

LILLA'S HERITAGE. CULTURAL SKETCHES OF THE VAY BRANCH IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

The Vay family, from which Dora Pejačević's mother Erzsébet (Lilla) hailed, played a significant role in shaping the formative years of the young composer, Dora. There is however, little research on that topic regarding the cultural heritage Dora inherited. The lineage of this family, though only partially documented from a musicological point of view, unveils a significant impact on Dora's abilities and sensitivities by diligently scrutinizing press and archival records from that era. These records highlight a legacy of academic, political, and artistic achievements associated with her background.

Lilla Vay was involved in various cultural events and dedicated much of her time to representing causes promoting the interests of Hungarian literature and art, in addition to her social and philanthropic activities. Meanwhile she was active as a *Liebhaver* performer, too. Lilla Vay placed significant importance on providing her children with musical education, in harmony with the aristocratic upbringing's emphasis on arts education. Her children were engaged in chamber music performances at various social gatherings, showcasing their musical talents on numerous occasions. Károly

Noseda, the initial music instructor of the Pejačević children, had a deep personal bond with the church on Servita Square, where Lilla may have attended worship services. Noseda later held a considerable position in musical life, functioning as the choirmaster at the Royal Opera House in Budapest and as a director at the National Conservatory.

The influence of Lilla Vay, along with the musical background of their family, probably exerted a substantial impact on the musical inclinations of young Dora Pejačević and her siblings. It is evident that Dora's musical performances received frequent mentions in the press; however, she occupied a comparatively minor position in the texts when compared to her mother, Lilla.

Keywords: the Vay family; Lilla Vay; Dora Pejačević; Central Europe; Budapest aristocracy; Károly Noseda; music education; amateur musicians

Ključne riječi: obitelj Vay; Lilla Vay; Dora Pejačević; Srednja Europa; budimpeštanska aristokracija, Károly Noseda; glazbeno obrazovanje; amaterski glazbenici

Aristocratic women, such as Erzsébet ('Lilla') Vay, engaged in philanthropic endeavors, salon music-making, and cultural organization, offering novel perspectives on the role of aristocracy within the musical and artistic networks of their time.¹ As a composer, her daughter, Dora Pejačević navigated a world that provided limited acknowledgment and appreciation for female composers, rendering the cultural contributions of these two women particularly noteworthy.² This study focuses on the cultural and historical contexts of the Vay family to demonstrate how these circumstances could have influenced Dora Pejačević's artistic trajectory compared to her mother in the period's reception. Particular emphasis is placed on aristocratic music education, shifting gender roles, and the broader cultural networks of Central Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries. The research draws upon contemporary press sources, family archives, and musicological and historical literature, shedding new light on the underappreciated historical and cultural contributions of women in the Vay family.

Lilla Vay, the mother of composer Dora Pejačević, influenced the Croatian-Hungarian cultural landscape during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Dora's artistic growth was profoundly shaped not only by her musical education and social milieu but also by her family's historical and cultural legacy. By examining these dimensions, the study seeks not only to illuminate the cultural heritage of the Vay family but also to contribute to a broader understanding of the social and cultural roles of aristocratic women and the historical context of female composers. Were the lives and contributions of Lilla and Dora representative of the typical roles of aristocratic women of their time, or do they offer an unique perspective on musical and social engagement? This study aims to address these questions while offering a new lens through which to view 19th- and 20th-century aristocratic female identity.

Methodology

The status of aristocratic women composers in the 18th and 19th centuries was shaped by restrictive social norms and limited access to professional training. Despite music being a component of upper-class women's education, their opportunities to create and publicly perform music were constrained.³ Most compositions were confined to small-scale salon genres, aligning with societal expectations of feminine modesty and domesticity.⁴ Women were often patrons rather than creators, as public performances were seen as diminishing their social status.⁵

¹ Marcia J. CITRON: *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

² Aneta MARKUSZEWSKA: Music-Making Women-Aristocrats, *Musicology Today*, 16 (2019) 1, 4-30.

³ M. J. CITRON: *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 54-56.

⁴ A. MARKUSZEWSKA: Music-Making Women-Aristocrats, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

The cultural contributions of Erzsébet (Lilla) Vay and her daughter, Dora Pejačević, reflect broader trends in women's labor and cultural activism in Central and Eastern Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Lilla's engagement in philanthropy and salon culture exemplifies the gendered forms of aristocratic contribution to social and cultural networks: Her efforts mirror the patterns described in studies of aristocratic women's activism, where cultural production and organizational skills were employed as both public service and personal expression.⁶ Dora's emergence as a composer within this environment highlights the influence of aristocratic women's roles in fostering artistic education and engagement, as seen in similar cases across Europe.⁷

Lilla and Dora's work connects with microhistorical approaches that illuminate the intersection of personal narratives and structural conditions, such as the cultural expectations of women in aristocracy.⁸ As with other underrepresented figures, their contributions reveal the potential for integrating gender, class, and transnational perspectives to reshape narratives about Central and Eastern European cultural history.⁹ By doing so, this study enriches understandings of women's roles in shaping cultural and social landscapes during transformative historical periods.

As the foundational research on Dora Pejačević has been largely overlooked in Hungary, there remains a wealth of tasks awaiting scholars in this area. So, the present paper aims to offer a broader view on cultural heritage based on her family history from the perspective of the Vay branch, using the period's press and archival material. Though the cultural legacy of Pejačević's maternal lineage and the history of her family have been the subject of ongoing historical investigations, a broader outline can be drawn. This study aims to provide an overview of the Vay family history, the life trajectories of Dora Pejačević's mother, Lilla Vay, and to outline Pejačević's musical connections in Budapest, including the possible circumstances surrounding the activities of her teacher, Károly Nosedá. In addition to drawing upon secondary historical and musicological literature, this paper will leverage contemporary press accounts, institutional records, and photographic evidence to offer deeper insights into the cultural background of the Vay lineage, particularly Dora Pejačević's childhood and her mother's, Lilla's role.

⁶ Susan ZIMMERMANN: Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond: Toward a Long-Term, Transregional, Integrative, and Critical Approach, in: S. Çağatay et al. (eds.): *Through the Prism of Gender and Work Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th and 20th Centuries*, Leiden: Brill, 2024, 1-80, here 16.

⁷ Aneta MARKUSZEWSKA: Music-Making Women-Aristocrats, 4-30.

⁸ Hans RENDERS – Binne de HAAN (ed.): *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004274709>> (Accessed 18 November 2024).

⁹ Magdolna RÉBAY: When People Still Had Enough Time to Live: Education of Girls from Hungarian Aristocratic Families, 1860s–1947, *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 14 (2024) 1, 43-60.

Sources and research history

The scholarly research and discussions in Hungary pertaining to the cultural background of Dora Pejačević are unable to rely on existing work, thus making additional foundational research necessary. The primary sources for this research should include Koraljka Kos's publications,¹⁰ as well as the urban and family histories used later in the present study. While historians have partially covered the history of the Vay family, the individual members' roles are still under investigation.¹¹ The research of historians entails a meticulous study of various documents sourced from the archives of the Vay family. Special attention is given to documents originating from locations in Hungary, namely Golop, Sáropatak, and the Hungarian National Archives. However, the archival records primarily focus on the maintenance of family estates, their association with the Reformed Church, and the parliamentary engagements of the family members.¹²

In particular, the absence of reliable sources and personal documents significantly hampers our understanding. Regarding the history of the Vay family, a separate monograph provides a focused investigation into the life and accomplishments of Baron Miklós Vay.¹³ It is crucial to emphasize the significance of personal accounts, such as the memoirs of Johanna Adelsheim,¹⁴ the great-grandmother of Lilla Vay, and the writings of the younger Miklós Vay,¹⁵ who was Adelsheim's eldest son and the brother of Dora's grandfather. Moreover, apart from the personal recollections of Lilla and Dora, no other sources have been identified in Hungary.¹⁶

In any case, the writings, memoirs, and important documents, including archival records of individual family members, school certificates, and other data related to Dora Pejačević's former music teacher, Károly Nosedá, are essential for understanding the circumstances surrounding Nosedá's employment as a private music teacher. Additionally, referencing the press from that era is essential for understanding the public perception of the family and supplementing the limited existing secondary literature.

¹⁰ Koraljka KOS: *Dora Pejačević: Leben und Werk*, Zagreb: Muzički informativni centar Koncertne direkcije, 1987; Koraljka KOS: *Dora Pejačević*, Zagreb: Muzički informativni centar Koncertne direkcije, 1998.

¹¹ A doctoral dissertation on the life of Baron Miklós Vay is currently being researched by historian Helga Angelovics.

¹² László BENDEFY: A Vay-család golopi levéltára a Sáropataki Református Levéltárban [The Vay Family's Golop Archives in the Sáropatak Reformed Archives], *Levéltári Szemle*, 19 (1969) 2, 290-326.

¹³ Orsolya SZAKÁLY: *Egy vállalkozó főnemes. Vay Miklós báró. 1756–1824* [An Enterprising Nobleman. Baron Miklós Vay. 1756–1824], Budapest, ELTE, 2003.

¹⁴ Etelke JÓKAI (ed.): *Emlékek B. Vay Miklósné Adelsheim Johanna báróné leveleiből* [Memories from the letters of Baroness Johanna Adelsheim the wife of Miklós B. Vay], Pest: Atheneum, 1888.

¹⁵ [Miklós VAY]: *Emléklapok vajai báró Vay Miklós életéből*. Lévy József bevezetésével [Memoirs from the life of Baron Vay of Vaja. With an introduction by József Lévy], Budapest, Franklin-Társulat, 1899.

¹⁶ There is no available evidence of Lilla Vay's musical manuscripts in Hungarian archives.

In these terms, it is worth detailing that the members of the Vay family were predominantly renowned for their contributions as scientists and statesmen, suggesting an environment that fostered intellectual curiosity and engagement with public service. Lilla Vay herself appears to have embodied these family traits, as evidenced by her active involvement in social and charitable initiatives, which ranged from organizing cultural events to providing aid to those in need. This multifaceted approach to social engagement was certainly an influence on the young Dora, both as a role model and as a barrier that weighed on her. Nevertheless, it seems that Lilla's own receptiveness to the arts, as demonstrated by her participation in various cultural activities, likely played a significant role in nurturing Dora's burgeoning musical talents and her keen aesthetic sensibilities.

Panoramic view of the Vay de Vaya family

The Vay family has a long and prominent history in Hungary, Szabolcs County. According to Iván Nagy, in his volume *Magyarország családai* [Families of Hungary], the family derived its name from the Vaja village in the county, which it likely owned. The family's lineage can be traced back to the 14th century, as documented in authentic historical records.¹⁷ According to the new research, the Vay family tried to solve the multifaceted uncertainties and economic crisis caused by the Turks, and later the Habsburgs, by allying with other families in the turbulent decades of 17th and 18th century in Hungary. The strategy was to marry in alliance with the wealthy noble families of Transylvania. It can be seen that from the end of the 17th century onwards, the daughters of Ádám Vay (1657–1719), yet not baron, married nobles almost exclusively, mainly Transylvanian counts. The Count Teleki family was later intertwined with the Baron Vay family in several ways, as was the case with the Transylvanian Wass, or Bethlen families. This marriage strategy clearly helped the social advancement of the Vay family.¹⁸ Following the beneficial marriage of Ábrahám, the centre of the Vay family became Alsózsolca and Golop in Borsod county from the end of the 17th century. Then a new chapter in the family history began: Generations of the Vays grew up in Alsózsolca, including Lilla.¹⁹

¹⁷ Iván NAGY: *Magyarország családai czimerekkel és nemzedékrendi táblákkal*, XII. [Families of Hungary with coats of arms and genealogical tables, XII], Pest: Ráth Mór, 1865, 91-109.

¹⁸ See e.g. Helga ANGELOVICS: A vajai Vay család. Vay Miklós báró (1802-1894) ősei [The Vay of Vaja Family. Ancestors of Baron Miklós Vay (1802-1894)], *Zempléni Múzsza*, 17 (2017) 4(68), 13-23.

¹⁹ The Vay Castle situated in Alsózsolca was meticulously restored and ceremoniously unveiled to the public in 2023. Similarly, in Golop, the legacy of the esteemed Vay family is ardently upheld, as evidenced by the ongoing preservation efforts. The castle has witnessed a remarkable restoration effort in recent years, led predominantly by the local community, aiming to revitalize and preserve its historical integrity.



Figure 1: The Reformed church in Alsószolca and the Vay castle built around 1720. Drawing by Wilhelm Egger, the Vay family's tutor from 1815, Hungarian National Archives

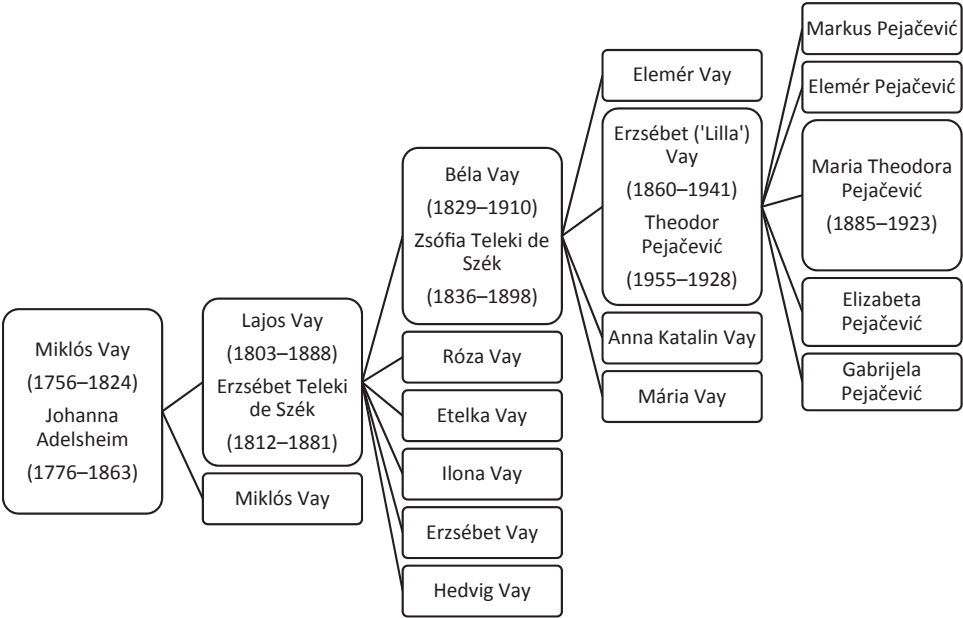
From the family tree, (**Table 1**) the well-documented members are the elder and younger Barons Miklós Vay and Johanna Adelsheim, but the data concerning the activities of men is commonly preserved in the primary and secondary literature.

The life of the elder Baron Miklós Vay (1756–1824) is marked by a series of significant academic and cultural experiences. After completing his studies in the nationally recognised Sárospatak,²⁰ he pursued further education at the Academy of Military Engineering in Vienna, a remarkable institution that graciously welcomed Protestants. The period he spent in Vienna had a significant impact on Baron Miklós Vay's personal development, as he immersed himself in the atmosphere of the era and visited Freemasonic lodges. Notably, his extensive journey across the German Lowlands, with France, and Great Britain serving as substantial waypoints, exerted an even greater influence on him. Notably, he also ventured to Ireland during this time.²¹ In the year 1787, he endeavored to secure membership in the prestigious Royal Society of London, a remarkable accomplishment that was made possible by his extensive scientific acumen and the unwavering backing of his benefactors. The acknowledgment of his membership as the 3rd Hungarian representative in the British Society of Scientists, supported by fourteen esteemed individuals, signifies the high regard he held in the scientific community.

²⁰ The Reformed College of Sárospatak is one of the oldest educational institutions in Hungary, founded in 1531 by the crown guard Peter Perényi in the spirit of the Reformation.

²¹ H. ANGELOVICS: A vajai Vay család. Vay Miklós báró (1802-1894) ősei, 16.

Table 1. Simplified family tree of the Vay family



»The Baron Nicolas Vajj [!] de Vaja, of Hungary Captain in the Corps of Engineers in the Service of the Emperor, a Gentleman well skilled in Mathematics and various branches of natural Philosophy being desirous of becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society, and being qualified by having resided upwards of six months in England; we whose names are subscribed do, upon our personal knowledge, recommend him as deserving of that honour, and likely to become an useful and valuable Member.«²²

The individuals who publicly supported him included Sir Charles Blagden (1748–1820), a significant figure in the fields of medicine and chemistry, and Henry Cavendish (1731–1810), a distinguished chemist acclaimed for his discovery of various gases, including hydrogen, which he recognized as an independent element (Table 2).

²² Certificates of election and candidature for Fellowship of the Royal Society, Reference number: EC/1787/08, <<https://catalogues.royalsociety.org/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=EC%2f1787%2f08>> (Accessed 18 November 2024).

Table 2. The list of the supporters of Baron Miklós Vay for the membership of the British Society of Scientists

Name (date)	Profession
Count Johann Moritz Bruhl (1736–1809)	diplomat and astronomer
Sir Charles Blagden (1748–1820)	physician and chemist
Jesse Ramsden (1735–1800)	mathematician, astronomical and scientific instrument maker
Henry Cavendish (1731–1810)	philosopher, experimental and theoretical chemist and physicist
Alexander Aubert (1730–1805)	astronomer and businessman
Samuel Foart Simmons (1750–1813)	physician
John Mervin Nooth (1737–1828)	physician, scientist, and army officer
John Smeaton (1724–1792)	engineer
Alexander Dalrymple (1737–1808)	explorer, cartographer, and hydrographer
William Roy (1726–1790)	military engineer, surveyor, and antiquarian
William Marsden (1754–1836)	orientalist, numismatist, and linguist
James Rennell (1742–1830)	geographer, historian, oceanographer
Pasquale de Paoli (1725–1807)	Corsican statesman, military leader
Tiberius Cavallo (1749–1809)	physicist and natural philosopher

Miklós Vay then returned to Hungary, to Alsózsolca, and commenced the modernization of the family estate. He contracted matrimony later in life, taking as his spouse Johanna Adelsheim (1776–1863), then a widow hailing from the Margraviate of Baden.

Johanna Adelsheim was the daughter of the chief forester to Karl Friedrich, Grand Duke of Baden. Johanna was raised at the court of the Duke of Baden following the passing of her parents. Eventually, during her teenage years, she became a court lady to the princesses and maintained contact with them. The subject in question maintained a particularly strong friendship with Caroline of Baden (1776–1841), the daughter of the Grand Duke. Caroline subsequently assumed the role of Queen consort of Bavaria and eventually became the grandmother of Franz Joseph I. It is worth noting that Caroline became the godmother to Johanna's firstborn son, the younger Baron Miklós Vay.

The letters of Johanna Adelsheim were compiled into a memorial volume in Vienna in 1864, first in German, and they were soon published in a Hungarian translation, too.²³ Her writings contain no material related to music, instead, they predominantly consist of educational notes pertaining to her teaching. The profound impact of Johanna's aristocratic education becomes apparent through the notable encounters she had in her upbringing, such as her early acquaintance with the renowned Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as eloquently expressed in her correspondences.

²³ E. JÓKAI (ed.): *Emlékek B. Vay Miklósné Adelsheim Johanna báróné leveleiből.*

»I also had another family who I spent many pleasant hours with and who always encouraged me to do good. It was the house of the Schlosser, secret councillor of Baden. Schlosser was a generally respected statesman and poet, and his daughter Lulu (later Nicolovius) was my most trusted friend. We got our lessons together, we played together. Lulu's deceased mother was Goethe's sister, and her uncle often visited the orphans of the deceased sister. I frequently had the privilege of witnessing not only the renowned poet, but also other noteworthy individuals of the time. As a child, I didn't fully understand how important they were, but now I consider these moments the most special memories from my childhood.«²⁴

The writings of Adelsheim unmistakably convey that her upbringing was largely steeped in faith, with a strong emphasis on modern sciences such as economics and estate management, a profound acquaintance with literature, and a fervent embrace of contemporary educational practices, particularly the Pestalozzi method. The descendants, the younger Miklós and Lajos,²⁵ who were brought up in Alsózsolca, were able to directly witness this groundbreaking educational approach in Sárospatak, as they continued the family tradition and pursued their education in an establishment that embraced progressive methodologies.²⁶ Despite the younger Miklós and Lajos holding opposing political views in Parliament, they exhibited close-knit behavior as brothers.²⁷

Their first-born son, Béla Vay, also entered politics as the *főispán* of Borsod county. He held his position for 22 years, until 1894. According to the address

²⁴ »Volt még egy másik családi kör is, melynek sok kellemes órát köszönhetek s a hol mindenkor csak a jóra buzdítottak. Schlosser badeni titkos tanácsos háza volt az. Általánosan tisztelt államférfi és költő volt Schlosser, leánya Lulu (a későbbi Nicolovius) pedig legbizalmasabb barátnőm. Együtt kaptuk tanóráinkat, együtt játszottunk. Lulu elhalt édes anyja Goethének nővére volt, s a nagybátyja gyakran meglátogatta az elköltözött nővér árváit. Itt nemcsak a világhírű költőt, hanem egyéb nevezetes kortársait is gyakran volt alkalmam láthatni, mit akkor ugyan még gyermek észszel nem igen tudtam méltányolni, de most mégis gyermekkori emlékeim legnevezetesebbjei közé számítom.« See E. JÓKAI (ed.): *Emlékek B. Vay Miklósné Adelsheim Johanna báróné leveleiből*, 12.

²⁵ Lajos Vay (1808–1888), the grandfather of Lilla Vay held a prominent political position and possessed substantial knowledge of the Alsózsolca estate. In 1829, Lajos married Count Erzsébet Teleki of Szék. It is believed that the nickname Lilla may have originated in the family through grandmother Elisabeth.

²⁶ The Reformed College of Sárospatak exhibited an exceptional receptiveness during the late 18th and early 19th centuries to various new ideas, educational objectives, subjects, and organizational methodologies that provided a comprehensive framework for teaching. This is widely acknowledged among historians specializing in education and culture. The institution is notable for having introduced innovations, including the establishment of secondary level education on the banks of the Bodrog, which was the first of its kind in Hungary in 1796. Additionally, the introduction of instruction in the Hungarian language at the academic level in 1818 also deserves mention. See e.g. János UGRAI: A gyakorlatias népoktatás jegyében. Pestalozzi eszméinek sárospataki megjelenése [In the Spirit of Practical Public Education. The Emergence of Pestalozzi's Ideas in Sárospatak], *Iskolakultúra*, 18 (2008) 1-2, 39-49; Irén VIRÁG: *A magyar arisztokrácia neveltetése (1790–1848)* [The Education of the Hungarian Aristocracy (1790–1848)], Eger: Líceum, 2013, 91-114.

²⁷ H. ANGELOVICS: A vajai Vay család. Vay Miklós báró (1802-1894) ősei, 18.

book of the Parliamentary Directory of 1892, it can be deduced that he was involved in parliamentary endeavors in Budapest during that particular year. It also offers the address of his wife's and her mother's family palace, the Teleki Palace. The location specified is the Palace at 10 Szervita Square.²⁸ Béla was a philanthropist, making donations to numerous organizations and viewing charity as a duty. Béla Vay also married a Teleki daughter, Zsófia Teleki of Szék in 1854.²⁹

Erzsébet (Lilla) Vay, the daughter of Béla Vay and Zsófia Teleki, was born in 1860 in Alsózsolca, just like her ancestors. During her childhood years she resided with her mother's and grandmother's family, the Telekis, at their mansion located on the aforementioned 10 Szervita Square in Budapest. The history of Szervita Square is closely intertwined with that of the Teleki family, who acquired the land in 1782 and held it for nearly 150 years. The first and second floors of the palace were consistently occupied by family members. **(Figure 2 and 3)** Adjacent to the Teleki Palace was the Church of Servita Square, which boasted a musical community. It is probable that Lilla would have encountered her children's, including Dora's prospective music teacher, Károly Noseda (1863–1944), the choirmaster of the church situated in Servita Square. However, prior to delving into the musical education of the Pejačević children, it is important to provide a succinct overview of Lilla Vay's connections in Budapest and her contributions to the cultural life of the city.

Musical education, cultural life, and the network of Lilla in Budapest

The role of Hungarian women composers during the 19th and early 20th centuries offers critical insight into the intersection of gender, culture, and aristocracy in Central Europe. While aristocratic women were primarily expected to fulfill roles as cultural patrons and facilitators, a small yet significant number engaged directly in music composition and performance. This period saw a gradual shift in opportunities for women, as formal education expanded to include musical training beyond the domestic sphere. Despite this progress, female composers often faced societal limitations that framed their work as amateur or supplementary to male-dominated traditions.³⁰

Hungarian aristocratic women were particularly influential in shaping salon culture, where their compositions, often characterized by intimate and lyrical

²⁸ 1885-ik évi VII. t.-cikk alapján szervezett s az 1892 évi február hó 18-ára összehívott s február hó 22-én megnyitott országgyűlés főrendi háza tagjainak név-és lakjegyzéke [The National Assembly, organized on the basis of Article VII of the Constitution of 1885, convened on 18 February 1892, and opened on 22 February, Register of Names and Residences of the Members of the House of Lords], Budapest: Pesti könyvnyomda-részvény-társaság, 1892, 28.

²⁹ H. ANGELOVICS: A vajai Vay család. Vay Miklós báró (1802-1894) ősei, 18.

³⁰ M. RÉBAY: When People Still Had Enough Time to Live: Education of Girls from Hungarian Aristocratic Families, 1860s–1947, 44-55.



Figure 2: Szervita Square on a photograph by György Klösz in 1900. Fortepan 82551, Budapest City Archives.



Figure 3: The collapsed corner of the Teleki Palace in 1945. During World War II, the building was destroyed. Fortepan 60153.

styles, flourished. These private settings enabled women to express their creativity while adhering to societal norms of modesty and domesticity. However, a few women transcended these boundaries, utilizing the increased visibility afforded by public performances and publishing opportunities.³¹ Figures like Erzsébet Vay and her daughter, Dora, together with contemporaries reflect the nuanced role of women as both preservers of cultural heritage and contributors to a broader musical identity.

Little is known about the documents of Lilla Vay's upbringing, early years, and musical background. The activities of Lilla Vay in Hungary can currently only be gleaned from the press of the period and inferred from secondary literature. It can be stated that after her marriage to Count Teodor Pejačević in 1881, and having raised their children, Lilla continued to actively engage in Budapest's social scene, as recorded by the press of the period. She demonstrated her extraordinary singing talents in salons, orchestrated lavish balls, and generously engaged in philanthropic affairs, whether by means of vocal performances or theatrical productions, which is proven by examples.

The nobility and aristocracy came together several times a year as *Liebhabs*, collaborating for charitable performances according to the press and memoirs of the time. One of these notable occasions took place on 11 May 1886 at the Buda Castle Theatre (=budai Várszínház), which Lilla Pejačević graced with her presence. The newspapers diligently provided the public with regular updates on the ongoing rehearsal proceedings. At that time, Dora had not yet reached the age of one. The *Pesti Napló*, in an account of the event, reported the following:

»The organizing committee held a meeting last evening at Countess Sándor Károlyi's residence to discuss the arrangements for an upcoming charitable theatrical production led by the esteemed aristocratic elite of the capital. Following the thorough discussion, the details pertaining to the inaugural theatrical presentation were duly finalized. The decision has been made to hold the performances at the castle theater [Várszínház or Burgtheater], with the first one scheduled for the 8th of the current month and featuring the staging of two comedies. [...] It was stipulated that the performances would be complemented by the accompaniment of an amateur orchestra. [...] The aristocracy is showing exceptional dedication to ensuring the success of the inaugural spectacle, which has received the promise of attendance from His Majesty the King [Franz Joseph I].«³²

It is unknown whether Franz Joseph I actually attended the lecture. However, it is certain that Lilla's performance was exceptionally successful.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² ***: A fővárosi arisztokrácia által rendezendő jótékony célú színelőadás ügyében... [In the cause of a charitable theatrical performance to be organized by the aristocracy of the capital...], *Pesti Napló*, 37 (2 May 1886) 121, [2].

»(Countess Theodor Pejacevic) Baroness Lilla Vay, who was generally noticed for her excellent acting and artistic temperament during the Liebhaber performances at Buda, which far exceeded the amateur standard, received an original, honorary compliment. Count István Keglevich sent her a formal contract, offering her a salary of 7,000 forints a year and 20,000 forints a year *in toilette* from the national theatre, accompanied by a letter expressing his admiration for her talent as an actress. The Countess replied with a witty, humorous letter. The offer of a contract caused a sensation in theatrical circles, as it was significantly higher than any previous *toilette* fee offered by the National Theatre [in Pest]. [...]»³³

The programme presented at the Castle Theatre has received coverage in the press. The one-act plays were reportedly complemented by musical compositions from Xavér Ferenc Szabó (1848–1911), who subsequently assumed a professorial role at the Academy of Music in Budapest, as detailed in the issue of *Pesti Napló*. The performance featured the overture to his opera *Nero*, the Adagio movement of his unidentified string quartet performed by 16 violins, and presumably the Allegro movement of the same string quartet. The musicians were students of the National Conservatory, and Szabó himself conducted the orchestra. Lilla, as actress, played a leading role in an one-act comedy of Abraham Dreyfus, *A Little Storm*. The list of other performers represents clearly a distinguished selection of Hungarian aristocrats, with Countess Irén Teleki,³⁴ Count Hadik, and the younger Count Aladár Zichy among the artists.³⁵

This was not the sole occasion; it is also known that Lilla used to perform arias at the aristocratic soirées. At the Károlyi Palace in Budapest Józsefváros, in the year 1901, Count István Károlyi graciously arranged a gathering, wherein the esteemed presence of Prime Minister Kálmán Széll was ardently welcomed. The newspapers of the era documented that a gala concert commenced at 10:30 p.m. in the banquet hall of the Károlyi Palace. The event showcased performances by Lilla Vay, as well as the Count Géza Zichy.³⁶ Count Zichy, a renowned composer-pianist and former director of the Opera House, was also recognized as a close acquaintance of Franz Liszt. The program for the evening was as follows:

»The concert commenced at half past eleven in the concert hall, featuring distinguished performers and maintaining a high artistic standard. Count Géza Zichy had the privilege of initiating the piano recital, wherein he eloquently performed one of Mendelssohn's captivating reveries. He presented his own collection of compositions,

³³ ***: (Pejacevics Tódorné) [(Mrs. Teodor Pejačević)], *Pesti Hírlap*, 8 (16 May 1886) 135, 5.

³⁴ The mother of Count Pál Teleki, the former prime minister of Hungary.

³⁵ ***: A jótékony czélú színi előadásra tegnap délután tartották [The charity theatre production was held yesterday afternoon], *Pesti Napló*, 37 (9 May 1886) 128, 2.

³⁶ ***: Estély gróf Károlyi Istvánnál [Evening reception at Count István Károlyi's], *Szatmármegyei Közlöny*, 27 (24 February 1901) 8, 2.

which included a waltz taken from a ballet piece by him. The virtuosic performance was met with enthusiastic applause and admiration from the audience. Subsequently, Baroness Lilla Vay, formerly known as Countess Tivadar Pejačević, delivered an aria from the opera *Gioconda*, along with two songs, showcasing her well-educated and magnificent voice, accompanied by precise vocal skills, much to the delight of all those present. The German Consul Below-Schlattau was greeted with enthusiastic ovations and surprised the esteemed audience with his performance of two compositions by Count Géza Zichy. At the stroke of midnight, the excellent concert concluded. The attendees proceeded to the restaurant following the event, where they enjoyed refreshments amidst tables adorned with flower garlands, thereby culminating the evening perfectly.³⁷

In addition to her acting and singing activities, Lilla was actively engaged in various cultural events as an organizer. She was involved in representing causes that helped to promote the interests of Hungarian literature and art in society.³⁸ Besides, she was a member of several women's associations, organized charity events throughout Hungary and Croatia and took part of the activities of the Red Cross.³⁹ The aforementioned information further underscores the notion that Lilla Vay, during the 19th and 20th centuries, was held in high regard and widely admired within Hungarian social circles. Lilla's remarkable persona was so widely acclaimed that the holiday estate of the Bethlen family, near Miskolc as Lillafüred [Lillabad] was named in her honor in 1892.⁴⁰

Early musical experiences: The Pejačević children at the Budapest social life

The aristocratic upbringing included a strong emphasis on arts education, as was common at the time. In Hungarian aristocratic families of the 19th and 20th centuries, musical education was a vital part of a girl's upbringing, reflecting broader social and cultural expectations of refinement and cultural sophistication. Music was often taught alongside foreign languages and fine arts, with piano and vocal instruction being particularly prominent. However, despite its prominence in their education, the goal of music training was rarely professional.⁴¹

³⁷ ***: Estély gróf Károlyi Istvánnál [Evening reception at Count István Károlyi's], *Hazánk*, 8 (23 February 1901) 47, 6.

³⁸ ***: Az arisztokrácia és a magyar irodalom [The aristocracy and Hungarian literature], *Buda-pesti Hírlap*, 9 (15 January 1889) 15, 6.

³⁹ ***: A grófnő szíve [The countess's heart], *Pécsi Napló*, 2 (21 March 1893) 66, [4]; János Ferenc SÁRKÁNY (ed.): *Az Athenaeum nagy képes naptára* [The Athenaeum Calendar with Pictures], Budapest: Athenaeum, 1908, 242.

⁴⁰ The estate, which graciously accommodated esteemed guests, has sustained its rich heritage through the years. The palace hotel in Lillafüred was opened in 1930, and is still functioning.

⁴¹ M. RÉBAY: When People Still Had Enough Time to Live: Education of Girls from Hungarian Aristocratic Families, 1860s–1947, 48–52.

Mothers played a pivotal role in overseeing this education, ensuring that their daughters acquired the necessary skills to participate in aristocratic salon culture and represent their family's status. While governesses and private tutors typically conducted the formal training, mothers frequently acted as coordinators, selecting instructors and monitoring progress.⁴² Therefore Lilla also placed great importance on providing her children with musical education. Living in the neighbour, there is a huge possibility that Lilla was acquainted with Károly Noseda, the first music teacher of her children through his church services at Szervita Square.

The details of Károly Noseda's life and family are unclear, since they are not well documented and researched.⁴³ He was born in Pest in 1863, and it seems that from the age of 16, he held the positions of organist and choirmaster at the church on Servita Square, demonstrating a profound personal connection to the establishment. Information about his studies at the Academy of Music is limited to the institution's yearbook from 1883/84. This scarcity may be due to the recent opening of the organ studies program at the Academy. Hans von Koessler (1853–1926), the later master of Béla Bartók, Ernő Dohnányi, and Zoltán Kodály, served as Noseda's professor, who was an organ student at that time. According to the same yearbook, in addition to organ playing, students were obligated to study composition and choir, too. Notable teachers of Noseda include the influential Kornél Ábrányi⁴⁴ and possibly the leader figure of Hungarian opera, Ferenc Erkel, although the latter is not conclusively proven. Noseda's initial certificate during his first year may have been hinted at his future career path. While his grade in the main subject, organ, was lacking, he excelled in choir singing.⁴⁵ It is plausible that this grade may have influenced his decision to skip the subsequent academic year and at the same time change the direction of his musical career.

Noseda persisted, however, in his pursuit of a vocation as a choir instructor and successfully secured a position at the Royal Opera House in Budapest, com-

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Agnes KENYERES et al.: Noseda, Károly, *Magyar életrajzi lexikon* [Hungarian Biographical Lexicon], II (L–Z), Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969, 302; Aladár SCHÖPFLIN (ed.): Noszeda Károly, *Magyar színművészeti lexikon: A magyar színjátszás és drámairodalom enciklopédiája* [Hungarian Dramatic Arts Lexicon: Encyclopedia of Hungarian Drama and Dramatic Literature], Vol. III. (Kornél Ábrányi – Püspöki Imre), Budapest: Az Országos Színészegyesület és Nyugdíjintézete, [1930], 376.

⁴⁴ See the website of current research at the Department for the Hungarian Music History, HUNREN Institute for Musicology: <<https://zti.hu/files/mzt/abranyi/index.html>>; Lili Veronika BÉKÉSSY: »... a son of our country asks for the patronage of your esteemed journal.« Sen. Kornél Ábrányi's Network, in: Lili Veronika Békéssy – Martin Eybl – Gesa Finke (eds.): *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft – Beihefte der Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich, Band 62. Musical Practice in the Long Nineteenth Century. Unknown Ego Documents from Central Europe*, Wien: Hollitzer Verlag, 2024, 85–118.

⁴⁵ »Orgona: elégséges; Köteles melléktárgyak. zeneszerzés: jó; karének: kitünő« [Organ: sufficient; Required minor subjects. composition: good; choir singing: excellent], *Az Országos Magyar Királyi Zeneakadémia évkönyve az 1882/1883-iki tanévről* [Yearbook of the Royal Hungarian Academy of Music for the academic year 1882/1883], Budapest: Athenaeum, 1883, 36.

mencing on 1 February 1894, and concluding on 31 December 1902. Subsequently, he served as the choirmaster from 1 January 1903 to 1914.⁴⁶ During this period at the Opera House, several of his compositions were published by Schubert & Co. in Leipzig, such as his German songs *Die erwachte Rose* (1894) and *Frühling* (1895). In 1913, Noseda began teaching at the National Conservatory and eventually became its director general from 1938 to 1940.⁴⁷ On 7 November 1944, during his years of retirement, Noseda tragically took his own life, presumably in connection with the events of World War II, but the specific reasons remain unclear.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, his professional experience and background exerted a noteworthy influence on the musical inclinations of young Dora Pejačević and her siblings.

Károly Noseda frequently engaged in chamber music performances with the Pejačević children at various social gatherings at the same time that Lilla was introducing her young children to social life at balls and other social events throughout Hungary. The Pejačević children had to showcase their talents on such occasions.

The charity concert and ball organized by the Budapest Catholic Circle, held in 1899, was a highly esteemed event that took place early in the year as the local newspaper, the *Pesti Hirlap* presented.⁴⁹ At the aforementioned event, Lilla's three children, Countess Dora, Count Márk, and Elemér, were in attendance at the preceding concert, accompanied by another child prodigy, the violin virtuoso Stefi Geyer (1888–1956). The report indicates that Dora Pejačević exhibited exceptional piano skills, while Stefi Geyer displayed great proficiency in violin playing. Károly Noseda offered piano accompaniment for the evening,⁵⁰ and a military orchestra contributed to the dance music.⁵¹ The program's specific details remain somewhat limited; nevertheless, the evening reached its pinnacle with a distinguished ensemble performance of a chamber music composition for the piano featuring eight hands. Károly Noseda, Dora Pejačević, and her brothers, Counts Mark and Elemér, sat at the pianos and skillfully executed Tito Mattei's *Le tourbillon*, Op. 22.⁵²

⁴⁶ ***: *A Magyar. Kir. Operaház 1884 – 1909. Adatok a színház huszonöt éves történetéhez. Az intézet megnyitásának negyedszázados évfordulóján* [The Hungarian Royal Opera House 1884 – 1909. Data on the Twenty-five-year History of the Theatre. On the Quarter-century Anniversary of the Opening of the Institution], Budapest: M. Kir. Operaház igazgatósága, 1909, 310.

⁴⁷ See Zenede-Lexikon [Music Lexicon], in: Lujza TARI – Mónika Iványi PAPP: *A Nemzeti Zenede* [The National Music], Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem Tanárképző Intézete, 2005, 358.

⁴⁸ Per the death certificate, the cause of death of the former 81-year-old music school principal was a gunshot wound to the head. Budapest City Archives, Budapesti halotti anyakönyvi kivonatok [Budapest death certificates], August 1944, 2604.

⁴⁹ ***: A katolikus kör bálja [The Catholic Circle Ball], *Pesti Hirlap*, 21 (26 January 1899) 26, 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ ***: A Katolikus Kör bálja [The Catholic Circle Ball], *Pesti Napló*, 50 (26 January 1899) 26, 7.

⁵² ***: A Budapesti katolikus kör hangversenye... [Concert of the Budapest Catholic Circle...], *Zenelap* 13 (5 February 1899) 4, 6.

Stefi Geyer prominently featured Dora Pejačević's compositions in her performances on multiple occasions.⁵³ The event featured a significant performance on 12 March 1902, in the banqueting hall of the Royal Hotel in Budapest.⁵⁴ Her repertoire was enhanced by compositions from renowned artists such as Bach and Sarasate. Furthermore, the Hungarian-language press frequently highlighted the joint performances of Lilla and Dora in Našice. In a notable instance, as reported in a 1903 issue of the *Pécsi Napló*, Dora performed on the violin alongside her mother, who sang an *Ave Maria*. The article primarily focuses on Lilla's talent, with little regard for the young Dora.

»The spouse of the Croatian Ban as a church singer. Countess Vay, wife of Count Dr Teodor Pejačević, the Croatian-Slavonian Ban, is passionate about art, especially music. Notwithstanding her husband's recent appointment as a ban, she maintains her unwavering dedication to her love of singing and derives immense joy from it. Our friend in Našice told us that a special mass was held on Sunday in the church to celebrate the Pope's coronation. The faithful, who filled the church to its capacity, were filled with immense joy as they witnessed the soul-stirring performance of the *Ave Maria*. The wife of the esteemed landowner of Našice graced the congregation with her angelic voice, while her daughter, Countess Dora, added a mesmerizing touch by playing the violin in perfect harmony. Countess Teodor Pejačević has a rich, beautiful contralto voice, which she had once heard in Eszék [Osijek], when she was promoting a charitable cause, and the people of Našice were pleased to find that the gracious lady was just as much a friend of church singing as the worthy lady was.«⁵⁵

It is unclear how exactly Dora was influenced by these concerts and subsequent reports. Dora's musical performances received frequent mention in the press, and on occasion, her compositions were showcased. However, it is evident that when compared to her mother, Lilla, Dora occupied a comparatively minor position in the texts. A thorough examination of this issue would require in-depth press research, which would undoubtedly illuminate the complex mother-daughter relationship between Lilla Vay and Dora Pejačević. Dora Pejačević likely faced challenges due to her constant performances since childhood, her family's esteemed cultural legacy, and the historical background of the Vay family. Further research is required for this particular chapter, given the fact that during that specific era, the occupation of being a female composer lacked proper appreciation.⁵⁶

⁵³ László VIKÁRIUS – Helga VÁRADI (eds.): *Geyer Stefi hegedűművész életútja: Levelezése Bartók Bélával* [The Life of Violinist Stefi Geyer: Her Correspondence with Béla Bartók], Budapest: Balassi, 2024, 322.

⁵⁴ ***: Hangversenyek [Concerts], *Budapesti Hírlap*, 22 (2 March 1902) 60, 11.

⁵⁵ ***: A horvát bán felesége – mint temploménekesnő [The wife of the Croatian Ban – as a church singer], *Pécsi Napló*, 12 (12 August 1903) 183, 3.

⁵⁶ Sarah KIRBY: »The Only Thing 'Womanish' is the Composer«: Music at Nineteenth-Century Exhibitions of Women's Work, *Music and Letters*, 100 (2019) 3, 420-446, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ml/gcz043>> (Accessed 18 November 2024).

Lilla Vay's work as a philanthropist, performer and cultural organiser is an example of the role of aristocratic women in Central European society in the 19th and 20th centuries. Lilla's upbringing and talents led her to become a committed participant in the social and cultural life of Budapest, where she organised and regularly performed in charity concerts and theatrical performances. Her musical upbringing and social contacts, particularly through Károly Nosedá, the Pejačević children's first music teacher, shaped her children's early exposure to music. Nosedá's expertise and influence, as well as Lilla's active participation in cultural events, underlined the importance of music in the Pejačević household.

Although Dora Pejačević's childhood performances and compositions were covered in the Hungarian-language press, her figure was often overshadowed by the prominence of her mother's personality and charisma. However, an assessment of Lilla's relationship with Dora, the possibilities and limitations of the mother-daughter relationship, and the role and prospects of aristocratic women in the arts, reveals a number of other characteristics. These include how difficult it must have been for aristocratic women to succeed in a career with few opportunities, and how Dora must have experienced the spotlight that her mother received.

This dynamic underscores the duality of their relationship: while Lilla's influence opened doors to musical education and public performance, Dora had to navigate the constraints of societal expectations and familial precedence. Examining this interplay not only enriches our understanding of Dora Pejačević's artistic achievements but also provides a broader lens through which to view the complexities of female creativity in aristocratic contexts. The Pejačević household stands as a microcosm, showcasing how women like Lilla and Dora negotiated their identities and roles within a rapidly evolving cultural landscape, shedding light on the often-overlooked narratives of aristocratic women as both creators and enablers of artistic legacy.

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Sažetak

LILLINA BAŠTINA: KULTURNE SKICE O OBITELJSKOJ GRANI VAY U MAĐARSKOJ

Obitelj Vay, iz koje potječe majka Dore Pejačević, Erzsébet (Lilla), imala je značajnu ulogu u oblikovanju formativnih godina mlade skladateljice. No, postoji vrlo malo istraživanja povezanih s kulturnom baštinom koju je Dora naslijedila. Loza ove obitelji, iako djelomično dokumentirana iz muzikološkog aspekta, otkriva znatan utjecaj na sposobnosti i senzibilitet Dore Pejačević, do čega se dolazi pomnim istraživanjem onodobnog tiska i arhivskih zapisa. Ti zapisi ističu nasljeđe akademskih, političkih i umjetničkih postignuća povezanih s njezinim porijeklom.

Lilla Vay bila je uključena u razna kulturna događanja i posvetila je velik dio svojega vremena promicanju ciljeva koji su bili u interesu mađarske književnosti i umjetnosti, uz ostale društvene i filantropske aktivnosti. Međutim, nastupala je i kao amaterska glazbenica. Lilla Vay pridavala je znatnu važnost osiguravanju glazbenog obrazovanja svojoj djeci u skladu s naglaskom aristokratskog odgoja na umjetničkom obrazovanju. Njezina djeca sudjelovala su u izvedbama komorne glazbe na raznim društvenim događanjima pokazujući svoje glazbene talente. Károly Noseda, prvi glazbeni učitelj potomaka obitelji Pejačević, bio je duboko osobno povezan s crkvom na Trgu Servita, gdje je Lilla mogla prisustvovati bogoslužju. Noseda je kasnije imao značajnu ulogu u budimpeštanskom glazbenom životu obnašajući funkciju zborovođe u Kraljevskoj operi u Budimpešti i ravnatelja Nacionalnog konzervatorija.

Utjecaj Lille Vay, kao i glazbeno nasljeđe cijele obitelji, vjerojatno se snažno odrazio na glazbene sklonosti mlade Dore Pejačević, njezine braće i sestara. Jasno je da su se glazbene izvedbe Dore Pejačević često spominjale u tisku. Međutim, u tim je napisima bila znatno manje zastupljena u odnosu na svoju majku Lillu.