

TWENTIETH-CENTURY MUSIC AND POLITICS

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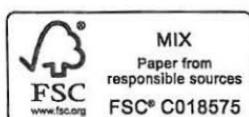
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9	Preserving the Façade of Normal Times: Musical Life in Belgrade under the German Occupation (1941–1944) <i>Melita Milin</i>	155
10	Musical Commemorations in Post-Civil War Spain: Joaquín Rodrigo's <i>Concierto Heroico</i> <i>Eva Moreda Rodríguez</i>	177
11	The Racialization and Ghettoization of Music in the General Government <i>Katarzyna Naliwajek</i>	191
12	'I Only Need the Good Old Budapest': Hungarian Cabaret in Wartime London <i>Florian Scheding</i>	211
13	Irish Nationalism, British Imperialism and the Role of Popular Music <i>Derek B. Scott</i>	231
14	Shostakovich as Film Music Theorist <i>Joan Titus</i>	249
15	Diaspora, Music and Politics: Russian Musical Life in Shanghai during the Interwar Period <i>Hon-Lun Yang</i>	261
	<i>Select Bibliography</i>	279
	<i>Index</i>	287

## Chapter 12

# ‘I Only Need the Good Old Budapest’: Hungarian Cabaret in Wartime London

Florian Scheding

### Introduction

The ascent to power of the proto-fascist Horthy government in Hungary in 1920, followed by the fascist regimes of Mussolini in Italy in 1922, Hitler in Germany in 1933 and Franco in Spain in 1936, led to the displacement of millions of Europeans, a wave ever growing as the Axis powers readied themselves for war. By the end of that war, 27 million persons had been displaced. No history writing can charter such numbers, and none can do justice to the 27 million stories, each of them unique, that form the fabric of this displacement.

Music accompanied the journeys of the displaced, and it sounded their histories. In addressing a very small part of that history in this chapter, I listen intently to the sounds that remain audible through the dense and multiple layers that form its backdrop. My focus is the history of the displacement of the Hungarian political cabaret from its birthplace, Budapest, to London, to which it was brought by those who could not remain in Hungary or, indeed, on the European continent.

I begin by sketching briefly the contours of the history of political cabaret on the stages of Budapest from its beginnings until its effective destruction by the Horthy regime and the German occupational forces on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War. After turning my attention to the Kleine Bühne, the cabaret of the Free German League of Culture, a German émigré organization, I focus on the cabaret of the Hungarian émigré community in wartime London. Before my closing remarks, two areas, the Hungarian section of the BBC and a series of propaganda films for the British government produced by Halas & Batchelor, invite me to consider the traces of the art of cabaret on the one hand, and those of its participants on the other.

### The MC Goes Political: Contours of the Cabaret in Budapest

The beginnings of the art of cabaret lie in Paris in the 1880s. In 1881 *Le Chat Noir* was opened in Montmartre, followed eight years later by the *Moulin Rouge* in La Pigalle, Paris’s red light district. Meanwhile, in 1886 the *Folies Bergère*, which had opened five years earlier as a music-hall venue staging operettas and popular songs,

joined the cabaret craze, combining the variety show of *Le Chat Noir* with music-hall songs and performances by scantily dressed female dancers. At first introduced as a master of ceremonies whose role it was to announce the next act, the *conférencier*, or compère, soon developed into a crucial component of the cabaret. Fuelled by a relaxed nightclub atmosphere where patrons could leave strict social rules at the door and smoke, drink and chat while the shows unfolded, the master of ceremonies would interact with the audience, alluding wittily and spontaneously to their little private scandals in a humorous style rich with double entendres.<sup>1</sup>

Cabaret was not restricted to Paris, and soon after Hungarian poet and writer Endre Nagy had experienced the genre in the French capital, he joined forces with Ernö Condor to open the first cabaret on Hungarian soil, the Fővárosi Cabaret Bonbonnière, on 1 March 1907. Situated on Budapest's Theresienring, the Bonbonnière placed the master of ceremony at the centre of the show. Compared to the Paris cabaret, its Hungarian cousin saw the Parisian *conférencier* promoted to the *konferanszié*. The role changed from that of the announcer with occasional banter with the audience to that of a social observer, commenting with bitter irony yet entertaining humour on the political events of the day. The numbers themselves were either musical songs – a sentimental chanson or an ironic-humorous *kuplé* – or a short dialogue.<sup>2</sup> On the Budapest stage, then, the Parisian variety show had turned political.

In its Hungarian guise, cabaret was rapidly embraced by the urbane Budapest society, and numerous other venues soon opened. Around the same time as the Bonbonnière, Jenő Haltai and compère Franz Molnár founded the Modernes Theater in Andrassy Street, renamed Nagy-Endre Kabarett in 1908 after Nagy had left the Bonbonnière. In 1910 Sándor Faludi opened the Modern Színház with *conférencier* Ferenc Molnar, who was described by László Békeffi as 'technically certainly not the most brilliant, yet an uncommonly witty, perhaps the most witty of Hungarian MCs'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Budapest cabarets were increasingly famed for, and attracted audiences on the basis of, the master of ceremonies. The Nagy-Endre Kabarett even sported Julius Köwary and László Békeffi as double-compère, perhaps the first double act on the comedic theatre stage.

Politics was always present on the stages of the Budapest cabarets, and the Budapest compères acquired increasing political power. Endre Nagy, for example,

<sup>1</sup> For a history of early cabaret, see Harold B. Segel, *Turn-of-the-century Cabaret: Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Cracow, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Zurich*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, and Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret*. London: Studio Vista, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> See John Neubauer (with Robert Pynsent, Vilmos Voigt and Marcel Cornis-Pope), 'Introduction', in Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, eds, *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Volume III: The Making and Remaking of Literary Institutions*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Hans Veigl, *Lachen im Keller von den Budapestern zum Wiener Werkel: Kabarett und Kleinkunst in Wien*, Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1986, p. 64.

deliberately gave his shows in Hungarian, seeking to promote the language in counterpoint to the institutionally dominant German and voicing the striving for Hungarian independence in the late years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Writing in 1959, Peter Halasz called the Budapest cabaret of the years up to the Second World War 'a battlefield of Hungarian intellectual life' and argued that the 'founders of the political cabaret considered their art to be far more than a mere variety show'.<sup>4</sup> Laurence Senelick has even suggested that the cabaret could bring down governments: 'Nagy's group was so influential that when it discredited the government of the time, the cabinet's downfall was attributed to the cabaret'.<sup>5</sup>

If the cabaret as a genre had first moved east from its origins in Paris, it was now the Central and Eastern European shows, spearheaded by the Budapest political cabaret, that influenced stages further west. The particular style of the Budapest cabaret as a specific form of the 'one-man show' conquered the cabaret stages of Vienna and Berlin, especially after the First World War.<sup>6</sup> Led by Endre Nagy, Nikolaus László, Stephan Szekely, Béla Szenes, Alexander Farago and others, this invasion of Austrian and German cabaret stages by Hungarian authors in the interwar years led to socio-cultural exchanges in an environment that, politically, was dominated by the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a plethora of fiercely nationalistic successor-states. Where national borders were springing up, many cabaret artists remained mobile, and collaborations between Budapest- and Vienna-based artists were particularly strong. For example, in 1927 László Békeffi collaborated with Fritz Grünbaum in Vienna, and the Budapest Orpheumgesellschaft in the Vienna district of Leopoldstadt frequently welcomed Sándor Rott, Berta Türk and Géza Steinhardt as guests. A common topic was the portrayal of Jewish life, with Steinhardt, for example, famed for his 'Jüdische Gstanzeln' (Jewish verse-songs; literally 'Jewish stanzas'), in which he highlighted the paradoxical marginalized centrality of the Jewish community: 'Wie die Juden sein gefahren übers rothe Meer / Da warn doch in Pest alle Cafehäuser leer' [As the Jews sailed across the Red Sea / all the cafés in Pest lay empty].<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as Philip Bohlman has argued, 'it was cabaret that opened a new space for the

<sup>4</sup> Peter Halasz, 'The Battlefield of Laughter: Hungary's Political Cabaret', *East Europe: A Monthly Review of East European Affairs* 8/9 (Sept. 1959), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Laurence Senelick, *Cabaret Performance: Sketches, Songs, Monologues, Memoirs*, 2 vols. *Volume II: Europe, 1920–40*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 123–4.

<sup>6</sup> For histories of Viennese and Berlin cabaret, see: Harold B. Segel, *The Vienna Coffeehouse Wits, 1890–1938*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993; Volker Kühn, ed., *Kleinkunststücke*, 5 vols, Weinheim: Quadriga, 1987–1994; and Sigrid Bauschinger, ed., *Literarisches und Politisches Kabarett von 1901 bis 1999*, Tübingen: A. Francke, 2000. *Das Kabarett: 100 Jahre literarische Zeitkritik ... gesprochen, gesungen, gespielt*, Düsseldorf: Econ, 1985, provides an encyclopaedic overview of the history of German cabaret.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Veigl, *Lachen im Keller*, p. 65.

critical encounter between urban Jew and the modernity of the metropole.<sup>8</sup> The multilayered sense of humour that lay in the portrayal of Vienna's and Budapest's socio-political lives and, specifically, of their Jewish communities, thus furthered the development of the political cabaret, of a distinct form of artistic performance, as much as the cabaret itself gave voice to the communities it portrayed.

### 'Don't Worry, They Will Hang': László Békeffi and the Pódium

Budapest, with its large Jewish community, had a new star of the political cabaret in the interwar years. László Békeffi's career had begun just before the First World War, in 1913, at the Ferenczy cabaret. In the midst of Békeffi's rise to fame, the aftermath of the First World War saw Hungary tumble from one catastrophe to the next. The Treaty of Trianon that followed the end of the war and broke up the Austro-Hungarian Empire led to a loss of two-thirds of Hungary's territory. After a Communist coup in 1919 had failed, Admiral Miklós Horthy seized power as regent of Hungary on 1 March 1920. Under Horthy's proto-fascist regime, the frustration that stemmed in part from the loss of what large sections of the population considered Hungary's rightful territories and in part from the trauma of the Communist terror of 1919, increasingly found its catalyst in a profound rise of chauvinist nationalism, xenophobia and, above all, anti-Semitism.

Before this highly charged political background, Békeffi became a national celebrity, first as compère of the cabaret on Andrásy Street, and later, in 1934 and 1935, as *konferanszié* at the Szivárváry [Rainbow], a cabaret with a cast of over 80 that included large-scale ballets and was steeped in folklore. In September 1936 Békeffi opened his own cabaret, Pódium, together with Julius Kövary. Alongside the other 17 cabarets that existed in Budapest between 1916 and 1936, the Pódium mocked the behaviours and attitudes of the city's bourgeois society. In spite of the increasing restrictions of civil liberties by the Horthy regime – above all for the Jewish population – the city's compères continued to satirize political affairs, and, as Laurence Senelick has argued, 'some ministers were disappointed if they were failed to be mocked with any regularity'.<sup>9</sup>

And yet many of the cabaret artists were dancing on a volcano. Hitler's rise to power in 1933 changed German cabaret drastically as freedom of speech was curtailed, and, as the Wehrmacht expanded the Nazis' grasp over Europe, so too did the restriction to cabaret, including in Budapest. Indeed, cabaret presented a natural enemy to the fascist terror, with several cabarets on the political left and numerous Jewish artists on their stages.<sup>10</sup> The Hungarian political cabaret

<sup>8</sup> Philip V. Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> Senelick, *Cabaret Performance*, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of Jewish artists on the European cabaret stage include Arnold Szyfman, Max Reinhardt, Salomo Friedlaender, Rudolf Bernauer, Valeska Gert, Kurt Tucholsky,

had by that point perfected the art of satirizing the regimes of Hitler, Horthy and Mussolini in a style heavy with innuendoes and double meanings that always managed to skim past censorship. In a tense social context marked by fear, the cabaret stages served not only fare that could offer the audience brief relief from the daily reality of political terror. Cabarets were often more effective than a censored and crippled press in transmitting political commentary. László Vadnay, for example, invented the double act of Hacsek and Sajo, the Laurel and Hardy of their day, whose sketches would denounce the expansionist and racial policies of the fascist regimes. In 1939 Békeffi, who, after the death of Nagy in 1938 was considered his successor at the helm of the Hungarian political cabaret, used the stage to condemn the racial purges that had by now become commonplace in fascist Europe. His show *Hand over the Documents* portrays the frantic search of a family for papers reaching back over generations in order to prove their Aryan credentials. While the first openly anti-Semitic Hungarian legislation dates to 1920, the situation for Hungary's Jews worsened drastically as Horthy prepared Hungary to join the German-Italian axis in 1940 in the hope of regaining the lost territories and in a blatant attempt at establishing itself as a third superpower.

On another occasion, in spring 1942, the Pódium's curtain failed to rise. Békeffi appeared on the front of the stage and informed the murmuring audience, 'Don't worry, it won't be long; soon they'll all be hanging the way they should.' After a moment's silence, laughter broke out. The double meaning was clear. Békeffi had been talking about the Nazis.<sup>11</sup> Born in Budapest in 1922, writer Peter Halasz remembered the episode shortly after his migration to the USA in 1956. His memories are instructive and are worth quoting at some length:

The cabaret was much more than a theatrical production; it was journalism at its best, and it required a close relationship between the actors and the audience, and an infallible instinct for determining the city's mood. The cabaret was like a secret radio transmitter operating in full view of the authorities. Békeffi, of course, could not risk making the same remark twice and he constantly sought new ways of defiance. But each joke became famous, and although only a few hundred people could fit into *The Podium*, all of Budapest knew about the 'defective curtain' by the following day, and two days later the entire country was winking and saying, 'Don't worry, they will hang'.<sup>12</sup>

Walter Mehring, Fritz Grünbaum, Julian Tuwim, Konrad Tom, A. G. Alekseev, Friedrich Hollaender, Egon Friedell, Hugo F. Koenigsgarten, Louis Davids, Jíří Voskovec, Peter Hammerschlag and Jura Soyfer. See Senelick, *Cabaret Performance*, pp. 248–50.

<sup>11</sup> The episode is recounted in Halasz, 'The Battlefield of Laughter: Hungary's Political Cabaret', pp. 3–4, and Senelick, *Cabaret Performance*, p. 250. For Békeffi's own account, see his autobiographical *A Száműzött Podium* [The Exiled Podium], Toronto: Continental Book Shop, 1955, pp. 5–8.

<sup>12</sup> Halasz, 'The Battlefield of Laughter: Hungary's Political Cabaret', p. 4.

Three days later Békeffi and his partner, Fritz Grünbaum, were arrested and deported to Dachau concentration camp. Békeffi survived and was freed by American forces in 1945. Grünbaum was less fortunate. He died in the camp in 1941.

### From the Continent to London

Not all potential enemies of the new regimes of terror had stayed in Budapest like Békeffi, of course, or in any other of the Nazi-controlled territories. By the time of Békeffi's arrest, a time framed by Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria in the previous year and the Wehrmacht's invasion of Poland four months later, 80,000 refugees from Continental Europe had escaped to Britain.<sup>13</sup> How many of them were Hungarian is not clear – about half were German – nor do we know for certain how many of them had been cabaret artists prior to their migrations.<sup>14</sup> What we do know is that the new arrivals soon organized themselves and erected numerous support circles.

Publications on any of them are scarce. Only one of them, the Free German League of Culture, has been researched in any meaningful way, and even here, scholarly studies are few.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the fact that the League's papers were transferred to East Berlin soon after the war is partly to blame for this lacuna, as it

<sup>13</sup> Figures such as this one have to be taken with a pinch of salt, as they depend on the method of counting: for example, numbers depend on whether one includes German migrants from before 1933, Austrian migrants from before 1938, etc., and whether those refugees that moved on to other countries, such as the United States, are included. Between September 1939 and April 1940, for example, 5,000 migrants left Britain. In March 1940 the British government identified 73,800 'enemy aliens', that is, immigrants from Austria, Germany and Italy. Even here, classification was inconsistent, with some Hungarians considered Austrian, for example.

<sup>14</sup> Examples of cabaret artists that escaped the Nazis are Kurt Schwitters, who arrived via Norway in England in 1940; Raoul Hausmann, exiled to Barcelona in 1933; Rudolf Bernauer, who arrived in England in 1933; Paul Nikolaus, who fled to Switzerland and committed suicide there in 1933; Kurt Tucholsky, who also committed suicide, in Sweden in 1935; Walter Mehring, who migrated to Paris in 1942 and eventually, in 1949, to New York; Kurt Robitschek, who also migrated to New York; Max Reinhardt, Bertolt Brecht, László Vadnay and Friedrich Hollaender, who spent some or all of the war years in Hollywood; and Hugo F. Koenigsgarten, who came to London in 1938.

<sup>15</sup> There does exist a book-length study, published in September 2010, over 70 years after the League's foundation: Charmian Brinson and Richard Dove, *Politics by Other Means: The Free German League of Culture in London 1939–1946*, London: Valentine-Mitchell, 2010. The volume is an expanded version of a book chapter by the same authors, 'The Continuation of Politics by Other Means: The Freie Deutsche Kulturbund in London, 1939–1946', in Anthony Grenville and Andrea Reiter, eds, *"I didn't want to float; I wanted to belong to something." Refugee Organizations in Britain, 1933–1945*, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies 10, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008, pp. 1–25.

effectively put them out of reach for Western researchers. And yet even in former East German scholarship, only very little was written on the League. What few writings there are, such as an article by Ulla Hahn from 1977, present the League through the socialist lens, as a cell of Communist freedom fighters preparing in exile the socialist post-war society, and do not provide a useful historical account or discussion.<sup>16</sup>

### Promoting the Third Front: The Free German League of Culture and the *Kleines Theatre*

They are advancing, they are advancing  
with angry thunder as they fly.  
They are advancing, they are advancing  
Nothing can stop their victorious march.  
We wait, we hope and see:  
We do not stand alone in time of need.  
We see: the future is ours,  
If we free ourselves in unity.

They are advancing, they are advancing –  
They will free mankind on earth.  
From the East – they are advancing  
From the West – they are advancing:  
Let us be allies and fighters of freedom.  
The fervour is glowing,  
The call has been heard:  
We are closing ranks,  
To rebuild the world in the fight for freedom,  
To finally be human in glory.  
We keep up the torch in danger and want –  
The Third Front will join up with your Second Front!<sup>17</sup>

Formed in late 1938 or early 1939 in London, the League's eventual membership number of 1,500 makes it the second-largest refugee organization of the time, following the Austrian Centre, with a membership of about 3,000. Moreover, as

<sup>16</sup> Ulla Hahn, 'Der Freie Deutsche Kulturbund in Großbritannien: Eine Skizze seiner Geschichte', in Lutz Winckler, ed., *Antifaschistische Literatur: Programme, Autoren, Werke*, Kronberg: Scriptor, vol. 2, 1997, pp. 131–95.

<sup>17</sup> No. 13 from *Mr Gulliver Goes to School* (premiere London, 28 Nov. 1942). Text: Heinrich Fischer and Egon Larsen / Music: Allan Gray. The last two lines are in English in the German original. My translation.

entry to the League was not restricted to Germans, members of many Continental European émigré communities visited the League or participated in its activities.

The League's pronounced goal was to promote an image of German culture in opposition to Hitler, to portray a better Germany. Crucially, however, it was not the avant-garde that was employed to serve this goal. In the papers of the Free German League of Culture I have found only seven concerts with programmes including contemporary avant-garde compositions, for example.<sup>18</sup> Rather than endorsing what Hitler was banning as 'degenerate music' the main efforts of the League's theatre and music sections with regard to scale of organization, size of venues and cost of production went into the staging of cabarets.<sup>19</sup>

The first programme, *Going, Going – Gong!*, staged in 1939, was a resounding success with the émigré audience, attracting nearly 5,000 visitors during the first three weeks, but ending up with a financial deficit. Later productions proved more viable. Even at the height of the war, in 1942, *4 & 20 Black Sheep*, the League's cabaret, staged five new cabaret productions at its venue, the Kleine Bühne, including the most successful programme, *Mr Gulliver Goes to School*, which opened in November 1942 and ran for nine months. The composers of the cabaret songs, Mischa Spoliansky, Hans May, André Asriel, Allan Gray and the Head of the League's Music Section, Ernst Hermann Meyer, fulfilled a crucial role. Music not only made the song lyrics more memorable. It also had the power to bring together the various fractions of a politically highly disparate émigré community united only in their fate of being Hitler's enemies. The composers were all too aware of their roles. In 1941 Meyer voiced explicitly the political aspect of the cabaret's songs:

The use of music in the battle for freedom is as old as the battle itself. Ever since mankind began to fight for human rights, human progress and happiness, against tyrants, homebred and foreign, people were roused by singing. The singing of the songs of liberty has always assisted those who have been in this struggle. ... Singing, and again singing has played its part in the growth of the great Labour movements of this century and the one before. ... It plays its part now, in the struggle of the free countries against the dark forces of destruction.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Jutta Raab Hansen has found the same number. See her book *NS-verfolgte Musiker in England: Spuren deutscher und österreichischer Flüchtlinge in der britischen Musikkultur*, Hamburg: von Bockel, 1996, p. 286.

<sup>19</sup> Unlike in the case of the League more generally, there are several publications dedicated to the League's cabaret programmes. See, for example, Reinhard Hippen, *Satire gegen Hitler: Kabarett im Exil*, Zurich: Pendo-Verlag, 1986, pp. 107–23; Hugh Rorrison, 'German Theatre and Cabaret in London, 1939–45', in Günther Berghaus, ed., *Theatre and Film in Exile: German Artists in Britain, 1933–1945*, Oxford: Berg, 1989, pp. 47–77 and Jörg Thunecke, "Das hübscheste sind die Lieder": Allan Gray's Contribution to the FDKB Revue *Mr Gulliver Goes to School*, in Berghaus, *Theatre and Film in Exile*, pp. 79–97.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Hermann Meyer, 'The Call to Freedom', *Freie Deutsche Kultur*, Oct. 1941.

As quotes such as this one show, the political aim of the cabaret *4 & 20 Black Sheep* was at least twofold in nature. While anti-fascist, it also sought to promote the beliefs of the powerful Communist core of the League. The British authorities regarded any open political proclamations by émigrés with suspicion and both MI5 and Special Branch carried out surveillance operations of the League.<sup>21</sup> In the summer of 1940 the government's general paranoia regarding émigrés resulted in the internment of approximately 27,000 refugees.<sup>22</sup> Before this background, the cabaret provided the ideal platform to be active politically in a light-hearted and relaxed setting.

### Unity through Laughter: The Londoni Pódium

#### I.

After five years I have finally understood,  
I swear,  
That Budapest is closer to my heart than London.  
I tried everything in my power, I did:  
To become a cold Lord,  
Well my God, it did not happen.  
Because my blood, it seems, is not insular, that of an islander:  
It is from the Boulevard and the banks of the Danube and a little from the Városliget [Budapest's city park] ...

#### Refrain

I only need the good, old Budapest,  
– I am not a proud Celtic colonist! –  
The Nagykörút Boulevard is romantic enough for me  
and the Kossuth Lajos Street is sufficiently dewy.  
I only need the good, old Budapest,  
And not the proud, wealthy England,  
Which might have a worldwide empire,  
But what's it worth without the Hangli [Budapest restaurant]?

#### II.

I confess that I hate

<sup>21</sup> See Brinson and Dove, *Politics by Other Means*, pp. 29–31.

<sup>22</sup> Colin Holmes estimates a figure of 22,000 German and Austrian internees plus 4,300 Italians ('British Government Policy towards Wartime Refugees' in Martin Conway and José Gotovitch, eds, *Europe in Exile: European Exile Communities in Britain, 1940–1945*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001, p. 20) and Peter and Leni Gillman quote a total number of 27,200 ('Collar the Lot!' How Britain Interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees, London: Quartet Books, 1980, p. 173).

beans on toast,  
And I refuse to drink tea,  
Only coffee with froth.  
I confess that I am still  
indignant at times  
When I hear 'lovely day'  
About a hundred times a day.  
I confess it still upsets me, and of course I am not indifferent  
if I am only referred to by: – 'you are a bloody alien ...'

## III.

Why is my bathroom as cold  
as the Vác prison?  
Why is there no double-glazing  
in my bedroom and dining room?  
No! I do not wear woollen trousers  
I do not catch little fish  
And I do not necessarily adore  
every errant cat.  
Beautiful Budapest, there is no more beautiful home in the entire world!  
And I give thanks to God that I am not at home.

*Refrain*

I am fed up with the dear Budapest,  
I wish I were a proud Celtic colonist!  
Hampstead is romantic enough for me,  
Piccadilly Circus is sufficiently dewy!  
I am fed up with the dear Budapest / She might have 660 Hangli,  
As I am thinking about it now.. but still..  
Sod it.. England will do for me.<sup>23</sup>

Precious little has been written about cabaret outside the Free German League of Culture, with a few writers perusing some of the activities of the Laterndl, the cabaret stage of the London-based Austrian Centre.<sup>24</sup> This lack of scholarly literature does not mean, of course, that there was no other cabaret. Other exiled

<sup>23</sup> 'Nekem csak a drága öreg Budapest kell' (premiere London, 13 May 1944). Text: György Mikes / Music: Mátyás Seiber. My thanks go to Ágota Székely and Mark Cornwall who helped me with the translation.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Hippen, *Satire gegen Hitler*, pp. 126–39; Rorrison, 'German Theatre and Cabaret in London, 1939–45', pp. 51–8; Marion Berghahn, *Continental Britons: German-Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany*, Oxford: Berg, 1988, p. 152, and Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler Émigrés: The Cultural Impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism*, London: Pimlico, 2003, pp. 135–6.

communities gathered in organizations comparable to the Free German League of Culture, like the Austrian Centre. Even if not all of them shared the League's Communist outlook, cabaret took centre stage in the activities of the émigré organizations right from the start. The Hungarian émigré community was no exception. And yet, if I say that the history of Hungarian exile cabaret in London is something of a lost treasure, this is more than a hollow phrase. Virtually nothing has been published on the musical activities of the various organizations founded by Hungarian refugees to represent and serve the needs of the Hungarian community in London. This dearth of secondary sources notwithstanding, primary source materials do exist, and they offer a fascinating insight into a chapter of political culture on British soil that may now be largely forgotten, but that provides tantalizing glimpses of the juncture between politics and cultural expression, between exile, displacement and a country at war.<sup>25</sup>

I start by introducing two protagonists, György Mikes and Mátyás Seiber. Born in 1912 in Siklós, Hungary, Mikes studied law and received his doctorate in Budapest University. In 1938 he travelled as a journalist to London as a correspondent to cover the Munich crisis. He had planned to stay no more than two weeks, but, with reports of anti-Semitic purges on the rise, decided not to return to Hungary, and ended up becoming a naturalized British citizen. Like Mikes, a majority of the Hungarian émigré community consisted of Hungarian Jews. As with their German counterparts, many of them moved to London's north-west, particularly Belsize Park, Swiss Cottage, Hampstead, Kilburn and Golders Green, areas that were highly popular with exiled European intellectuals. András Bán mentions Lajos Bíró, Alexander Korda, György Tarján, Thomas Balogh, József Bató and Karl Mannheim.<sup>26</sup> Others could be added, such as Mátyás Seiber.

Seben years Mikes's senior, Budapest-born Seiber studied composition with Zoltán Kodály. Following Horthy's takeover, Seiber left Budapest to settle in Frankfurt where he accepted a professorship in jazz at the prestigious Hoch Konservatorium. There, Seiber's compositional development marks him as a composer of the avant-garde, making him one of the first to employ dodecaphony

<sup>25</sup> The two main archival sources for the Londoni Pódium are the papers of Mátyás Seiber, held by the British Library (especially shelf marks add.58126 and add.62826 through add.62828) and the booklet *Pont ugye mint az angolok: A Londoni Pódium kiskönyve* [Just Like the English: The Booklet of the London Pódium], self-published by the Londoni Pódium in 1945, and available in the British Library. The archival research on the Free German League of Culture has been done in the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, and the Deutsches Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives), Berlin. The material for the section on the BBC stems from the BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC) in Caversham, Reading, Berkshire, among them a file on Mátyás Seiber (RCont1 Matyas Seiber—Composer [1941–1962]), and a file on émigré composers generally (RCont1 27/3/5—Music General—Alien Composers—File 5: 1945). Several of the *Charley* films are available on YouTube.

<sup>26</sup> András Bán, *Hungarian–British Diplomacy, 1938–1941: The Attempts to Maintain Relations*, trans. Tim Wilkinson, London: Frank Cass, 2004, p. 181.

outside Schoenberg's immediate circle. In 1933 the Nazi administration dismissed Seiber in an act of ethnic cleansing. Seiber left Frankfurt and migrated to London in 1935, where he eventually established a reputation for himself as composer, conductor, and one of the country's most renowned composition teachers.

The first collaboration of Mikes and Seiber resulted in a blend of cabaret and operetta, *A Palágyi Pékek* [The Bakers of Palágy]. Premiered in 1942, the very *raison d'être* of *A Palágyi Pékek* was political. A total of three Hungarian émigré movements represented different facets of political opposition to fascism. The Nagybritánniai Szabad Magyarok Egyesületében [Association of Free Hungarians in Great Britain], of which Mikes was part, which occupied the Szabad Magyar Ház [Free Hungarian House] in London's Manchester Square, represented the anti-fascist bourgeoisie. A second, headed by the former Hungarian Prime Minister and President Count Mihály Károlyi, stood for the non-Communist left. Based at Pembridge Square in London and with Zoltán Radó as President, the third, the Londoni Magyar Klub [Hungarian Club in London] was Communist. The political differences appeared too substantial to bridge, and the three communities seemed unable to unite. *A Palágyi Pékek* parodied this discord amongst the fractious Hungarian émigré community: three bakers in the imaginary village of Palágy are engaged in wild rivalry. So great is their competition that, rather than uniting, the three of them start quarrelling and fighting, and end up killing one another on stage. Dying, they utter under their last breath, 'We have, at last, united, in the bosom of Abraham.' It is difficult to assess what role the cabaret played in what happened next, but following the performance, the three movements formed a super-organization, the Angliai Magyar Tanácsnak [Hungarian Council in England]. To adopt Pál Ignatius' words, 'Hungarian poetry is essentially political. ... It fell to the man of letters, and particularly to the poet, to say what the man of action was unable or reluctant to express.'<sup>27</sup>

Motivated by the success of *A Palágyi Pékek*, the Hungarian émigré societies decided to set up their own cabaret, which staged performances of four cabaret programmes between 1943 and 1945 in front of an audience totalling about a thousand Hungarian exiles. Alongside pre-existing texts by László Békeffy, Frigyes Karinthy, Tamás Emőd, Endre Havas and Jenő Heltai, and songs by Endre Ady and Béla Reinitz, most songs were co-productions by Seiber and Mikes, with Seiber also playing the piano during performances. A cast of able actors including Etelka Dán, János Strasser, Mária Széchy, Frida Singer and György Sándor ensured the cabaret's popularity, while song titles such as 'Nekum csak a drága, öreg Budapest kell' [I only need the good, old Budapest] parodied the nostalgia harboured by large parts of the émigré community. Continuing the line of support for the anti-fascist cause, the cabaret variously dedicated its profits to the Free Hungarian House, the Hungarian Club in London and the Hungarian Council in England.

Following *A Palágyi Pékek*, a second larger-scale work was *Balaton*, premiered in 1944 in London's Royal College of Music. If the former had mocked the

disagreements of the Hungarian émigrés in London, *Balaton* left British shores and satirized the political situation in Hungary. *Balaton*, the plot's protagonist rather than the lake of the same name, wanders through wartime Budapest and declares, 'It is too hot in Africa.' Two years earlier, the Allied forces had won decisive battles in El Alamein. Alarmed by the covert meaning of the phrase, *Balaton* is arrested and abused by prosecutor, judge and even his own lawyer. Suddenly, it emerges that he is related to a government minister. Everything changes, he is acquitted and the judge invites him for lunch.

The name chosen for the cabaret of the Hungarian community is instructive. Named Londoni Pódium, its participants sought to construct a line of continuity and tradition to László Békeffy's original Pódium. Indeed, the first programme, which premiered in July 1943, was dedicated to Békeffy, with subsequent shows also charting masters of the Hungarian political cabaret as dedicatees. Opening in October 1943, the second programme celebrated the memory of Frigyes Karinthy, who had died of a brain tumour in 1938, while the third was dedicated to composer Béla Reinitz, an ardent supporter of Bartók who had set to music many of the poems of Endre Ady. The fourth programme was given in memory of Endre Nagy, founder of the Bonbonnière.

Journalist and writer Pál Ignatius, who had arrived in London during the winter of 1938–39, acted as the Londoni Pódium's compère. Writing in 1945, Ignatius makes the link between the London and the Budapest Pódium explicit, highlighting the defiance and resistance present in the laughter of the political cabaret:

The Londoni Pódium sprung in the neighbourhood of restaurants of clubs. ... There are no statistics about how many times the food stuck in the throats of those hundreds and hundreds who gathered by common sense, instruction, fate, intention or opportunity in wartime London when they remembered their parents, brothers and sisters who might have been massacred by the German invaders and Hungarian collaborators in that very moment; but you cannot live without eating, and everyone only does a favour to their enemy by spoiling their own appetite. The main character of the Londoni Pódium, the audience, did not do this favour to the Nazis by spoiling their own appetite for a good laugh. There was sense in the laughter; there was happiness, sometimes sentimentality, sometimes agreement, sometimes opposition and, fortunately, hatred. It was the laughter of the hiding exiled, today's *kuruc* [Hungarian anti-Habsburg rebels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries], who would betray his comrade if he stopped hating those who corrupt their first fellow countryman into hitting a man, expatriate the second, massacre the third and make the fourth and the fifth suffer imprisonment. The Hungarians put chains on their own feet, when they imprisoned the leader and soul of the Budapest Pódium, László Békeffy. He was the person who could laugh and made people laugh in such a way that the GESTAPO and its Hungarian henchmen would have their flesh creep. Since then, even the opposition that was hidden in the laugh was numbed in Hungary.

<sup>27</sup> Pál Ignatius, *Hungary*, London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1972, pp. 309–10.

But those who laughed here with us in this free land preserved the voice of a more human Hungary.<sup>28</sup>

### Legacies of Hungarian Cabaret in England

Does any of this really matter? Did the exile cabarets exert any influence beyond the confined spaces in which they were performed? Some authors have doubted this. Daniel Snowman has suggested that the cabaret stages attracted only 'occasional visitors from the wider theatrical world, including the more adventurous critics'.<sup>29</sup> And Marion Berghahn has even argued that the isolation of the exile cabarets from wider society was so overwhelming that it led to 'the ultimate death of the political cabaret' on British soil.<sup>30</sup>

While a direct and immediate impact of exile cabaret on British soil does indeed seem intangible, I would still argue that the skills as well as the networks established in and around institutions such as the Londoni Pódium manifested themselves outside of the direct sphere of the theatre stage. Perhaps an obvious point is György Mikes's success with his satiric guide for foreigners, *How to Be an Alien*, published first in 1946 by André Deutsch – another émigré from Budapest – which soon became a bestseller among the British. The very short chapter on 'Sex' might as well have been a remark by a master of ceremonies on the cabaret stage and, with the omission of the indefinite article, has the flavour of a non-English native speaker: 'Continental people have sex life; the English have hot-water bottles'.<sup>31</sup>

Further, as András Bán has remarked, 'perhaps even more remarkable than the impact of Hungarian literature was the impact that Hungarian émigrés themselves had on Britain'.<sup>32</sup> In the following two sections, I will focus on two such lines of impact. The first is the 'Hungarian connection' at the BBC; the second concerns the influence of Hungarian émigrés on a chapter in the history of British film.

#### *The BBC and the Hungarian Service*

The influence of the Hungarian refugees was maybe greatest in the Overseas Service of the BBC, especially in the European programmes, propaganda stations which were, after all, aimed at the countries they had come from. Several of the Hungarian émigrés on the payroll of the BBC were also active in the Londoni Pódium. Like György Tarján, a former actor of the National Theatre in Budapest

<sup>28</sup> *Pont Ugye Mint Az Angolok ... A Londoni Pódium Kiskönyve*, London, 1945, p. 5. My thanks go to Szilvia Boechat who helped me with the translation.

<sup>29</sup> Snowman, *The Hitler Émigrés*, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, p. 152.

<sup>31</sup> György Mikes, *How to Be an Alien*, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 35. Originally published in London by André Deutsch in 1946.

<sup>32</sup> Bán, *Hungarian-British Diplomacy*, p. 176.

and the Londoni Pódium's 'director, main artist, ticket seller, chair organizer, piano mover, costume organizer, cleaner and leaflet designer',<sup>33</sup> George Mikes started working for the BBC's Hungarian Service from 1939 onward, interrupted only by his internment as an enemy alien on the Isle of Man in 1940. Pál Ignotus worked for the BBC's Hungarian Service from 1940 onward, first as a translator and typist, later as programme reviewer. Journalist András Révai, who had come to London in 1935, was not on the actual Londoni Pódium team. As co-founder in 1941 of the Association of Free Hungarians in Great Britain, of which he became president in 1943, however, he was at least indirectly responsible for the first Mikes–Seiber collaboration, *A Palágyi Pékek*, and the subsequent foundation of the Londoni Pódium. From 1942, he worked as a commentator for the Hungarian service.<sup>34</sup>

The composer of the Londoni Pódium, Mátyás Seiber, belonged to a group of émigrés whose abilities as musicologists, musicians, composers and conductors were well respected at the BBC. From 1943 onwards, Seiber frequently gave talks in English, German and Hungarian, mostly on Bartók, Kodály and Schoenberg, both on the European and Home Services, and after the war he composed and conducted incidental music for over 30 radio plays for the Home Service and Third Programme.

Given the BBC's willingness to employ refugees, and the Corporation's respect for abilities such as Seiber's as musicologist, musician and conductor, the composers among the émigrés hoped that their works might be broadcast, too. With London's concert circuit suffering from wartime restrictions, the radio could provide the platform the émigré composers needed to become better known to a wider public and, hence, improve their chances of finding work and facilitate their integration. The Corporation's role was ambiguous, however. In July 1940 the BBC internally and confidentially blacklisted over three hundred Austrian- and German-born composers. Strikingly, about a quarter of them were émigrés and, more absurdly still, some of them were even employed by the Corporation, such as Berthold Goldschmidt.<sup>35</sup> Even those émigrés that were not banned – Seiber among them – had little hope of having their music aired; this included composers on the BBC's payroll. Music by Walter Goehr, Ernst Hermann Meyer, Franz Reizenstein, Artur Willner and Leo Wumser, for example, was rejected for broadcast.

Seiber's case highlights the particular absurdity of the Corporation's dealings with émigré composers. His name was not added to the list of banned alien composers and his Second String Quartet had been performed at the 1941 International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) festival in New York as Britain's entry, co-representing the country alongside Benjamin Britten's *Les Illuminations*. As such, Seiber expected the BBC to broadcast the quartet. Yet, while the BBC aired *Les Illuminations*, the BBC panel responsible for selecting

<sup>33</sup> *Pont Ugye Mint Az Angolok*, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> Other names include writers László Héthelyi, Pál Tábori, Ferenc Körmendi and Jolán Földes, and lawyer Andrew Martin (Endre Neugröschl). See Bán, *Hungarian-British Diplomacy*, pp. 176–81.

<sup>35</sup> See Hansen, *NS-verfolgte Musiker in England*, p. 197.

music for broadcasts rejected the quartet. Perhaps more poignantly, in June 1943, the panel also rejected Seiber's *Serenade* for wind sextet for broadcast on the Home Service. Ironically, the Hungarian Service had included the same work in a programme just three months earlier. If nothing else, this case points, on the one hand, at the inconsistencies within the Corporation while, on the other, highlighting the freedom of programming enjoyed by the BBC's Hungarian Service.

Cabaret, again, closes the circle. While reluctant to provide a platform for more serious works, the BBC did, conversely, record and broadcast a cabaret show of the Londoni Pódium. György Mikes has reported that *Balaton* was aired during the war by the BBC and, after the end of the war, even made it to Budapest. This return of musical cabaret, however, was itself marred tragicomically by the beginning of the cold war:

The broadcast was arranged during the short liberal era of post-war Hungary but by the time the records got to Budapest, Rákosi's takeover was in full swing, so Hungarians were not to be reminded that Britain, too, had played a part in winning the war. They did not actually reject the agreement to broadcast *Balaton*, but it was put out at 6 o'clock in the morning.<sup>36</sup>

#### *From Stage to Silver Screen, from Pódium to Charley*

As in the case of the BBC, the impact of the cabaret on the next example I present here may not be overt. And yet, the skill of selling a political story in an entertaining, humorous way, perfected on the cabaret stage and re-sharpened for the BBC's European services, led to Hungarian émigrés exerting an influence on British socio-political life.

In 1948 Clement Attlee's newly elected Labour government set into action a comprehensive set of social reforms, the major one being the introduction of a national health service, providing free and universal health care from cradle to grave. Not everyone embraced the reforms with open arms. For example, in the first decade after its introduction, 3,500 British doctors emigrated to Canada, the USA and elsewhere because they were unwilling to participate in the new health service.<sup>37</sup> The government's response was propaganda. Filmmakers were commissioned to advertise the changes in short clips. Many of the people commissioned to make these propaganda films were migrants who had come to Britain during the 1930s.

Commissioned by the Central Office of Information, Joy Batchelor and her partner, Hungarian-born producer and director, John Halas, of the production firm Halas & Batchelor, joined forces with Seiber to run a series of eight 10-minute

<sup>36</sup> György Mikes, *How to Be Seventy: An Autobiography*, London: Deutsch, 1982, p. 145.

<sup>37</sup> See Emma L. Jones and Stephanie J. Snow, *Against the Odds: Black and Minority Ethnic Clinicians and Manchester, 1948 to 2009*, Manchester: Carnegie, 2010, pp. 12–13.

films.<sup>38</sup> Released from 1948 onward, all of them are based around the cartoon character Charley, an 'everyman' through whose eyes British audiences could learn about the various reforms. Charley explores post-war Britain on his bike, forming a double act with the narrator to comment on social developments. The films show Charley shedding his initial hesitations about political change and promoting the reforms instead. Halas & Batchelor mastered the technique of packaging a complex political message of a daunting scale into a focused, humorous and seemingly light-hearted film narrative. The music was essential to the success of the Charley films. Charley's own theme tune and opening titles, in which he would ride across the screen on his bicycle, writing out his name, was used in each of the films. And if the connection between the film-makers and the art of the cabaret might seem far-fetched, the theme tune evidences the connection. It closely resembles the first number of the cabaret programme *Balaton*.

Through media and with cultural means, the migrants thus participated in the political debates of the time through their creativity, hence rendering their art a political act. Whether they were necessarily supportive of Attlee's reforms on a private level is a different matter. But their individual attitudes are not germane to the point I am trying to make. Instead, I would argue that émigré composers and film-makers like Seiber and Halas played an intrinsic part in the history of what were perhaps the most crucial social-political reforms on British soil since the Second World War. And arguably, Seiber, for example, would have composed his catchy theme tune for the Charley films differently had he not also written the songs for the *Balaton* programme of the Londoni Pódium.

Of course, the émigrés worked not only in the production of propaganda films. The large number of European and, particularly, Hungarian exiles in British film has led Hungarian émigré Miklós Rózsa to suggest jokingly that, during the Second World War and in the first years following the war, 'it was not enough to be talented, you had to be Hungarian as well' to be employed at the Denham Film Studios, for example. In his autobiography, Rózsa furthermore remembers a popular joke at the time that the three Union Jacks hoisted at the Denham studios stood for each one of the three British, non-Hungarian employees working on the premises.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Born János Halasz in Budapest in 1912, he arrived in London in 1936. In 1940 he founded the production company Halas & Batchelor, in partnership with the British animator and scriptwriter Joy Batchelor, whom he later married. The company was immensely successful, particularly with short propaganda films such as the Charley series made during and after the war for the British government, and achieved notable success with the feature-length cartoon *Animal Farm*, for which Seiber also wrote the score. See Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 153–4, and Vivien Halas and Paul Wells, eds, *Halas & Batchelor Cartoons: An Animated History*, London: Southbank Publishing, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Miklós Rózsa, *Double Life*, Tunbridge Wells: Baton Press, 1982, p. 70. For the impact of European émigrés on British film during the Second World War see, for example,

'A little foreign blood', as György Mikes commented, 'is almost essential to become a really great British film producer.'<sup>40</sup> Besides influential Continental directors and producers that increasingly dominated the British film industry in the 1930s (Alexander [Sándor] Korda, Max Schach, Gabriel Pascal, Emeric [Imre] Pressburger, Friedrich Feher, Lajos Bíró and Berthold Viertel spring to mind), European émigré composers such as Seiber, Mischa Spoliansky (alias Allan Gray), Walter Goehr, Hans May and Ernst Hermann Meyer, left their stamp on the history of British film music. With the exception of Goehr, all of them had written for the cabaret stage during the Second World War. Indeed, Erik Levi suggests that 'the greatest achievements of immigrated composers lay ... in their music for films'.<sup>41</sup> And András Bán has considered the influence of Hungarian émigrés on British film to have had diplomatic dimensions, as an inclusion on their story in his book on Hungarian-British diplomacy between 1938 and 1941 suggests.<sup>42</sup>

### Conclusion

The rise of fascism in Europe during the 1930s led to the displacement and forced migration of large numbers of creative artists. In their new locations, the migrants soon established networks of communication, information and creativity. In this chapter, I have visited two cabaret stages by émigré communities in London that were at the centre of their networks. More existed. In the austere climate of war, and in the face of a blackout that severely restricted cultural activities, hundreds of cabaret performances entertained and provided welcome relief for audiences totalling thousands. Given their strong Continental European character and historical connotations, the cabarets also played with desires for homesickness and nostalgia. As Adorno put it in an inimitable one-liner, 'In the memory of emigration, every German venison roast tastes as if it was freshly felled by the Freischütz'.<sup>43</sup>

In terms of content, certain topics and themes predominated: travel and movement across borders including language and communication problems, as well as wider political issues – especially the fight against fascism. In this respect, cabaret performances linked micro- and macro-histories and embedded everyday experiences within wider socio-political commentaries. The art on the cabaret

Kevin Gough-Yates, *Somewhere in England: British Cinema and Exile*, London: IB Tauris, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Mikes, *How to Be an Alien*, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Erik Levi, 'Musik und Musiker im englischen Exil' in Horst Weber, ed., *Musik in der Emigration 1933–1945: Verfolgung, Vertreibung, Rückwirkung*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994, pp. 202–3. See also Jan Swynnroe, *The Best Years of British Film Music: 1936–1958*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002, pp. 158–72.

<sup>42</sup> See Bán, *Hungarian–British Diplomacy*, p. 176.

<sup>43</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1951, p. 78.

stage abandoned perceived divisions of media, as well as transcending borders between high and low. Diasporic music-making on the cabaret stage can therefore act as a lens through which to rethink the ways in which migration and its popular creative manifestations challenge grand narratives, especially those that are rooted in fixed conceptions of national identity. Mirroring the mobilities of the migrants themselves, diasporic networks often proved insecure and temporary. Creative efforts were marked as ephemeral and were dependent on collaboration and exchange rather than on single, autonomous authorship. With its 'fast-moving', small-scale and hybrid forms, designed as components of performative artworks and at the same time as consumable cultural products, the cabaret as a genre was particularly suited to the mobility of the migrant,

Stories like the ones I recount in this chapter may not appear to have any impact upon music's grand narratives. Despite a considerable creative output and a socio-cultural significance, musical cabaret and entertainment among émigré communities are an almost entirely unresearched topic, certainly in the case of Hungarian cabaret in wartime London. The hybrid and intermedial nature of these works does not fit easily within clearly demarcated disciplinary boundaries. And yet, to paraphrase Jim Samson, 'little stories have a way of constantly taking detours from the simple characterizations offered by grand narratives. They allow us to see around the edges of the grand narratives, lighting them up in various ways; they can instantiate them, critique them, revise them'.<sup>44</sup> All of my 'little stories' are framed by tense political contexts: the physical displacement of large numbers of people on the one hand, and the witty engagement with the political everyday, displacing it from the outside world onto the looking glass that is the stage, on the other. In so doing, the exile cabarets in London indeed remind us of Hannah Arendt's phrase 'refugees ... represent the vanguard of their peoples',<sup>45</sup> as they take an active aesthetic-political stance within the context of their time.

In exploring cabarets like the *Londoni Pódium*, I not only recognize a poignant piece of cultural heritage. Listening to the exile cabarets of wartime London also makes audible the inherent transnational and ephemeral character of the work of the migrant artists and the processes of migration in terms of creativity, constructive challenges, and the opening to new worlds. The cabaret might be underexplored. But it should be researched, as it carries the characteristics of migration and mobility. With numbers of refugees in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries having exceeded those of any previous point in history, the migrant has turned from a figure on the fringe to a mobile player at the epicentre of our global world, an inextricable part of the very fabric of our society. Their highly distinctive voices, sounds, and idioms not only reflect their specific identities.

<sup>44</sup> Jim Samson, 'Little Stories from the Balkans', in Erik Levi and Florian Scheding, eds, *Music and Displacement: Diasporas, Mobilities and Dislocations in Europe and Beyond* (Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities 10), Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp. 181–95.

<sup>45</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', *Menorah Journal* 31 (1943), p. 77.

They also impact upon the societies in which they are performed, are influenced by them, constantly interrogating and challenging the experience and perceived certainty of the everyday, shifting seamlessly between Self and Other. For those who listen attentively, the music of the cabaret stage can sound the diversities and multi-layered riches that are a hallmark of migration.