

## THEATRE • LITERATURE • ART

## EUGENE HUBAY

1858—1937

by

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On 12th March Hungarian music suffered a severe loss. On that day Eugene Hubay, Member of the Upper House, Director of the Hungarian Academy of Music and the uncrowned king of the Hungarian musical world, died at a ripe old age. As artist and teacher his influence extended far beyond the narrow frontiers of Dismembered Hungary, and therefore we consider it appropriate to publish in these columns for the benefit of our Anglo-Saxon readers a brief summary of his life and work.

Eugene Hubay's father, himself a gifted violinist, composer and teacher of music, was musical Director of both the National Theatre in Budapest and the Royal Operahouse. He was his son's first music teacher; but when the latter was little more than a mere child he decided to send him abroad to study under a famous master.

At that time there were three centres of the art of the violin: Brussels, with *Vieuxtemps* and *Wienawsky*, Leipzig with *Ferdinand David*, and Vienna with a number of lesser lights — all of them excellent musicians whose musical genealogy might be traced back to *Schuppanzig* and the days of *Beethoven*. About this time *David* died and Hubay took his son to his most famous pupil, *Joachim*, in Berlin. Eugene Hubay was then 13 years of age. *Spohr—David—Böhm—Joachim—Hubay* — all links in the same chain. After four years of study with *Joachim*, for whom he conceived an affection that was to last as long as life itself, Eugene Hubay, with a letter of recommendation from *Liszt* in his wallet, went to Paris to play before *Vieuxtemps*. He became the protégé of *Wienawsky* and *Massenet* and gained admittance to the magic circle of French music. Thus the demoniac, enthralling personality of *Liszt*, the broad tones, French *esprit* and facility and subtle virtuosity of *Vieuxtemps*, the philosophic calm and depth of *Joachim*, and the Polish passion of *Wienawsky*, mingled with an inborn Hungarian impulsiveness, fiery rhythm and wildness in the scarcely 18 years old musician. His art drew from three sources: it was composed of Hungarian, German and French elements, and this mixture characterized it to the end.

This catholic, European amalgamation was perhaps one secret of his art and of his fame as a teacher of the violin. But the deepest and most lasting impression was that created by Francis *Liszt* and his personal contacts with him.

The author has been privileged to see Hubay's notes still awaiting publication — a diary running to several volumes — in the Master's desk. Two incidents in particular are very arresting. The one describes his first night in Berlin, when he was left alone in his room to prepare for next morning's meeting with *Joachim*. There was no sleep for him and in the middle of the night he tiptoed into the next room to investigate the source of the peculiar odour and the light emanating from it. There, in a coffin surrounded with wax candles, he found the corpse of a grey-haired man. The dead man's room had been let to him.

The other arresting scene is his first meeting with *Liszt*. It was at a *matinée* arranged in honour of *Joachim* by the great patron of art, Cardinal *Haynald* of *Kalocsa*, that Hubay first played before *Liszt*. "*Liszt* came to me, kissed me and amidst repeated outbursts of applause, introduced me to *Henry Wienawsky*, who was in Budapest for a concert at that time. Little did I, a mere youth, dream that a few years later I was to be *Wienawsky's* successor at the Brussels Academy of Music... My joy was boundless. During the winter months I spent an hour, sometimes an evening, every second day with him (*Liszt*). Those months remain one of my most happy memories. With *Liszt's* letter of recommendation I began my career in Paris. In the autumn of 1878 I again met *Liszt* there. He was the head of the Hungarian art department at the Paris International Exhibition."

His personal contacts with *Liszt* left an indelible impression on the soul and the art of young Hubay. Armed with that letter from *Liszt* he presented himself to *Vieuxtemps* in Paris and played before him. The crippled master took an immediate fancy to him, practically adopted him and opened the doors of the fastidiously critical Parisian *salons* to him. He soon became a favourite in musical circles, for he had learned to feel at ease in the elegant world in Berlin, where, in *Joachim's* villa, he had played before the Kaiser, *Moltke* and *Bismarck*.

1880 was a turning-point in his life: a concert in London and another in Paris made his name famous.

It was probably through *Joachim* that he went to London, for the latter, who spoke English fluently, spent some months every year in London, where he was very popular and where his "Hamlet" overture had already been performed several times. Hubay, accompanied on the piano by a Hungarian musician, *Charles Aegházy*, made his London debut in St. James's Hall with "Hungarian National Melodies" and scored an extraordinary success. This was the first time Hungarian folk-music had been heard in London, and in the audience was the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII.

All London spoke of the two young Hungarian musicians. Lord *Paget* arranged for them to play at a concert in his own mansion in honour of the King and Queen of Greece. Among the guests present was the Prince of Wales, who was accompanied by the beautiful *Ladv Dudley*. Leaning on the piano, with closed eyes, they drank the music of the *pasztas*. The songs played by Hubay were those which later he wove into his *Csárdajelenetek* (Scenes in a Country inn.). The Prince of Wales, who had visited Hungary more than once and honoured several Hungarian noblemen with his friendship, seizing a glass of champagne drank to Hubay, saying in Hungarian "Éljen a szép Magyarország!" (Long live beautiful Hungary!).

The same year Hubay had a concert in Paris at which he played his *suite* composed from *Massenet's*

opera "The King of Lahore". These two concerts established his fame. He was besieged by impressarios with offers of tours from America to Russia. The "Menetrel" refused to believe that Hubay was a Hungarian: "Only a gypsy could put such fire into Hungarian music". But Hubay refused all offers, and accompanied his old friend Vieuxtemps to Algiers, where he remained until the death of the latter. Dr. Lister, the famous English physician, who was also one of Vieuxtemps' friends, then had the opportunity of enjoying Hubay's music daily.

It was only after Vieuxtemps' death that Hubay learned the last wish of the great master that Hubay should take the place he had vacated in the Royal Academy of Music in Brussels. Thus, at the age of 23, he became director of one of the most famous schools of artists in Europe. But although he spent five years in Brussels, where he again met Liszt, he continued to remain a Hungarian national. During his sojourn in Belgium King Leopold II gave a concert in honour of the Prince of Wales and Hubay had another opportunity of playing to the Prince.

After five years of brilliant successes at concerts in various countries he was recalled to Hungary by his father, who was ill and in 1886 was appointed professor at the Budapest Academy of Music in his father's place. The premises of the Academy consisted of a few rooms in Liszt's private apartments and Liszt himself was director, in consequence of which he spent a few months every year in Budapest.

From that time on the last fifty years of Hubay's life were devoted to Hungarian music, of which during that period he was the uncrowned king, and it was he who raised Budapest to international importance in the sphere of music. First professor, then director, later chief director and on his retirement presiding director of the Hungarian Academy of Music, it was during his administration that the Academy attained its present European fame.

His work of half a century covered a wide sphere of activity. As *violinist* he was one of the greatest virtuosos of the century, not even second to Sarasate, while Vieuxtemps and Wienawsky acknowledged him their superior. The original way he handled the bow, the elegant, wide sweep of his wrist, created a school of its own. His sweet warm *cantilena* was inimitable; it touched the heart and brought smiles to the lips or or tears to the eyes of the hearer. Like a fountain of gold it welled up, radiant, sparkling, exciting, and exhilarating, to fall a cascade of gentle rain, soothing and lulling the heart. Hubay never lost this art.

To hear him was a never-to-be-forgotten experience. Even compared with a Hubermann or a Kreisler, he was something unique; his technique was individual, inimitable. To a certain extent his pupils acquired the art, and among them perhaps Joseph Szigeti most closely approaches the Master. The lyrical Francis Vecsey, who died a few years ago, was another of his famous pupils, of whom he had many — all first-rate artists, for Hubay chose them carefully from among applicants from every quarter of the globe. On his lists we find German, French, Italian, Swedish, South American, Esthonian, Spanish and English names. Hubay's artists' school was famous all the world over. One of the most valuable elements of his art was his ability and patience as a teacher, the latter trait being usually rare in great artists.

His ability as a teacher procured for him an invitation to the school of artists in London. In 1904 Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Director of the British Royal Academy of Music, offered him the post of director of the school of artists. He would not have had to teach more than five months a year for a salary of L 5000, but he declined the offer as, preferring to

remain in Budapest, he declined other invitations to America and St. Petersburg.

As *composer* his range covered everything from simple songs to symphonies. The following operas by Hubay have been produced in the Budapest Opera-house: *Alienor* (1891), *The Fiddler of Cremona* (1894), *The Black Sheep* (1896), *Moss Rose* (1903), *The Love of Lavotta* (1906), *Anna Karenina* (1923), *The Mask* (1931), and *The Venus of Milo* (1935). Of these *The Fiddler of Cremona* and *Anna Karenina* have been produced in several European and American opera-houses. In 1886 the Budapest Philharmonic Society gave a performance of his "*Concerta Dramatique*" for the first time, and from that date on it performed many of his works, e. g. the B. Major Symphony, Hungarian Variations, C. Minor Symphony, Violin Concerto and *Vita Nuova* (Dante Symphony), while his Petöfi Symphony has been performed in Budapest, Rome and Debrecen by the new concert orchestra. Of his songs those composed to poems by Petöfi are the best — a harmonious blending of text and melody. Besides these he has composed innumerable other works: songs for male and mixed choirs, duets for violin and piano, violin studies, dances, etc. In 1936, a few months before his death, he finished the composition of a symphonic ballet, "The Selfish Giant". His fourteen *Scenes in a Csárda*, variations on Hungarian folk-songs, are recognized everywhere as touchstones of virtuosity, and figure on the programmes of most violinists. At the age of 79 he was working on a new symphony.

As said before, Hubay as composer received his first real impulse from Liszt, although he had already done some work in that direction under Joachim's influence. Liszt's Rhapsodies for the piano are elaborations of Hungarian folk-songs cast in a new, hitherto unknown, free mould, lacking all strictures of form. The composer had given himself a free hand, and like the gypsy, following the inspiration of the moment, varying mood, rhythm and tune in quick succession, often within the same melody, a method which lent a special magic, mobility, and impetus to the composition and made him an early herald of musical impressionism. Liszt elaborated the themes of about 80 Hungarian folk-songs besides those in his rhapsody for the violin and piano discovered after his death and re-written as a violin concert by Hubay.

But Liszt had never heard Hungarian songs except as played by gypsies, and he made the fatal mistake of supposing that the gypsies not only played, but also composed, them, whereas gypsies are merely excellent interpreters; creative artists among them are very rare. Their folk-songs are old gypsy songs that have nothing to do with Hungarian music. It is surprising that Liszt never inquired into the origin of the songs he chose. Had he done so he might have found the tunes of some of them in the Russian steppes. Such perhaps had followed the Hungarians on their wanderings from the time of the migration of the peoples. The majority, however, were composed by Hungarian gentlemen, amateur composers, and were thus merely more or less successful imitations of real folk-songs.

In his youth Eugene Hubay did not know the masterpieces of Sicilian song, the origins of which reach back a thousand years. The collection of what has remained of ancient Hungarian songs was not begun in earnest till the twentieth century, although Prince Paul Eszterházy, a great favourite of Marie Theresa and himself a writer of songs, collected over 500 with music and in the eighteenth century Pálóczy Horváth made a collection of 450. Although, I repeat, Hubay did not draw from the source of real folk-music, yet his compositions were more natural and

nearer to the psyche of the Hungarian folk than were Liszt's. Hubay knew the genuine sources, knew what the gypsies had done in the way of polishing, embellishing and often spoiling the originals. His impulse was not derived, but he could not escape the influence of Liszt's powerful genius, much less that of German classical music.

In one of his essays Romain Rolland writes that most of the musical controversies between the followers of Rameau and Gluck, Debussy and Wagner, had their origin in one great question, that of aristocratic art and popular art. Scarcely 150 years have elapsed since popular art was discovered, since people began to collect old folk-songs. Beginning with Chopin, Russian, Norwegian, French and German composers now strive to give a national stamp to their music and draw on folk-songs as on a primary source. A century and a half stretches between John Parry's collection of folk-songs (*Ancient British Music*, 1745) and the collection of Bartók and Kodály (1905)... Meanwhile Hungarian dance music and folk-songs turn up here and there, „*alla ungherese*”, in the works of classical composers — Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert.

Hubay's art was characterized by a certain aristocratism, a certain lyric sensitiveness. What it drew from folk-songs was chiefly their melodiousness; dramatic crescendo put too much a strain on it. He was of the *l'art pour l'art* school, a spectator who described the experiences of others while he himself remained aloof, his heart untouched. In this respect he reminds us of the great Hungarian poet, John Arany, who has not left one single love lyric to posterity, owing to a reluctance to let world peer into the intimacies of his private life. John Arany, author of the greatest popular epic in the Hungarian language, was at heart an aristocrat like Hubay.

This was one of the reasons why Hubay did not appreciate modern music, though as appreciating

youth, he introduced the now world-famous representatives of that music, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, into the Hungarian Academy of Music. The origine of his own musical culture and also his age made it impossible for Hubay to effect changes in his art.

It was marvellous how splendid this original genius was in Chamber Music. The Hubay-Popper string quartette was famous all the world over and it is to Hubay that Brahms owes his popularity in Europe. Until the end he enjoyed playing Chamber Music; but his greatest pleasure was to conduct an orchestra.

Hubay also contributed to the literature of music. Many articles from his pen have appeared in Hungarian and foreign papers. His inaugural address in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, his essays on subjects connected with music, his suggestions and his writings on the development of the Academy of Music, besides his unpublished diary, would fill volumes. His biography has been written by several authors, amongst others by Emil Haraszthy and Victor Papp.

In a speech delivered in the British Parliament on the occasion of the death of a great statesman, Lord Beaconsfield said that his death had been as beautiful as his life. The same may be said of Hubay. A meeting had been called in Budapest to discuss the arrangements of a general musical festival, and Hubay, whose mind and memory were as clear as ever, was taking part in the debate. He was just outlining his suggestions about the operatic part of the festival when his hand flew to his heart and he dropped dead.

He was buried with due honours by the nation. His epitaph might well be the words spoken by Lord Beaconsfield of England's great statesman: „He was the noblest representative of the middle classes, an ornament to his office and the pride of the country”.

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Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

## P O L I T I C A L E C O N O M Y

### B U L G A R I A

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BULGARIA

A highly interesting lecture on the economic development of Bulgaria was held recently in the Hungarian capital by M. Lazar Tzvetkov, Press Attaché at the Bulgarian Legation in Budapest. He gave a graphic illustration, with many figures and particulars, of the remarkable progress which the economic life of Bulgaria has achieved in spite of her unfavourable circumstances. At the time of her liberation from the Turkish yoke the country was almost a desert, and in the first sixty years of her existence as an independent State she passed through four successive wars, the last of which — the Great War — almost completely destroyed her material resources. The possibilities of a profitable production are unfavourably influenced by the fact that the country is so far from its great markets. Its means of communication with the West are also imperfect, because it is shut off from the Aegean Sea, which is only 30 kilometres away. Greece has not connected any of her railway lines with those of Bulgaria nor is Rumania willing to have a railway bridge built between her and Bulgaria. Nevertheless, Bulgaria has

very nearly reached the stage of intensive culture in almost every branch of agriculture. South-Bulgaria has almost completely turned from wheat to the growing of industrial and other useful plants, such as tobacco, cotton, rice, grapes, etc., since the climate of that region appears to be extremely favourable to these plants; thus Northern Bulgaria remains the only wheat-growing part of the country. What with the remarkable increase of the population and its growing demands, the growth of industrial production has become so rapid that it reached a total value of 1500 million leva in 1936. Nevertheless, Bulgaria will still remain a valuable industrial market for other countries, especially as far as the manufacturing industry is concerned. Though she is one of the most stable money markets, Bulgaria has very little foreign capital at her disposal, which makes her suffer continually from the shortage of money. Her safest source of capital is the economy of her people. Co-operative societies are not found in such large numbers in any other country of Eastern Europe. The great distance of her markets and the imperfection of her means of communication are no doubt responsible for the fact that Bulgaria's exports have not more than doubled in the last fifty years. This, again, makes the acquisition of foreign currencies extremely difficult, this — owing to the unexpected growth of the demand —