* 22/133 (1917. május 25.), 7.

⁷² For more on the Sztojanovits opera see Amadé Németh, *A magyar opera története (1785–2000)* [History of Hungarian Opera 1785–2000] (Budapest: Anno, 2000), 189–190.

⁷³ The People’s Opera, (later the Municipal Theater, now the Erkel) opened in 1911. See Klára Molnár, *A Népopera – Városi Színház. 1911–1951* [The People’s Opera – Municipal Theater 1911–51] (Budapest: Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, 1998).

⁷⁴ Gramophone Company, Matrix Nos 15560b and 15561b, with piano accompaniment. The recordings were made on 7 July 1911 in Prague. There is no information on their release. See DLA dissertation, 179–180.

⁷⁵ E. g. Klára Kolofíková, “Burian, Karel”, in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*. [Praha, 2010] http://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mdictinary&action=record_detail&id=7049 (Retrieved 6 December 2010.)

Budapest took place in the years after 1913.⁷⁶ At one such concert he appeared with his younger brother, Emil Burian.⁷⁷

Looking through the programs, it emerges that – beside the lieder – these recitals included excerpts from not only those operas in which he was appearing in Budapest. Concert audiences could hear him sing Rienzi's Prayer, Tamino's aria from *Die Zauberflöte*, the Romance from Goldmark's *Merlin*, the grand aria from Mascagni's *L'amico Fritz*, an *Aïda* duet with Erzsi Radnai, and the finale ("Farewell and final scene") of *Otello*. In one Italian opera evening, he took part in two ensembles: the love duet in *Otello* with Anna Medek, and the sextet in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Adelina Adler, Anna Medek, Kálmán Szügyi, Sándor Farkas, and Béla Venczell. He also sang arias, not otherwise identified, from *Der Freischütz*, *Tosca*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Werther*, *Dalibor*, and Smetana's *Hubička* [The Kiss]. Featured in his lieder repertory were Wagner's *Schmerzen*, Mahler's *Revelge*, Richard Strauss' *Morgen* and *Zueignung*, and pieces by the Czech composers Jindřich Jindřich⁷⁸ and František Neumann.

The bill on 2 April 1918 attracted a full house at the Opera, when Burian sang the leading male role in Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*. The reviews talk of a superb vocal and acting performance, despite the shortcomings of his physique.⁷⁹ Yet his brilliance did not remain unalloyed. Two weeks later he sang the title of *Lohengrin* at the Opera while drunk, making a mockery of himself and the performance.⁸⁰ He is reported to have behaved scandalously on stage, turning away from the other singers, forgetting his part, becoming too personal with Anna Medek (as Elsa), and apparently cracking jokes as well.⁸¹ Medek berated him in the interval, whereupon Burian is said to have spoken to her in an unacceptable tone.⁸² In the church procession in Act 2, *Lohengrin* had to

⁷⁶ For the programs of Burian's concerts see DLA dissertation Appendix 1, also the Budapest concert catalog of the Institute for Musicology of the Research Center for Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

⁷⁷ A Wagner evening on 5 March 1918 at the Vigadó.

⁷⁸ He gave Jindřich's two songs *Liebesträume* and *Verwelkte Blüte* their first Hungarian performances on 27 November 1921, accompanied by Miklós Gutmann.

⁷⁹ k. e., "Operaház", *Pesti Napló* 59/88 (13 April 1918), 7.

⁸⁰ James Dennis mentions the episode in his study of Burian. He failed to board the boat drawn by swans and tried to cover up with a remark that became famous: "What time does the next swan leave?" See James Dennis, "Karel Burian", *The Record Collector* 18/7 (July 1969), 162. I heard the same anecdote told of several tenors, including Burian, but failing to find it in the Hungarian press. It may actually have happened to Leo Slezak, whose son Walter included it in his memoirs as from his father and occurring in America. It became a classic when the book first came out in 1964. Walter Slezak, *Wann geht der nächste Schwan?* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971), 211.

⁸¹ "Károly Burián particularly insulted Anna Medek. He pushed her onto the stage or drew her on with him. For instance in the church scene. He was always turning his back on her and while Medek sang, Burián amused himself and made jokes." [Anonymous], "Burián tegnap részegen énekelte Lohengrint" [Burián sang Lohengrin while drunk last night], *Magyar Estilap* 25/87 (17 April 1918), 1.

⁸² [Anonymous], "A becsipett Lohengrin. Burián Károly tegnap esti szereplése" [Topsy Lohengrin. Károly Burián's performance last night], *Az Est* 9/92 (18 April 1918), 3.

be led by Telramund (Lajos S. Rózsa), as Burian was not prepared to take the arm of Medek, who he said had insulted him.⁸³ During the second interval, large amounts of black coffee were poured into the singer, with benign effects: he sang properly again and the performance ended in an orderly fashion.⁸⁴ Despite the scandal, intendant Bánffy invited Burian to appear next season, singing the title role in Hungarian of Ödön Mihailovich's *Toldi szerelme* (Toldi's Love),⁸⁵ but in fact Burian did not appear in Budapest at all in the 1918–19 season.

In 1919–20 Burian appeared at the Opera notably often, but due to the storms of the day he was caught up in one of the biggest Opera House scandals. On 5 April 1920, near the end of *Walküre*, a group of anti-Semitic youths burst into the auditorium yelling against Lajos S. Rózsa in the part of Wotan.⁸⁶ The show stopped, but Rózsa told the press:

It felt good that my friend and colleague Károly Burrian showed full solidarity with me.⁸⁷

All that is known for certain of Burian's behavior at the performance is his advice that the show be abandoned. His solidarity consisted in "announcing he would never appear at the Opera House again".⁸⁸ He did not abide by that, of course, for he appeared as soon as 16 May 1920 in a new role in Budapest, in a highly spectacular production of *Das Rheingold*.⁸⁹ The *Népszava* correspondent wrote, "he sang Loge, the fire-god of the Teutonic legend in a sonorous voice, with youthful verve and a perfect grasp of Wagner".⁹⁰

⁸³ [Anonymous], "Nagy botrány az Operában. A berugott Lohengrin" [Big scandal at the Opera. The drunken Lohengrin], *Új Hírek* 17/91 (18 April 1918), 3.

⁸⁴ [Anonymous], "Részeg Grál lovag az Operában" [Drunken knight of the grail at the Opera], *Déli Hírlap* 2/181 (18 April 1918), 3.

⁸⁵ Valkó Arisztid (compiler), *Adatok az Operaház történetéhez I* [Notes toward the history of the Opera House] (Ms., Budapest, 1975), 71–72. Held by MTA BTK Zenetudományi Intézet, Budapest. In the event there was no revival of *Toldi szerelme* in that season.

⁸⁶ The incident is described in *A budapesti Operaház 100 éve* [100 years of the Budapest Opera House], ed. by Géza Staud (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1984), 185.

⁸⁷ [Anonymous], "Nagy botrány az Operaházban" [Great scandal at the Opera House], *Az Ujság* 18/83 (6 April 1920), 3. Rózsa would never appear again at the Royal Hungarian Opera. He soon left for America to make guest appearances, but died there suddenly of food poisoning after giving only six performances. See Kutsch and Riemens, *Großes Sängerlexikon*, 4, 2992.

⁸⁸ [Anonymous], "Nagy botrány az Operaházban" [Big scandal at the Opera House]. *Az Ujság* 18/83, no date; [Anonymous], "Rózsa Lajos az Operaház megzavart előadásáról" [Lajos Rózsa on the interrupted performance at the Opera House]. *Az Est* 11/84 (7 April 1920), 3.

⁸⁹ The stage trick devised by Jenő Kéméndy to make the Rhine Maidens as effective as possible was to have the three singers deliver their opening tercet suspended above the audience on almost invisible ropes, worked by stage hands behind the scenes. [Anonymous], "Kéméndy Jenő színpadtechnikai találmánya" [Jenő Kéméndy's stage invention], *Az Ujság* 18/114 (13 May 1920), 3.

⁹⁰ B., "Operaház", *Népszava* 48/118 (18 May 1920), 3.

On 30 December 1921, the Opera marked Burian's thirty-year performing jubilee with him as Tristan in *Tristan und Isolde*, which had been in the repertory for twenty years.⁹¹ Burian in his festive address pointed out that of all the performers in that première twenty years before, only he and the conductor István Kerner were still active.⁹² Burian expressed thanks in Hungarian for the almost endless applause at the end of the first act.⁹³

He had the opportunity to appear once again in Budapest in the same role as he had made a name for himself in musical history: as Herod in a *Salome* revival (17 March 1923). The correspondent of *Nemzeti Ujság* gave a sensitive description of Burian's rightly world-famous interpretation:

Burián played 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.⁹⁴

Not long after would come his final appearance at the Opera House, in the role of Siegmund.

News of Burian's death in Bohemia on 25 September 1924 was quick to reach Budapest. A lengthy obituary appeared next day in the daily *Világ*, with remarkably accurate biographical information for the time.⁹⁵ It even mentioned Burian's last letter written from Budapest, apparently to Béla Környei. The Opera House could not be represented at the funeral, but a requiem mass was said the next Friday at the nearby Terézváros Parish Church,⁹⁶ where the Opera orchestra under István Kerner played the funeral march from *Götterdämmerung* and the Opera chorus sang the Pilgrims' Chorus

⁹¹ I have found no sign of any other city marking the jubilee. This is not anyway likely, as Burian no longer appeared in Dresden or America. The online archives of Prague National Theater makes no mention of it.

⁹² [Anonymous], "Burian ünneplése. A mai Trisztán-előadás" [Celebrating Burian. Today's *Tristan* performance], *Az Ujság* 19/294 (31 December 1921), 8. Still, he had omitted József Gábor, the Shepherd in the *Tristan* première, who not long after the jubilee was singing the title role in *Parsifal* and alternating with Burian as Loris Ipanov in *Fedora*.

⁹³ (–Idi.) [Béldi Izor], "Burian jubileuma" [Burian's jubilee], *Pesti Hírlap* 43/294 (31 December 1921), 7.

⁹⁴ R. M., "Operaház", *Nemzeti Ujság* 5/63 (1923. március 18.), 8.

⁹⁵ [Anonymous], "Burián Károly meghalt" [Károly Burián died], *Világ* 15/201 (26 September 1924), 3.

⁹⁶ [Anonymous], "Burián Károly halála" [Death of Károly Burián], *Az Ujság* 22/202 (27 September 1924), 9.

from *Tannhäuser*.⁹⁷ Numerous other obituaries appeared, of which one has importance to opera history: a lengthy, sentimental remembrance that Italia Vasquez herself wrote for *Pester Lloyd*.⁹⁸

2. Burian as a Wagner singer

A sizable number of recordings of Karel Burian's voice have survived, the earliest from 1906 and the latest from 1913,⁹⁹ but modern reissues of these are scarce compared with those of contemporaries such as Caruso, presumably because of language problems: on his discs he sang only in Czech and German. They include opera excerpts, art songs, Czech folk-song arrangements, and a special treat: a couplet by Gus Edwards (1879–1945) for which Burian himself wrote the lyrics, entitled *Můj kolega Caruso*. The refrain quotes the famous aria from *Pagliacci*.¹⁰⁰

The literature has plenty of general descriptions of Burian's voice and artistry, but not all are sufficiently specific. One notable exception comes in reminiscences by Paul Wilhelm, who could have heard Burian personally in Dresden:

[...] as soon as Burrian opened his mouth and those glorious sounds of pure melting gold filled the air, the public was simply spellbound. In fact, his was the golden voice *par excellence* and not only in a few special top notes. His whole range was golden in sound, even his piano and pianissimo notes which penetrated to the last corner of the big Dresden opera house in consequence of their peculiar metallic golden quality.¹⁰¹

Later descriptions could rely only on the recordings. The problems with these are best put in the last sentence of the Grove entry for Burian:

In Burian's numerous but somewhat primitive recordings, the penetrating clarity of his tone is more in evidence than the golden quality for which he was also praised.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ [Anonymous], "Gyászmise Burián lelkiüdvéért" [Requiem mass for the soul of Burián], *Az Ujság* 22/204 (30 September 1924), 10.

⁹⁸ Italia Vasquez, "Karl Burrian", *Pester Lloyd* 71/203 (28 September 1924), 16.

⁹⁹ Several attempts to compile a discography of Karel Burian have been made. Appendix 2 of the DLA dissertation was compiled from earlier lists – James Dennis, "Karel Burian", 156–61; Paul Wilhelm, "Carl Burrian", *Record News* 4/7 (March 1960), 239–44, Alan Kelly's CD-ROM discography for the Gramophone Co., and unpublished discographies by Rainer Lotz és Christian Zwarg. Identification of the last Pathé recording with the help of Gabriel Gössel and Christian Zwarg came only after the defense of the DLA dissertation and could not be included.

¹⁰⁰ Gramophone Company 2-72184, Matrix 7769r, with piano accompaniment, made on 1 September 1910. See the website www.karelburian.cz.

¹⁰¹ Wilhelm, "Carl Burrian", 241.

¹⁰² Desmond Shawe-Taylor, "Burian, Karel", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 4, 624.

What can be known generally about Burian's voice and performing qualities? According to Jürgen Kesting, he had a bronze-hued heroic tenor voice that was slightly subdued in the middle range but strong in the upper.¹⁰³ Reference to his strong, darker tone is made also by Kolofíková, in describing him as a "baritone-tenor".¹⁰⁴ This is somewhat contradicted by Rodolfo Celletti, who calls his tone light and shining.¹⁰⁵ This brightness of tone can be heard in Burian's early recordings, especially of the *Gralserzählung* from *Lohengrin*, where the clearly audible shining tone manages to be strong as well.¹⁰⁶ Apart from his qualities as a singer, his stage acting was also convincing,¹⁰⁷ while both Kolofíková and Celletti note his excellent enunciation as a great virtue as well.

Burian arrived in Hungary as a Wagner tenor, appearing first in Wagner roles, and he was contracted in Budapest "mainly for Wagner works", although as a "heroic and lyric tenor".¹⁰⁸ But the picture of Burian that emerges from accounts of his Wagner interpretations and singing style in Budapest does not exactly match the spirit of Bayreuth, where a style based on principles devised by Cosima Wagner prevailed.

Cosima did all she could after her husband's death to make Bayreuth a viable and self-sufficient undertaking as the center of Wagner's art.¹⁰⁹ To bring into being a Bayreuth canon of Wagner's oeuvre, she presented a succession of hitherto unperformed Wagner operas in her own productions.¹¹⁰ The musical guardian of this post-Wagner Bayreuth style was Julius Kniese (1848–1905), who had worked as Wagner's assistant at the time of the *Parsifal* première.¹¹¹ He devised after Wagner's death a comprehensive plan for future organization of the Bayreuth Festival.¹¹² Kniese put himself forward as the one true expert at Bayreuth, on the grounds that he had noted in his own score all the composer's instructions for the 1882 *Parsifal* performances.¹¹³ In November

¹⁰³ Jürgen Kesting, *Die grossen Sänger* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2008), vol. I, 192.

¹⁰⁴ Kolofíková, "Burian, Karel".

¹⁰⁵ J. Dostal, Roberto Celletti, and Th. Kaufmann, "Burian, Karel", in *Le grandi voci. Dizionario critico-biografico dei cantanti con discografia operistica*, compiled by Rodolfo Celletti (Roma: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1964), 103.

¹⁰⁶ Gramophone Company 042131, Matrix 169s.

¹⁰⁷ Kutsch–Riemens, "Burian, Karel", 510.

¹⁰⁸ Based on Burian's contract of 10 August 1900 (Magyar Állami Operaház Archivuma – Archives of the Hungarian State Opera).

¹⁰⁹ Hans Meyer, *Richard Wagner. Mitwelt und Nachwelt* (Stuttgart and Zurich: Belser, 1978), 289.

¹¹⁰ Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, 1883–1930*, ed. by Dietrich Mack (Munich: Piper, 1980), Vorwort, 11.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 786.

¹¹² Kesting, *Die grossen Sänger*; I, 156.

¹¹³ Michael Karbaum, *Studien zur Geschichte der Bayreuther Festspiele (1876–1976)*. I: *Textteil*; II: *Dokumente und Anmerkungen* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1976), I/34. Karbaum blames the Wagner style's misinterpretation after 1883 mainly on Kniese, not Cosima Wagner.

1892, he and Cosima jointly inaugurated the Bayreuther Stilbildungsschule,¹¹⁴ which was intended to train up a new generation of singers conversant with the Bayreuth style. Kniese was no singing teacher, however, more of a mouthpiece for the principles of Cosima Wagner, teaching the Wagner style that he and Cosima thought authentic.¹¹⁵

According to the performance ideal of the Cosima period, priority went to a maximally dramatized, declaimed rendering, in as enhanced a voice as possible, to stop singers being drowned by the orchestra.¹¹⁶ Under these criteria, score prescriptions were subordinate to enunciation of the text. Cosima Wagner underlined in her inaugural speech for the Stilbildungsschule that comprehensibility is a significant factor in dramatic works, especially those of Wagner, which in her view were primarily dramas.¹¹⁷ Also essential were a thorough musical grounding and fidelity to the score, as the basis for the performing style.¹¹⁸ Legato singing was only permitted in passages of an *arioso* nature; *portamenti* could be used only rarely and with good reason.¹¹⁹

But Cosima certainly went too far in not giving primacy to the music.¹²⁰ Richard Wagner's personal statements show clearly that he saw Italian *bel canto* as the starting point, on which he wished to base the singing style for his own works.¹²¹ Kesting sums up the bases of Wagner's performance ideal as a fine voice, continual legato between the notes, *portamento* as the basis for linking intervals with a slight crescendo on up-

¹¹⁴ David Mahlon Breckbill, *The Bayreuth Singing Style around 1900* (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 83–84.; Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben*, 786. For Cosima Wagner's inaugural speech see op. cit., 311–13.

¹¹⁵ He took on various conducting tasks from the age of 15, but never had regular singing instruction, having studied composition in Leipzig. See *Bayreuth 1896. Praktisches Handbuch für Festspielbesucher. II: Biographien und Porträts*, hrsg. von Friedrich Wild (Leipzig and Baden-Baden: Constantin Wilds Verlag, [1896]), 29. Yet he trained some excellent, world-renowned Wagner singers, such as Ernest van Dyck, Erik Schmedes, Anton van Rooy, Ellen Gulbranson, Alois Burgstaller, Hans Breuer, Otto Briesemeister, and Ernst Kraus.

¹¹⁶ Michael Seil, "Der Bayreuther Vortragsstil auf Schallplatte, oder: Was können wir hören?" in *Ton-Spuren. 100 Jahre Bayreuther Festspiele auf Schallplatte*, hrsg. von Jasmin von Brünken (Bayreuth: Richard Wagner-Museum, 2004), 20–21.

¹¹⁷ "Für die deutliche, sinngemäße Aussprache, diesen so wesentlichen Faktor bei der Ausführung aller dramatischen Werke, insbesondere aber der Werke des Meisters (welche vor allem Drama sind), wird das Erlernen und Ausführen von Schauspielen eintreten." Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben*, 312.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 312.

¹¹⁹ Seil, "Der Bayreuther Vortragsstil", 20–21.

¹²⁰ Meyer, *Richard Wagner*, 291.

¹²¹ See, for instance, Cosima Wagner's diary entries for 3 August 1872 and 7 March 1878: Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, vol. I: 1869–1877 (Munich: Piper, 1976), 556–557.; vol. II. 1878–1883 (Munich: Piper, Verlag, 1977), 54. Also Canto Spianato [Richard Wagner], "Pasticcio", in *Richard Wagners gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, hrsg. von Julius Kapp (Leipzig: Hesse und Becker, [n. d.]), 11–18. 12. First appearance: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 1/63–64 (6 and 10 November 1834).

ward intervals and decrescendo on downward, *messa di voce*, and agility in performing trills, scales, ornaments and grace notes.¹²²

It is worth reflecting on how the first Wagner singers to be heard on record, who had studied their parts under Wagner (Lilli Lehmann, Marianne Brandt, and Hermann Winkelmann), clearly did not match fully the style of performance expected by Cosima Wagner. After Wagner's death, they appeared in Wagner roles mainly in America and England, and more rarely in the Bayreuth of Cosima's day.¹²³ Similarly avoided was Julius Hey (1832–1909) who in 1875 had prepared several singers for appearances in the first Festival,¹²⁴ and in 1877 had been Wagner's choice for the post of singing teacher in a future Bayreuth school.¹²⁵ In 1884, one year after Wagner's death, he published the two-volume manual *Deutscher Gesangsunterricht*, in which he remarked in the introduction,

In a number of better singers can be found another, equally worrying habit. They seek to meet the requirement of pronouncing the text intelligibly by giving each syllable excess emphasis, but this quite disturbs the musical phrasing, so that continuous, tied *cantilena* singing becomes impossible. This reprehensible manipulation often serves to disguise a singer's weakness and in many cases derives from a lack of basic voice training, i. e. it is an unforgivable expedient.¹²⁶

This view being contrary to Cosima's text-centered principles, it is unsurprising there was no place for Hey in Bayreuth after Wagner's death. In effect he was replaced by Kniese.

The Cosima style of Wagner ruled in Bayreuth until the first decade of the 20th century. She and Kniese built up a staff of performers whom they trained, so that a singer might sing the same part for years. The autocracy in Bayreuth is exemplified by the fact that only one break in that casting continuity occurred: the famous American "theft" of *Parsifal* in 1903. None of those who took part in that production (probably with

¹²² Kesting, *Die grossen Sänger*, I, 135.

¹²³ Seil, "Der Bayreuther Vortragsstil", 20.

¹²⁴ Kesting, *Die grossen Sänger*, I, 155.

¹²⁵ Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, II, 1070.

¹²⁶ "Bei einer Anzahl besserer Sänger begegnet man einer andern, eben so bedenklichen Gepflogenheit. Diese suchen nemlich durch übertrieben scharfe Betonung jeder einzelnen Silbe den Anforderungen deutlicher Textaussprache gerecht zu werden, wodurch aber die musikalische Phrasirung völlig zerstört wird und eine gebundene, zusammenhängende Gesangscantilene niemals zu ermöglichen ist. Diese verwerfliche Manipulation dient häufig dazu, die vorhandenen Schwächen des Sängers zu verdecken und entspringt in vielen Fällen dem Mangel einer gründlichen Gesangsbildung, ist also ein nothdürftiger Behelf, der nicht zu entschuldigen ist." Julius Hey, *Deutscher Gesangsunterricht. Lehrbuch des sprachlichen und gesanglichen Vortrags*, vol. 1: *Sprachlicher Theil* (Mainz: B. Schott und Söhne, 1884), 4.

support from Munich, but against Cosima's protests),¹²⁷ were ever invited to Bayreuth again.¹²⁸ The following summer, in 1904, the first Bayreuth recordings were made, and those who appear on them represent the performing style deemed authentic by Cosima and Kniese.¹²⁹

The death of Kniese and Cosima's heart complaints led to Siegfried Wagner taking over as head of the Bayreuth Festival in September 1906. He instituted the next era in the history of the Bayreuth Festival with a new production of *Lohengrin* on 22 July 1908.¹³⁰ Yet he remained under Cosima's shadow until the Great War, able to make only lesser, superficial changes, for instance by systematizing the program and timetable of the festival.¹³¹ Even then the style of performance followed the line Cosima laid down.

Still, it is questionable what Hungarian critics of the time understood by Wagner style. It is almost impossible to discover which critics found their way to Wagner productions in Bayreuth or other notable foreign opera houses. Some mention their experiences in one or two reviews, but fail to specify quite what productions they saw or which singers featured in them. So their observations must be handled cautiously. It is obvious that Burian was a singer who did not perform in the exact spirit of Bayreuth at the time, and yet on hearing him the critics dubbed him a Wagnerian singer and made mention of Bayreuth in support. For Budapest reviewers, the concept of a "good Wagner performance" was entwined with the name Bayreuth, yet their reviews recall some marks of Burian's singing style.

His singing and his characterization are praised alike in early Budapest appearances.

[His was] a Lohengrin of a kind not seen on our opera stage before. We have heard better singers – a lot better – but never a better Lohengrin. We can say only that he is a first-class Wagnerian singer, a true artist with a great style and great individuality of conception. [...] We have never seen a role so worked as Burrian has done.¹³²

¹²⁷ See Cosima Wagner's letter to Felix Mottl dated 28 September 1903: Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben*, 642–643.

¹²⁸ The first American performance of *Parsifal* on 24 December 1903 was also the first performance outside Bayreuth. See *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera. The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists*, vol. 2. *Chronology 1883–1985*, ed. by Gerald Fitzgerald (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild, Inc./Macmillan Press, 1989), 126. For more on the event see Spotts, Bayreuth, 141. Among the cast were Alois Burgstaller (*Parsifal*), Anton van Rooy (*Amfortas*), and conductor Alfred Hertz. They could never return to the Bayreuth Festival in Cosima's time, although Alois Burgstaller sang again there in 1909, under the directorship of Siegfried Wagner. See Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben*, 828.

¹²⁹ For more on the 1904 Bayreuth recordings see David Mahlon Breckbill, *The Bayreuth Singing Style Around 1900* (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1991).

¹³⁰ Meyer, *Richard Wagner*, 301.

¹³¹ Geoffrey Skelton, "Bayreuth", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1997), 358.

¹³² (e. á.), "Opera", *Egyetértés* 34/153 (6 June 1900), 4.

Some idea of his original, unaccustomed conception and thorough working of the part can be gained from comments in a review of a *Carmen* of the same time:

Hitherto we saw him only in Wagner roles, in which we found his realistic interpretation interesting. He broke with tradition, out of the mold of Wagner's legendary heroes whose every movement was frozen into a cliché, and shaped figures of flesh and blood. This unusual verism was a surprise to audiences.¹³³

But reviewers are often found not to describe Burian primarily as a Wagner singer. The following appeared in a *Pesti Hirlap* article when he made his Budapest début:

He is a Wagner singer but not a Wagner hero. To those who personify Wagner's heroes, like those who portray Shakespeare's, we should apply the highest standard, which Burian meets only in part. His short, squat figure and still more his voice are to his disadvantage. He is more of a lyric tenor. [...] His voice is sonorous, flexible, and very pleasant in the middle register, but too thin above G.¹³⁴

This is not the only assertion that Burian in his time was no typical Wagner singer. It can be read in Izor Béldi's review of *Tristan* that "his style of voice and perhaps his personality point to the lyric sphere, but today he excelled in the hardest of Wagnerian heroic roles, arousing undivided, honest admiration for his stylish performance".¹³⁵

Most of Burian's aria recordings offer German opera excerpts. Apart from the young Siegfried, Loge, and Parsifal, he recorded some excerpts from all the main Wagner roles. These discs allow Burian's Wagner style to be analyzed in detail, along with his performing techniques.

The best place to start the stylistic survey may be with a single remaining fragment of *Tristan*, as the title role is known to have been a favorite of his.¹³⁶ He first appeared in it in Munich on March 17, 1903,¹³⁷ then on May 3, 1904 in London,¹³⁸ and 2 November 1908 in Vienna.¹³⁹ London, Munich, and New York were the places where he sang the

¹³³ [Anonymous], "Operaház", *Budapesti Hirlap* 20/329 (30 November 1900), 9.

¹³⁴ [Anonymous], "(M. kir. operaház.)" [Royal Hungarian Opera] *Pesti Hirlap* 22/153 (1900. június 6.), 7. It has to be said that the article is problematic in other ways, not just for its rather ironic tone, but also because the paper published it again almost verbatim a year and a half later, after Burian's first appearance on becoming a contracted company member: [Anonymous], "M. kir. Operaház." *Pesti Hirlap* 23/258 (18 September 1901), 6.

¹³⁵ Dr. Izor Béldi, "Trisztan és Izolda. III", *Pesti Hirlap* 23/330 (29 November 1901), 7.

¹³⁶ [Anonymous], "Burian, Karel", in K. J. Kutsch und Leo Riemens, *Unvergängliche Stimmen. Sängerlexikon* (Bern und München: Francke Verlag, 1975), 103; also a note by Karl Böhm (*Musica*, 1973) quoting the sleeve notes of the Supraphon portrait disk (*Karel Burian. Operatic Recital*. Supraphon mono 0 12 1579. 1974); and Heinz Gerlach, "'Der beste Tristan'. Erinnerung an das Stimmwunder Karl Burian", *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, 27 September 1999. Press cutting in Dresden Opera House archives (no year, no., or page no.)

¹³⁷ Based on data on the German Theater data in the Theater Museum, Vienna.

¹³⁸ Based on a letter of 13 December 2010 from Erica Donaghy of the ROH Collections.

¹³⁹ Based on a letter of 27 September 2010 from Therese Gassner of the Wiener Staatsopermuseum.

part most often.¹⁴⁰ Gustav Mahler used to say the best American *Tristan und Isolde* performance he conducted was with Burian and Fremstad in the title roles.¹⁴¹ Regrettably only a few minutes of Burian's interpretation survive: the Act II monologue beginning "Wohin nun Tristan scheidet".¹⁴²

The tone of Burian's *Tristan* excerpt is statuesque – free of extreme expression of feeling. He can easily be imagined singing the monologue on stage in the same way. The last syllable of the opening question ("folgen") strangely extenuated, probably because German was not his native language. This appears also in a flatter pronunciation of "der Nacht" and "geht". The rhythm follows the score almost consistently, eschewing any declamation to assist the meaning of the text, and the use of decrescendo and crescendo to express feeling is restrained. One of the finest moments comes with the word "Liebesberge", where he slows down slightly and sings with a brighter hue.

Several *portamenti* can be found, most conspicuously at the beginning, connecting "Wohin" and "nun". Further slides occur at the words "meint", "wundernäch'te", "folge" and "Isold". At one point Burian seems a little to be playing for effect in the way he presents the highest note in the monologue (F², "folge").

A similar device appears in both the Burian recordings of Siegmund's "Frühlingslied" known to me.¹⁴³ Burian's Czech accent can be heard twice in the same word on the 1911 recording, where he sings a flattened "e" in "dem" ("zwischen dem Wonnemond" and "lacht sie selig dem Licht"). He uses several original ideas in the first passage of the excerpt before "mit zarter Waffen...", which shift the style toward *bel canto*. He softens the rhythm several times, singing a duplet instead of a quarter-note and eighth-note, and makes conspicuous use of *portamenti*. He ornaments the arch of the word "haucht" on both recordings with an appoggiatura, as he does a couple of bars later on "entblühen", though Wagner wrote out the ornament only at that point (Examples 1 and 2).

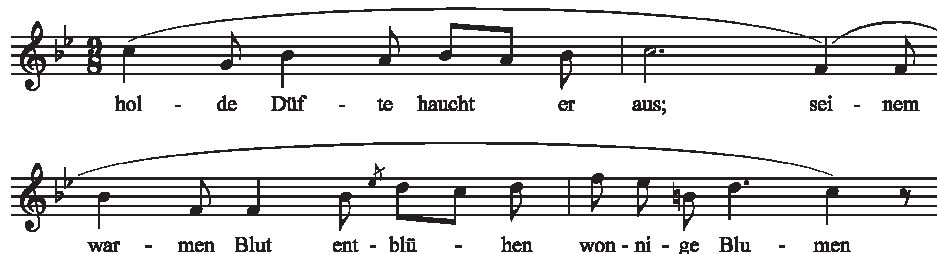
In the second passage, beginning "Mit zarter Waffen...", his performance inclines toward declamation and he sings shorter notes. On the other hand, he emphasizes the text "trennte von ihm" by doubling its length, drawing out the F² so far that the orchestral chord scored for the third beat sounds as the first beat of the next bar. Then the last of the three eighth-notes is spread over almost a complete bar. The rhythm is

¹⁴⁰ Based on a letter from Erica Donaghy, data from the Theatermuseum, Vienna, and Fitzgerald (ed.), *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera*, vol. 2.

¹⁴¹ Note by Alma Mahler. Irving Kolodin, *The Story of the Metropolitan Opera. 1883–1950. A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 236.

¹⁴² The whole recording can be heard on www.karelburian.cz. Unfortunately I had no chance to hear the *Tristan* excerpt sung by other performers of Burian's time.

¹⁴³ G. C. 4–42473, Matrix 15512b és Parlophon P 286, Matrix 2–7263. I could analyze in detail only the earlier of the two, made by the Gramophone Co. (heard on www.karelburian.cz). The speed of the Parlophon recording is less than 78 rpm.

Example 1: *Die Walküre*, Siegmund's Song of Spring, "holde Düfte..." – originalExample 2: *Die Walküre*, Siegmund's Song of Spring, "holde Düfte..." – Burian, GC 4-42473

rather more precise in the later, Parlophon recording, but the move off beat is felt more strongly (Examples 3–5).

The following passage ("Zu seinen Schwester") uses several *portamenti*, for instance at the words "seinen", "Liebe", "Lenz", and "selig". He again sings shorter notes in the dotted section ("Die bräutliche Schwester..."), but in the closing section ("jauchzend grüsst sich...") he returns to broader singing, so that, for instance, the second, longer syllable of "vereint" arrives after the beat. Finally, the last note before the cadence (the "und" of "und Lenz") he starts sooner than he should and broadens it appreciably. Furthermore, on the Parlophon recording he arrives from "und" onto "Lenz" with a slide. This melodious gesture in both recordings is expressly Italianate, a seemingly *bel canto* element.

Comparing Burian's interpretation with recordings by other contemporary singers (Table 1), there are conspicuous differences of tempo. Burian is among the slower performers along with Alfred von Bary. Two famous German contemporaries, Ernst Kraus and Heinrich Knotte, take Siegmund's song much faster.

When compared the recordings may be seen as falling into two pairs. Kraus and Knotte employ almost exactly the same performing techniques and tempi, while Burian and Bary sing "Winterstürme" in very similar ways. Kraus and Knotte were considered

trenn - te von ihm.

f *mf*

Example 3: *Die Walküre*, Siegmund's Song of Spring, "trennte von ihm" – original

trenn - - - te von ihm.

f *mf*

Example 4: *Die Walküre*, Siegmund's Song of Spring, "trennte von ihm" – Burian GC 4-42473

trenn - - - te von ihm.

f *mf*

Example 5: *Die Walküre*, Siegmund's Song of Spring, "trennte von ihm" – Burian Parl. P-286

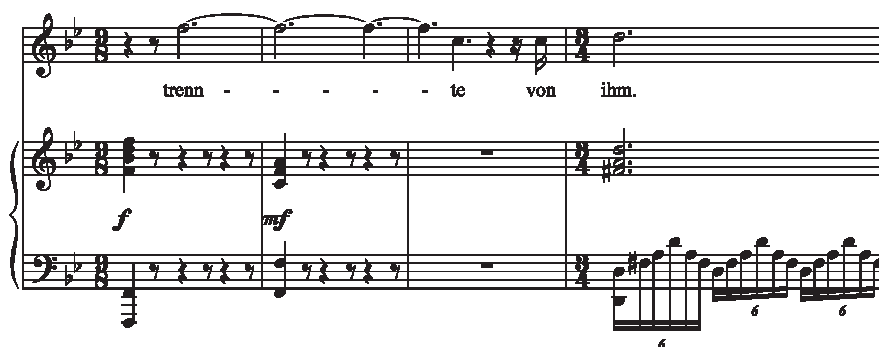
Table 1: *Die Walküre*, Siegmund's Song of Spring recordings compared

Singer	Date	Accompaniment	Catalogue No.	Matrix No.
Karel Burian	2 July 1911, Prague	Orchestra	G.C.2-42473	15512b
Alfred von Bary	1904, Bayreuth	Piano	G.C.2-42925	1136e
Ernst Kraus	27 April 1909, Berlin	Orchestra	G.C.4-42222	954ab
Heinrich Knoté	[not known]	Orchestra	Edison Record	[n. a.]

the two most famous Wagner tenors singing in Germany at that time,¹⁴⁴ but while Kraus sang regularly in Bayreuth, Knoté was a frequent guest at Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera, who never sang in Bayreuth.¹⁴⁵ The Burian/Bary pairing is remarkable because Ring Cycle performances during Burian's early years in Dresden regularly had Bary as Loge and Siegmund, while Burian sang the two Siegfried roles.¹⁴⁶ When Cosima Wagner visited Dresden in 1903, she found Bary the more worthy of the two to invite to Bayreuth, where he appeared regularly at the Festspiele between 1904 and 1914.

The “trennte von ihm” passage that Burian doubled in length Bary also sings over several bars, but he fits the end of the motif better to the original rhythm (Example 6). Kraus and Knoté broaden the bar only a little and the rhythm in the score tends to remain.

Bary too employs *portamenti*, if not so often as Burian, while Kraus and Knoté hardly use this technique at all. It is curious that Burian and Bary sing shorter notes in

Example 6: *Die Walküre*, Siegmund's Song of Spring, “trennte von ihm” – Bary GC 2-42925

¹⁴⁴ Only Knoté and Kraus received higher fees in Germany than Burian at that time. Letter from Graf Seebach, 23 May 1906, No. 740/06. Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Dresden, 10711 Ministerium des Königlichen Hauses Loc. 44 No. 35. Acta, das Königliche Hoftheater betreffend, 1906. 75v.

¹⁴⁵ Desmond Shawe-Taylor, “Knoté, Heinrich”, in *The New Grove*, vol. 13, 699.

¹⁴⁶ Based on playbills in the archives of the Dresden Opera.

the middle part (“mit starker Waffen...”), so making the performance more energetic, while Kraus and Knoté seek to enhance it with longer, less truncated notes.

Burian has a unique solution for the closing motif. Bary uses a downward bend (on the word “Liebe”), but then sings the final notes in tempo. Kraus sings the cadence as written, while Knoté broadens it, but far less than Burian. Kraus and Knoté share the device of accelerating the passage, arriving by the end at an average tempo of M. M. 105–110.

To sum up, the performances of Burian and Bary, who had sung together in their Dresden years, resemble each other more closely, but Bary, Cosima’s preference, interprets the score less freely. Indeed he is the only one of the four who audibly follows the performance instruction written by Wagner (“Zart”) in singing the passage “lockte den Lenz” with a different timbre. Kraus and Knoté stick closer to the score and their steadily continually increasing tempos lend their performances more verve than Burian’s or Bary’s. Of course we cannot judge from a recording why one had a chance to sing in Bayreuth and another not, but comparing the “Winterstürme” interpretations shows Kraus adhering most closely in the score, which he may have matched Cosima’s expectations most closely.

In the Act III farewell scene of *Lohengrin*, Burian and Kraus also use typically different solutions for two cadence *fermatas*.¹⁴⁷ Burian appreciably broadens the first (“aus Schmach und Noth befreit”) and even uses a *portamento* between the extended note and the following one. Kraus also stretches the crowning note, but goes on rhythmically, so intimating to the pianist the character and tempo of the next passage. At the second cadence (“Leb’ wohl, leb’ wohl!”) Burian again puts a longer *portamento* before the cadence than Kraus does.

The passage of *Lohengrin* beginning “Höchstes Vertrau’n” provides a chance to compare Burian with one of Wagner’s favorite singers, Hermann Winkelmann, who created Parsifal at the world première in 1882. Their two recordings are joined by those of Heinrich Knoté again and of Fritz Vogelstrom (Table 2). Vogelstrom made his début in Bayreuth a year later than Burian, in 1909, as Parsifal, Lohengrin, and Froh,¹⁴⁸ and then succeeded Burian in Dresden.¹⁴⁹ The styles of Knoté and Winkelmann are worth comparing as Winkelmann had still learned his from Wagner himself, while Knoté was engaged mainly in Munich, and like Winkelmann in Cosima’s time, appeared frequently in England and America.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Burian: Gramophone Company 2-72219, Matrix 12259L. The recording was made in April 1911. Burian sings in Czech. Kraus: Gramophone Company 3-42119, Code 3067L. The recording was made in 1905.

¹⁴⁸ Niehrenheim (hrsg.), *Wegweiser*, 222–223.

¹⁴⁹ Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Dresden, 10711 Ministerium des Königlichen Hauses Loc.44 Nr.44. Acta, das königliche Hoftheater betreffend. 1911. Registered on 12 August 1911, 125.

¹⁵⁰ [Anonymous], “Winkelmann, Hermann”, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed., vol. 27, ed. by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), 436.

Table 2: *Lohengrin*, “Höchstes Vertrau’n...” recordings compared

Singer	Accompaniment	Date	Catalogue No.	Matrix No.
Karel Burian	Orchestra	1906	G. C. 3-42585	1337r
Fritz Vogelstrom	Orchestra	1910	Parlophon P. 283.	2-373
Heinrich Knoté	Orchestra	[not known]	Edison Record	[not known]
Hermann Winkelmann	Piano	1905	G. C. 042110	479c

On the Winkelmann and Vogelstrom recordings the passage marked “sehr ruhig” after the one beginning “Höchstes Vertrau’n” (“Dein Lieben muss ich hoch entgelten...”) is also heard, but is absent from the Burian and Knoté versions. Of the four singers, Vogelstrom and Knoté employ denser vibrato, while Burian and Winkelmann sing more smoothly. The comparison shows that the singing styles of Burian and Winkelmann are not far apart. Both convey a slight sense of *bel canto*.

The four show big differences of *portamento* use. The slightest slide identifiable without computer analysis occurs on the one by Vogelstrom, who appeared more often in Bayreuth. There are two small instances, both within a range of a second (at “Glühen” and “bescheine”). Winkelmann and Knoté bridge three broader and two narrower intervals with *portamenti*, while Burian has five broader and three narrower ones. All three use broader *portamenti* for “dünnst du mich werth” and “in dem dich”.¹⁵¹

Burian does not land cleanly on the first note of the excerpt, but with a little slide. That also occurs several times in Winkelmann’s recording. Burian adds further contrast between the first more rhythmic passage and the second more lyrical one by prolonging the dotted notes in the first. This device is also heard on the Winkelmann recording. The even second-part melody Burian softens further with short *portamenti* between the smaller intervals. There may be another sign of the Bayreuth concept in the way Vogelstrom refrains from any change of rhythm, eschews double pointing, and makes a bigger difference of tempo between “Langsamer” and the “Viel bewegter” passage.

That declamation may have been the prime attribute of the Wagner style for Hungarian critics is suggested by reviews of the time, which sometimes have surprisingly detailed reports on where one singer declaims and another not. In this case we cannot neglect the question what contemporary critics called “declamation”. There is no entry for declamation in Schöpflin’s drama dictionary, but the one edited by Bence Szabolcsi and Aladár Tóth identifies as the problem surrounding it the need to reconcile the laws of textual meaning and form with the intrinsic laws of musicality.¹⁵² Further light on the period’s declamation ideal is shed in the Wagner entry: “The Wagnerian

¹⁵¹ Knoté’s third *portamento* falls on the word “Gebote” and Winkelmann’s third on “glauben”, while Burian’s third occurs within the cadence formula “mö’ glücklich”.

¹⁵² [Anonymous], “Deklamáció”, in *Zenei lexikon. A zenetörténet és zenetudomány enciklopédiája* (Music dictionary. Encyclopedia of music history and musicology). 2nd expanded edition, ed. by Bence Szabolcsi and Aladár Tóth (Budapest: Győző Andor kiadása, 1935), vol. I, 213.

school of singing starts out from correct recitation [...].”¹⁵³ Even after Burian’s death, declamation remained typical of the Wagner style as envisaged in Budapest. Presumably, if the key word for the style was declamation, it had to be compared to recitation, not melody. Critics repeatedly stated that Burian refrained from exaggerating the Wagnerian declamation in his performances, that his approach was more melodic and lyrical. Not should it be forgotten that he sang his Wagner roles in Italian, which may have affected the judgments of those hearing them. This was written in 1907 about his personation of Tristan:

He places Wagner’s splendid love hero before us devoid of declamatory exaggeration, in a natural and thus striking way. [...]¹⁵⁴

There is no knowing, of course, the yardstick by which the critic judged the performance to be “devoid of declamatory exaggeration” and “natural”. He may have been thinking of what the recordings show: a more melodic, *cantabile* approach to Wagner that pleased the journalist enough to make a special note of it. After Burian’s only *Meistersinger* appearance in the 1901–02 season, István Gergely writes similarly of “splendid recitation” that still “never loses its song character”.¹⁵⁵ But this did not always bring him undivided success. The following appeared after a *Walküre* performance in 1914:

Declamation dominates in Siegmund’s singing part and Burrián’s enunciation lacks true pathos. He is more of a singer. His Siegmund was rich in singing finesse.¹⁵⁶

If Burian can be said to have sung his Wagner roles more lyrically, sometimes in a more Italian style, it is conceivable for him to arrive at the Italian-based singing ideal presented earlier by Wagner, where the music, the singing, come first and the devices of *legato* and *portamento* gain more importance than the principles espoused by Cosima.¹⁵⁷ Of all Burian’s recordings, the monologue by Siegfried in Act 3 of *Götterdämmerung* offers the best chance to study his declamation.¹⁵⁸ He departs obviously from the score several times.¹⁵⁹ But still more important to the subject here is to see how he manages to sing more *portamenti* even in the basically speech-like section, without robbing his declamation of any *cantabile* character.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Molnár Antal, “Wagner, Richard”, in Szabolcsi–Tóth, *Zenei lexikon*, II, 687.

¹⁵⁴ [Anonymous], “Tristán és Isolde”, *Budapest* 31/228 (25 September 1907), 11.

¹⁵⁵ G[ergely István], “Operaház” (Opera House), *Budapesti Napló* 7/135 (18 May 1902), 13.

¹⁵⁶ [Anonymous], “Burrián: Siegmund”, *Független Magyarország* 14/10 (1914. január 11.), 12.

¹⁵⁷ Burian’s recordings of Italian opera excerpts display perfect knowledge of Italian operatic style, even if they are not always so extreme as those of Caruso. For more see DLA dissertation, 109–112.

¹⁵⁸ Gramophone Company 042305–042306, Code 2254c–2255c, with orchestral accompaniment. The recording, made in Prague on 27 June 1911, is accessible in the Vienna archives of GHT.

¹⁵⁹ For instance right at the beginning of the excerpt, where the rhythm and the notes of the melody are sung differently from the score.

¹⁶⁰ G[ergely István], “Operaház”, *Budapesti Napló* VII/135 (18 May 1902), 13.

Burian did not confine this *bel canto*-based style of declamation to Wagner's operas.¹⁶¹ István Gergely, reviewing the Hungarian première of *Fedora*, had this to say of Burian's performing style in what counted as a modern Italian opera:

He depicted Ipanov excellently in song and acting, and enraptured the audience not only in his unimpeachable Hungarian pronunciation of the text, but in his artistically delivered recitation, which remained as singing throughout.¹⁶²

This singing-like recitation may have been the style of declamation that distinguished Burian's singing from the Wagner concept in Bayreuth at that time.

Cosima Wagner came to know Burian in Dresden in 1903.¹⁶³ But there must have been other reasons beside singing style for Karel Burian, one of the best Tristans of all time, to receive just one invitation to Bayreuth.¹⁶⁴ Writers have either ignored this or found it inexplicable and turned to guesswork.¹⁶⁵ One reason may have been his physique. When he was at last invited in 1908, he was not an unmitigated success and felt uncomfortable in the Bayreuth milieu.¹⁶⁶ A further reason may have been that Alois Hadwiger, with whom he alternated as Parsifal, was a protégé of Cosima.¹⁶⁷ Andor Somssich describes an awkward scene during Burian's stay in Bayreuth. After a dress rehearsal of *Rheingold*, the wife of Otto Briesemeister saw Burian with his back to her and managed to confuse him with Hans Breuer, the great interpreter of Mime. This so incensed Burian that he

gave up his flat in Bayreuth. [...] and never appeared among the audience again. The ruse did not work, however, as Burian also seemed small on stage, especially beside the heftily built singers of Bayreuth.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ This style of performance is conspicuous also in Burian's recordings of excerpts from Werther, especially in "Pourquois me réveiller" ("Was bin ich aufgewacht?", Gramophone 3-42586, Code 1335r, recorded in 1906). See DLA dissertation, 116.

¹⁶² Gergely István, "Fedora", *Budapesti Napló* 7/144 (28 March 1902), 11.

¹⁶³ "Burrian erzählte in Dresden, wie er am Nachmittag um 3 Uhr in München angelangt sei und abends Tristan, ohne zu wissen, wo er zu stehen habe, gesungen." Letter from Cosima Wagner to Felix Mottl, Bayreuth, 28 September 1903. Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben*, 643.

¹⁶⁴ Despite other claims in several sources, Burian sang in Bayreuth only in one year, 1908, when he and Alois Hadwiger shared the role of Parsifal. See "Dirigenten, Solorepeditoren und Vertreter Wagner'scher Hauptgestalten bei den Bühnenfestspielen in Bayreuth seit 1876", in *Wegweiser für Besucher der Bayreuther Festspiele 1911*, hrsg. von Georg Niehrenheim (Bayreuth: Georg Niehrenheim, [1911]), 222.

¹⁶⁵ While Bartoš, for example, sees it as a compliment that he was invited once, Einhard Luther discusses in detail the possible reasons why he was overlooked. Bartoš, *Karel Burian*, 29; Luther, *Helden an geweihtem Ort*, 355–357.

¹⁶⁶ Luther, *Helden*, 357.

¹⁶⁷ Kesting, *Die grossen Sänger*, vol. I, 178.

¹⁶⁸ Somssich Andor, *Harminc esztendő Bayreuthban* (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 1939), 143.

There is little need to detail how degrading it must have seemed to Burian, as a heroic tenor, to be mistaken for the tiny Breuer, playing a dwarf. Furthermore, the importance attached in Bayreuth to singer physique appears in a letter from Hans Richter to Cosima Wagner written in May 1904 after hearing Burian at Covent Garden:

As Tristan and Tannhäuser Burrian was, vocally and musically, a model of security, but he is too short and his face has a comic look about it. A pity! Otherwise he is splendid and dear fellow who involves himself enthusiastically.¹⁶⁹

Also to be learned from Hans Richter is that this special importance was attached to singer physique was confined to Bayreuth. He regularly recommended Bayreuth singers for Wagner productions in London, but after the 1906 Festspiele he also included the non-appearing Karel Burian, as suitable for Loge, Tristan and Tannhäuser, and “possibly the young Siegfried”.¹⁷⁰ Thus he might well, in Richter’s view, sing the character part Loge and the heroic tenor roles of Tristan, Tannhäuser, and Siegfried in London, if not in Bayreuth.

Burian, on the evidence of his recordings, did not fully meet Cosima’s expectations for Wagner roles, and his physique made him a less than ideal heroic tenor. So how did he still become a world-famous Wagnerian tenor? Hungarian audiences would not have been alone in noting his characterizations, realistic for their time. He had the voice for the parts and his acting must have been convincing, for in Hungary especially, he was not in a venue that suffered any shortage of such tenors. After Wagner’s death, Wagner singers touring America took there a style and a Wagner ideal that was different (perhaps somewhat more authentic) than Cosima Wagner’s in Bayreuth. Burian at the Metropolitan, or even at the Royal Hungarian Opera, was free for many years to sing Loge, Walter von Stolzing, Siegfried, Tristan, Tannhäuser, and Lohengrin just as he thought fit.

(English translation by Brian McLean)

¹⁶⁹ Hans Richter’s letter to Cosima Wagner dated 22 May 1904. Quoted in Christopher Fifield, *True Artist and True Friend. A Biography of Hans Richter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 377.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Hans Richter to Percy Pitt, dated 28 July 1906. Quoted in Fifield, *True Artist*, 388.