

A WORLD RE-CREATED

THE LIFE OF THE HUNGARIAN BALLET DANCER, DANCE EDUCATOR, AND CHOREOGRAPHER KALMAN SOLYMOSSY IN AUSTRALIAN EMIGRATION

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Abstract

After fleeing Hungary due to his participation in the 1956 revolution, Kalman Solymossy left behind his renowned status as a dancer of the Budapest Opera House and had to start his life from scratch. Dance held a central position in Solymossy's life, whatever the circumstances. Although there was no demand for dancers when he arrived in Australia, his everlasting optimism, endurance and courage helped him stick to the path he had chosen, leading him to establish the largest ballet school of his time in Australia while educating and supporting dancers, many of whom later chose dance as their profession. With his choreography and his presence on TV, Solymossy significantly contributed to the cultural life of Australia and its Hungarian community. The present article is based on primary, secondary and tertiary sources, relying mainly on convenience sampling of the available resources accessed through both Australian and Hungarian online archives. This study presents a critical period in Solymossy's influential career and highlights a number of uncertain aspects of his life, topics which have so far been sparsely examined.

Keywords: choreographer, dance educator, Australia, classical ballet

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite sharing the stage at the Budapest Opera House with renowned names such as Dóra Csinády, Imre Eck, Éva Éhn, Viktor Fülöp, Zsuzsa Kun, Gabriella Lakatos, János Ősi, and Viktor Róna, Kalman Solymossy's name is hardly ever mentioned, except for in the cast lists of works performed in the Opera House, where he was a second soloist between 1950–1956 [MTVA Archívum (*Kultúra - Balett - Solymossy Kálmán*, n.d.) and Opera DIGItár (n.d.)]. As most of his career was spent far away from Hungary, data related to his work after 1956 is mostly found in distant and sometimes subjective sources. It is no wonder that one might be sceptical about how authentic this loose collection of information is; however, to gain as complete of a picture as possible, all the available fragments and recollections must be

investigated due to the shortage of references to Solymossy in Hungarian textual, audio and video databases. Although his dancing career was well documented up to 1956 – see, for example, the records of Arcanum Digitheca (Arcanum Digitális Tudománytár, 1989) and Opera DIGItár (n.d.) – because of his participation in the events of the 1956 revolution (*On This Day*, 2020; Mrongovius, 2014; Tanka & Balás, 2005, 2009), the forcibly displaced artist was dishonourably neglected by the public media and his fellow professionals for decades and was essentially erased from the public consciousness. Considering this, Kürti’s (2018, translated by Author) words are particularly relevant: “the biggest fault of the Hungarian dance history research is that it uncritically lists untested assumptions as facts, without any proof and thorough analysis.” Although Kürti’s observation referred to early sources of dance research, the attempt to shed light on Kalman Solymossy’s career is also characterized by a certain degree of groping in the mist. His career as a ballet school founder, ballet master and dance educator is completely missing from the Hungarian records – see the MTVA Archívum (*Kultúra - Balett - Solymossy Kálmán*, n.d.) and Opera DIGItár (n.d.). Only his role in the *Austrian Chamber Ballet* (a brief two-year period after fleeing Hungary before migrating to Australia) and his role as the head of Australian Hungarian Television (a program broadcast once every two weeks for thirty minutes – Kurunczi & Balás, 2005) are mentioned, ignoring the significant part that he played in Australian cultural life as a ballet dancer, choreographer and educator, as if the regime sought to take revenge on him for turning against it. Despite the scarcity of sources, my goal in this article is to undertake an unravelling of the once broken but later revived career of an artist.

However, it is only in his motherland that Kalman Solymossy, the ballet dancer, choreographer, ballet master, teacher, artistic director and producer sank disgracefully into oblivion. Although he passed away on August 23rd, 2014, his memory in Australia lives on, proving that despite setbacks, after a short career in his native Hungary, he was able to leave his mark on various areas of art and culture in his new home. Nearly one lifetime after he was forced to leave his home country due to his role as the leader of the armed guard of the revolutionary committee of the Opera House (Tanka & Balás, 2005) and witnessed the slaughter of peaceful demonstrators in front of the Budapest House of Parliament on “bloody Thursday” of October 25th during the 1956 revolution (or “uprising” as it is sometimes called) in Hungary (Gazda, 2006), he received an award from Géza Bánkúty¹, the former 8-time national motorcycle champion, army colonel and 1956 revolutionary, as an acknowledgement of his participation in the events (*Figure 1*). The ceremony took place in the Bocskai Hall of the *Hungarian House* in Melbourne on November 23rd 2006, marking the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution (Szeverényi, 2014b). Although the award was a significant gesture, it was unfortunately not given by an official representative of Solymossy’s native country that he had fought for, and which had (indirectly) expelled and then deliberately forgotten him.

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¹ Géza Bánkúty is also claimed by Stefka (2002) and Koós (2017) to have suffered humiliation because of his revolutionary activities in 1956.



Figure 1. Kalman Solymossy (on the right) receives an award from Géza Bánkuty as an acknowledgement of his participation in the events of 1956 (Szeverényi, 2014b)

2. THE AIM AND FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the present article is to reveal and introduce the lesser-known period of the life of Kalman Solymossy, his emigration to Australia, based on primary to quaternary sources as detailed in the *Methods* section. As dance and education were the dominant activities throughout the somewhat obscure years when he was working with ballet in Australia, this article is built on four pillars and uses a zooming-in approach. First, I will look into why Solymossy's career history is worth mapping out in the chapter *A nod to the dance educator* in view of how his students remember him. Then, as the second pillar, I will focus on two particular roles that Solymossy played in the chapter *The dance educator and choreographer* instead of following a strictly chronological order. However, chronology is provided within the chapters. This approach reflects in an authentic way the utmost importance that Solymossy put on becoming a dance educator and choreographer. Being a ballet educator was his best chance of surviving the personal tragedy of losing touch with the stage as a dancer, allowing him to provide others with something that he missed in his „exile”.

Growing into an acknowledged dance pedagogue, however, could never have been accomplished without Solymossy's previous experience with ballet dancing. Thus, his dancing career is the third pillar of this article, described in the chapter *The ballet dancer*, which follows his career as a dancer from its beginnings to the Australian years.

However, the life of a dance artist and educator is not solely devoted to the transfer of his or her dancing skills to instruction. Instead, it might take new directions and may involve activities which are more loosely related to the performing arts. As a result, the fourth pillar of this article is a brief examination of the later years of Solymossy's career, found in the chapter entitled *Further cultural footprints*.

In short, the present articles aims to shed light on significant phases of the entirety of Solymossy's life, with his career as an educator as a starting point. I will then highlight the elements in his early dancing career which made it possible for him to later become a renowned ballet master and choreographer in Australia. Finally, I will subsequently present information about the cultural activities which he was involved in alongside and after his position as head of a ballet school in his new home country.

3. METHODS

As a work of historical research, the present study aims at enumerating and analysing sources of historical value; the sections of the paper follow a chronological order in presenting the significant stages of the life of the dancer and dance educator Kalman Solymossy. Among the various types of historical research, the present study examining the career of the artist belongs to the concrete category of biography. The article is based on primary sources such as programme leaflets, invitations or postcards stored by certain museums or archives, tertiary sources such as articles and book chapters, and quaternary sources including memoirs and interviews (Lanszki, 2020).²

Due to the biographical focus of the research and a lack of availability, no secondary sources were used, with the exception of a recorded interview with a prima ballerina of the Budapest Opera House who was Solymossy's contemporary. The research relies mostly on convenience sampling of online sources available to the author during the given time frame in which the study was carried out, which took place during the COVID pandemic with its various restrictions. Due of the nature of some of the sources available (e.g., comments under obituaries), the authors of such materials were regarded as indirect informants having the best possible knowledge of the subjects under investigation: Kalman Solymossy and his career. Information regarding these sources is provided in the reference section. The databases used included the Arcanum Digitheca, the Australian National Library, Informit (a leading database of credible, peer-reviewed, scholarly resources from Australasia and around the world), the National Archives of Australia (i.e., Destination Australia), Opera Digitár, MTVA Archivum, Google Scholar, The Hungarian Academy of Dance and The National Museum and Institute of Theatre History as well as WorldCat, an online public access catalogue. Furthermore, data provided by direct informants through personal communication in the form of semi-structured interviews were also collected.

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²However, the categorisation and ranking of sources may vary. According to Anthony Brundage (2017), in addition to manuscript sources, printed sources such as newspapers, magazines and journals as well as pamphlets are also regarded as primary sources for historical research, whereas books, essays, scholarly articles, dissertations and conference papers are categorised as secondary sources. In the same book, dissertations, government documents, websites and video recordings are (also – in case of dissertations) referred to as other types of sources (Brundage, 2018). Nevertheless, as the present publication is situated in the Hungarian context and considering the aim to include a thorough overview of the possible types of sources for historical research, the author of this article follows Lanszki's (2020) categorization.

4. A NOD TO THE DANCE EDUCATOR – KALMAN SOLYMOSSY'S LEGACY

Grateful students of Kalman Solymossy and his wife Elizabeth Mrongovius have paid tribute to the memory of their master, who instilled „a love of dancing“ in them (Stephens, 2019) and „truly sparked“ their „great love of ballet and the arts“ in addition to helping them to find „the importance and truth of beauty in all things, despite the sometime horrors of human circumstances“ (Peura, 2017). Solymossy was described as „one of a kind“ and deserving of the „utmost respect“ and gratitude for „all the wonderful years“ he spent teaching (Perugini, 2016), and was praised with the following words: “Mr. Solymossy’s teaching has entered my heart and soul so that to this day I have a warm spot for Hungarian dancing and I dream of flying” (Hannigan, 2014). Luke Toohey and Merle Lamb remembered him as „a dancer of great talent and vision“ (Toohey, 2014). Sharyne Jewell [nomen est omen – the author] has recently recalled fond memories of her instructors: “Although the school was full of other people, all my memories begin and end with Miss Elizabeth and Kalman. I remember being in the studio and secretly waiting for them to dance together. Sometimes they would play around and make me laugh. Other times they would be concentrating on some choreography” (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021).

Kalman Solymossy taught many dancers in his ballet academy over the years. In 1963, just one year after its foundation, the academy had over 90 students (Special Correspondent, 1963). Kalman Solymossy’s work was acknowledged by many: Luke Toohey and Merle Lamb (2014) claim that „through his academy he gave countless young people inspirational artistic experiences and expert training“. Solymossy’s brother-in-law, Will Mrongovius also referred to him as „a very talented man“ (Mrongovius, 2014b) on the tribute page set up by the magazine/newspaper *The Age*, published on 22nd September, 2014. It should not be surprising to see one family member praise another, but Will, Elizabeth Mrongovius’s brother, was well aware of what the virtues of a ballet dancer and educator could be, as his sister was one as well. The special correspondent (1963) of the journal *Music and Dance* also regarded Solymossy as the „director of a top Melbourne academy of music and ballet“ (Special Correspondent, 1963), which is evidence of Solymossy’s ballet school earning a high reputation.

Solymossy’s legacy is still with us. Some of his former students have become renowned artists, dance instructors and pioneers in their profession. Sharyne Jewell, for example, whose classical ballet foundations had been laid by Kalman Solymossy at the Solymossy Ballet and Music Academy (later called the Australian Ballet Comique) in Melbourne became a celebrated contemporary dancer and choreographer in Australia, having toured the U.K., Europe and the U.S. (“Inspiring Women to Dance like a Diva,” 2017; Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7, 2021). She is the founder of a burlesque dance school, *Dance Like a Diva* in Sydney, and her choreographies blend elements of jazz ballet, hip hop, salsa, bachata, afro-contemporary, Japanese butoh, and burlesque (“Inspiring Women to Dance like a Diva,” 2017). One of her productions, *Blue Cabaret*, was named a top 10 nominee by the 2018 industry awards, and as of now the show is running (*Blue Cabaret’s Victory Bombshell Show*, n.d.)

Anita Scott, one of the teachers of Sharon Saunders Dancers (a trusted Bendigo dance school), is also a former Solymossy Academy student. After having choreographed several shows (e.g., *Fiddler on the Roof*) and also winning the Choreographic Award at the Bendigo Comps in 2014, is teaching ballet classes to 2-5 year-olds on a non-competitive basis, facilitating their safe technical development in a supportive environment in Bendigo, a city with a population of around 420,000 (*Our Team*, n.d.). Another talented disciple is Claire Campbell, the Associate Director of the National Theatre Ballet School. Her ballet career started with Kalman Solymossy at the age of three and a half (“Teachers’ Spotlight 2018/19. Placing Teachers Centre Stage,” 2018). Interestingly, she later continued dancing at Utassy Ballet School, another Melbourne dance academy established by a Hungarian, Eugene Utassy (Jenő Utassy) in 1960 (*History*, n.d.). This Jenő Utassy was a recognized artist known for his tap dancing in Budapest during the 1940s (Bogár, 2011).

5. THE DANCE EDUCATOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER

Solymossy’s reputable dance educator and choreographer career, by which he paved the way for his student artists to be the heralds of new trends in dance art, started in 1955, when he founded his dance company, the Matra Ballett in Hungary. His most prominent works from this period were settings for *Romeo and Juliet*, Ravel’s *Bolero* and *The Scarf* (Mrongovius, 2014). Another memory of his teaching activity also claims that Solymossy had already acted as an assistant ballet master for Nádasi Ferenc as early as 1949 (Atyimás, 2014). Unfortunately, no further documentation has been found by the author of this article to support this statement. However, we have no reason to doubt the indirect claims of the informant, a member of a strong and cohesive emigrant community which makes every effort to preserve such memories and takes pride in recalling their times of fame in the old country. This is especially the case in the light of having been deprived of everything after 1956, when all they had were the memories that they could retain in their hearts and minds amidst the threat of their forthcoming arrest (Mrongovius, 2014), the unwanted, sudden necessity to leave their home and their erasure from official forums.

The cultural concept of the socialist educational system was characterised by two main deviations from the previous status quo which was based on democratic and national cultural ideals. First was the formal addition of the term ‘socialist’ to every subject, (e.g., socialist theater or socialist literature). The more substantial change was typically made by standardising the content based on the ideology laid out by the Institute for Popular Education established in 1951. A network of ‘culture homes’ was set up for the propaganda activities of the early ‘50s which housed libraries, concerts and other cultural programs as well as adult education events (Valuch, 2001).

An important figure during this period was József Révai, Minister of Culture, chief ideologue and omnipotent leader of cultural life between 1949-1953 whose ideology was the so-called cultural revolution, which aimed at taking advantage of all means necessary to promote the socialist re-education of the public through schools, agitation and propaganda, art, film and literature. As a proponent of a

showdown with the bourgeois, he placed the archetype of the socialist man at the centre of art as a hero. Révai put socialist realism on a pedestal as a creative method and art at the service of the working man and the class struggle. The centralization of the network of art institutions was a means of inclusion for party functionaries and the new technocratic elite with proletarian or peasant roots. State regulations were also present in the recognition of artistic talent and the awarding of art prizes (Bolvári-Takács, 2011). In terms of ballet, dancers could only choose from two genres, both of which were Soviet imports: revivals of Russian classics and dramoballets³ (Fuchs, 2007; Gara, 2018).

In this unhealthy milieu of centralization, a young, creative mind may have felt imprisoned. In this intolerant environment, there was no mercy for the revolutionaries revolting against the system, hiding their weapons in sawdust in the Opera House in the hope of an armed uprising, who were later betrayed by informants of the regime (Tanka & Balás, 2005).

Kalman Solymossy, knowing that he would have to leave the country, invited his brother Zoltán to join him. Zoltán had been studying at medical school but dropped out because he was dissatisfied with the fact that the university placed greater importance on political seminars than medical studies. Although at that point Zoltán rejected his brother's invitation, he later emigrated to Toronto, where he published the legendary literary magazine *Őrtűz*, following the footsteps of their father Sándor, who had written plays (Tanka & Balás, 2005). At first, Kalman himself did not want to flee the country. After leaving Budapest in the middle of November, he spent one and a half months staying with friends near Szombathely, hoping that help from western countries would arrive in support of the Hungarian revolution. He only left when all hope was lost (Tanka & Balás, 2005).

As a result, the second stage of Solymossy's career as a choreographer and dance educator was in Austria after he had fled Hungary for Vienna on December 31st, 1956. The Hungarian artists were accommodated at a resort called Baden bei Wien near Vienna (Tanka & Balás, 2009). According to the records (*Kultúra - Balett - Solymossy Kálmán*, n.d.), it was here with the aid received from the Rockefeller Trust Fund (Mrongovius, 2014, quoted by Szeverényi, 2014a, 2014b) and the Ford Fund (Tanka & Balás, 2005) that Solymossy, alongside Iván Galambos, founded and then led the Freie Ungarische Kammer Ballett (Free Hungarian Chamber Ballet). The troupe consisted of 16 dancers and toured the country between 1957-1958 in two buses which the funds provided for them (Tanka & Balás, 2005). At that time, various initiatives were available to support those who fled Hungary for Austria. For example, across 26 Red Cross camps, refugees themselves organized ballet courses, folk dancing and theatre groups, as well as small orchestras in January 1957 to ease the burden of camp psychosis (Murber & Weber, 2001). Solymossy and his chamber ballet program featured Hungarian dance pieces in collaboration with opera singer Ferenc Borszék, warmly welcomed by the audience members, who were deeply touched and moved by the performance (Tanka & Balás, 2005).

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³The term dramoballet refers to a dance work that, in addition to academic ballet, is based on character dances; dramoballets are full-length, "realistic" representations with an emphasis on acting for the sake of comprehensibility and catharsis (Fuchs, 2013).

According to Mrongovius (2014), during this period Solymossy was also the ballet master for the movie *Sissi*, with Romy Schneider in the lead role. However, the fact of the matter is that there was a film trilogy directed by Ernst Marischka, starring Romy Schneider, the first part of which, *Sissi*, was released on 22nd December, 1955 (Maths Jespersen {maths.jespersen1@comhem.se}, 1956). As Solymossy only arrived in Austria on December 31st, 1956 (Tanka & Balás, 2005, 2009), he could not have been the ballet master of that part of the trilogy. The second part of the trilogy, *Sissi – Die junge Kaiserin* (*Sissi – The Young Empress*) was released in 1956, which also excludes the possibility of Solymossy’s participation in the production; rather, Willy Fränzl is mentioned among the additional crew as the choreographer (*Sissi - Die Junge Kaiserin* (1956), n.d.). The last part of the trilogy, *Sissi - Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin* (*Sissi – Fateful Years of an Empress*), released in 1957, however, has a ball scene with a couple of dances (among others, a Hungarian ‘csardas’, or inn dance), but no choreographer, assistant choreographer or ballet master is mentioned among the crew (Maths Jespersen {maths.jespersen1@comhem.se}, 1958). The date of release and the Hungarian dance scene may lead one to conclude that the dances might actually have been choreographed and taught by Kalman Solmossy. On a side note, the film, just like the previous two parts of the trilogy, was nominated for the Cannes Film Festival (*In Competition - Feature Films Sissi, Schicksalsjahre Einer Kaiserin*, n.d.).

During the short time he spent in Austria, Solymossy was also involved in a self-organized political group of seven Hungarians who had their headquarters in a popular café near the Opera in Vienna. While planning their uncertain future, they envisioned helping the people of Hungary. To Solymossy’s great shock, some of these individuals could later be heard on Hungary’s Radio Kossuth expressing views that were the complete opposite of what they used to proclaim in Vienna. Solymossy did not trust the reports of their voluntary return to Hungary and concluded that he was also in danger. Therefore, he applied at the Australian embassy for a work and settlement permit as a sheep shearer and found himself on board a ship heading for Australia in two weeks’ time (Tanka & Balás, 2009).

The third and final stage of Kalman Solymossy’s career as a choreographer, ballet master, and educator took place in the faraway land of Australia. He arrived there on June 30th, 1958 (Australian National Archive, 1958; Mrongovius, 2014; Tanka & Balás, 2005, 2009) with the fourth wave of Hungarian refugees to ever set foot in the country, alongside 15,000 fellow Hungarians that, according to Attila Urmenyhazy’s (2015) essay, had been recruited from United Nations’ migrant camps and provided subsidized fares. After their arrival, they enjoyed the support of established Hungarians who had already been living there for about a decade and shared their language and cultural heritage (Urmenyhazy, 2015). Furthermore, the Richmond Hungarian House, where the Victoria Hungarian Association held its meetings, allotted 4000 pounds toward emergency aid for those in need after their arrival in Australia following the 1956 war of independence (Szeverényi, 2000). Kuncz (1997) also reports on the 4000 pounds raised in Melbourne.

Solymossy was initially put up in a temporary accommodation center for immigrants in Bonegilla, where he was appointed as interpreter due to the language knowledge he had acquired over the one-month voyage from Trieste to Perth,

learning 200 English words a day (Tanka & Balás, 2005, 2009). His stay at the camp, however, did not last long. László Ligeti, the goal-keeper of the Hungarian water-polo team who, like many of his teammates, decided not to return to Hungary after the Melbourne Olympic Games (Corwin, 2008), invited him to move into his apartment. Thus, Kalman Solymossy settled in Melbourne in July of 1958 (Tanka & Balás, 2009).

The jobs awaiting the new arrivals, however, were mostly restricted to physical labor. As a result, it was particularly difficult for a ballet dancer to pursue his former career (Mrongovius, 2015) However, as Kalman Solymossy used to say, dance was his life and the only path that he saw for his future (Szeverényi, 2014b). He had already suffered a major interruption of his Opera House career when he had to leave Hungary, but he could not imagine abandoning ballet for the rest of his life, nor did he. The Australian chapter of his career as a ballet dancer will be discussed in Part 3 of this article: *The ballet dancer*.

The idea of the Richmond Hungarian House, where the editor of the *Ausztráliai Kisújság* first met Kalman Solymossy, was conceived before the arrival of the 1956 emigrants in 1953. The former Methodist Church, by then disused, was purchased in 1957, after in 1955 the Hungarians of Melbourne had established the Hungarian Cooperative Society Ltd. under the supervision of the state, with a view to providing the financial basis by subscribing for shares. However, due to a lack of resources, the initial ambitious plans for the conversion of the building were scaled down to an impromptu renovation and internal repairs that did not reach the desired degree of preservation. Therefore, the property on Cremorne Street was sold as early as 1964. Before that, however, in the six and a half years of its existence, thousands were able to cross its threshold. In 1958, with the start of the Hungarian School, the Hungarian House became more active; this was soon (in 1960, c.f. Tanka & Balás, 2009) followed by the hosting of the ever-expanding and increasingly popular folk-dance group and ballet classes of the Budapest Hungarian Ballet Theater, led by Kalman Solymossy (Szeverényi, 2000). The source does not refer to the exact time of the formation of the dance group; however, a detailed account of this period is quoted below from the editor of the retrospective, May 2000 issue of the *Ausztráliai Kisújság* (Szeverényi, 2000, pp. 12-13):

“I myself and many good friends saw Kalman for the first time at the Hungarian House in Richmond, to teach young girls the girl dance called ‘Lefelé folyik a Tisza’ (Downstream Tisza). The Hungarian House was the center at that time, for as new emigrants, because of the language and connections, we were all attracted by it to look for company. When Kalman started teaching the Karád ‘rezgős’ (a Somogy county vibrating mode of dancing the Hungarian dance ‘csárdás’ or inn-dance⁴), the girls ‘vibrated’ alone, and then — at the request of Uncle Feri Kern, that we should just hold the girls’ hands so that they should not vibrate alone —, we, the boys, also stood up. The end of this was that we went there for weeks and then months — at first only a small group of us, which became a large group, and

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⁴By vibratory mode of movement, we mean the descent from the tip of the toe to the heel and a lesser degree of knee flexion, and the execution of these movements (ascent, descent, elongation and bending) at the length of sixteenth notes / semiquavers. (Morvay & Pesovár, 1954, p. 147)

finally Kalman's teaching was so effective that the company was able to perform many beautiful programs. Then the name of the group was Budapest Hungarian Ballet Theater. The performances, of course, were complemented by the ones being already solo dancers who danced at Kalman's ballet school, and also by young, talented children."

The classes were followed by performances in Melbourne and as well as in rural towns; most notably, the first serious and highly successful show was at the Fitroy Townhall, followed by another storming performance at the Prahran Town Hall in March of 1960 (Szeverényi, 2000). Tanka and Balás (2009) also claim that the Budapest Hungarian Ballet Company, founded in 1960, was composed of Hungarian dancers who had emigrated to Australia after the 1956 revolution, performing not only in Melbourne but also Sydney, Geelong, Albury and Wodonga. According to the article in *Független Magyarország* from 1st June, 1960 (ko, 1960), all the dancers from the Budapest Hungarian Ballet Company were composed of individuals who had emigrated from Hungary after the 1956 revolution. The article praises the founder for the existence of the ballet company, the choreographies and the enthusiasm of the dancers, as well as their honesty in not claiming to be more than who they are. The performance of Mária Pálfia and János Farkas is acknowledged as well as the characterization and representation of the comic, which are emphasized as the strengths of the company. At the same time, the writer of the article urges the further training of the dancers, especially in terms of the Hungarian character dances that – according to the author – require more temperament on behalf of the female dancers. Solymossy himself is criticized as looking rather tired while dancing during the performance (ko, 1960).

On the other hand, Szeverényi (2014c) writes endearingly about the March performance at Prahran Town Hall in 1960. He recalls the enthusiastic, non-critical wording of the article in the local paper at the time. The programme began with the traditional Hungarian ball-room dance 'palotás': "the pairs of the ensemble of forty-six members began the steps of the proud, aloof, yet light traditional dance in colorful, age-appropriate attire" (Szeverényi, 2014c, *Figure 2*). The opening dance was followed by twenty more (*Figures 3-6*), with various traditional folk dances – such as the 'Keszkenő tánc' (Scarf dance), 'Karád rezgős', 'Fereteges', 'Kapunár Verbunkos' and 'Sárköz háromugrós' – and ballet dance pieces – including choreographies for Debussy's *Clair de Lune* or Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* – together with a dance composition called 'The Hungarian Revolution'. All these pieces were performed by professional emigrant dancers, including Mária Pálfia, János Farkas, Viktoria Biro and Kalman Solymossy. The singers, Katalin Futsek and Laszlo Sennit (accompanied by Robert Wilson on piano, the only Australian in the performance) made the event even more colorful. Agi Lengyel and Lajos Mersits were named as promising talents of the future generation. With their charming performance, Solymossy's younger students Györgyi Nagy and Eszter Oláh were praised for their 'Hejre Kati' dance choreography. Kalman Zsolnay's band was said to have played their music with empathy and emotion. "Kalman had to dance the 'Verbunkos' (military recruiting dance) three times", which was and still is rather exceptional in dance performances and it shows the highly heated atmosphere (Szeverényi, 2014c).



Figure 2. The 'palotás' at the March 1960 performance at Prahran Town Hall (Szeverényi, 2014b)



Figures 3-6. The dancers from the performance at Prahran Town Hall (Szeverényi, 2014 b)

Kalman Solymossy was only 29 years old when he arrived in Australia, and only 33 when in 1962 he founded the Solymossy Ballet and Music Academy (*On This Day*, 2020), which was likely based on the Budapest Hungarian Ballet Theater started in 1960 in the Hungarian House in Richmond, an inner suburb of Melbourne. The ballet academy soon became the largest in Australia (*On This Day*, 2020; Mrongovius, 2014; Tanka & Balás, 2005, 2009). In Victoria, not only did he have branches in the suburbs of Melbourne, but in the countryside as well. The dancer Elizabeth Mrongovius helped him with teaching and choreography such as *The Wall* (A fal) presented in the Palais Theatre in 1962 (Tanka & Balás, 2009), as well as the costume design for the performances. As Solymossy was not provided with government support for his school, he relied on his passion, enthusiasm and energy as resources (Mrongovius, 2014). The newspaper *Délamerikai Magyarorság* also reported the opening of Solymossy's ballet school in Melbourne under the heading "Magyarok mindenfelé" (Hungarians Everywhere). According to the news bulletin, the academy had 100 students, about half of whom were Hungarians. The paper also reports that in September 70 dancers of the academy performed the dance drama *A falu* (*The Village*) by Pál Ambrózy ("Magyarok Mindenfelé," 1962). The August 1963 issue of the Australian

journal *Music and Dance* acknowledged Solymossy's achievements in overcoming seemingly insuperable obstacles to establish his ballet school (Special Correspondent, 1963). The article shows the reader around the rooms of his ballet school, informing the audience about how much effort and actual physical labour Kalman Solymossy put into every corner of it. Solymossy loved ballet to the point that he wanted to recreate what he had left behind. He did not surrender to delusion or psychosis in Austria, nor did he give up his dreams in Australia. Instead, he took the initiative and indefatigably fought to pursue his dream. Except for the financial support, he had what was needed: courage and determination, a cheerful nature, good humour and deep optimism. These characteristics pushed him to work hard to build the interior of his school all on his own, equipped with special mirrors, exercise bars and changing rooms (Special Correspondent, 1963).

In a 1963 September issue of the Australian TV Guide (Andrew @TelevisionAU, 2018), the television debut of the Solymossy Music and Ballet Academy with three ballet choreographies was announced (*Ballet's TV Debut*, n.d.-b). On Sunday, September 22nd, 1963, the viewers of ABV 2 TV could watch a 25-minute program directed by Bryan Faull in Melbourne, featuring ballet choreographies to Manuel de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance* and Claude Debussy's *Claire de Lune*, as well as the Walpurgis-Night scene from *Faust* (Tanka & Balás, 2009). As this was his ballet academy's debut on television – and based on Sharyne Jewell's later account on how busy Solymossy and Elizabeth Mrogonovius were with producing choreographies (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021) – it could be concluded that these were Kalman Solymossy's and Elizabeth Mrogonovius's original choreographies, even though they might have taken inspiration from Ernő Vashegyi's choreography of *Faust* (Walpurgis-Night) in which Solymossy danced Beelzebub in the City Theater (Városi Színház – today Erkel Theatre) in 1953. "Choreography always seemed like such serious business," Jewell stated, recalling a memory of the couple (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7, 2021).

Solymossy made substantial progress within the first couple of years after his 1958 arrival in Australia. He had just founded his ballet school in 1962 before debuting on television (ABV 2 TV) in 1963 in his new home country, when he was able to experience new success in his career. In 1964 he was the director of the Hungarian Arts Festival which featured his original ballet *The White Elk* (Csodaszarvas) with Maria Palfia and Helen Brimblecomb in the leading roles (Herald And Weekly Times, 1964) and attracted an audience of around 7000 (*Photograph 7502022 | Destination Australia*, n.d.). According to an invitation to Kenneth Hince, a record held by the Australian National Library and shared with the author of this article for reference purposes only, the composer of the ballet was Paul Ambrosy, while it was written and choreographed by Kalman Solymossy, whose full-length ballet was performed by the Solymossy Ballet Company at 8:15 p.m. on 8th October, 1964 at the Palais Theatre in St Kilda, a suburb of Melbourne (Australian National Library, 1964). Further choreographies created by Solymossy were *The Hungarian* (Magyar) on ABV2 TV and *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* on stage of the Methodist Ladies College in 1966, followed by *The Lost Magic Wand* (Az elveszett varázsvessző) in 1967 and *Searadia* in 1968 (Tanka & Balás, 2009).

The company soon changed its name to the Australian Ballet Comique and staged productions at venues including the Comedy Theatre and the Palais in St Kilda. The Australian paper *The Bulletin* reported on the formation of the company: “A new Australian ballet company has been formed by Melbourne ballet teacher Kalman Solymossy and has been given the rather ironic title ‘The Australian Ballet Comique’” (“Comedy Capers?,” 1970)

Based on a report by Art Sound FM (an independent community arts and music radio station in Canberra) from 1970 (*On This Day*, 2020), Solymossy’s and his Australian Ballet Comique’s services were offered to substitute the Australian Ballet’s dancers when the British ballerina, Margot Fonteyn arrived as a special guest at the Canberra Theatre to find the dancers of the Australian Ballet on strike. To prevent the famous ballerina from any possible inconvenience, Solymossy proclaimed that “We are not strike breakers but Fonteyn should not be in the centre of a strike.” However, his services were not used at that time (*On This Day*, 2020).

At the end of the 1970s, Solymossy’s ballet school was still at the height of its operation, with 40 dancers under the artistic direction of Kalman Solymossy, according to a September-October program brochure (*Figures 7 and 8*) which advertises two ballets: *Soul of Stradivari* and *Searadia*.



Figures 7 and 8. The September-October programme brochure of the Australian Ballet Comique from 1970. ([Australian Ballet Comique : Programs and Related Material Collected by the National Library of Australia] | National Library of Australia, n.d.)

The ballet school had several venues in a number of suburbs in Melbourne. According to Tanka and Balás (2009, p. 267), “he founded the Solymossy Ballet and Music Academy, and from the first school, there soon emerged ten.” As Sharyne Jewell (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7, 2021) recalls, there were occasionally classes and rehearsals which took place at other venues. The venue she attended “was a smallish school that operated in a local hall,” with “timber floor, which appeared to be immense,” equipped with a piano and a long barre, but the rehearsals and the examinations were held at locations in the city (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7, 2021).

Besides the regular afternoon classes for the registered students, the ballet school also offered scholarships for those who were especially gifted. Talent was awarded extra attention, but the students also learned that they should give back in return. Gaining a scholarship meant a daily afternoon commitment along with Saturday attendance in addition to community work such as tidying up the studio or assisting in company costume maintenance (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021). “When not training, I would spend hours cross-legged on the floor darning the top of pointe shoes (a pointe technique that is no longer employed) and sewing on elastic and ribbons or repairing tutus,” Jewell recalls. She also regarded such duties as meditation, and ballet as an asylum from her abusive foster family life characterized by brutal domestic violence. The monotonous maintenance tasks led to the development of life skills that helped her make extra income and have “access to bespoke costumes for four decades” (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021). She admits that the dance training gave her joy even though it demanded exceptionally strict discipline as well as an extraordinarily high level of commitment and determination. The fact that the dance training gave her joy was because the program also provided her with structure, something that helped her move forward despite all the uncertainty and hostility stemming from her background that she had not yet realized was unusual (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021).

The reports and memoirs provided by Kalman Solymossy’s and Elizabeth Mrongovius’s students are proof of the instructors’ humanistic approach in the harsh world of performing arts. By becoming such an educator, Solymossy made significant personal progress, transforming from an immature, quick-tempered dancer of the Opera House Ballet School to a mature, empathetic and generous dance educator. In October 1948, he was punished (together with three fellow dancers) by the disciplinary committee for beating other students (Bolvári-Takács, 2013), possibly as a means of inauguration. In his own school, however, that energy was used to create an appropriate physical and mental environment of a ballet academy with rooms to rehearse in and a caring attitude to help others grow.

Public performances were common, even after the school was renamed the Australian Balett Comique. Among other venues, the students performed at the Comedy Theatre and the Palais, one of the largest theatres in St Kilda (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021; Szeverényi, 2014a). Young ballerinas backed by their amazon mothers fought for the main roles in every possible way, whether ethical or not. The following report on such a fight reveals the emotions that occurred behind the scenes and sheds a light on how seriously these young

students took their career and the chance of being at the centre of attention wearing a beautiful costume. In addition, such events also provided the opportunity to learn life lessons.

I do remember wanting one specific role. I cannot remember what ballet it was but the reason I wanted it was because Elizabeth had shown us the costume. It was the most beautiful purple tutu I had ever seen. I am not a competitive person but I remember going “all out” to secure that role. And I did. On the night of the performance, I believe it was at the Palais in St Kilda, tragedy struck. I leant backwards and as I did, the stitching down the front of the tutu burst and my teenage breast was exposed. In extreme embarrassment, I contracted forward to conceal the reveal. I looked to the wings and saw Kalman and Elizabeth looking at me with horror. They couldn’t understand why I was behaving badly and were angrily gesturing for me to continue. It wasn’t until I was off stage that they saw what was wrong. I was absolutely humiliated. I felt I had let them down. They examined the costume and came to the conclusion that someone had unpicked the seam. Elizabeth was sure that it was another student’s mother. I will never know if that was true or not but it certainly took away my desire to fight for a role again. (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021)

Other memorable performances credited to Solymossy included the gala at the Comedy Theater in 1974 and *The Nutcracker* in 1977. In 1979, in the International Year of the Child, the Australian Ballet Comique toured Europe with 40 children, giving 68 performances of *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* and *The Snow Queen* in West-Germany, West-Berlin, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Switzerland (Mrongovius, 2014; Szeverényi, 2014b; Tanka & Balás, 2009). Irene Perugini, a former student, recalls this period passionately:

I was one of the fortunate dancers that had the opportunity at the ripe of age of 11 to tour Europe with you in 1979. We had to return without you and Elizabeth and that devastated us. I tried to continue with my dance however there was no one like you and eventually I gave it away but still to this day I have a passion for it and so does my daughter now. (The Age, 2016)

According to WorldCat, the largest online public access catalogue, in 1979 a Danish book was published by Vejlbj Risskov Hallen with the title *Snedronningen*, authored by Solymossy (1979) – also marked as choreographer – about the Australian Ballet Comique. This publication must have been related to the program presented by Solymossy’s Ballet Comique in Denmark during their European tour.

It was at that point that Solymossy’s flourishing Australian career took a turn and for a decade the couple, with their deep European roots, seemed to have been trapped by their affection for the mother continent. The available sources only contain unspecific references to this period, saying the couple spent this time “in teaching roles” according to Mrongovius (2014), “teaching ballet dancing” according to Szeverényi (2014a), “continuing their artistic activity” (Tanka & Balás, 2009),

and also visiting Hungary in 1989 after the change of the regime (Tanka & Balás, 2005). However, back in his home country, Solymossy's broken family ties, with his parents deceased and his brother Zoltán in Toronto (Tanka & Balás, 2005), did not appear to make up for what he had missed out on for many years, despite the nostalgic feelings he experienced due to the emotional effects of homesickness far away from Europe. Even returning to his homeland might not have provided him with what he had expected to gain upon his return. However, there are other possible explanations: meeting his remaining relatives and friends might have recharged him enough to be able to return to Australia on his own will and in his own way in 1989, essentially closing an earlier chapter in his life which had been forcefully torn apart by the threat of the communist regime. Soon after that, back in Melbourne, he was both mentally and spiritually ready to resume his career as a dance educator, taking over the leadership of the dance group *Délibáb* (Mirage) of the Hungarian House in Melbourne with Elizabeth, whom he had married in 1984 (Tanka & Balás, 2009). Based on István Fejes's interview with Solymossy published in *Magyar Sajtó* in 1999, Solymossy was then still leading a ballet studio with his Subcarpathian-born German wife, Elizabeth (Fejes, 1999).

6. THE BALLET DANCER

Solymossy started dancing at the Ballet School of the Opera House in Budapest at the age of 12 (Tanka & Balás, 2009). As the training usually lasted for five years – at least after 1945 – according to Bolvári-Takács's research (2013), and Solymossy's first mention in the roles of Carters (Kocsisok) in the ballet *Petruska* is dated to 1946 (Opera DIGItár, n.d.), he must have begun his education in the ballet school in 1941. As Solymossy recalls, his registration took place in Ferenc Nádasí's apartment facing the Opera House – which was also the venue of Nádasí's ballet school (Bolvári, 2014) – with no audition, due to a little trick of his: claiming that he was too busy to report the next day at the ballet school for an entrance examination, for which he was sent to Nádasí by the secretary general of the institution. Although his ballet dancing career started with an infantile conversation with a neighbor's daughter who boasted of becoming an actress, his courageous backlash, that he would become a ballet dancer, soon proved to be a real, lifetime passion. Under the direction of famous masters and choreographers such as the Hungarians Gyula Harangozó and Ferenc Nádasí, as well as the Russian (then Soviet) Vasily Vajnonen, Asaf Messerer and Rostislav Zakharov (Mrongovius, 2014; Opera DIGItár, n.d.-a; Szeverényi, 2014a;), he could not have had a better opportunity to develop his technique and become a well-trained dancer. Solymossy had 24 different roles in the Opera House within a short period from 1946 to 1956, mainly between 1950-1956. The list of his numerous roles during these years can be seen in *Table 1*.

A WORLD RE-CREATED

Role	Title of Performance	Year
Carters (Kocsisok)	Petruska	1946-1947
Petruska	1946-1947	1950-51-52
Circus performance	A diótörő	1950-51
The Bartered Bride	1950-51-52	1950-51-52-53-54
Waltz of the flowers solo	The Nutcracker	1950-51
Russian dance	The Nutcracker	1950-51-52-53-54
Spanish dance	Traviata,	1950, 1952-53-54-55-56
Basques	The Flames of Paris	1950-1951-52-53-54-55-56
Farandola	The Flames of Paris	1950-1951-52-53-54-55-56
Recruiting	The Gypsy Baron	1950-51, 53, 55, 7 th Jan. 1957. p.m. (However, allegedly leaves Hungary on December 31st)
Sword dance	Palkó Csínom	1951, 1953-54
Young Gypsy men's dance	The Scarf (Keszkenő)	1951, 1953-54-55-56
Three horsemen	The Sly Students	1951
Polovtsian warriors	Polovtsian Dances/ Prince Igor	1952/1953-54-55
Wooden puppet	The Wooden Prince	1952*, 1954
Spanish dances	Carmen	1952-53-54-55-56
Spanish dance	Swan Lake	1952-53-54-55
	Young Guard	1953, 1954**
Beelzebub	Faust	1953-54-55-56
Pas de six	Coppelia	1953-54-55-56
Hungarian sergeant	Coppelia	1953
Arab dance	King Pomádé's New Clothes	1953
Nurali, Tartar chieftain	The Fountain of Bakhchisaray	1953-54-55-56
Evil Spirit	Swan Lake	1954-55-56

Table 1. Solymossy's roles in the Opera House (or the affiliated City Theater, today Erkel Theater) in Budapest between 1946-1956, based mainly on Opera DIGItár (n.d.) and partly on MTVA Archivum** (*Kultúra - Balett - Solymossy Kálmán*, n.d.) and Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet (National Museum and Institute of Theatre History)* (OSZMI, 2018).

However, no sources include the full list of Solymossy's roles in their entirety. Even the database Opera DIGItár (n.d.) cannot be trusted as being entirely accurate. The dates of the performances in which Solymossy danced in a role might not always include all of his appearances or might not reflect unexpected changes. For example, there is a contradiction between the database information and print literature. Opera DIGItár marks the afternoon performance of *The Gypsy Baron* on January 7th, 1957 as having Solymossy among the recruiters (Opera DIGItár, n.d.), while he claims to have left the country on the night of New Year's Eve in 1956 (Tanka & Balás, 2005). In addition, according to a record (marked in the table above with an asterisk) in the database of the National Museum and Institute of Theatre History (Várkonyi, n.d.), Solymossy danced the Wooden Puppet with Vera Pásztor as the Princess in the ballet *The Wooden Prince* in 1952 (Figure 9). The same website claims that Kalman Solymossy was a 'magántáncos' (which can roughly be translated into English as a second-solo dancer) of the Opera House from 1951 (OSZMI, 2018) during his period of service at the Opera House between 1947–1957 (Opera DIGItár, n.d.); however, he is referred to (with respectful exaggeration) as a 'principal dancer' by Mrongovius (2014). Meanwhile, in Opera DIGItár (n.d.) and in the book *A budapesti Operaház 100 éve* (The 100 years of the Budapest Opera House) by Gelencsér et al. (1984), Solymossy is only referred to as a member of the *corpse de ballet* from 1947-1957 without distinguishing the period from 1951 (cf. OSZMI, 2018).



Figure 9. Kalman Solymossy as the Wooden Puppet with Vera Pásztor as the Princess in the ballet *The Wooden Prince* in 1952 (Várkonyi, n.d.)

A short clarification regarding the terms used in the strict hierarchy of the world of ballet dancing is necessary to identify Solymossy's position without depriving him of the title he deserves. However, the mere act of dancing solo on stage, as he did at times (*Table 1*), would not by itself make one a soloist, let alone a principal (dancer) within the hierarchy of a renowned national ballet company. Well before dancing roles such as the Wooden puppet or Nurali (*Table 1*), Solymossy stepped on to the next stage as a second-soloist of the Budapest Opera House in 1951 (OSZMI, 2018). In addition, Solymossy was also referred to as one of the best soloists of the Budapest Opera House (together with names such as Dóra Csinády, Gabriella Lakatos, Etelka Kálmán, Andor Gál and László Tóth) in Hungarian print media reporting on a ballet performed by the dancers of the Budapest Opera House in the city of Debrecen ("A Pénteki Ballett-Estről..." 1950). Although Solymossy had no chance to continue up the ladder of succession in this prominent Hungarian institution as he was forced to leave the country for reasons detailed earlier, based on the roles he fulfilled during, beside and after his Opera House period, Solymossy could be remembered as a soloist in the world of ballet in general.

Another piece of information missing from Opera DIGItár (n.d.) is the ballet dancers' – and among them Solymossy's – contribution to the performance of Yuliy Meitus's opera *Young Guard*, which was first staged in Budapest on December 20th, 1953 (*Kultúra - Opera - Mejtusz: Az ifjú gárda*, n.d.). Solymossy, quoted by Tanka and Balás (2005, p. 302), speaks rather unenthusiastically about the opera which they danced "with weapons in hand", stating that there were only five performances due to the lack of viewer interest, with only Rákosi-related, invited V.I.P. guests at the first, and only five paying viewers at its fourth performance. In the book by Gelencsér et al. (1984), we also learn about the premiere of *Young Guard* in December 1953 and that it was on show in 1954; however, there is only information regarding the monstrous size of but no relevant details of the cast. The official reviews referred to the performance as a significant breakthrough (Gelencsér et al., 1984; cf. Tanka & Balás, 2005); nevertheless, the goal of the production had only been to refute any accusations of neglecting Soviet opera (Gelencsér et al., 1984).

Beside his Opera House performances, there is evidence of other ballet night performances as well. For example, according to a 1953 flyer from the records of the Katona József Bács-Kiskun County Library (*Figure 10*), Solymossy participated in a ballet night at the Culture Centre of the (Hungarian) City of Baja with other Opera House dancers including Iván Galambos, Boriska Rácz and Éva Maross. The program included the palotás (a traditional Hungarian ballroom dance) from the opera *László Hunyadi* composed by Ferenc Erkel, a scene from Gounod's *Faust* and Weber's *Rondo*, a scene from the first act of *The Nutcracker* by Tchaikovsky, the Spanish dance from *Traviata* by Verdi, the Pizzicato polka by Delibes, a piece from *For Children* by Bartók, a scene from *The Scarf* by Kenessey, the recruiting scene from Strauss's *Gypsy Baron*, one from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, *Melody* by Járdányi, a dance from the *Land of Smiles* by Lehár, Strauss's Blue Danube Waltz and a part from Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* (Országos Filharmónia Szegedi Kirendeltsége - Lippói Gyula, n.d.).



Figure 10. Leaflet of the Ballet Night at the Culture Centre of the Hungarian City of Baja with Kalman Solymossy and other Opera House dancers (Országos Filharmónia Szegedi Kirendeltsége - Lippói Gyula, n.d.)

Szeverényi (2014a), based on Mrongovius (2014), regards Solymossy’s progress in his ballet career as fast. He adds that Solymossy was already a solo dancer in 1949, and according to Atyimás (2014) he was appointed an assistant ballet master alongside Nádasi. Although Solymossy’s first role – based on data from the Opera DIGItár (n.d.) – was in 1946-1947 as one of the carters in *Petruska*, it is true that on a 1949 flyer of the Royal Revü Varieté’s nightly revue performance at 31 Erzsébet Boulevard, Solymossy is listed as a solo dancer in programs like *Mézeskalács* (Gingerbread) and *Chopin* and *Anna bál* (*Ann Ball*) (Leaflet provided by the National Museum and Institute of Theatre History). The author of this article has found no evidence of Solymossy being an assistant ballet master as mentioned in the previously discussed sources; nevertheless, as an experienced dancer he might have been a demonstrator or company repetiteur in the ballet school leading rehearsals and could have been asked to substitute Nádasi occasionally. With Nádasi himself being responsible for the technical development of the dancers of the ballet school as the ballet master, Harangozó being the choreographer, and Margit Horváth being the repetiteur of the children’s repertoire (Bolvári-Takács, 2013), Solymossy might as well have been responsible for occasional teaching duties even if there is no record of it. In addition, at that time no accurate identification of the various positions and titles existed. Based on the Opera House Yearbooks (*A Magyar Királyi Operaház Évkönyve, 1925–1944* as cited by Bolvári, 2014) and the Official Directory of Titles and Names of Hungary (*Magyarország Tiszti Cím És Névtára, 1873–1937* as cited by Bolvári, 2014, p. 17), Nádasi held various titles during his period in a leading position at the Opera House Ballet School between 1937-1949, including “leader of the dance school”, lower or higher grade “teacher of the ballet school”, and lower or higher grade “dance teacher” or “ballet master”.

Regardless of whether Solymossy's progress involved teaching in the Ballet School of the Opera House or not, his ballet training and thus personal technical development was in the hands of two reputable and efficiently collaborating ballet masters and choreographers. Ferenc Nádasi, the ballet master, was merely responsible for the pedagogical and technical aspects of ballet training, while Gyula Harangozó focused on choreography. The rapid development of the dancers was partly because Harangozó, when imagining the solo of upcoming ballets, asked Nádasi to involve techniques in his training program which demanded higher technical proficiency (Harangozó, 1971 cited by Bolvári-Takács 2013). Consequently, the dancers were continuously made to face new challenges, which resulted in the development of their skills. "We had to do the series of split leaps until the audience applauded or until the dancer was 'killed'," recalls Solymossy (Tanka & Balás, 2005, p. 302). According to Gelencsér et al. (1984), before the 1950 première of *The Nutcracker*, the Soviet masters Vajnonen and Armashevskaya extended the corpse de ballet to a large extent by recruiting dancers through a broad talent search, drawing dancers from amateur ballet schools, courses and ensembles to meet the artistic vision originally conceived for the Tsarist ballet company. Rigorous training was essential for developing a well-coordinated ballet body. The size of the ballet ensemble at that time was around 110 (Gara, 2018; Gelencsér et al., 1984). This might have contributed to Solymossy's rise through the ranks to second-soloist in 1951. On the other hand, for many dancers the large size of the group could have been an obstacle for promotion. In the most important Hungarian journal of dance criticism to date, *Táncművészet (Dance Art)*, Solymossy's performance was praised alongside those of other young artists by Nádasi's wife and ballet mistress, also claiming that "The Opera Ballet works a lot to supply the two theatres, The Opera House and the City Theatre (now Erkel Theatre) with ballet dancers. Without such dancers as Eck, Füleki, Balogh, Szilágyi and Solymossy this would be unimaginable" (Nádasi, 1953). A former ballerina of the Dresdener Operett appreciatively recalls that "Kalman was a very good dancer. I saw him in the Opera House. It was also him who took me to Endre Jeszenszky's ballet school" (I. Heydenbluth, personal communication, April 4th, 2021). Not only was Solymossy a talented dancer, but he was also a witty raconteur when professing his love of dancing.

I was dancing the Evil Sorcerer (Evil Spirit) in *Swan Lake* (Figure 11), which was actually a miming role that I did not really like the way it was, just simply walking on stage, frightening the swans and the audience. So, without permission, I changed the choreography and created a dancing role from it. The audience went crazy and they did not want to let me leave the stage. The Russian choreographer's hair, however, stood on end and shouted that changing the choreography was a deadly sin in dance art. I replied "Master, I like dancing, not walking about on stage." Then he turned back to me and ignored me. And while he was in Hungary, I was not allowed to dance that role. However, when he left, I could dance it again. (...) And since then that role has been danced through. (Tanka & Balás, 2005, p. 302).

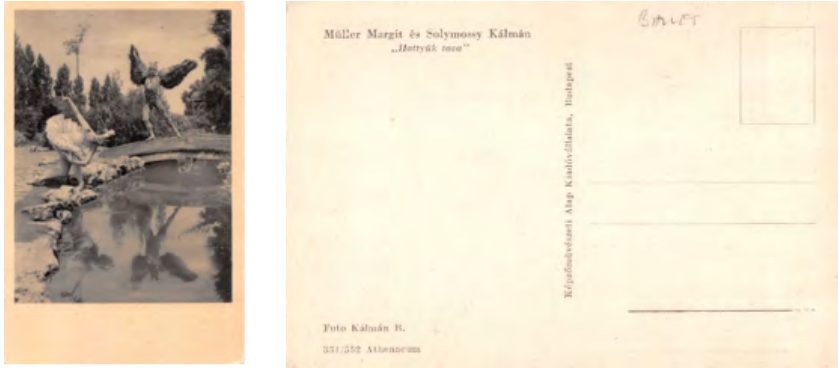


Figure 11. Margit Müller & Kalman Solymossy in *Swan Lake* (1954) in a picture postcard (Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, Budapest & Kálmán, n.d.)

Regarding the Budapest Opera House debut of *Swan Lake*, a source refers to the role of the Evil Spirit choreographed by Messerer in the 1951 première as a miming role. However, the role in the next performance in 1977 is described as highly demanding in terms of technical skills (*A Hattyúk Tava (Balett): Magyarországi Bemutatók*, n.d.).

Another anecdote shared by Tanka and Balás (2005) illustrates how Solymossy drew the audience's attention to himself at the end of the performance while in the role of Beelzebub. Supposedly at the end of the ballet night called Walpurgis-Night at the Erkel Theatre (then City Theatre) featuring famous ballet excerpts from the following ballets, according to Opera Digi Tár in this order, *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Scarf*, *The Bartered Bride*, *Polovtsian Dances* and *Faust* (First scene, Act 5, Walpurgis-Night) in 1953 choreographed by Ernő Vashegyi (Opera DIGItár n.d.), or rather in the finale of the opera, *Faust*, while dancing with two lit torches as Beelzebub Solymossy, who was on top of a cauldron in the finale, supposedly jumped down with a split leap while exhaling the previously inhaled smoke wreathing around him to impress the audience when it was his turn to bow. After that, the lionized ballerina Etelka Kálmán was said to have asked the choreographer Ernő Vashegyi to stop Solymossy from performing such exaggerated tricks. Vashegyi, beckoning to him, asked "Did you hear what Miss Kálmán had said?" When Solymossy said that he had, Vashegyi added "And you know what must be done, don't you?" "I know" Solymossy replied. "Are you pleased with this, Etelka?" Vashegyi said, turning to the ballerina, who then confirmed that she was. When she had turned back, Vashegyi allegedly whispered to Solymossy "You were great, Kalman, just do it your way next time again" (Tanka & Balás, 2005, p. 302).

According to the *Australian Kisújság* (Szeverényi, 2014a, 2014b) Solymossy was said to be a solo dancer and choreographer in his ballet company Mátra Ballet, founded in 1955. However, in Tanka and Balás's (2005) book, he is said to have been the soloist and one of the choreographers of Mátra Ballet from 1954. Further mentions of the group have been found in Arcanum Digitheca. One record from June 26th, 1956 which advertises a performance by Mátra Ballet on June 30th at the Kulich Gyula Open-Air Theater refers to the performers as the dance artists of the

Hungarian State Opera House, Hella Nádas, Imre Nádas, Kalman Solymossy, and the Mátra Ballet Ensemble. A small photo is also attached depicting “a scene” with seven “young dancers”: two males and four females wearing ankle-length, flounced skirts on two sides of a fifth ballerina in the middle (Új Világ, 1956, p. 2).

Another mention of the “autodynamic ballet group”, also from 1956, is from a brief announcement in the renowned Hungarian journal *Táncművészet* (Dance Art) regarding the group’s performance on August 4th and 5th at the Városmajor⁵ Open-Air Stage, organized jointly by the 2nd and 12th district organizations of the Hungarian-Soviet Society and the Culture Department of the 2nd and 12th District Councils of Budapest. The news bulletin also lists Hella Nádas, Imre Nádas and Kalman Solymossy, dancers of the State Opera House, as contributors. The text reports that “among others, two longer productions (*Sunday Afternoon* and *Gypsy Dance*) were performed. The choreographies were designed by Imre Nádas and Kalman Solymossy” (“A Mátra Balettegyüttes” 1956). The wording of these documents might suggest that for the media and the audience, the dancers of the Opera House, even if they themselves were part of the group in this case, were apparently a greater attraction than the less famed ballet group alone. Nevertheless, the existence of Mátra Ballet is clearly documented in these sources. Whether the group was organized by Solymossy himself and in which year is not stated. However, he is explicitly named as a choreographer. In addition, mentioning him and two of his colleagues as the dancers of the Opera House suggests that they were the solo dancers of the production.

The next stage of his dancing career (which also marked the beginning of a transition from dancer to choreographer and educator) commenced after leaving Hungary in December 1956 for Baden-bei-Wien, where emigrant musicians, actors and ballet dancers gathered. It was there that Solymossy and Iván Galambos started the Free Hungarian Chamber Ballet with sixteen dancers (OSZMI, 2018; b; Tanka & Balás, 2005), with Solymossy as the leader and also a dancer, as mentioned above. After one and a half years, the company dissolved as its members relocated to various parts of the world. Solymossy made such a move in 1958 when he left to settle down in Australia.

Arriving in Melbourne, Solymossy found limited work in the ballet world, such as working and performing on television for Channel 7 (Mrongovius, 2014). From this period, a photo and its caption from the Australian National Archive (*Photograph 7501831 | Destination Australia*, n.d.) shows Solymossy alongside Latvian-born dancer Vija Vetra “bringing traditional European dances to Melbourne through television and stage appearances.” In another source, Sharyne Jewell (Jewell, S., personal communication, March 7th, 2021) also mentions Solymossy’s television appearances. Furthermore, a photo of a newspaper page from 1963 announcing the launch of a new channel, Network 10 (Channel 10) shared on Twitter’s photo blobstore (Andrew @TelevisionAU, 2018) informs the readers about Solymossy Music and Ballet Academy’s television debut in which Kalman Solymossy is announced as the solo dancer of the following pieces: *Fire Dance*, *Clair de Lune* and a

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⁵Városmajor is a large park in the 12th district of Budapest in Buda: the green, hilly, and generally wealthier part of the city of Budapest on the right bank of the River Danube.

scene from *Faust*. In addition to the roles that Solymossy played in his choreographies at his ballet academy (mentioned above) in 1960 he was the main dancer supporting the popular Trinidadian ragtime and honky-tonk pianist Winifred Atwell's⁶ tour in Australia (*On This Day*, 2020; 1970; Mrongovius, 2014, quoted by Szeverényi, 2014a).

7. FURTHER CULTURAL FOOTPRINTS

Upon his return to Melbourne in 1989, Solymossy became president of the Australian Hungarian Magazine TV Association and a broadcaster of Hungarian news on Radio 3ZZZ with the help of his wife Elizabeth until she passed away in 2012 (Fejes, 1999; Mrongovius, 2014; *Kultúra - Balett - Solymossy Kálmán*, n.d.; OSZMI, 2018; Tanka & Balás, 2005, 2009). In addition to their own programs, they also broadcast shows created by Hungarian television companies. From 2000 until his death in 2014, Kalman Solymossy also worked for the American Hungarian Panorama World Magazine (Tanka & Balás, 2009).

In their account of the history of the programme entitled Australian Hungarian Magazine Television, Kurunczi & Balás (2005) report on the successful operation of the programme aimed at Melbourne Hungarians, which they regard as one of the highlights in the lives of the Hungarians at that time. The programme began soon after Solymossy was asked to take over the management of a "video club" which he had just joined in 1996. Even though he tried to excuse himself from the task because of his lack of expertise in television, his organizational skills were considered to be enough for the post. He took over the presidency for a three-month "probationary period" and cherished the idea of being involved with Hungarian television. He first turned to Channel 31 to learn if a Hungarian program could be broadcast under the auspices of the social channel. It was then that a charming associate, Rosemary Field from St. Kilda Access (SKA) Television – a volunteer-run community media group (Wiser Directory, 2021) – helpfully offered him the opportunity to join them, explaining to Solymossy how to produce a half-hour show so that it could be broadcast (Kurunczi & Balás, 2005).

In March 1997, a professional film producer by the name of Ronald Barkóczy also offered Solymossy his help with launching the Hungarian television programme. Finally, it was through his connection with a well-known radio man, Antal Ámon, that Péter Dunavölgyi, a senior employee of Hungarian Television, sent Solymossy's crew a half-hour program which was warmly welcomed and shown on Channel 31 with English subtitles. From then on, the half-hour news programs were regularly sent from Hungary to Melbourne (Kurunczi & Balás, 2005).

However, Solymossy already began wondering how he and his staff could produce local shows. In an interview with István Fejes (1999), Solymossy admitted visiting the Hungarian city of Pécs in order to express his gratitude towards Sándor Békés and the Pécs Regional Studio and discuss the possibilities of further cooperation. According to

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⁶ Winifred Atwell (1914-83), also known as 'The Amazing Miss A', was one of the most popular ragtime musicians of her time with two UK No. 1 singles, 11 Top 10 hits in the 1950s, and millions of records sold in the U.K. as a black artist. She settled in Sydney in 1970 (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, n.d.).

this interview, the half-hour Hungarian program – which focused on reporting the lives of Australian Hungarians and the customs and daily life of the Hungarians in the South Transdanubia region – was broadcast at 6:00 p.m. on Mondays (Fejes, 1999). They had to provide the financial resources for their own production by finding advocates. Within a period short time they found three hundred sponsors, who raised thousands of dollars in share capital for the production of the program. To be able to purchase cameras and film cutting machines, further money had to be raised through events such as literary evenings or balls (Fejes, 1999; Kurunczi & Balás, 2005). The first original program of the Hungarian TV was broadcast in October 1997, reporting on the funeral of Imre Kancsár, editor-in-chief of the *Australian Kisújság*. Cited by Kurunczi & Balás (2005), Kalman Solymossy recalls the hardships of this period with the following words:

We were excited to introduce ourselves. We worked on the film from six p.m. to four in the morning, and when we wanted to watch the production back, the computer crashed. Our ten-hour job was wasted, and we had to start all over again the next day. Although we were taught a lesson, since then our own programs have been screened to the satisfaction of the viewers (Kurunczi & Balás, 2005).

From then on, their original shows were commonplace on the channel.

After some internal disagreement which created a rift among the Australian Hungarian television team, the faction directed by Kalman Solymossy and his wife Elizabeth was called Australian Hungarian Magazine Television. They regularly reported on local events such as celebrations of national holidays (e.g., March 15th, June 4th, commemorating the tragic Treaty of Trianon, St. Stephen's Day on August 20th, and October 23rd) or religious holidays (e.g., Easter and Christmas), as well as other days of remembrance and major events of Hungarian associations. Film portraits or interviews with Hungarian artists such as the sculptors Andor Mészáros and Sándor Antal, the painters Hajnal Csutoros and Judit Rácz, and religious figures such as the Transylvanian bishop Kálmán Csiha, pastor Sándor Bíró and Father Csaba Dézsi were broadcast. Among the hundreds of programs in their audio-visual archive preserving Hungarian values and showcasing valuable members of the community, the Melbourne Hungarian Culture Circle as well as individuals such as Tamás Vida, professional snake catcher and removal man of Western Australia, were also introduced. The magazine television's work was greatly supported by the cooperation and contribution of Hungary-based creators such as editor and presenter Margit Kurunczi and Duna Television (Kurunczi & Balás, 2005).

At that time, the Australian Hungarian Magazine Television was broadcast at 11 o'clock p.m. on Sundays⁷ every two weeks for thirty minutes and was further supported by presenters Szilvia Papp, Ilona Teleki, Eszter Parádi, István Benedek and Ronald Barkóczy, as well as by cameramen Szilveszter Hipping and András

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⁷ The program was broadcast at different times throughout the years according to the sources quoted (Fejes, 1999; cf. Kurunczi & Balás, 2005). In addition, according to the February 2012 issue of the *Australian Kisújság*, Melbourne Hungarian Television (MHTV) was broadcast at 16:30 on Channel 31 on Sundays (Szeverényi, 2012).

Dvornitzky. The television programming was sustained from donations and by the dedication of the team and Kalman Solymossy in particular, “who with his special individuality conjured a unique atmosphere for the broadcasts” (Kurunczi & Balás, 2005).

8. CONCLUSION

Despite all the hardships he had to face, Kalman Solymossy successfully adapted to his new home and integrated into Australian life in general. But most importantly of all, his activity significantly contributed to Australian cultural life (Mrongovius, 2014, quoted by Szeverényi, 2014a) and The Hungarian Community of Australia in many ways. Not only did he successfully face and combat the effects of deprivation and exclusion from the social and theatre world after his 1956 escape from Hungary, but with extra effort, hard work, intrinsic motivation, and with never-fading optimism he was able to re-create his artistic talent on a higher level through founding and maintaining his ballet school, choreographing and dancing in ballet performances, and organizing as well as contributing to the local Hungarian Arts Festival. As a dance educator, he did not simply teach ballet moves but set an example and gave hope to his students by supporting them financially as well as mentally and emotionally. Finally, he gave back to the Australian society that accepted and appreciated him as well as to the global Hungarian community by preserving and promoting the values of Hungarian culture through his television program.

Although this study did not eliminate the all uncertainties regarding Kalman Solymossy’s career, it did reveal a rich period of his life and influence – which has so far only been partially uncovered – on the cultural and artistic life of not only the Hungarian community but a much wider spectrum of Australian society. Moreover, the present study represents a worthwhile addition to similar attempts to rehabilitate those Hungarian artists who, despite having left the country, deserve to be paid attention to. Many were forced to emigrate and among them, several artists and ballet dancers, who should be remembered because of how they preserved their humanity, managed to attract public attention a second time for their worthy accomplishments, even though they were not able to resume their careers in Hungary.

Imre Dózsa’s closing remarks from an interview are a worthy conclusion to the recollection of Kalman Solymossy’s career: “The art of dance is terribly evanescent, and great performances and great accomplishments disappear without a trace. Therefore, what everyone who does art needs is our ability to appreciate our predecessors” (mara222100, 2011).



Figure 12. Elizabeth Mrongovius and Kalman Solymossy in a picture provided by the Mrongovius brothers and their wives for the exhibition commemorating Kalman Solymossy in the Faith Ferenc Library of the Melbourne Hungarian House on October 26th 2014 (Atyimás, 2014)

As László Szeverényi, editor of the *Australian Kisújság* recalled: "Kalman was rather reserved regarding his private sphere. He did not even accept personal assistance near the end of his life. We who were with him and helped him at the beginning of his successful Melbourne career will keep him in our memory forever." (Szeverényi, L., personal communication, March 13th, 2021)

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