

This building was erected (between 1898 and 1900) on the site of a former arsenal, as a result of an architectural competition. The architects, Aladár Arkay and Mór Kallina were to face a rather demanding project: to design a building in a pre-existing block which should function both as a theatre and a library in order to satisfy the expectations of the residents of Buda.

There used to be a restaurant on the first, and a café on the ground floor of the Vigadó. The relatively simple eclectic appearance of the building is compensated for by some magnificent art nouveau decoration inside: an impressive hall, the wide marble staircase and pillars, a spacious richly-decorated theatre hall and a splendid 301-seat theatre. Nowadays, performances of the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble approximately 120 times annually can be seen here.

**Coordinates:** [47° 30.1641' N, 019° 2.2815' E](#)

{vsig}gallery/venue/bv{/vsig}

### Detailed information

The Buda side of Hungary's capital city, Budapest became culturally and economically more developed and prosperous than Pest by the end of the 17th century. Buda was re-conquered from the Turkish invasion after 150 years and then the city's progress took a slower pace. The 'Vigadó' used to be a large storeroom of the army and later it was a military cart-storage building. In 1867 (Compromise) the building was in possession of the 'K. und K.' Army. The rather simple storage buildings rested on baroque and Mediaeval foundations.

By the end of the 19th century, the borough of Pest had caught up with its rival both culturally and economically. In the middle of the 19th century, the 'Pesti Vigadó', a huge cultural center was built on the Pest side of the Danube. It was suitable for many cultural occasions of that time, mainly balls, receptions and concerts. The citizens of Buda also wished to have a building in which they could host their cultural events. In 1892, Károly Gerlóczy (deputy mayor of

Budapest) received a formal request from the Buda citizens about their wish for a new and modern cultural center. Realization of this plan took a longer time, since there seemed not to be a suitable site for a future cultural center. The problem was solved finally in 1894, when PM Sándor Wekerle managed to get through a bill that issued any former military buildings into the possession of the Municipal Office of Budapest. This bill gave not only the Buda Citadel but the spacious cart-storage building on the corner of Fő utca, Corvin tér and Iskola utca to the Municipal Office. It appeared to be an ideal spot for a cultural center. The Municipal Office wished to enlarge the area so they bought the two neighboring plots as well.

In 1897 the City Council of Budapest called for tenders of a cultural center. Basically, the main requirement was multifunctionality, the new venue had to be appropriate for being a library, having several assembly rooms, an auditorium and what is more, a restaurant. Two architects won the right for realization, Aladár Árkay and his father-in-law, Mór Kallina. They started the construction works in 1898, and they finished it one year later.

The new cultural center became a two-storey building, designed in the eclectic style features of the 19th century, and had a courtyard and a roof structure like a dome. The frontage colonnade combines features of ionic and renaissance styles as well. Italian (Florentine and Roman) design can be discovered while seeing the windows and gates. Wooden pillars and columns could be seen originally on the main facade.

Although the Iskola utca was modest, Corvin tér and Fő utca sides of the external walls were richly ornamented. The building's main block has two flanks attached to it. The semicircular windows of the first floor and circular ones of the second floor used to have richly decorated frames.

The Vigadó was completely appropriate for cultural purposes, however its decoration was rather simple in contemporary standards. Simplicity was due to economic reasons. The fact that the sculptors of the frontage was not from Hungary could be the explanation why we cannot find any mentions in contemporary publications or in later historic descriptions. Simplicity can be an interpretation of the artistic unimportance of the authors, since there were no possibility of well-known Hungarian sculptors of the age being linked to such a grand enterprise. Some art historians suppose that the statues were made by László Kászonyi, one of Kallina's less talented colleagues.

It can be seen on old photographs that the Fő utca corner of the building used to be a café, and on the Iskola utca corner there was a restaurant. A lavish interior ornamentation compensated the rather moderate decoration of the exterior. A marble colonnade was in the spacious atrium with marble stairs led up to the first floor. The stairs were generously lit by lights on either sides, with light green walls. The internal Stuccoes of the building were manufactured by the Company of Matscheko and Schroedl. The ground floor was occupied by the café, the restaurant and some cloakrooms, and the first floor held a 350 m<sup>2</sup> hall, decorated with allegoric paintings of Erik Pauli. 270 spotlights and 3 large arch-lamps lit the hall which was especially appropriate for balls. The grand hall opened into two smaller rooms on both sides. There was a large restaurant for 400 people at the Iskola utca part of the building, and that part contained the Buda Citizens'

Circle's assembly room, reading room and gaming rooms. The second floor consisted of four private flats, and there could be found the offices of the Buda Library Association and the Buda Registry Office.

The new "Vigadó" was opened in January, 1900, and the first occasion was a carnival ball. The lavish opening ceremony included a charity raffle, and it was attended by both the Buda and Pest aristocracy. Later the ball-room was converted into a 306-seat auditorium.

During the WW II. the building was seriously damaged and the former design and layout had not been taken into account during the consequent restoration works, which meant a considerably less impressive and less suitable appearance. Nowadays the theater hall is the home of the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble, that gives a performance here more than 120 times per year. Today, the building has more functions: not only the Hungarian Institute for Culture and Arts but Hungarian Heritage House also can be found here.

A building-less company of the National Theater wanted to move into the former 'Vigadó' in 1997, but the idea was finally rejected together with the plan of building a huge underground parking area.

In 2007, new restoration works began. It was absolutely time to start the renovation because the latest one happened in the 1940's, and it focused mainly on restoring the damages of the War. The main goal was to make the building simpler. In that renovation the main task was to repair the exterior of the building and to reinstall the original decoration.

The main facade recovered its original, impressive outlook: the formerly absent statues of famous composers and the mythological statue group above the tympanum were placed on their original spots. The formerly walled-up windows were opened again, granting the building its original sense of space. The restoration was chiefly founded by the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture.

The restored "Vigadó" changed name and function: it became the seat of the Hungarian Heritage House, in service of representing Hungarian folk culture.

## The architects

### **Mór Kallina**

*Moravia, 1844 - Budapest, 1913.*

The architect, Mór Kallina, studied in Prague and worked in Vienna. His planning of the synagogue in Rumbach Sebestyén utca (Budapest) with his master, Otto Wagner was among the highlights of his career. In Budapest he was responsible for designing elegant apartments. He generally designed buildings for contemporary upper-class families (for example Count Bethlen, Bánffy, Mocsonyi, Jálics, Oetl, etc.), and became a renowned architect of his time. His most significant work is the building of the Ministry of Defense and Military Headquarters in the Buda Castle. He was rewarded for his plan for the new Parliament, though the winning project was not his. With his son-in-law, Aladár Árkay, he won the tender for the new cultural center in Buda. His architecture is characterized by neo-renaissance elements (for example the

ex-National Sports Hall, the ex-Ministry of Defense, the St. Gerard Memorial, etc.) He used conventional neo-renaissance and eclectic elements filled with taste and experience, rarely diverting from his habitual forms. He often used to be the chief supervisor of his construction works.

### **Aladár Árkay**

*Temesvár, 1868. - Budapest, 1932.*

The architect, applied artist and painter Aladár Árkay, went to study to Italy and France after graduating from the Technical University of Budapest. He used to work together with Mór Kallina, and designed buildings in eclectic style ('Vigadó', St. Gerard Memorial). His individual works were characterized by folkloristic as modern style as well. At the beginning of the 1900's, he turned to Art Nouveau. Árkay was one of the most well-known experimentalists before the War. His extraordinary talent prevented him from being attached to one sole artistic style.

The Art Nouveau-style Babochay Mansion on Andrásy Avenue (erected 1906.) considered to be Árkay's most significant work, according to his contemporaries. However, the posterity rather appraises the folkloristic design of the Városmajor Roman Catholic Church. Árkay's works include the Baróthy Mansion, the Hungarian Reformed Church and the "Rákócziánium", Catholic Parish and Boarding School in Budapest, and the Roman Catholic Church in Győr's industrial district. Árkay won the Greguss Prize in 1928, a distinguished Hungarian artistic prize. In his later works (town hall and post palace of Mohács, the Győr Theater, and the plans for the Erzsébet Avenue in Budapest) the most up-to-date architectural concepts of his age has been reflected.