
2016. May
June
Eszter Sümegi
Shakespeare 400+ Festival
The Tempest
The Fairy Queen
Billy Elliot – the Musical
Bryn Terfel
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Dear Music Lovers,



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I am profoundly honoured that the Hungarian State Opera are presenting my opera The Tempest in their excellent programme. The General Director Szilveszter Ókovács and his colleagues have assembled a wonderful cast and production team and I know that it will be a memorable evening. As I complete the finishing touches on my new opera, I look back with a father's fondness on my first full-scale opera, a work that is very close to my heart, and it is hugely significant to me that it is to be produced in Hungary, whose music and musicians I have loved and learned from so much throughout my life. I am particularly happy to have this work, born on the banks of the river Thames, performed in Budapest in 2016 as we mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

I send my very best wishes to all of the cast, the conductor Péter Halász, the creative team and the Opera House staff. This is a truly exciting moment for me.

Best wishes

Thomas Adès





PÁL GÖTTINGER
Photo by Orlai Production Office



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MAGYAR ÁLLAMI OPERAHÁZ

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A BUDAPESTI FILHARMÓNIAI TÁRSASÁG
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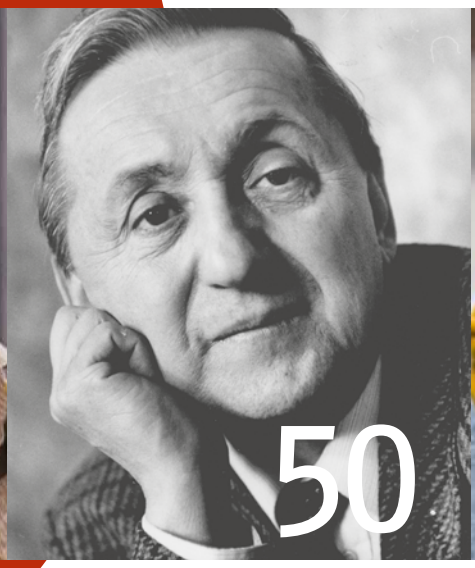
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OPERA

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HUNGARIAN STATE OPERA

RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHER: General Director Szilveszter Ókovács
PUBLICATION CONCEPT: Dr. Monika Turkovics, Director of Marketing and Communication
EDITOR: Viktória Filip
LAYOUT: Mátai és Végh Kreatív Műhely
PROOFREADER: Ildikó Endreiné Szemők
PREPRESS: Mátai és Végh Kreatív Műhely
PRINTER: Keskeny és Társai 2001 Kft.
COVER PHOTO: László Emmer
ADVERTISING CONTACT: hirdetes@opera.hu
Printed in 30,000 copies
ISSN 1789-4093

AUTHORS: Anna Braun | Adrienn Csepelyi | Viktória Filip | Viktor Hankó | Tamás Jászay | Zsófia Krupa | Ferenc László | Kornél Magyar | András Oláh Tímea Papp | Zsófi Rick | András Várhegyi | Zoltán Zsiray-Rummer

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Work first, rewards afterwards

Celebrating her birthday in early April was the Opera's two-time Chamber Singer Eszter Sümegi, who also received Hungary's Artist of Excellence award on the occasion of the country's 15 March national holiday. But it wasn't just because of these major distinctions that we were talking.

Kornél Magyar

© Photo by László Emmer



DIE WALKÜRE | Photo by Attila Nagy



LEAR | Photo by Attila Nagy



AIDA | Photo by Zsófia Pályi

– As you were intensely working on *Walküre*, the news must have knocked you for a loop and maybe gave you pause, like the other distinctions you've received in your now nearly quarter-century career...

– I was rehearsing *Walküre* when I received the phone call about receiving the Artist of Excellence award for my high-level and exacting achievements on behalf of Hungarian art. It was completely unexpected and unprepared for, since I had not been counting on it at all. It's not for certificates and titles that I practice and sing, but if I'm rewarded, then that is an uplifting and fantastically great feeling. First I thanked God, my family and Márta Ónody, my teacher, and everybody who had stood beside me. Lots of things went through my mind, as I've been in the profession for 23 years, and from Mimì to Brünnhilde has been a long journey. For the last few years, Wagner and Strauss have dominated my repertoire, but I still enjoy singing *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Aida* very much. Next season I'll get the chance for that too

– Along with those two German composers, your favourites are Verdi and Puccini, as your first appearance was as Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera* in Győr, and at the Opera House here in Budapest, it was as Mimì in *La bohème*. The other Italian heroines followed, and Wagner and Strauss came later.

– In the first decade of my career I sang only Verdi and Puccini, and then I added Mozart's Countess and Leoncavallo's Nedda. I first sang Wagner in the 11th year, in the ominous *Lohengrin* directed by Katharina Wagner. Half the audience rejected the production, while the other half like it, rejoicing that something was happening at the Erkel. Then along came Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, and I appeared in Paris a the Théâtre du Châtelet as Gerhilde, one of the Valkyries, with Linda Watson, the same marvellous Brünnhilde I sang Sieglinde with in March. I grew to love her a lot and consider her a great artist and person, one who helped me a lot to get ready, including during rehearsals. Last season I sang Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. Géza M. Tóth's *Walküre* in March was interesting and very modern in concept. As much as possible, I tried to make it my own, always starting from the music. With Verdi, Wagner and Puccini, one absolutely must sing the notes as the composer envisioned them.

– Which is more difficult, learning a new role and identifying with the heroine for an extended period or peeling off the costume when the production is over and having to return to being a wife, mother... a woman? In six or so performances of *Walküre*, you obviously can't just "take off" Sieglinde and then "move back in" every three days.

– Learning a role like that is ideally a year-long process, and I spent at least that long with it. But even when



DIE FRAU OHNE SCHATTEN | Photo by Attila Nagy



DIE KÖNIGIN VON SABA | Photo by Péter Rákossy

I wash off the make-up, the character doesn't vanish inside me, especially with difficult roles by Verdi, Wagner or Puccini. These great romantic works often touch me so much I can't sleep at night: they play in my head and I feel the melodies in the cells of my body. You also have to know that for a production like this, the words and notes have to be ready to go and perfect months ahead of time. My own ideas might not always jibe with the directing, but musically I'm generally right on. The répétiteurs always help a lot, and conductor Péter Halász took up the entire opera with me much earlier. Tóth's directing was a unique test because Sieglinde here was a "fashion victim" whom Hunding considered his property, not a partner. That's why it was easier, even necessary, to abandon it later, because the roles have an involuntary effect on me. Even while studying the part, I allow the emotions to fully soak through me. If I'm singing Tosca, I don't need to become a murderer, but I do have to summon up a very stressful memory in order to kill Scarpia, the sexual blackmailer, on stage out of powerful passion. I have to identify with the characters in the opera, but if that doesn't work, I try to call forth some kind of help from my own experience. The beauty of performing opera is that I can live through an experience that I couldn't in my own life. Every night I can create unique characters, but know for sure that when the curtain goes down, I'll still be me.

– Yes, Eszter Sümegi, with her own emotional life, has to be an actress, not just an opera singer. Which is dominant? Or both are equally?

– There's an opera I love very much: *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. I play the Empress, and in the third act I have to appear before Keikobad, the father and chief god. When the plot has me reaching the spirit world, the gaze of one of the women on stage makes me think of my mother's eyes, my mother who has been gone for more than 20 years. That's upsetting enough, but then I have to address the father: "*Vater, bist du's? Drohest du mir*" – and my father is no longer alive either. It's very difficult to fight back my tears when I get to this part, because I know that one day I will present myself to God in the same way, and I hope I'll see my parents again.

– You come from a family where faith and work are key.

– I started singing with Calvinist psalms in the church choir as a little girl, and I still regularly appear in oratorios that include a fair percentage of the high points from the history of sacred music. Verdi's *Requiem* is my favourite, but I've performed many others too. Singing the title role of Liszt's *Legend of Saint Elizabeth* was a wonderful and uplifting experience. Faith is a very personal thing. It helps me in my career, pushes me along in life and helps me make sure I'll handle the beautiful tasks of the future better and better and at an ever higher level. O

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WAGNER

A BOLYGÓ HOLLANDI

07. I 01., 02.

Világsztár fellépő: **Paul Potts**

Címszerepben: Kálmándy Mihály I További szerepekben: Rálik Szilvia I Wiedemann Bernadett I László Boldizsár I Gábor Géza Díszlet: Khell Csörsz I Jelmez: Füzér Anni I Zenei supervisor: Pál Tamás
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* A készlet erejéig.

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MÉDIATÁMOGATÓK:

Greetings from the island of sounds



Photo by Brian Voce



The opera *The Tempest* that Thomas Adès composed to the libretto by Meredith Oakes was premiered at London's Royal Opera House on 10 February 2004. Coming to Hungary in May, following London's Covent Garden, Strasbourg, Copenhagen, Santa Fe, Frankfurt, Lübeck, New York and Vienna, is this work that is not merely an opera adaptation of Shakespeare, but a self-standing creative work true to his spirit.

Tímea Papp

In addition to the fact that Shakespeare's final independently authored work, dating from 1610-1611, is itself full of music – and this extends beyond the two songs remaining from it, since it also includes the music to tame Caliban, and the sounds of Prospero's island that give the drama its extraordinary lyricism. Over four centuries, it has inspired vocal and orchestral works, and nearly 50 operas have been based on it. Expanding the diversity of genres of adaptation is the fact that *The Tempest*, which can be considered a kind of recapitulation, is not built around a single set of themes: it addresses power, friendship, love, revenge and forgiveness, and moral and emotional questions, the realistic and the supernatural, reason and Providence, all appearing in it equally, and can be interpreted as a metaphor for the theatre, social politics, ethics, or even private life.

This creation by Adès was inspired by a West End dramatic production directed by Jonathan Kent he saw in 2000. His librettist, Meredith Oakes, with major successes behind her in prose theatre, opera and television, did not take the easy way. The Australian writer and dramaturg pulled apart the drama and the essence of the story and the text in such a way that in rebuilding the deconstruction, even Shakespeare purists will find nothing to object to. While she altered the linguistic structure, she also retained certain phrases. While she left the characters by and large intact and scarcely changed the drama's structure at all, she did not simplify their features into black and white, but instead clarified them. Adès's music, ranging from dissonance to the lyrical, also eschews illustration: with a virtual lack of arias, he instead concentrates on the tragedy implicit in the story and the precise expression of the emotional fluctuations of the characters. Ethereal, witty, incandescent, enchanting, full of energy – after the world premiere, the critics were not stinting with their praise for Adès.

After all this, it's no coincidence that it is with heightened anticipation that we await one of the most exciting premieres of the Shakespeare season, staged by the well-honed team of director Ludger Engels and his design colleagues Sabine Blickenstorfer and Ric Schachtebeck, who have many triumphs in German prose theatres and opera houses under their belts. The team also includes conductor Péter Halász. Engels had worked with Halász on Salvatore Sciarrino's *Superflumina*, and having him as music director carried great weight. "It was a very good experience, with very concentrated work," he said. "I like to work in a team with people who don't think in hierarchies. Although I, the director, have to make the final decisions, we are equal partners. This can mean that we inspire and motivate each other, so that we can understand each other from a few words, and above all, having the same intellectual basis is the important thing. This means opinions can differ or debates take place in a way that has a fructifying effect on the project," Ludger Engels explains his method of work. He stresses that it's not that they leave each other to themselves, but rather that they have a maximum level of openness towards, and faith in, each other.

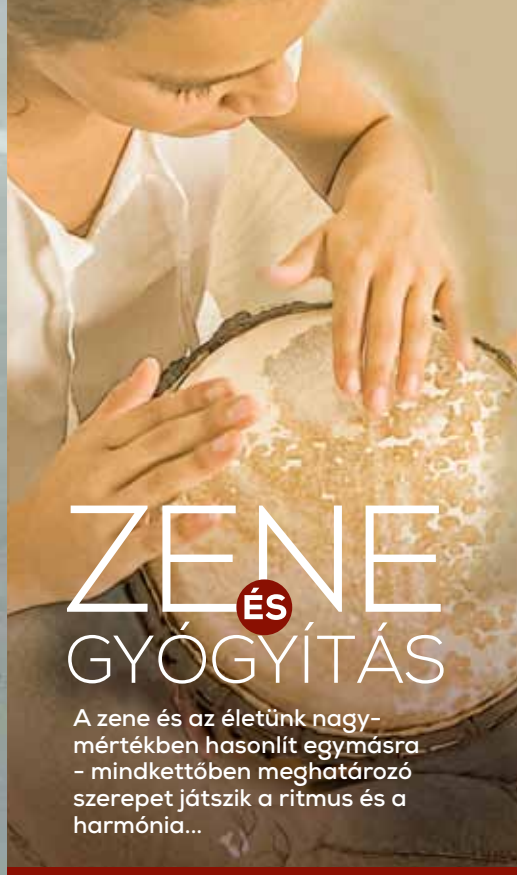
Naturally, the director of numerous contemporary operas wouldn't have agreed to the invitation if the work didn't look interesting: years earlier he

had come to know the work through his good friend Moritz Junge, costume designer at the London world premiere. He seized this musical world full of interesting twists and turns, containing both realistic and supernatural elements, often in parallel with each other and layers built atop each other, yet nevertheless easily graspable

The dramatic and spatial realisation of the two contrasting levels of this psychological and natural tempest, most visible in the music and already perfectly "visible" in the overture, presented the most difficult task for set designer Ric Schachtebeck. Should it be a real storm with a raging sea and pouring rain? Which is more important? Depicting a drifting ship or showing the people's internal struggles in a more abstract form? It wasn't so much the sets as the space that had to be created for the arising emotions of fear, horror and crisis to thicken together. The physical and psychological shipwreck has to be a clear and precise image, stresses theatre and film set designer Schachtebeck, who together with costume designer Sabine Blickenstofer, has nothing but words of praise for the Opera's workshops and their employees' "old-fashioned" expertise.

The director – as already experienced with dramatic and operatic versions of *Macbeth*, was drawn to Shakespeare, and was curious as to how to express the atmosphere in *The Tempest* in prose and music. They read the play and the libretto in parallel. They reached back to the 17th century: the starting point for preparation was researching Shakespeare's era, so that they could precisely understand the reference, the medium, and starting from there, sought the answers for Adès's and Oakes' interpretation. For example, why Prospero hands over power to the new generation: Ferdinand and Miranda.

And of course, there is the lure of novelty, because this was the first time for all three of them to work in Budapest, although they had seen several performances at the Opera House. Through Péter Halász, however, they were perfectly clear on how the project was going, where the cast selection stood, and how the singers were learning their parts. Still, they were leaping practically into the unknown, and it's no wonder what excitement the start of work brought when they first met the singers and got to know them. Then they entered a partly calmer, partly more active state during the rehearsal process, as they built the characters more and more on the characters of the singers, shaping the characters from their shared ideas, Ludger Engels explains. Then a new phase follows, when the production stands on its own two feet, everyone has a deeper and deeper understanding of their role, its motivations, and then a sudden bit of uncertainty pervades the mood as they leave the rehearsal stage for the final new space of the much larger Opera House. The work of building comfort zones then resumes in order for the energies to come together for the premiere. The director and his designer colleagues, however, are not just going to rely on the emails from the assistants and dramaturgs: they'll fly back to Budapest to continue to monitor the production's fortunes. O



ZENE ÉS GYÓGYÍTÁS

A zene és az életünk nagymértékben hasonlít egymásra - mindkettőben meghatározó szerepet játszik a ritmus és a harmónia...

A zenei élmények megelőzik a beszédet, az érzelmek szintjén működnek. Gyakran nagyon nehéz verbális módon kifejezni ezeket az érzéseket... Egy pszichotrauma feloldásakor, ott, ahol a szavak megtorpannak, gyakran csak a zene segítségével tudunk továbbhaladni. Egy-egy ilyen pszichotrauma olyan, mint az éjszakai hold. Nagyon messze van tőlünk, de mindig kísér. A zeneterápia segítségével képessé válhatunk arra, hogy ezeket a lelki megrázkódtatásokat „időbe és térbe" helyezzük, azaz „lehorgonyozzuk" őket a múlt megfelelő időpontjához, és onnantól nem kell tovább „cipelnünk" e terheket. A kliens egy fajta módosult tudatállapotba kerül, amelynek során az élmény „elragadja" egy lelkiállapotból s egy másikba repíti, olyan – képzeletbeli – helyre és időbe, ahol közelebb tud férkőzni a problémája megoldását jelentő kulcsokhoz. Képletes értelemben a lélek néhány ajtaja csak violinkulccsal (időnként basszuskulccsal) nyílik.

(Részlet dr. Kollár János cikkéből. Mindennapi Pszichológia, 2015. 3. sz.)
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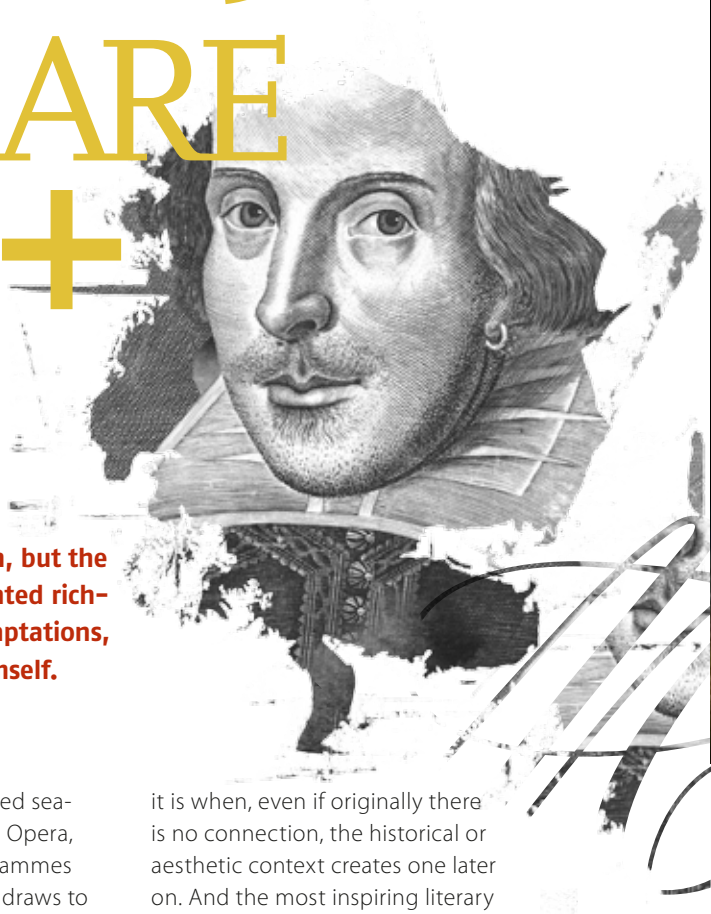


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Ha komolyan szórakozik...

SHAKESPEARE 400+

As you like it



We're most of the way through the Shakespeare Season, but the best is still to come: a festival of practically unprecedented richness taking place in three venues, with 17 different adaptations, capped by an appearance by the mighty Bryn Terfel himself.
Ferenc László

"Shakespeare himself was half of Creation," declared the poet Sándor Petőfi, and even if this laudatory statement contains some agreeable exaggeration, it is because the impact of the Bard of Avon's oeuvre truly does far outstrip that of any other poet or dramatist. This will soon be brilliantly confirmed by the opera literature, as well as the ballet repertoire, as Shakespeare's works have served as the literary and dramatic basis for so many musical works for the stage over the last 400 years. For that is exactly how long it has been since Shakespeare died in the spring of 1616, and this is the anniversary that dominates the Opera's season this year. The greatest undertaking of the 2015/16 season, however, is just now taking place: from 18 May to 2 June, the traditional May Celebration this year promises a Shakespeare Festival.

The institution of a themed season is now familiar at the Opera, just as condensing programmes into a festival as the year draws to a close, after the Budapest Spring Festival and before the Wagner in Budapest festival, is also now part of Budapest's opera and concert life. General Director Szilveszter Ókovács further outlines the reasoning and significance behind the approaching Shakespeare-themed series of events: "In its 400 years of history, several tens of thousands of works have been created in the genre of opera. But the more-or-less agreed list of masterpieces is also long. Why not place this treasure in a different prism each year? Each season should be different from the last, and we can enjoy contemplating the perceived, actual and undefinable interrelationships between various works. Along with how interesting it is when, even if originally there is no connection, the historical or aesthetic context creates one later on. And the most inspiring literary source material always came from Shakespeare, which is why we leapt at the round-numbered anniversary, construing the little cross marking the 400th anniversary of his death instead as a "plus" sign.



LEAR - ÉVA BÁTORI, ANDRÁS PALERDI, TÓMAS TÓMASSON, CAROLINE MELZER, ANDRÁS KÁLDI KISS , SZILVIA RÁLIK |
Photo by Szilvia Csibi



THE TAMING OF THE SHREW
JESSICA CARULLA LEON | Photo by Attila Nagy

We are offering 17 complete adaptations of literary works, from the Baroque to the contemporary, from countries ranging from Germany to America, in styles ranging from incidental music and singspiel to opera, dance drama and musical theatre. Anyone who joins us for the entire Shakespeare Marathon by the end will not only see Bryn Terfel, they'll also get a glimpse into the universe created by this great playwright. It will be an unforgettable occasion, and one that can scarcely be repeated on this scale."



MACBETH - SZILVIA RÁLIK, MICHELE KÁLMÁNDY | Photo by Pál Csillag

As proof of the event's size, simply listing the entire programme would exceed the limits to this article's length, and so we can only provide details about a few special events. Firstly, the Opera House premiere of Thomas Adès's *The Tempest* on 21 May (with three more performances to follow) is the most important of the festival and one of the most important of the season. Adès's work embarked on its march of triumph in February 2004 at London's Covent Garden, performed by Simon Keenlyside, Ian Bostridge and Philip Landgridge. The work has made it since then to Vienna and to the Met, whose video simulcast gave millions around the world the



FALSTAFF - AMBROGIO MAESTRI, BEATRIX FODOR | Photo by Szilvia Csibi



MACBETH- RAMI LAHAJ, DÁNIEL PATAKI POTYÓK | *Photo by Attila Juhász*



MACBETH - MICHELE KALMÁNDY, SZILVIA RÁLIK | *Photo by Pál Csillag*

chance to see the magical Prospero's operatic island. The Hungarian premiere, staged by German director Ludger Engels and conducted by Péter Halász, with Franco Pomponi and Laure Meloy in the principal roles, will soon enchant us.

The National Theatre of Szeged will make a guest appearance at the festival (on 27 and 29 May) with their performance of *Sly*, borrowed from the induction scene of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari's tragic 1927 opera will be directed by Pál Göttinger, starring Boldizsár László, who also sings the lead in the two May performances of *West Side Story* and in Sándor Szokolay's *Hamlet*.

In addition to the Shakespeare-themed opera and ballet works from the Opera's repertoire, there will also be a number of special productions. One will be the "other" comic opera immortalising Falstaff: Otto Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a chamber (or in this case, "foyer") work premiering on 24 May and sung by members of the Opera's chorus. The other special productions at the Erkel are concert versions of *Hamlet* (on 19 May) and, sharing the same subject matter, Vincenzo Bellini's opera *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (23 May) and Charles Gounod's French Romantic *Romeo and Juliet* (28 May).

A key feature of the event are the 400 young people (high school students and primary and university students studying drama) who have committed, along with their teachers, to spend the semester preparing to watch the Shakespeare series. They will be at each of the venues, including the Liszt Academy, for the premiere of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (27 May).

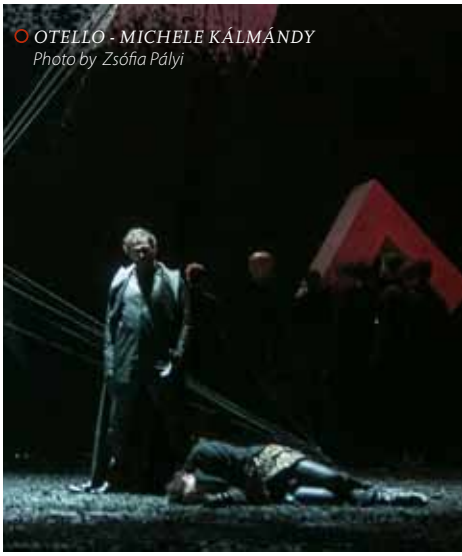


ROMEO AND JULIET, LILI FELMÉRY, GERGELY LEBLANC | *Photo by Péter Herman*



○ *WEST SIDE STORY* | *Photo by Zsófia Pályi*





○ *OTELLO - MICHELE KÁLMÁNDY*
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

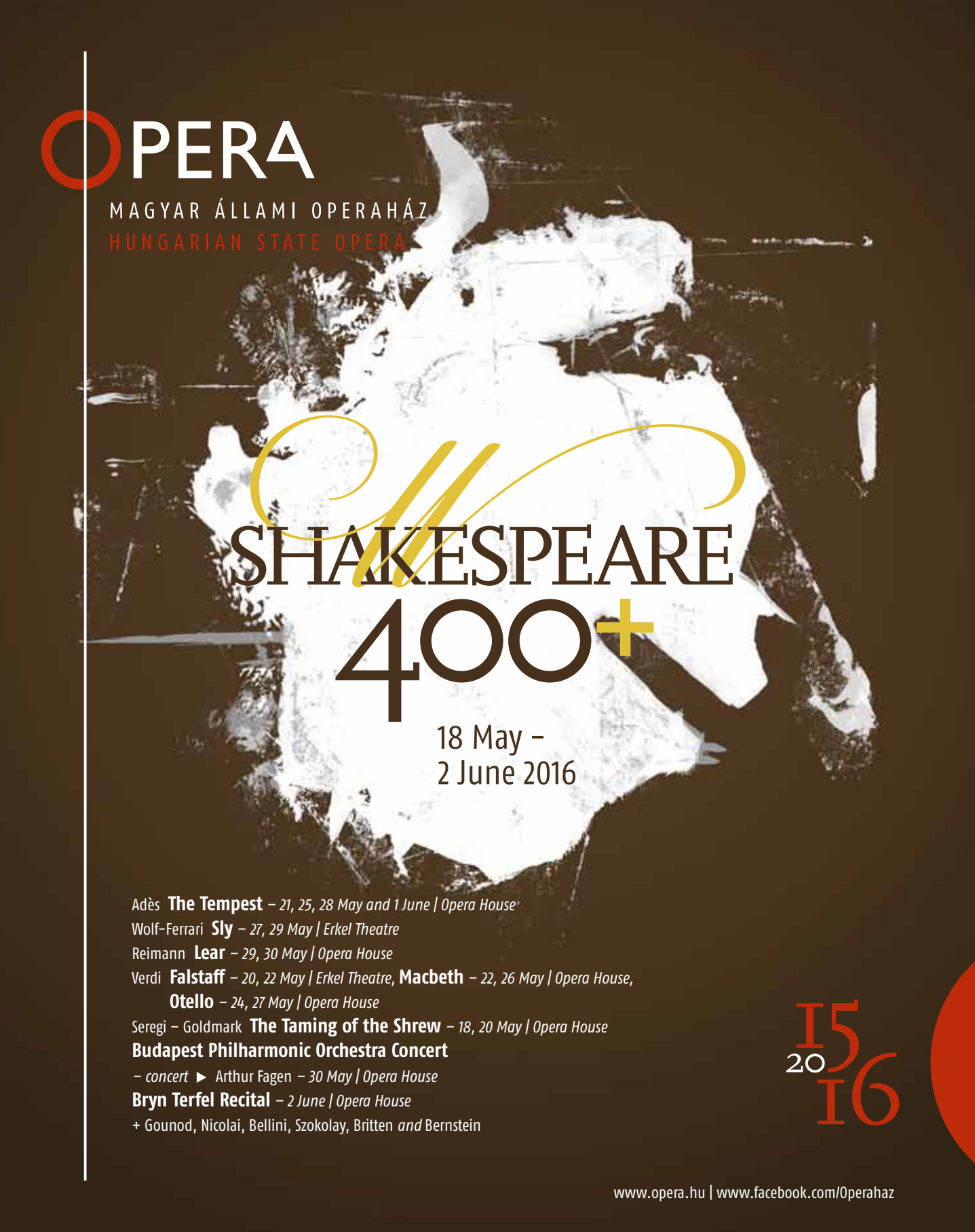
Speaking of "bards", a famous poem by János Arany means that most Hungarians associate the word with Wales. On 2 June the pride of Wales, Bryn Terfel, will crown the festival with Iago's *Credo* and Falstaff's "*honour monologue*", as well as some wicked arias from his successful album *Bad Boys*. ○



○ *ROMEO AND JULIET - GERGELY LEBLANC* | *Photo by Péter Herman*



○ *WEST SIDE STORY - BOLDIZSÁR LÁSZLÓ, HELGA NÁNÁSI* | *Photo by Péter Rákossy*


OPERA
MAGYAR ÁLLAMI OPERAHÁZ
HUNGARIAN STATE OPERA
SHAKESPEARE
400+
18 May –
2 June 2016
Adès **The Tempest** – *21, 25, 28 May and 1 June | Opera House*
Wolf-Ferrari **Sly** – *27, 29 May | Erkel Theatre*
Reimann **Lear** – *29, 30 May | Opera House*
Verdi **Falstaff** – *20, 22 May | Erkel Theatre*, **Macbeth** – *22, 26 May | Opera House*,
Otello – *24, 27 May | Opera House*
Seregi – Goldmark **The Taming of the Shrew** – *18, 20 May | Opera House*
Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra Concert
– *concert* ▶ Arthur Fagen – *30 May | Opera House*
Bryn Terfel Recital – *2 June | Opera House*
+ Gounod, Nicolai, Bellini, Szokolay, Britten *and* Bernstein
2015/16
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A Welshmen from Valhalla

Taking the stage of the Hungarian State Opera House on 2 June will be one of the world's most sought-after bass-baritones: Bryn Terfel. We spoke to the Welsh star about the hammer-wielding Donner, low-flying biscuit tins and his other passion: football. But how did Pink Floyd get into it? *Adrienn Csepelyi*

© Photo: Sheila Rock, Deutsche Grammophon



Photo by Sheila Rock, Deutsche Grammophon

– Is it true, that story that you completely lost your voice before the finals for the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World? What happened exactly?
– Yes, on the morning of the contest I woke up mute. The previous week had been incredibly difficult for me, since I was representing my country, and I also had my examination concert at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where I was then studying. As the day went on, my voice gradually started to come back and strengthen, and inevitably, the life-saving adrenaline rush allowed me to sing at the finals that night. At that point I couldn't look back: I went for all or nothing on the stage. I'll never forget the relief when I got to the end of the Dutchman's aria. That day, nothing could help me and my vocal chords but some steam, lots of liquid intake and pure Welsh courage!

– How do you recall your first rehearsal with Sir Georg Solti?
– The wonderful Welsh bass-baritone Sir Geraint Evans introduced me to him. He arranged an audition, whereupon I got work in *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* in Solti's already-underway concert tour. I vividly remember how much I dreaded my first rehearsal: I was shaking like a leaf. But then I'd get to experience human greatness up close. If anybody ever embodied the classical ideal of the Maestro and everything the title means, he was the one. Skill, a great knowledge of music and a strong personality that always knew what it wanted and never deviated from it. Even the debut managed to be intense. Solti put me rather to the test, and rightly so: he always drove me to achieve more.

– What's the most important thing that you learned from Solti?
– He shaped me into a better performer: taught me to instantly respond to how he, as conductor, was constructing and interpreting. And last, but of course not least: if you sang with Solti, people listened. Your career could take a new direction, doors instantly opened for you. Solti built careers. If only I could have worked longer with that genius!

– Why don't you hold master classes?
– Because such occasions create situations where I don't feel at all comfortable. It might even still have an effect on my regular repertoire. Even at Guildhall I wasn't too enthusiastic about such events, and I still think that there are much more suitable people than I am to come be at the centre in this sense.

– But is there anybody in music with whom you'd be glad to sit down with for a few days of training?
– If I could pick only one person, it would be Renata Scotto. I even took classes with her in New York once and loved them. I was sitting quietly in the dark corner with the Met's new administrative director, John Fisher. Both of them are so full of

knowledge and anecdotes, that I'd never even try to follow in their footsteps.

– What is the funniest thing that you've ever read about yourself in the newspapers?
– Once somebody wrote that I am an ardent fan of steam locomotives. Well, that's not the case.

– What's the nicest compliment you ever heard from a fan?
– I can't highlight anything in particular, because it's always terribly moving when somebody says my music helped them get through a serious illness or a difficult life situation. And this is what makes me think that it's incredibly worthwhile to work hard and with dedication.

– Imagine you're with the gods of Valhalla! Which one do you have a good relationship with?
– Obviously the frenzied and furious ex-boxer-type and hammer-wielding Donner!

– What godlike superpower would you like to have, and how would you use it?
– Ever since I was very young, I've regularly dreamed that I can fly. In these visions, I'm surveying everything below me, floating silently and calmly. If I really could fly, that would come with unforeseeable consequences. (*Laughs.*) But this is just an illusion.

– What's the most unexpected thing that ever happened to you on stage?
– Once at the Wiener Staatsoper, during the curtain call at the end of *Tales of Hoffmann*, a crazed fan on the top level threw a tin of biscuits at the head of the poor tenor. The tenor, who was named Plácido Domingo, serenely picked up the package from the floor and happily waved it in the air: it was his favourite snack! At first I was so astonished I didn't know what to do, but then when I saw Domingo's reaction, smiling with a bump on his head, it became a fun thing.

– Let's suppose that you could commission a musical work from any composer of your choice. Who would it be? Would you ask for an opera or perhaps a song cycle?
– I'd engage Roger Waters of Pink Floyd and ask for a rock opera. But it would also be lovely if Stephen Sondheim would write a musical to the medieval Welsh stories from *The Mabinogion*. I know that he'll enjoy these tales just as much as I do. Who knows? Maybe it'll happen one day.

– They say you're a big football fan. Tell us which you'd prefer: watching Gareth Bale lifting the World Cup trophy skyward for Wales or to chat with Wagner about *Meistersinger*, with the help of a time machine?
– I'd be too nervous and insecure to step into a room with Wagner, much less ask him anything... So I'd rather watch Gareth Bale lifting the Cup. The side played wonderfully this year, and made it to this year's European Cup, while Bale has been performing outstandingly for a long time. Our footballers deserve every credit for their hard work and persistence!
As we say in Welsh: "*Ymlaen a ni!*" – "Forward!" O

Disappointment, defiance and eternal happiness

Three timeless tales, three beloved ballets: in May, the month of great passions, John Cranko's choreography for Onegin was back in the repertoire, as was László Seregi's *The Taming of the Shrew*, while Gyula Harangozó Jr.'s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* will be on the June programme. Because the whole world really is made of love.

Anna Braun



ONEGIN - ALIYA TANYKPAYEVA, ROLAND LIEBICH | Photo by László Emmer

Onegin: the story of rejected love

Puskin's story from nearly three centuries ago still speaks to those who know what it's like to be loved, or know unrequited love, or perhaps yearn for love. Onegin, the young Russian golden boy could have everything from life if he'd just understand how much Tatiana's pure and sincere affection is worth, but the dandy chooses pain, disappointment and emptiness instead of happiness. Tchaikovsky's bitter-sweet music, which does not include a single measure from the composer's opera of the same name – completely filled the Opera House as the curtain rose on the garden of Madame Larina's house, on the cheerful, carefree and young Olga and her fragile sister, the daydreaming Tatiana, who falls in love at first sight of the aloof stranger from the city.

With incredible sensitivity, John Cranko's dance drama depicts an era when women could not approach men, in which the fulfilled and happy passion was a great rarity, and when it was usual for people to murder each other out of jealousy. The South African-born choreographer selected the excerpts from the novel-in-verse with brilliant dramaturgical feeling, and although the story's arc fills up the three acts, the piece never drags. Some of the most prestigious institutions in the world – such as the Met, Covent Garden, the Bavarian State Ballet and the Berlin and Vienna state operas – keep it continuously in their repertoires. It returned to Budapest in November of 2012, and after an absence of a few years, this May the audience could again delight in the endless Russian soul, wrapped in enchanting costumes.



THE TAMING OF THE SHREW - JESSICA CARULLA LEON, JÓZSEF CSERTA | Photo by László Emmer

The Taming of the Shrew: love tames

Shakespeare wrote this charming and merry story of the untameable, taunting, big-mouthed and endlessly grumbling Paduan girl in the 16th century. In the past five centuries, its characters have come to life in many forms, including in musical, film and ballet adaptations.

The best-known of the ballet versions is perhaps Maurice Béjart's 1954 choreography to music by Scarlatti, although John Cranko's 1969 version, also set to the Italian composer's work, is no less important. Budapest, fortunately, got its own *Shrew* in 1994, thanks to László Seregi, who chose music from Károly Goldmark for his choreography. This piece by the master of storytelling and dramatic humour has again returned to the Opera's stage this spring. The legend of the fiery Paduan girl and her heavy-handed husband comprises part of the Seregi's Shakespeare cycle, preceded in the eternal dance of love by *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The hitch in the plot was easier created than solved: the sweet and lovely Bianca cannot marry until her father finds a husband for her stubborn older sister, as tradition requires. Kate, however, has no intention to yoke herself into a marriage. Padua produces no suitors, but a nobleman from Verona hoping for a lavish dowry decides to take her on. The two characters engage in the ancient ritual of bickering and rivalry between man and woman, sometimes gently, sometimes more stridently, but every minute filling the plot with the vitriolic humour of self-irony.



SNOW WHITE AND THE 7 DWARFS - ILDIKÓ BOROS, BENCE APÁTI, BORIS MYASNIKOV, DÁVID MOLNÁR, BÁLINT KATONA, CSABA HOMMER, ANDREA P. MERLO, RICARDO VILA MANZARANES, ANDRÁS SZEGŐ | *Photo by László Emmer*

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: the feeling that brings adulthood

The story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is one of the best-known western "legends". We know both the Grimm brother's more horrifying and sombre version and Disney's lighter, less terrifying one. Just as *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and even *The Sleeping Beauty* all belong to the classical ballet literature, the fable of the fair-skinned and raven-haired girl with blood-red lips persecuted by her wicked stepmother who is saved from loneliness by seven little dwarfs and from death by love is part of the fairy-tale literature. This story is more than a fairy-tale: it's really about a child maturing into an adolescent, and then an adult.

This charming story first took on life in the language of ballet in the early 2000s at the Erkel Theatre, and now Gyula Harangozó's choreography and Rita Velich's costumes are returning to the repertoire. Kentaur's grandiose sets and Tibor Kocsák's music are proof that our sense of wonder will be just like it was in our childhoods. We are enchanted by the mirror, play together with Snow White in the dwarfs' two-storey house, and marvel at the bubbling waterfall as we again meet the pedantic Doc, the ever cheerful but ungainly Happy, the gentle Bashful and the constantly snoozing Sleepy. We pity Sneezy, humour Grumpy and want to help poor clumsy Dopey. We share the girl's fear of the Stepmother, and eagerly await the Prince just like we did decades ago, when our parents read us these stories night after night at the side of our bed. Snow White's story is about becoming an adult, but her gift to us is becoming a child. Because, in this story, everything is clear and simple: there is no blurring of good and evil, nobility and wickedness, helpful and harmful intentions. And for two acts, we too are sure to live happily ever after. O

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Psychological fairy crime thriller

Standing at the heart of the production of Purcell's opera *The Fairy Queen* being staged by director András Almási Tóth is a heroine in search of both herself and happiness. This work, evocative of *film noir*, dispenses with *A Midsummer Night Dream*, the comedy it originally belonged to, but retains Shakespeare's wit. *Zoltán Zsiray-Rummer*

– Based on the cast list on the Opera's website, you've substantially transformed the original piece, using much fewer characters. What have you changed, exactly?

– *The Fairy Queen* is a so-called "semi-opera", based on *A Midsummer Night Dream*, for which Purcell created musical/vocal interludes. We reworked the structure, using only the work of the English composer, and I wrote a completely new plot, using the original as a starting point. It's really a *film noir* script about a *femme fatale*, which comes to life through Purcell's songs. The heroine is seeking both herself and happiness through various men, but always fails. I got to choose the singers, so even while writing the story, I was thinking of specific artists. They have a very complex task, since they have to enrich the production with their movement and physical presence, which physical theatre





○ *DESIGNS BY SEBASTIAN HANNAK*

choreographer Kristóf Widder will be helping them with.

– With the heroine seeking her way, then, we could say that something of Shakespeare's comedy still remains in it – from its philosophical content.

– Actually, yes, several of the characters might ring a distant bell, and like the original work, the line between dream and reality is blurred here too. Also remaining, for example, is the eternal question of whether one can only define oneself through one's relationships with others, or if first one must be clear about oneself in order to form a true connection with another. Worthily of a true *film noir*, we'll also find a criminal angle. The moment of clarity, however, comes at the end like an awakening, as if the whole story had been a single, very long night, although the plot itself had unfolded over some years.

– Why did you decide on leaving out the original structure, and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* with it?

– Precisely because of the prose sections. Performing the comedy and the musical work together with actors and singers seemed to me like theatrics from a different era. The declamation made the text very musical, which centuries ago was highly stylised and poetic, but today's different tastes would see it as affected. On the other hand, if we performed the prose sections with a modern approach, this would entail a huge gap in the sung segments, which I wanted to avoid. Nowadays, musical and prose theatre differ substantially in their "mechanism of action".

– Where did the *film noir* idea come from?

– I was looking at different associations to lend drama to the story to replace *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For me, film and opera somehow come from the same source, and I had directed a condensed version of Purcell's work as an examination at the music academy a few years earlier, when I noticed a similar line of thinking. Now I've further developed this idea built around those earlier improvisations.

– So that means that the stage design will evoke the '40s and '50s?

– Yes, in keeping with the genre, there will be a strong light-and-shadow effect, with a great deal of artificial lighting providing the nearly black-and-white character. A great German designer, Sebastian Hannak, is creating sets we can use to create many various spaces, while the unique costumes portraying the era are the work of Krisztina Lisztopád. The recurring element, where the story returns time and again, is a bar, with an actual jazz band playing.

– The renowned Kornél Fekete-Kovács and his quintet, no less. How did they get involved?

– This was the result of another big change. Purcell wrote a huge amount of dance music for the piece, but I've taken this out in order to reinforce the dramatic character. I asked the jazz musicians to replace these passages with classic jazz numbers that are suited to the production's style, but still use Purcell's musical motifs. Naturally, we retained the opera's other parts, which the opera's orchestra will interpret on modern instruments, albeit in a Baroque configuration. From the start, we've collaborated on developing the production with the young Australian conductor Benjamin Bayl. It seems we've assembled a very good team together for this production. O



○ *OLIVÉR LUKÁCS, DÁVID BORKA, ZALÁN KAMARÁS, JOHN BAILEY MCALLISTER, ÁRON VIZLENDVAI, KAMILL HÁMORI KÖKÉNY, SÁMUEL GÁSPÁR, MÁTÉ PÁL DÁNIEL, BERCEL TÓTH, ANDRÁS HREBENÁR | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*

Boxing for ballet

Multiple rounds and eventual triumph: *Billy Elliot – the Musical* had its title character. A replay of the most important moments of the exciting match! *Viktória Filip*

In February 2015 news spread that the HSO was looking for child performers, and for an important assignment at that. There began a "search" for a boy of around 10 with good physical attributes, stamina, an excellent sense of rhythm and other skills needed for dance. Voice not cracking, pure singing voice and with experience in tap dance or classical ballet; a bit of background in any kind of acrobatic athletics wouldn't hurt either. Some asked whether Hungary actually had such a multi-skilled wunderkind who could carry a full-length show. Ballet Director Tamás Solymosi was optimistic from the start: yes, he existed.

It wasn't easy at first though. The first round took place last year in March, when over four days and nearly 40 hours, with more than 100 youths participating in the review of their dancing, singing and acting abilities. The first audition examined their classical ballet skills, including barre and centre practice, jumps, and then made the boys prove their skills in street dance, tap dance, modern dance, acrobatics and improvisation. The second audition involved scale and rhythm exercises, the required songs from Billy Elliot: (*Expressing Yourself* and *Electricity*) and a monologue, as well as a song of any genre chosen by the candidate. The professional jury led by the director, Tamás Szirtes (and including Solymosi, Emese Soós, head of artistic administration, and conductors Géza Köteles and István Silló, voice teacher Mária Toldy, choreographer Ákos Tihány, choreographic assistant Ferenc Molnár, director's assistant Eugénia Vaszilenko and elocution teacher Zsuzsanna Fehér) failed to find a suitable candidate. As Tamás Szirtes indicated in an earlier edition of *Opera Magazine*, "it's not enough for the lead performer to be nice and sweet: he has to be able to sing, dance and master prose at a high level." Of the candidates from Hungary and the neighbouring countries, 13 would continue, a less-than-reassuring result, since suitable performers had to be found for the triple cast and the substitutes. In addition, children at this age can undergo relatively rapid vocal and physical changes, and the jury had to take this process into consideration as well.

As a result of the more targeted search, a second round ensued at the end of May for which at the recommendation of professional colleagues, a good number of boys, around 50, came



ILDIKÓ HŰVÖSVÖLGYI, ILONA BENCZE, ESZTER CSÁKÁNYI, TAMÁS SZIRTES, SZILVESZTER ÖKOVÁCS, TAMÁS SOLYMOSI | *Photo by Zsófia Pályi*

to audition from other dance schools and large cities around the country. Not everyone took the age restriction seriously: there was one little rascal who was barely seven years old, but with seven miles of talent, he truly enchanted the audience.

But the staff members still could not just sit back and relax, and the 20-25 children who made the cut only got three weeks of holiday themselves before participating in intensive training. Taking the lead at this point were the teachers involved in the production: Mária Toldy and Brigitta Kovács (voice), Zsuzsanna Warnus (répétiteur), Zsuzsanna Fehérné Kovács (elocution) and Csaba Jantyik (acting). Teachers from the Madách Musical Dance School and High School under Gyula Sárközi in particular are doing a great deal to ensure success: since May, they have been helping the performers with their preparations in modern dance, classical ballet, tap dancing, and with music lessons.

But the casting still hadn't ended: four more rounds remained in the competition to join the production. A separate selection was held for the girls age 9-12 from the Madách Musical Dance School.

The candidates for the adult cast – invited from among the country's best known actors – took part in a three-day audition, and in January of this year the adult dancers were selected from over a hundred applicants, and the chorus and orchestra members were also surveyed. The reason was simple: "the cast was the most important thing; it would decide the production's fate."

Fate, which the story has Billy Elliot altering by replacing boxing lessons and his mining family's hard life for ballet lessons. The Opera's management has made no secret about wishing for something similar: to channel young people toward dance and the magic of the stage and help develop the next generation so that in ten or 20 years there will still be excellent Hungarian ballet dancers for the MNB and other ensembles. For this, nothing could be more inspirational than this musical based on the 2000 film that won several Oscar nominations.

The librettist, Lee Hall, and composer Sir Elton John conceived of the idea for the piece after the film's premiere. The multi-Grammy-winning composer considers the work to be one of the most rewarding experiences of his life. As he put it earlier:

"The talented young performers who have become part of our *Billy Elliot* family have amazed me with their achievements from the very start. Each time I have revisited the show, I have been moved by Billy's heart-warming story and his determination to achieve his dreams. I am so delighted that new audiences around the world will now have the opportunity to experience this extraordinary piece of work."

The musical has enjoyed continuous success since its premiere: April marked 11 years of its West End run,



NIKOLETT GALLUSZ, ÉVA LUKSZ, JUDIT LANDINEK *Photo by Zsófia Pályi*



○ *OLIVÉR LUKÁCS, BERVCEL TÓTH, ZALÁN KAMARÁS, ÁRON VIZLENDVAI, KAMILL HÁMORI KÖKÉNY | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*

where it has won numerous awards (including four Olivier Awards), with more than five million viewers attending some 4600 performances. The Broadway version can boast 35 drama awards, including including ten Tonys, while the productions running in Canada, Australia, South Korea, Brazil and the Netherlands are similarly successful, with the first Japanese-language version coming to Tokyo in 2017. Now joining this illustrious group are Budapest and the Opera, where the musical will be on the programme from the end of July. This justifies the exacting and careful selection process in order to ensure that the uplifting story of young Billy comes to life with similar beauty and quality. ○



○ *KRISTÓF NÉMETH | photo by Zsófia Pályi*



○ *ILDIKÓ HŰVÖSVÖLGYI, ILONA BENCZE, ESZTER CSÁKÁNYI | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*



○ *SZILVESZTER ÓKOVÁCS, TAMÁS SOLYMOSI, ÁKOS TIHANYI | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*



BILLY ELLIOT
THE MUSICAL

Librettist:
Lee Hall

Composer:
Sir Elton John

Original director:
Stephen Daldry

Director:
Tamás Szirtes

Translator:
Ferenc Bárány, István Puller

Choreographer:
Ákos Tihanyi

Tap dance choreographer:
Boglárka Szikora

Set designer:
István Szlávik

Costume designer:
Alida Kovács Yvette

Conductor:
Géza Köteles, István Silló

Lighting designer:
János Madarász „Madár"

Scenist:
János Szűcsborus

Director's associate:
Eugénia Vaszilenko

Billy:
Dávid Borka, Zalán Kamarás, Olivér Lukács, McAllister John Bailey, Máté Pál Dániel, Áron Vizlendvai

Michael:
Sámuel Gáspár, Kamill Kökény Hámori, Máté Pál Dániel

Tall boy:
András Hrebenár

Mrs. Wilkinson:
Éva Auksz, Nikolett Gallusz, Judit Ladinek

Dad:
Kristóf Németh, András Stohl, Sándor Tóth

Grandma:
Ilona Bencze, Eszter Csákányi, Ildikó Hűvösvölgyi

Tony:
Richárd Borbély, Balázs Csémy, Attila Fejszés

Mum:
Renáta Krassy, Boglárka Simon

Mr. Braithwaite:
Bálint Ekanem, Zoltán Mező, Pál Ömböli

Also starring: Attila Barát, István Fillár, Veronika Foki, András Hrebenár, Gábor Jenei, Zoltán Kiss, András Körösi, Gyöngyi Molnár.
Featuring the dance ensemble and the orchestra of the production and the Children's Choir of the Hungarian State Opera.

Children trained and prepared in part by:
Zsuzsanna Fehér, Csaba Jantyik, Brigitta Kovács, Mária Toldy

The children featured in the Opera's production have been trained and prepared in partnership with the Madách Musical Dance School and the Hungarian Dance Academy.

Premiere: 29, 30 and 31 July 2016; Opera House | Further dates: 1–21 August 2016

This production of Billy Elliot – The Musical has been developed with special permission from Music Theatre International (MTI, 421 West 54th Street, New York, New York 10019 – tel.: (1) 212 541 4684, www.mtishows.com), using material it has made available.

And the award goes to...



ILDIKÓ KOMLÓSI | *Photo by Attila Nagy*

Often quoted is G. B. Shaw's sour bon mot that rather than rejecting accolades, it is better to avoid having one's name come up for consideration in the first place. There are always exceptions to this rule, of course.

Tamás Jászay

At the Opera, June is a time for summing things up and looking ahead. A time between the past season and the upcoming season, when there is a moment for the management of the House to point out to both the artists and the audience the extraordinary accomplishments that were made here. Traditionally, they have handed out prizes of significant moral and material value to the outstanding soloists at the season-closing *Night of Stars Gala Night*. Since 2012 the title of Chamber Singer of the Hungarian State Opera House has gone to the best soloist, and since 2015 the title of Chamber Artist of the Hungarian State Opera House has gone to the best orchestral musician, while the finest ballet dancers will get to bear the rank of Étoile of the Hungarian Ballet through the next cycle.

But what's the situation with other institutions of cultural life in this country? In this compilation, we have a look at an (incomplete) list of some of the prizes awarded by professional bodies to the best in the branches of literature, music, the fine arts, and of course, theatre.

If we look at which non-governmental award-winners cross the media's stimulus threshold, then what unsurprisingly comes first to mind is literature, with its "award market" dominated by the Aegon Art Award.
Founded in 2006, and being handed out for the 11th time this year along with a three-million-forint prize, this recognition was linked for years to a so-called co-award in connection to the sister arts. An independent, professional jury selects the ten best works of the year from



SZILVIA RÁLIK | *Photo by Attila Nagy*



GÁBOR BRETZ | *Photo by Tomas Opitz*



ZOLTÁN OLÁH | *Photo by Attila Nagy*

the vast number of books produced in Hungary, regardless of genre. The announcement of this short-list is subject to great anticipation, and the "winning" names are highlighted in the media. This isn't surprising, given that past winners have included such heavyweights in the local literary world as György Spiró, Péter Esterházy, and Imre Oravecz in 2016.

And new ones are also coming: the Libri literary prize is on its way, together with a sum of 1 million forints, which is decided on by a panel of four professional jurors after voting in multiple rounds. The most important criterion for the organisers is the efficient and widespread popularisation of contemporary, Hungarian literary works. In addition to having a list of the nearly 200 works from the first round of voting online on their website, there is an audience prize based on the best works from the ten finalists selected by the critics in an online poll. The top ten represents the crème de la crème of contemporary Hungarian literature, including Zsuzsa Rakovszky, János Térey and Pál Réz. Another novelty is the Attila Hazai Literary Prize founded in 2016, aimed at helping young and mid-life writers with a sum of half a million forints. Imre Bartók was the first winner selected by the professional jury.

The Béla Bartók-Ditta Pásztory Award has been bringing classical musicians renown for over 30 years. On the anniversary of Bartók's birth, the board, consisting of professors from the Music Academy, hands out the plaque and cash prize, partly funded by royalties collected from Bartók's oeuvre.

In the past decades, exceptional Hungarian artists such as György Kurtág, Péter Eötvös, Ilona Tokody and Ilona Prunyi have had the chance claimed this



LILI FELMÉRIY | *Photo by Attila Nagy*

prize. The two current winners are Zsófia Tallér and Dénes Várjon. For a few years now, Müpa Budapest has been focusing somewhat differently on its most favoured artists. In addition to being named artist of the season or band of the season and appearing in the institute on a regular basis throughout the season, their performances are given an independent season pass, so their loyal fan base can follow their current work. The first marquee names belonged to Zoltán Kocsis and the Ferenc Liszt Chamber Orchestra, and this year we can enjoy the performances of László Fassang, the Purcell Choir and the Orfeo Orchestra, while next year it will be Kristóf Baráti, and the production of the Contemporary Ballet of Szeged.

In the area of fine arts, we should mention the MúzeumCafé Award presented by the editors of the Museum of Fine Arts' publication, *MúzeumCafé*. Founded in 2011 with the goal of drawing attention to the profession's innovations, they have recognised, for example, the permanent exhibit in the Mór Jókai Memorial House in Balatonfüred and the creation of the museum exhibit rescuing the Goldberger collection. This year, three curators were highlighted: Krisztina Jerger, András Rényi and László Százados won the prestigious prize, accompanied by special artwork for their concept of the successful El Kazovsky exhibit at the Hungarian National Gallery.

Numerous theatres have an "in-house" prize, perhaps the most well-known for the viewers is the annual one at the Budapest Comedy Theatre, where the society members hold a secret vote to pass out the Éva Ruttkai Commemorative Ring on 30 December. The exceptional jewellery, signed by the legendary actress, has been handed out since 1987



GABRIELLA LÉTAY KISS | Photo by Attila Nagy

and is worn for one year, including by the likes of Géza Tordy, Iván Darvas, Róbert Alföldi, Enikő Eszenyi, Erzsébet Kútvölgyi and Barbara Hegyi. It is also the artistic community who gets to award the 13-year-old Erzsi Máthé Award at the József Katona Theatre, to such winners as Ervin Nagy, Adél Jordán and Zoltán Bezerédi. The National Theatre founded the Imre Sinkovits Award, which has been awarded to actors Zsolt Trill and Attila Kristán so far. And the accolades also manifest in a different way, by uniting, so to speak, all the companies in the country: any Hungarian-language theatre can make a nomination for the Attila Kaszás Award, then the nominees themselves select, by secret vote, the three artists who will ultimately be chosen by the audience. Past award winners included József Szarvas and Zoltán Mucsi, and last year Tibor Mészáros was handed the prestigious title.

This overview cannot hope for comprehensiveness; it simply picked out a few exemplary initiatives recognising the very best with cash, fame, and glory. And if we began with Shaw, let's end with him: the author of the famed quote proved himself wrong when, after long hesitation, he finally decided to accept the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925. And how right he was! O



Emlékem

SIMÁNDY JÓZSEFRŐL IRODALMI PÁLYÁZAT

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A legjobb pályázatokat pénzjutalommal díjazzuk:

I. díj: 100 000 Ft
II. díj: 30 000 Ft
III. díj: 20 000 Ft

A pályaműveket postai úton kérjük eljuttatni a következő címre:

Kistarcsai Kulturális Egyesület
2143 Kistarcsa, Bercsényi u. 18.

A beadási határidő **2016. június 1.**
A pályázat részletes kiírása a **www.kike.hu** honlapon olvasható.

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Night of Stars

25 JUNE 2016 OPERA HOUSE NIGHT OF STARS AWARDS CEREMONY
- GALA NIGHT OF THE BEST OF THE SEASON

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OPERA CHORUS BUDAPEST BUDAPESTI OPERA KÓRUS





Péter Mátyás Wels 1969–2016

After originally studying to be an opera singer, the editor/reporter conducted a huge number of interviews and reports for the news programmes of TV2, the Opera's strategic partner. In cultural matters, we could thank him, as a fan of the theatre and opera, for the most meaningful and credible accounts, and we were shocked to learn of his death.

Matyi was to the opera like a percussion instrument in a musical work. He wasn't always there, but he always reliably appeared at key moments, giving significance to our news the same way a timpani sounds: precisely and with unquestionable impact.
Farewell, Szilveszter Ókovács, Monika Turkovics, Judit Várkonyi and Zoltán Balla

Adventurers coming, Ambassadors going



Photo by Zsófia Pályi

It has been three years since two initiatives were launched under the aegis of the Opera to develop a sensitive, informed and music-loving audience across the country. The quantitative data from the organisers of the OperaAdventure and the work of the Ambassadors speaks for itself, but the result is quite a lot better even than this.

Viktória Filip

"Good day to you!" The burly opera singer who greets the classroom he's entered with a deeply sonorous and resounding bass voice commands instant attention. The ballet dancer who intersperses with a few cleverly executed and spectacular turns has a similar effect, as does the musician who pulls out of case after strange case beautiful instruments that make the most remarkable sounds. This is the personal magic that captivates even these hard-to-reach teenagers. Nobody, however, thinks that just their presence and a few sentences will be enough to complete the mission.

"Any artist from the Opera or another theatre with an opera staff who has not yet reached the age of retirement, who no longer takes part in actual productions, but still would like to see their decades of experience put to use may become an Ambassador," said singer Éva Bátori, the programme's technical manager. "They keep up with developments, meaning they can put together and perform a high-quality presentation using genuine costumes and props, which they are able to flesh out with some kind of personal, small-scale programmatic material. So, they have to meet quite high requirements, because they have to relay the very highest level of understanding about the genre of opera."

The Ambassadors first provide basic background over the course of four sessions before they can move on to the specific works in the fifth. "I consider it important for them to establish a long-term partnership with the institution (whether it be a school, cultural organisation or club). To show up somewhere once and then not nurture the seeds is a waste of energy. The hardest task is to address different age groups in the appropriate language. Some of the Ambassadors specialise in certain subjects or generations, but others are drawn to being able to present about the same matters to kindergarteners and pensioners alike," Bátori continues.

The programme now encompasses the entire country, and even extends into Transylvania. Over two academic years, therefore not including the data for





Photos by Zsófia Pályi



2015/16, the Ambassadors gave 1602 lectures in 268 communities, going to each at least four times a month, but sometimes nearly every day.
The interest is huge, which reflects both the internal need for music in the country of Kodály and Bartók and the gaping void in arts education. Also addressing this gap is the OperaAdventure programme, which targets ninth-year-students, who each academic year get to attend a performance series: one in the autumn and one in the spring. The two programmes help each other, because the Ambassadors often do the preparations for the trip to Budapest and then, returning home, discuss with the students what they've seen and heard. Dr. Noémi Kiszely, head of the Erkel Programme Office, says that the change in attitude and opera-attending habits is already palpable. "After each series, the letters pour into the OperaAdventure mailbox and clearly indicate that we have succeeded in reaching the young people both literally and figuratively. Anyone who is ready to watch an opera after a long train ride isn't there just to check off the cultural programme... we're talking about real fans here, and this places a huge responsibility on us."

Based on the final registration for May's *The Magic Flute*, the total attendance numbers for the Adventure now exceeds 175,000. During each series, the groups come from well over 400 institutions in around 130-160 communities. Now expanded, with the involvement of the public collections, into the CultureAdventure, the programme is now in its seventh series, but interest remains intense. Two-thirds of the students come from outside Budapest, new schools are constantly joining and taking note of the notices sent each time to every high school. "Over ten days, 25,000 students came to us, an astonishing number in itself. For our part, I feel we've organised as rationally as possible."

One might ask how one could make the youth-oriented programmes even better. Éva Bátori sees opportunities for development with subjects better integrated into the curriculum, an IT connection, and a separate image and music archive and costume and prop collection, while Dr. Noémi Kiszely is working to increase the 90% discount Hungarian State Railways already generously gives the students. So the coming and going continues, and when it comes to opera, this exponential growth can only be for the good. O







A different kind of recreation





Photo by Attila Nagy

Open-air performances of *La traviata* and *Otello* with world stars, the premiere of *Billy Elliot – the Musical*, as well as a gala programme at Balafüred's Anna Ball and a light-hearted initiation as part of the Sziget Festival.

András Oláh

The Hungarian State Opera will be presenting two popular works by Verdi, with unique casts, at the Margaret Island Open-Air Stage. On June 24 and 26, on what will hopefully be sultry summer nights, Ferenc Anger's new production of *La traviata* will debut before the autumn premiere, with the world-famous Hungarian coloratura soprano Erika Miklósa, who just celebrated the 25th anniversary of the start of her career this year, creating the role of Violetta Valéry for the first time. Partnering with her will be Italian lyric tenor Giuseppe Filianoti, who with a nearly two-decade career under his belt himself, has played the amorous figure of Alfred Germont at Covent Garden, the Wiener Staatsoper, as well as in Barcelona, Madrid and Florence, among other opera stages, to great acclaim.

A month later, on 29 and 31 July, visitors to Margaret Island will get a look at *Otello*, Verdi's most mature Shakespearean adaptation. The part of Desdemona will be sung by internationally-tested Hungarian soprano Andrea Rost, partnered with Marc Heller in the title role, as the the superb American tenor sings in Budapest for the first time in a career that has taken him to prestigious opera houses on three continents. Also noteworthy is the fact that this will be the last chance to see László Vámos's production with costumes and sets by Attila Csikós and Nelly Vágó. The production was originally developed in Szeged, also for the open-air stage, and now 25 years again, hopefully under a similarly starry sky and to noisy acclaim, it will enter retirement.





Photo by Zsófia Pályi

A few days later, the Opera House will be hosting the Hungarian premiere of Sir Elton John and Lee Hall's *Billy Elliot – the Musical*, which was hugely successful in the West End and on Broadway. With 30 performances between 29 July and 21 August, the production is being directed by Tamás Szirtes, director of the Madách Theatre, which has put up such classics of the genre as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misèrables* and – running continuously for more than three decades now – *Cats*. The Opera's partner in training the children featured in the non-replica production being run with a triple cast was the Madách Musical Dance School and High School.





Photos by Zsófia Pályi



The production will include such luminaries of the prose theatre as András Stohl, Kristóf Németh, Eszter Csákányi, Éva Auksz, Nikolett Gallusz and Eszter Balla. This unique run also features the HSO Orchestra conducted by Géza Köteles and the Children's Chorus.

Travelling to the shore of Lake Balaton and the capital of its exclusive northern shore, we arrive at Balafüred's Anna Ball, a tradition dating back to the 19th century and taking place for the 191th time this year. In connection with the outstanding society event of the summer season, between 19 and 24 July the city is organising the fourth Anna Festival offering colourful cultural events enhanced in prestige by the Opera's now tradition OperaFüred programme series. Each evening on the great stage on György Square, the chorus, orchestra and its soloists will select gems from the opera literature. The opening dance of the Anna Ball will be performed by the dancers of the HSB on 23 July, while the final day will feature an opera film of Verdi's *Otello*.

The Opera's other, also new, tradition is its regular appearance at the Sziget Festival. The organisers of Central Europe's biggest popular music event on Óbuda Island are always happy to welcome representatives from the sister arts, and four years ago the Opera got the chance to present the most popular arias to festival-goers from close up. Each evening between 10 and 17 August on the Classical, Opera and Jazz Stage, there will be a 90-minute OperaSziget production with audience participation. The songs, enhanced with humorous elements and accompanied by live music, will in all certainly once again meet with effusive enthusiasm from the audience. O

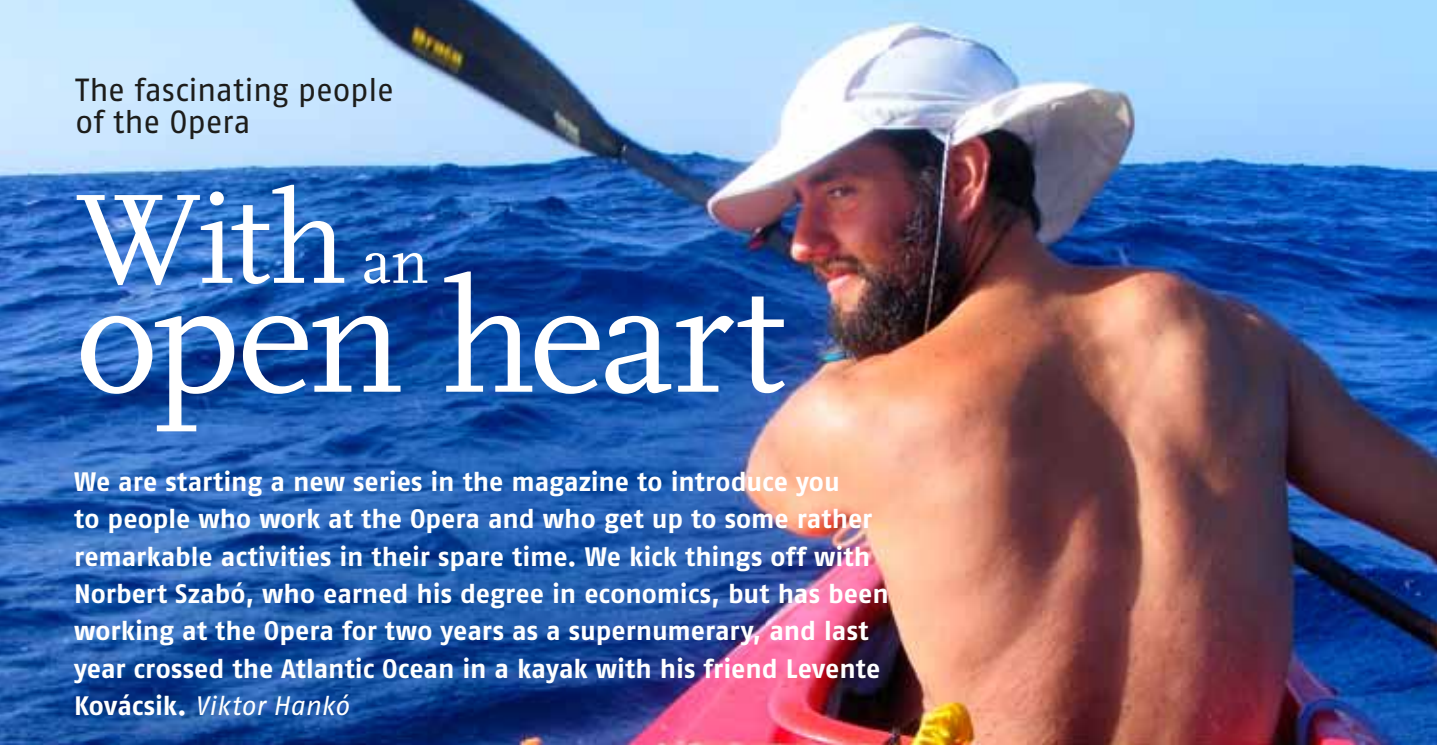


Photo by Attila Nagy



The fascinating people of the Opera

With an open heart



We are starting a new series in the magazine to introduce you to people who work at the Opera and who get up to some rather remarkable activities in their spare time. We kick things off with Norbert Szabó, who earned his degree in economics, but has been working at the Opera for two years as a supernumerary, and last year crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a kayak with his friend Levente Kovácsik. *Viktor Hankó*

A love of the sea and ocean has been a big part of Norbert's life for a long time, and he has also always known that he would like to see the world. With this in mind he – as he puts it – wanted to cook up a project that no one else had ever done before. Inspired by a book, he got the idea that, rather than taking a solo or group trip as others had done, to sail the ocean with one of his sporting friends as a twosome. Let them be the first! In 2013, after long preparation, they set out to complete the journey, but various factors, including a cyclone, got in the way. Two more years of training followed before they made their second attempt in October 2015. That's where Norbert takes up the story.

– How did this adventure start?
– Quietly. Then after a few days we met our first serious challenge in the Strait of Gibraltar, when we had to squeeze past ocean liners and tankers. It can best be described as like trying to crabwalk across the Hungária Boulevard in rush hour on your hands and knees. There were boats coming past continuously from left and right, while we were hardly able to move at all. Barely 150 metres away from us there were ships the size of a football pitch. We really had to be careful.

– Of course there were some more relaxing moments too...
– Naturally! The nights on the open water, for example, were simply spectacular. I would be paddling alone with a thousand stars shining above me. And there weren't even any waves. It was a stunning sight to see how our little boat parted the water in that calm, nighttime ocean. At the same time there were many tens of thousands of tiny plankton which glowed green when I disturbed them with my paddle. Just me and the infinite. And the glowing green ocean. Like in some wonderland.

– What do you mean when you say that that you were paddling alone?
– That we only both paddled if the weather was bad; for the rest of the time we took it in turns. The entire expedition lasted 85 days, and there were only about 10 days where we paddled together, the rest we did solo. We did four hour shifts: four hours of work, four hours of rest. Morning till night. For months on end.

– Didn't it all get too much after a while?
– The bad times, like the ocean waves, tended to come at regular intervals. I noticed that every five days or so a dark moment would come, where I would ask myself what the heck I was doing there. And each day had its emotional swings. In the mornings it was a bit depressing, the afternoon was better, and at night everything was totally relaxed.

In the middle of the 20 day there was a major problem: we ran into a storm. We really had to pay attention to the strength of the wind, because if we didn't have the wind coming from behind, then the boat gets flipped round, the waves tilt it, and the wind tosses it from side to side so everything gets soaked. It's pretty hard to get the boat back in the right direction when water's coming in. You need a lot of technical skill in this kind of situation.

– Was that the hardest point?
– No, that was when we started the journey. That's your last chance to decide not to go. Once you sit in the kayak and set off, there's no turning back. And you have to make the decision knowing that you don't have any idea what's in store later on. You just go, but you don't know where. That's why, psychologically, the first five days are incredibly difficult. To be honest, I cried every day. At that point I still couldn't control myself to the point where I could cope with the stress. It's like aching muscles after training. At the start it hurts a lot, but then you get used to it. In the beginning I had the sensation that my survival instinct was doing everything to stop me from setting off. After a while you realise that it's just a mind game.

– What was it like when you arrived?
– We landed at the island of Antigua, in the northern part of the Caribbean Sea. Before that point, for 63 days we hadn't seen anything except sky and water. For two months, while we were paddling we could only imagine our goal. Then, when I saw it in real life… An amazing experience! Indescribable!

– How can you go back to everyday life?
– It took four years to reach that peak, and we got there, but afterwards you have to come down, and it was seriously hard work. Either we fall into the void, or we consciously, step-by-step, make our way down, nice and slowly. How we do it depends on us. The downwards journey can be a descent into the depths, or a way of moving on to the next goal. One thing I'm sure of is that if a person wants to put themselves into such an extreme situation, once is enough.

– And before and after these ocean adventures you have worked as part of the supporting cast in the Opera…
– I ended up here because of a very kind actor friend. Originally I was only meant to help out for the Opera ball, but I ended up staying. It's not a big surprise, since I have always like performing. To put it simply, it's good to be on stage. I get an incredible amount of energy from the audience.

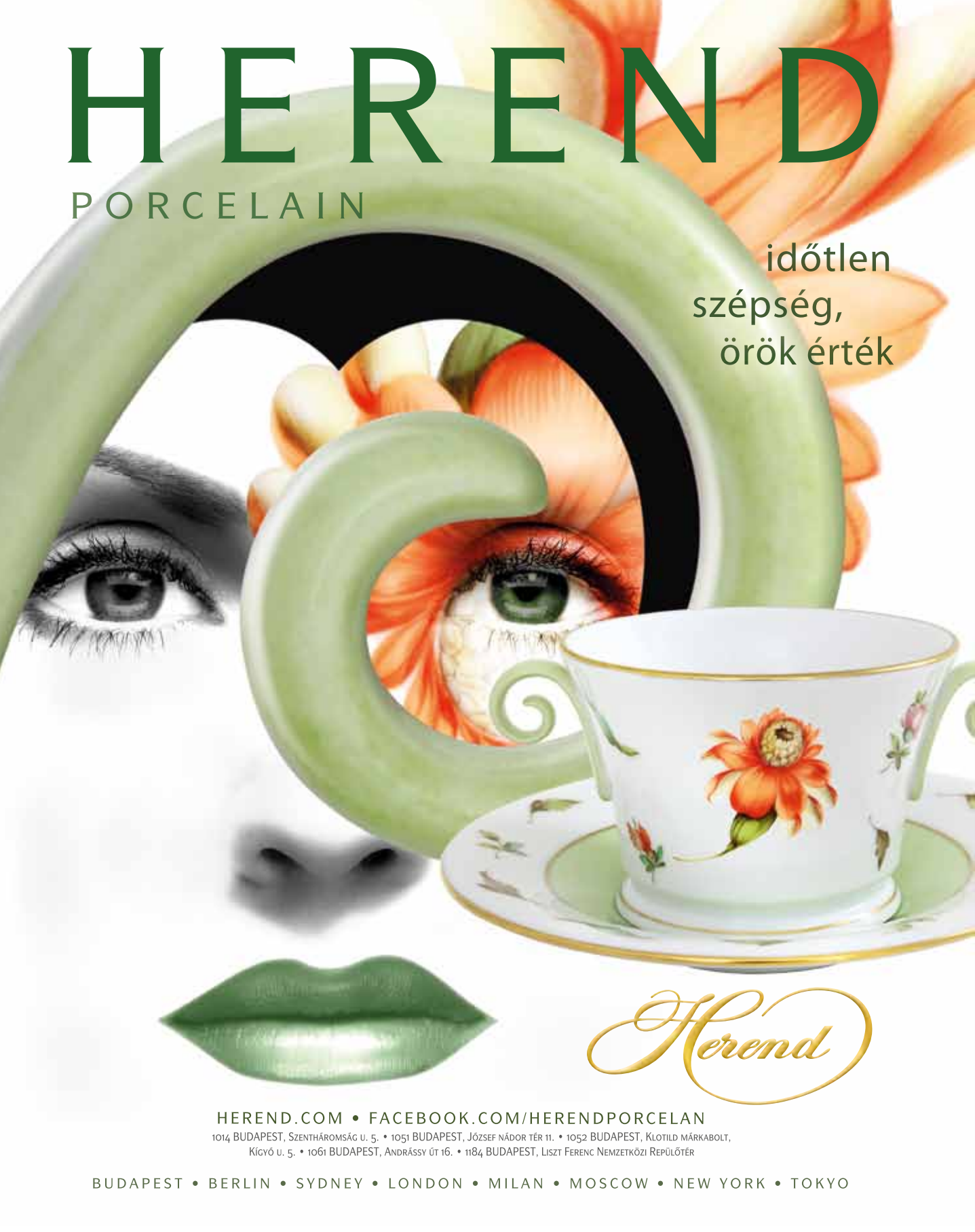

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS | Photo by Szilvia Csibi


THE RAKE'S PROGRESS | Photo by Szilvia Csibi

– And you get this feeling even when you're an extra?
– Yes, because there are still tasks or roles where you can really feel the presence of the crowd, though maybe it's just because I'm overly sensitive to everything.

– Please give us an example of when you have felt all this energy!
– I'd say *The Rake's Progress*. I play Tom's alter ego, so the whole play starts with me. I'm lying on a small sandbox like a homeless person. Then at the end of the play I come back again, hold Anne's hand and stand there on the stage with the main cast. It's a fantastic feeling!

– What do you get from the Opera?
– It might seem a bit over the top, but I would say happiness. It's good to come here, to work here. I've found great company and true friends. There are only a few things which I do gladly, but this is one of them. I take on every test happily, and I always look forward to the performances. That's unbelievably important, because people are only useful if they do what they do with an open heart. O



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A világ kedvenc gasztromagazinja már 5. éve Magyarországon

A new look amongst old splendour

To sit out out on a marble table by a boulevard with a coffee, seat turned toward the bustle – this essential sense of big city life was hitherto something only Paris had been able to elegantly provide. Up until now.
Zsófia Krupa



Photo by Péter Rákossy

The Opera Café, with its terrace by the stately institution's Sphinx statue, gives guests seated on its trademark wicker chairs this experience on spacious Andrássy Avenue the feeling of being *where the world unfolds*. The café, opened in autumn 2015, does not only to seem to fill a gaping hole in the capital – the fact that Andrássy's Avenue's wide pavements had previously largely been unused – but also provides a unique experience until now enjoyed only by the narrow segment of opera and ballet fans: consuming our food and drink in one of Budapest's grandest building in an incomparable culinary visit. The Opera House, with 132 years of history and performers past and present, makes for a unique place to have supper.

The Opera's own café also opens up the theatre building to those who have only seen it function from outside. "If one recalls any European city they've ever visited, they surely will recall a café terrace in the city centre. Budapest had to wait a long time before it could create this atmosphere that would allow masses of locals and tourists alike to feel they owned the city. It is very important for the Opera House, as both a monumental tourist site and as the country's premier cultural centre, to seize this opportunity, and not simply be an open house welcoming well-dressed audiences each evening.



This temple dedicated to art must open its doors, since like any house

of workshop, its worth is measured by the number of visitors," is how General Director Szilveszter Ókovács, who took a leading role in reinventing the institution's gastronomical amenities, expressed it. The Opera Café consists of two seating areas – the 120-seat terrace operating seasonally from late March until late October, and the classic indoor dining area accessible from Hajós Street tried to convey a café atmosphere from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with modernity and the past meeting in imperceptible harmony. To develop the concept, refurbish the space and operate the café, the Opera chose – based on a tender – a 33-year-old family business, which also reconceived, along with the ground-floor units, the first-floor Feszty Bar, the third-floor Confectionery and the buffets at the Erkel Theatre. During the development phase, the The Zsidai Gastronomy Group strived to make sure that the gastronomic offerings and appearance matched the world-class standard of the Budapest Opera House, and studied 12 of the world's most famous opera houses in the process, including Sydney's and London's.

The Thonet chairs and round marble tables are meant to provide a Grand Café-type atmosphere. Past and present meet at the Opera Café's counter, where state-of-the-art infrastructure – including the most up-to-date coffee machines – merge with the motifs and styles of the Opera's boxes. The menu was created under the direction of Zsolt Litauszki, one of the country's top chefs. The Opera Café's welcomes guests with classic fare, including soups, starters, Italian pasta dishes, pizzas and new-wave sweets. Starting from mid-April, guests have also had the option of ordering first-class breakfasts, with everything from French toast to egg dishes to croque monsieurs and breakfast cereal, with the menu also renewed with a wide range of coffee specialities, ice creams desserts and a wide range of wines, cocktails, spirits and liqueurs and beers. The high-quality courses are offered at prices that people wandering in off the street to marvel at the building will be willing to pay, not just those hungry for culture's loftiest genre. With its completely renewed café, previously only an evening affair, the Opera from now on provides a complete and informal experience for both opera fans wishing to dine and sip champagne before or after the performance and morning visitors ready to tuck into lunch after their coffee, in the hope that in time the latter will become the former. O



O *Photo by Attila Nagy*

Let's go! We can strike!

The snappy exclamation in the title is a recurring sound in the Opera House's carpentry workshop, where nothing is impossible for the industrious craftsmen when it comes to implementing the designers' constantly shifting ideas. We plunged into an atelier that will soon be housed in a much more modern building, the Eiffel Art Studios.
András Várhegyi



For the time being, however, work continues at the Andrássy Avenue building, where – except for one move when it moved from one wing to the other – sets have been constructed for the productions since the very beginning. The huge space is divided into two sections: the ground-floor gallery is used for developing the frameworks, while the basement houses the storage area and machinery. This is where the incoming lumber is shaped into standard lengths and then into skeletal structures.



The carpentry shop is where the sets, platforms, ramps and stairs used in the productions are created, and frequently furniture and props as well. "The range of tasks is incredibly varied, which is what makes the theatre world so exciting," said manager János Szick, who for 33 years now has been working to create the wonder of productions at the Opera House and Erkel Theatre and so that the performers can take the stage in a realistic-looking setting.

Primarily pine wood is used in the shop, for practical reasons: "We like it for its weight, since it is very light and easy to work with. These days, however, directors sometimes ask us to use styrofoam. This is a thin material, much harder to work with because of its fragility, and also because it's difficult to make adhere. Carpenters, after all, are fondest of wood," Szick adds, gazing at the boards piled up to the ceiling. Although it all just looks like wood to us, to the 13 employees in the shop, these are the castle walls in *Bánk bán*, the genteel salon in *Le nozze di Figaro*, the ballroom interior in *Don Giovanni* and the balcony for *Romeo and Juliet*.

Preparing a set ordinarily requires one month, although the carpenters frequently work on several productions at the same time. "In recent weeks we've been making three sets: For *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Billy Elliot* and *The Martian Chronicles*. We don't stop for a second," said the chief carpenter, who is always collaborating with the Opera's machinist and paint workshops.

After the scaffolding is built according to the designs, it goes via a nine-and-a-half metre lift to the paint shop, where it gets its canvas, colour and styrofoam decorative elements.



Photo by Attila Nagy



Here too, verisimilitude is key, or as Szick puts it, there are objects here that also exist in real life. "With sets, we have to aim for simple utility, but for the props, they really are what they seem to be. The toy cannon in *The Nutcracker*, for example, can really fire, and in creating interiors, in addition to being faithful to the styles of various eras, another important criterion is they have to be usable.

A theatre employee has to be aware that his creations will be subject to more use than is usually the case. "They don't teach this at carpentry school, and we have to learn through experience how much a material can withstand and how many wheels are needed to make it moveable," Szick explains. Here too, one can also learn the ins and outs of the craft from the great predecessors of old. The oldest carpenter in the shop is Imre Tóth who, in 42 years with the opera, has supervised everyone else at one time or another. "In order to handle theatre work, you have to be able to adapt. This isn't a factory where the whistle blows and you put down what you're doing. This occupation requires dedication and much patience," says the master, who says requirements have changed a lot since 1974. "Previously, the sets were substantially simpler, and the repertoire was also smaller.

Back then, if someone wanted a gun, it was enough to cut it out of ply-







Photo by Attila Nagy

wood and paint it. But today we have to give it an extremely sculpted look, primarily because of the television recordings," he adds.

Naturally, the available tools have also developed along with the requirements. While initially all they had were a few hammers, handsaws, angles and an worn-down jigsaw, now they work with battery-powered machines, drills, sanders and other modern equipment. The big change, however, will take place in the planned move, when the entire workshop will go to the Eiffel Art Studios, entailing a new chapter in the history of set production at the theatre.

János Szick starts his list of the new site's advantages with how improved receiving lumber will be. "Currently, the wood comes in through an emergency exit on the street one piece at a time, and then through several trapdoors. This is a time-consuming process for us. At the Eiffel building, the forklift will bring the wood directly into the workshop, saving us a lot of time. Another important change is that in the current space, two columns prevent us from laying the scenery walls completely side by side, but we will be able to in the new building," the shop manager adds, who will also be in direct contact with the other teams, since the various assembly units will be housed in the neighbouring spaces.

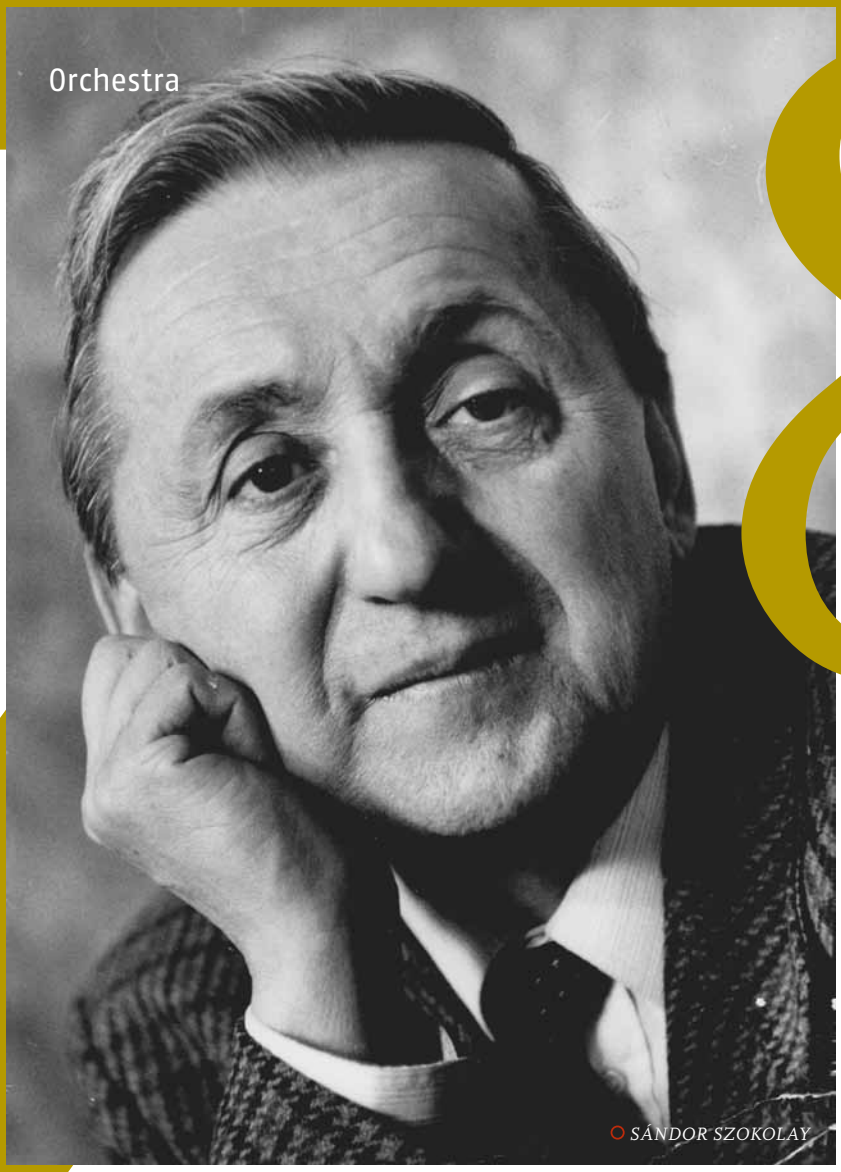
The move will allow the backdrops to the Opera's productions to be created with old know-how and modern circumstances, thus further expanding the rich stock of sets remaining from the Opera's performances of the last more than 130 years, thus not only erecting a lasting monument to, alongside the productions themselves, the dedicated craftsmen who worked on them.



PORT.hu



Válassz élményt!



SÁNDOR SZOKOLAY

Builders

Many legendary personalities have enriched Hungarian opera culture over the past 200 years. Intendants, conductors, music directors and general directors, choreographers, stage directors, singers, instrumentalists and, last but not least, composers. The building still continues, but there are gaping holes in need of immediate repair.

Viktória Filip

The greatest Hungarian cultural institution can be expected to offer a broad spectrum of quality programes that address every age group and are accessible for as many segments of society as possible, and are also appealing to foreign visitors. They should also be heart-warming, thought-provoking, entertaining, innovative or even simply provide an overarching cathartic experience; whether commissioning new works or reviving the classic grand operas, it must be a catalyst in musical life. One may ask what the Opera can do further for the sake of cultural literacy. In addition to its OperaAdventure and OperaAmbassador programmes, competitions for students, and children's activities, how deeply can it affect education and what can it do to make sure both the stage and auditorium are populated with cultured people?

Principal Music Director Balázs Kocsár thinks the opera has a clear responsibility in this regard. "I've been a lecturer at the University of Pécs for seven years, and I know both how education works in Budapest, Szeged and Debrecen and the dedicated employees there. But the simple fact is that the opera master's course is only two years long, which sadly limits the opportunities for students. There is a huge need for the Budapest Opera, like other major opera houses around the world, to operate an opera studio tasked with continuing the education and vocal training of talented singers graduating with both vocal and dramatic tasks and familiarising them with the opera repertoire. A bridge must be constructed to link the actual working artists with the youngsters and also offers an attractive career model," the music director said.

This same problem affects orchestra and chorus members, too, because the academic training teaches them primarily solo and chamber pieces. At an audition at the opera house, on the other hand, having excellent score-reading skills is a major advantage, proof that the new employees will be able to join in an existing production as soon as possible. "This also goes for the chorus when I say that they don't need to be solfège champs, but rather musicians with the same standard of sound quality as the opera singers," Kocsár added. "While with a soloist, the conductor tries to direct the instrumentalists in the pit so that they don't smother the vocal part, while the chorus also has to be able to sing through the orchestral sound night after night. This requires very serious technical preparation."

The skill level and standard of performance of the current members is a good sign that the professional singers of the Opera's chorus will also be able appear as soloists in chamber operas from year to year. Next in line after Gounod's *Mireille*, Giordano's *Fedora* and Rota's comic opera *Il cappello di paglia di Firenze* will be Otto Nicolai's chef d'oeuvre *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The composer, who was also the founder of the Wiener Philharmoniker, died at a young age two months after the work's successful March 1849 premiere in Berlin, and ten years before its discovery by the international music world. Popular in both New York and London, the composition was later declared the forerunner of the Romantic comic opera. After a hiatus of 60 years, the Opera is again presenting the work, updated by the dramatist, university instructor, editor and dramaturg Róbert Markó.

Close observation was also an important teacher for composer Sándor Szokolay, who despite being the father of four boys and one girl had more than his own children's futures at heart. With more than 100 hours of music composed – including four operas for children and seven for adults – and with several decades of teaching at the Liszt Academy, as well as working as a radio editor and television presenter, did much to raise the level of public taste. His first opera, *Blood Wedding*, based on the drama by García Lorca, won him the Kossuth Prize and widespread international exposure and placed special attention on his second major dramatic work. He had set out to translate *Hamlet* into musical notes starting from his academy years and found special inspiration for the libretto and structure on a French island in the Atlantic Ocean, although the composition itself – often done in parallel with that for *Blood Wedding* – took ten years. He needed the time to create his work adapted in four different languages, syllable for syllable, from the original Shakespeare. "János Arány's translation proved to be the most incomparably perfect, precisely following both the high and low vowels of the original," the composer said.

The critic from *The Times* reported very approvingly and in great detail. "Hamlet's soliloquy ("To be or not to be.") floats impressively between parlando singing and sung speech. There are lyrical passages as well, especially Ophelia's mad scene. The role of the Ghost is underscored with a hazily and electronically emerging, and undulating, sound, giving it a hair-raising and otherworldly sound. The composer preserves the non-twelve-note sound in such "extroverted" scenes as the characters appearing on the scene. The other important point that can help the novice listener through the structural complexity is the uniquely suggestive and imaginative treatment."

A concert version of the piece recorded live at the Opera House, the venue for all of Szokolay's world premieres, will mark the 85th anniversary of the composer's birth on 19 May. Szokolay originally planned to become a missionary, showing how he always considered the soul's development to be paramount. He taught his students that "art is not a hobby, and not entertainment. And it certainly makes people better." So there have been a few cracks here and there at the Opera House since 1884, but there will always be talented teachers who, with both minor corrections and great edifices, expand the Opera as the institution of a musical genre. O



Travelling through time

The Opera's list of subscriptions for this year will entice lovers of instrumental music with two concert series that have both promising talents of the future and superb musicians of the present paying tribute to the outstanding figures of the past.
Viktória Filip


ION MARIN


JÁNOS BALÁZS

Each of the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra's series of four concerts and an additional bonus concert provides a genuine historical overview of both dark times and happier ones, of eras that are uplifting or full of horrors, periods when there worked artists who left their imprint on the annals of music history. One such crucial figure is Zoltán Kodály, who worked through both World War Two and the communist era with the same devotion as during his more placid years of collecting folk music. In 1945, after the February siege of Budapest, the Opera House's cloakroom hosted the premiere of his *Missa brevis*, a mass pleading for peace, and this exceptional composition will be played again in the same spot on the morning of 6 March 2017. The evening's event will also focus on the charismatic Kodály on the 50th anniversary of his death.

The concert will be conducted by Romanian-born Ion Marin, whose evocative performance style and technique are sure to sparkle again as he directs *Dances of Galánta* (which was originally premiered by the same orchestra), *Two Songs* and the *Budavári Te Deum*. The 5 June rediscovery of *Czinka Panna*, Kodály's third singspiel, will be special for another reason. After its premiere, falling in the communist "year of the turning point" fizzled, now it is up to present-day listeners to judge the merits of this work about the daughter of a Gypsy "prímás" violinist and a brigadier's love.

Paging over to the next chapter of Hungarian history, we reach the revolution of 1956. On the eve of the 23 October protest, György Cziffra – in place of a Chinese pianist – performed Bartók's *Piano Concerto No. 2* at the Liszt Academy. Exactly 60 years later on 22 October, the Liszt Award-winning János Balázs, who is behind the commemorative festival honouring the brilliant icon of the piano whose life took such a gripping path, will be performing the legendary work under the baton of Pinchas Steinberg.


IVETT GYÖNGYÖSI
Photo by Zsolt Birtalan, Liszt Academy

During the period after '56 and around the regime change, there was always surely something to be said about Ilona Tokody and her 40-year career. As a globe-trotting soprano, she had and has a superb view of conditions in Hungary, and we hope that she will somehow recount these experiences at her jubilee concert on 13 March 2017, for which she herself is compiling the programme and list of performers.

Now in the present, we should note the young talents who themselves can be expected to write history. One of the pieces ringing in 2017 on the 1 January concert will be composer Bálint Karosi's *Overture*. Ivett Gyöngyösi, also familiar from television's classical music talent search, and young pianist Mihály Kocsis, who has gained the notice of Zoltán Kocsis, will be giving a performance together with Erika Miklósa on 24 October, two day after Liszt's birthday, as part of the Piano Arias series. Again spinning the wheel of time, we return to the 19th century, engraved with the names of Liszt himself, Miklós Ybl, István Széchenyi and the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra, founded in 1823, as well as one of its legendary conductors, János (Hans) Richter. They are the ones evoked by these two subscription series, which look both back to the past and to the future.



Koncert

Szórakozol velünk?!

Színház

Kiállítás

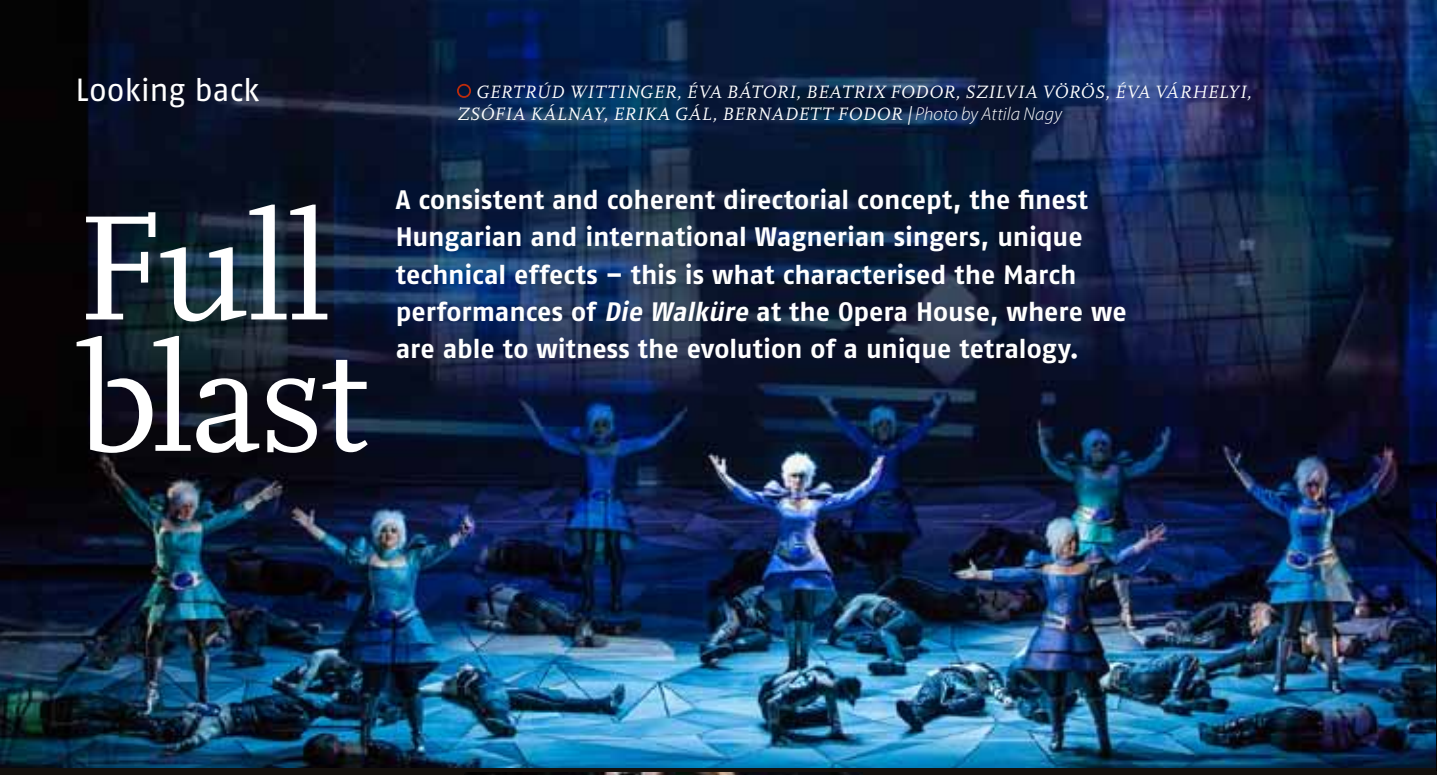
Étterem

Kocsma

Party

Sport

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GERTRÚD WITTINGER, ÉVA BÁTORI, BEATRIX FODOR, SZILVIA VÖRÖS, ÉVA VÁRHELYI, ZSÓFIA KÁLNAY, ERIKA GÁL, BERNADETT FODOR | Photo by Attila Nagy

Full blast

A consistent and coherent directorial concept, the finest Hungarian and international Wagnerian singers, unique technical effects – this is what characterised the March performances of *Die Walküre* at the Opera House, where we are able to witness the evolution of a unique tetralogy.

"As Sieglinde, Eszter Sümegi gives a portrayal of a uniformly high standard. The tremendous dramatic heat of her singing, her sure-footed high notes, her lovely melodic ligatures and the flawless suppleness of her voice did not disappoint this time, either. In her representation, Siegliende is a timid wife famished for love. (...) Judit Németh sang Fricka with great stylistic understanding, precision and superb articulation. (...) The group of singers portraying the Valkyries (Gertúd Wittinger, Éva Bátori, Beatrix Fodor, Szilvia Vörös, Éva Várhelyi, Zsófia Kálnay, Erika Gál and Bernadett Fodor) gave a high-quality performance not only vocally, but also did a fine job of mastering Marianna Venekei's choreography."
(Zoltán Péter, Opera Portál.hu)



ZSÓFIA KÁLNAY, ÉVA VÁRHELYI, ERIKA GÁL, TOMASZ KONIECZNY, SZILVIA VÖRÖS
Photo by Valter Berecz



LINDA WATSON | Photo by Zsófia Pápai

"Géza M. Tóth's production and everything it contains: the nervously colourful metropolis, the twins in white and grey dreadlocks who are alien there, the grey-suited big-haired Hunding and his two canine companions give the strange feeling that the story, without particular self-consciousness or swordplay, is about us. This is something quite rare in a Wagnerian opera, and if one is not a half-naked demigod and is older than 20, is reason enough in itself to come. (...) But it is not just drama, but music as well, which Péter Halász does not conduct with delirious white heat, instead providing clean musical foundations, and Eszter Sümegi here too is absolutely top class."
(Miklós Fáy, Népszabadság)

"First of all, István Kovácsházi's Siegmund held his own, which next to Linda Watson is a great feat in its own right. Eszter Sümegi gave a great portrayal. As Hunding, Andreas Hörl not only sings well, his acting is good, while Judit Németh's Fricka reached the required standard, and Tomasz Konieczny was very expressive. Linda Watson's Brünnhilde and Konieczny's Wotan were absolutely world class, it was worth going just for their duet, while the Hungarian singers making up the Valkyries ranged from acceptable to better, and the orchestra under Péter Halász was at times completely captivating. (...) Set designer Gergely Zöldy Z varied the spaces well, creating interesting relationships through the use of the various planes. (...) Ibolya Bárdosi's costumes, however, are worthy of note: the Valkyries' clothes fit the concept, and all the costumes formed a unity, and even the wigs were thoughtfully applied as hairstyles."
(Eszter Veronika Kiss, Magyar Nemzet)

"The incredibly difficult part of Brünnhilde was executed with ease by the highly

experienced Linda Watson. Well into it, she played the ageless, playful girl-child who has fun doing what she does until her duet with Siegmund, when she realises her true duty, and is filled with a sense of responsibility. Watson performs this transformation with astonishing human smoothness, singing the part free of the heroine tradition. A bel canto Brünnhilde..."
(zéta, CaféMomus)



○ *TOMASZ KONIECZNY | Photo by Attila Nagy*



○ *ESZTER SÜMEGI, ÉVA VÁRHELYI, LINDA WATSON | Photo by Attila Nagy*



"What many felt was extravagant and questionable in *Das Rheingold* becomes completely acceptable in *Die Walküre*. (...) At last year's premiere, I liked this spectacle portraying totality in a constant flow on several screens at various depths of the stage, which made it three-dimensional, but I admit that there were debatable parts. Now, despite fewer visual ideas, the visuals are still more intense and "denser", and better suit the music, which truly meshes with Kedd Kreatív Műhely's creative work. The visual design is 21st century, while the story evokes an ancient mythical world. (...) A huge volume of sound flows from the orchestra, with raging emotions bursting out of the pit, assailing not only one's eardrums, but one's entire being, practically shaking the walls as much as the audience. The orchestra, conducted with impressive intensity and expressiveness by Péter Halász, soon gets to show its teeth, which feels like a furious wild animal gnawing at one's body. (...) A huge amount of human talent, willpower and teamwork came together to make this production rival the standard of Müpa Budapest's Wagner festival."
(Gábor Bóta, Népszava)



○ *ANDREAS HÖRL, ISTVÁN KOVÁCSHÁZI | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*

"It was a genuine sensation musically, and a visual experience as well. (...) Following up on last year's *Das Rheingold*, director and video artist Géza M. Tóth also endows *Die Walküre* with powerful flash and flair. (...) It is completely extraordinary what wonderful Wagnerian voices the Hungarian State Opera has. (...) Péter Halász, at the helm of the Opera's orchestra, provides the multi-layered and colourfully varied sound. Every detail from the score is in its place."
(Jörn Florian Fuchs, Deutschlandfunk, Nordbayerischer Kurier)

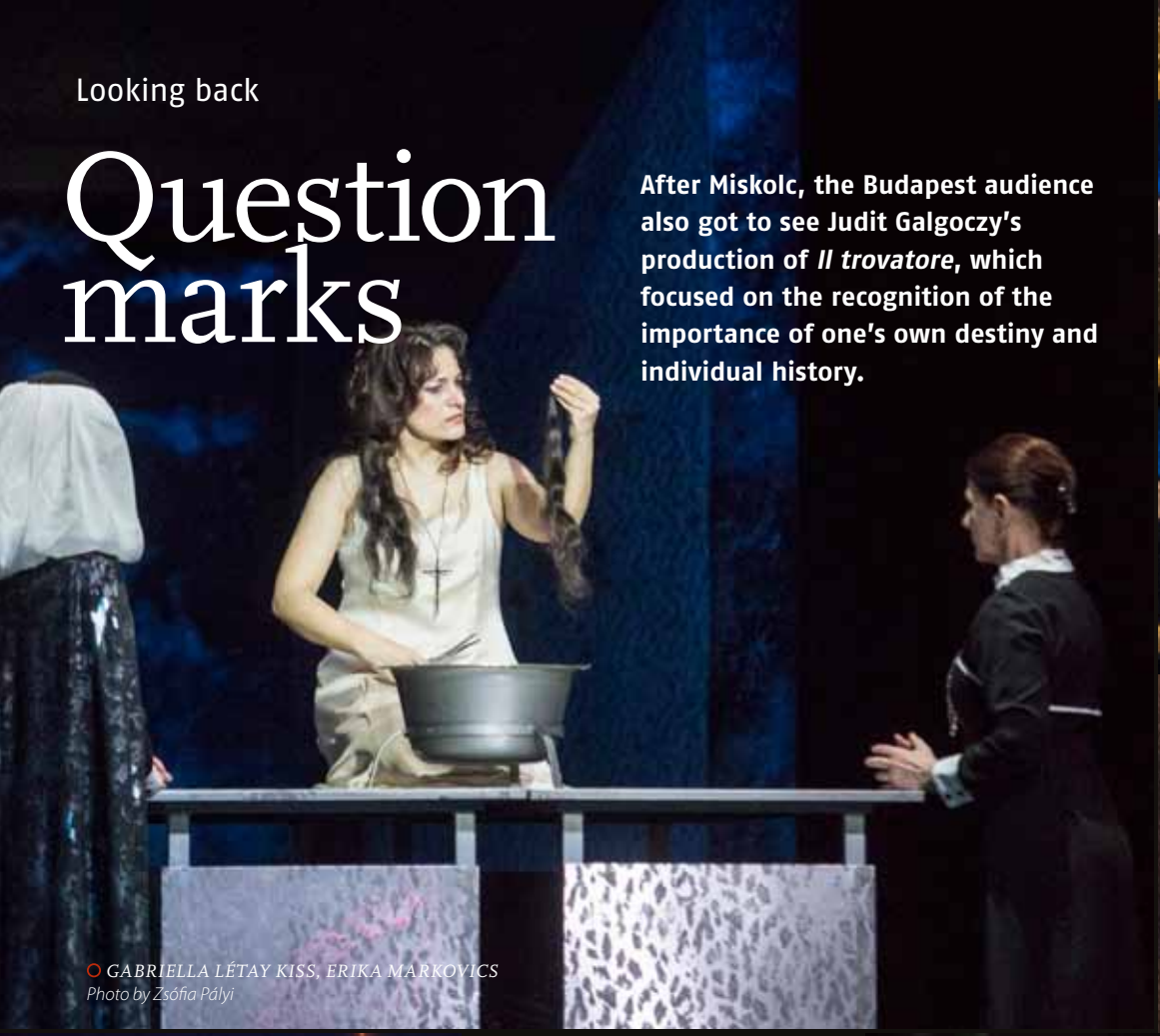
"Young conductor Péter Halász and his Hungarian State Opera Orchestra succeeded in bringing the score to captivating life. He built passages full of tension and expressed love for the details with musical emphasis on the dramaturgically significant moments. (...) There were shouts of "bravo" for all the soloists, both the house's and the guests. We are eagerly waiting to see how the director tackles *Siegfried* in 2017.
(Harald Lacina, Der neueu Merker, Der Opernfreund)



○ *ESZTER SÜMEGI, ISTVÁN KOVÁCSHÁZI*
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

Question marks

After Miskolc, the Budapest audience also got to see Judit Galgoczy's production of *Il trovatore*, which focused on the recognition of the importance of one's own destiny and individual history.



○ *GABRIELLA LÉTAY KISS, ERIKA MARKOVICS*
Photo by Zsófia Pályi



○ *GABRIELLA LÉTAY KISS | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*

"Chanev Kamen sang well this time too, with assured technicality, superb high notes, consistently clear sound, fluidly, never shouting. (...) With him, the theatre could now again present an international-calibre Manrico. This wasn't the first time that András Palerdi sang Ferrando's narrative so well. (...) Erika Markovics's oft-seen contribution in the thankless role of Ines was also reliable. We must make separate mention of the chorus, which in this production is not simply a collaborator but truly a main character in the singing as well as the drama.
They start 20 minutes before curtain, strolling the hallways and, on a temporary bridge across the auditorium, arrive on stage to participate in an undefined theatrical reception. (...)



○ *KAMEN CHANEV, GABRIELLA LÉTAY KISS | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*

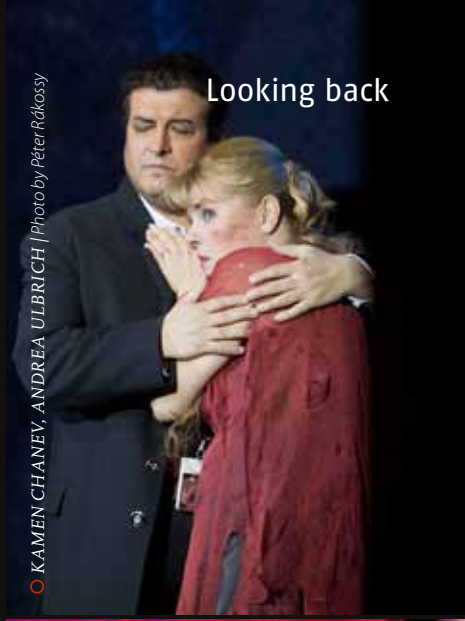


NADIN HARIS, ANDRÁS PALERDI | Photo by Péter Rákossy

The chorus excelled from every perspective. On each occasion I marvel at their lovely, homogeneous sound, and now I could see now how differently each also fulfilled their dramatic role as determined by the production. Their enthusiasm, collaborative spirit and the artistic humility are all amazing."
(ppp. Café Momus)

"The singers deservedly received sustained applause, especially Ildikó Komlósi, who sang the role of the gypsy woman Azucina, and Michele Kálmándy, as the Count di Luna, as did conductor Ádám Medvecky."
(Zsuzsa Mátraházy, HVG)

"Ildikó Komlósi's Azucena will remain an eternal memory. For me, this interpretation was one of the best defined of my Azucena-experiences thus far. (...) Ádám Medvecky conducts superbly; it is a great experience to hear the orchestra; the chorus sounds great, the *Miserere* is still resounding in my ear. Each singer brings a high level; Michele Kálmándy's Count di Luna is forceful, Gabriella Létay Kiss's Leonora was transfigured. Chanev Kamen's Manrico is passionate, but András Palerdi's Ferrando, Erika Markovics's Ines, and Gergely Újváry's Ruiz are also pleasant musical experiences. Ildikó Komlósi, however, soars above all this with her musical dominance, somewhat rearranging the singers' balance of forces in the acts.
(Eszter Veronika Kiss, Magyar Nemzet)



KAMEN CHANEV, ANDREA ULBRICH | Photo by Péter Rákossy



ILDIKÓ KOMLÓSI | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



MICHELE KÁLMÁNDY | Photo by Zsófia Pályi

A VIEWER'S OPINION

"For many years, we have been subscribers to your magazine. I order your periodical each year for my mother's birthday, but whenever we had the opportunity I claimed a second copy for myself. We always received the paper with great anticipation and read the valuable, interesting articles with pleasure. The fact in itself that we have the opportunity to subscribe to such a high-level publication is of great benefit in today's world, where we have to endure the onslaught of worthless media products, which we have practically no way of avoiding. This, however, was not where the enjoyment ended this spring!

In March, we were pleasantly surprised to receive a registered letter from the editor containing two tickets for the performances of *Il Trovatore* and *Rigoletto* at the Erkel Theatre. I can't even tell you how happy this singular gift made us. (...) After *Il Trovatore* – during which we could hear an extraordinary interpretation of Verdi's delightful music – but with *Rigoletto* still to come, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for giving us the good fortune, through your generosity, to enjoy these marvellous works."
(Viktória Pesthy)



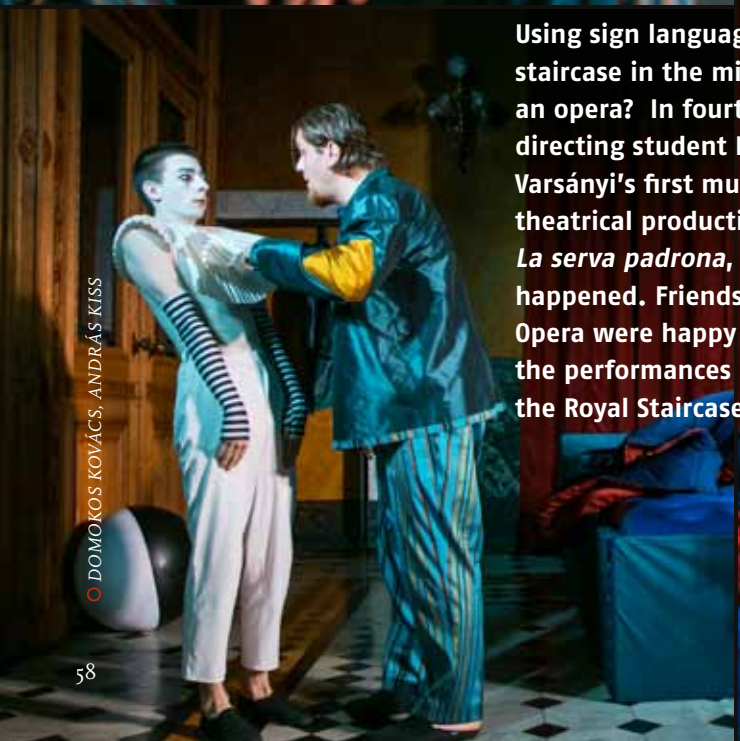
ANDRÁS KISS, ORSOLYA SÁFÁR

Something else

Photo by Szilvia Csibi

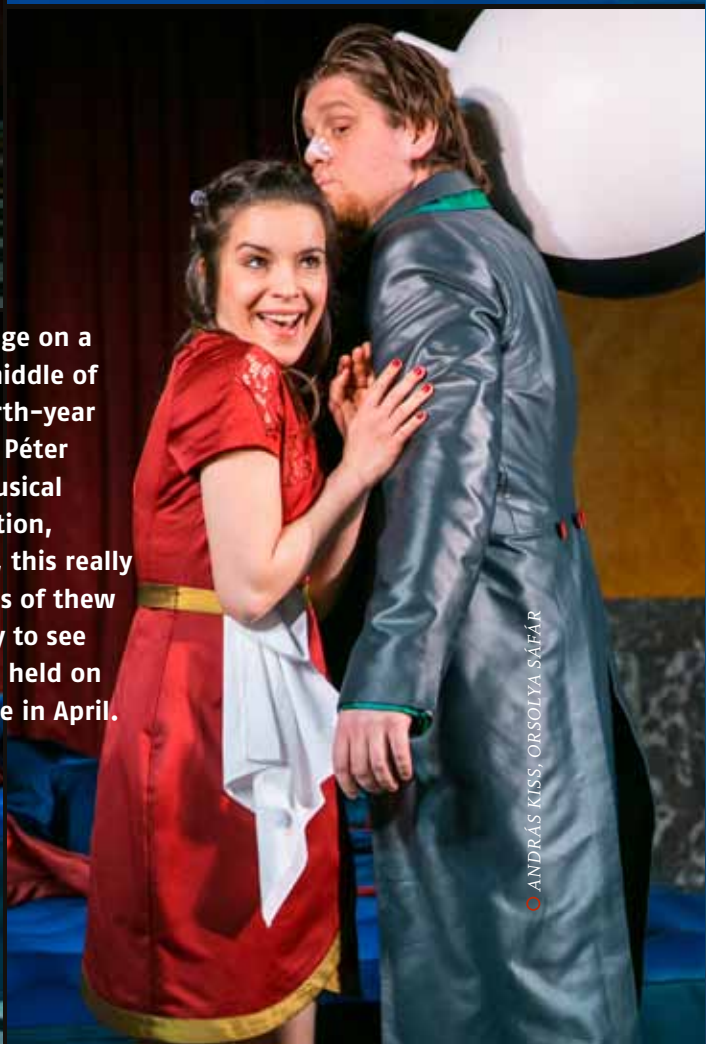


ANDRÁS KISS, ORSOLYA SÁFÁR



DOMOKOS KOVÁCS, ANDRÁS KISS

Using sign language on a staircase in the middle of an opera? In fourth-year directing student Péter Varsányi's first musical theatrical production, *La serva padrona*, this really happened. Friends of thew Opera were happy to see the performances held on the Royal Staircase in April.



ANDRÁS KISS, ORSOLYA SÁFÁR

KULTÚRÁBAN OTTHON VAGYUNK. AZ OPERÁBAN IS.

Jó szórakozást kívánunk!

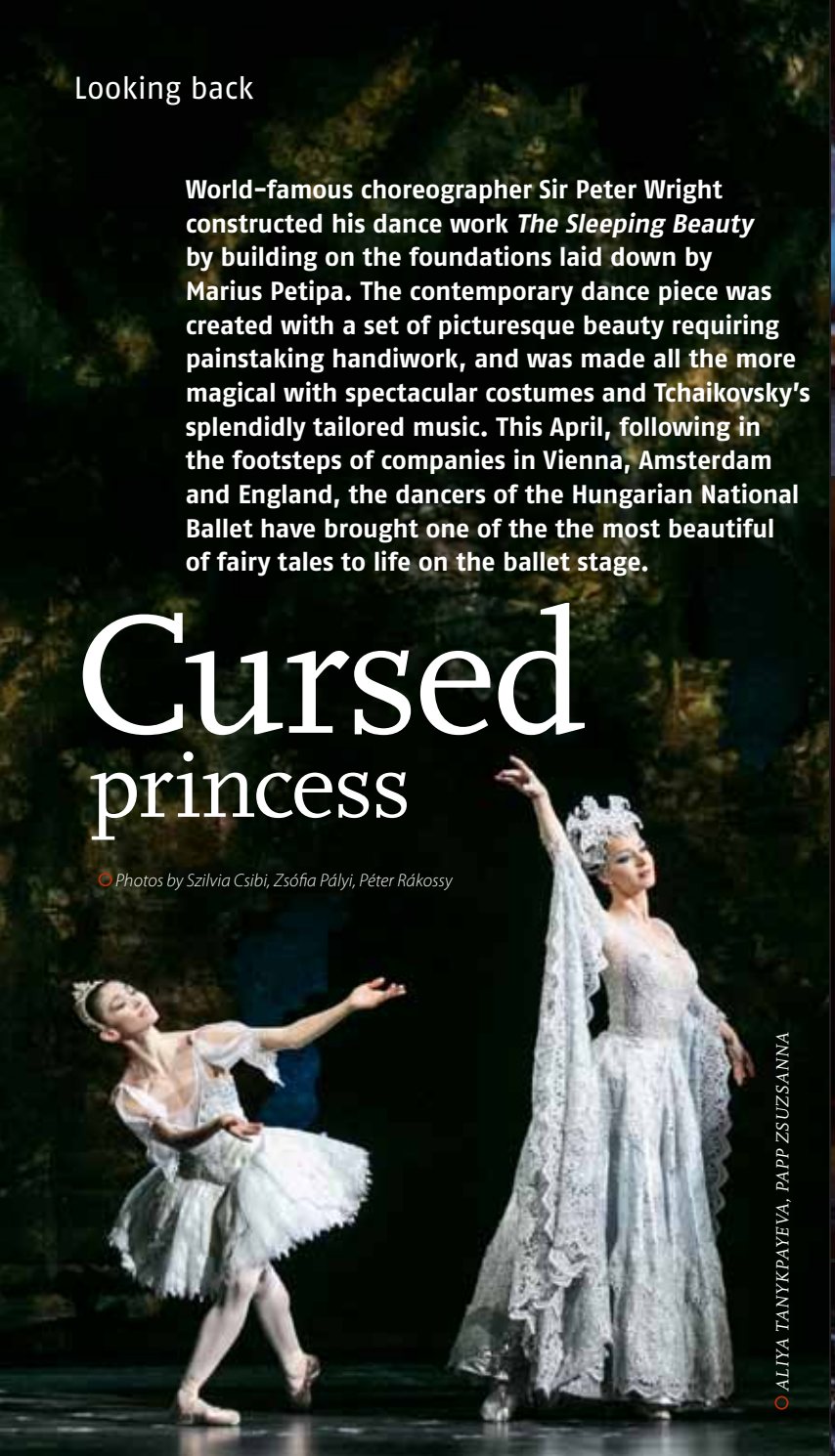


NÉPSZABADSÁG

World-famous choreographer Sir Peter Wright constructed his dance work *The Sleeping Beauty* by building on the foundations laid down by Marius Petipa. The contemporary dance piece was created with a set of picturesque beauty requiring painstaking handiwork, and was made all the more magical with spectacular costumes and Tchaikovsky's splendidly tailored music. This April, following in the footsteps of companies in Vienna, Amsterdam and England, the dancers of the Hungarian National Ballet have brought one of the the most beautiful of fairy tales to life on the ballet stage.

Cursed princess

Photos by Szilvia Csibi, Zsófia Pályi, Péter Rákossy



ALIYA TANYKPAYEVA, PAPP ZSUZSANNA



ALIYA TANYKPAYEVA, VLADISLAV MELNYK, MARK JAMES BIOCCA



CRISTINA BALABAN, GERGELY LEBLANC



TATIANA MELNIK, IEVGEN LAGUNOV



ANGELA MINGARDO



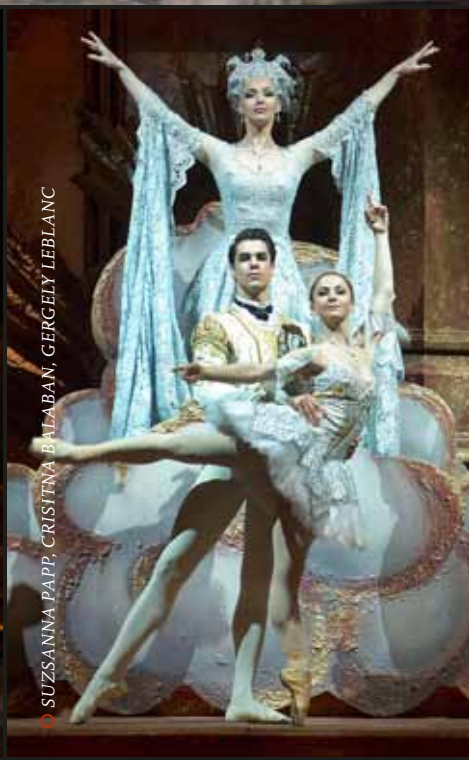
ANNA KRUPP, ZSUZSANNA PAPP



IEVGEN LAGUNOV



ALIYA TANYKPAYEVA, DMITRY TIMOFEEV



SUZSANNA PAPP, CRISITNA BALABAN, GERGELY LEBLANC



BENCE APÁTI, ANNA KRUPP, ALIYA TANYKPAYEVA, KARINA SARKISSOVA

Interplanetary-themed one-acts about the dangers of apocalypse and the colonisation of a new world were related in the language of dance. Dóra Barta's *Planet in Turmoil* and Béla Földi's *The Martian Chronicles* were brought down to earth by the Hungarian National Ballet, some experts on modern dance, and the *Solaris* ensemble.

Space opuses

Photo by Péter Rákossy



GEZMIS OBENGÜL POLEN, ISTVÁN KOHÁRI



BUDAPEST DANCE THEATRE



JÓZSEF MEDVECZ, BIANKA ROTTER, TAMÁS CSIZMADIA



BUDAPEST DANCE THEATRE



BIANKA ROTTER, KSENIA KULIKOVA



BUDAPEST DANCE THEATRE

BUDAPEST DANCE THEATRE

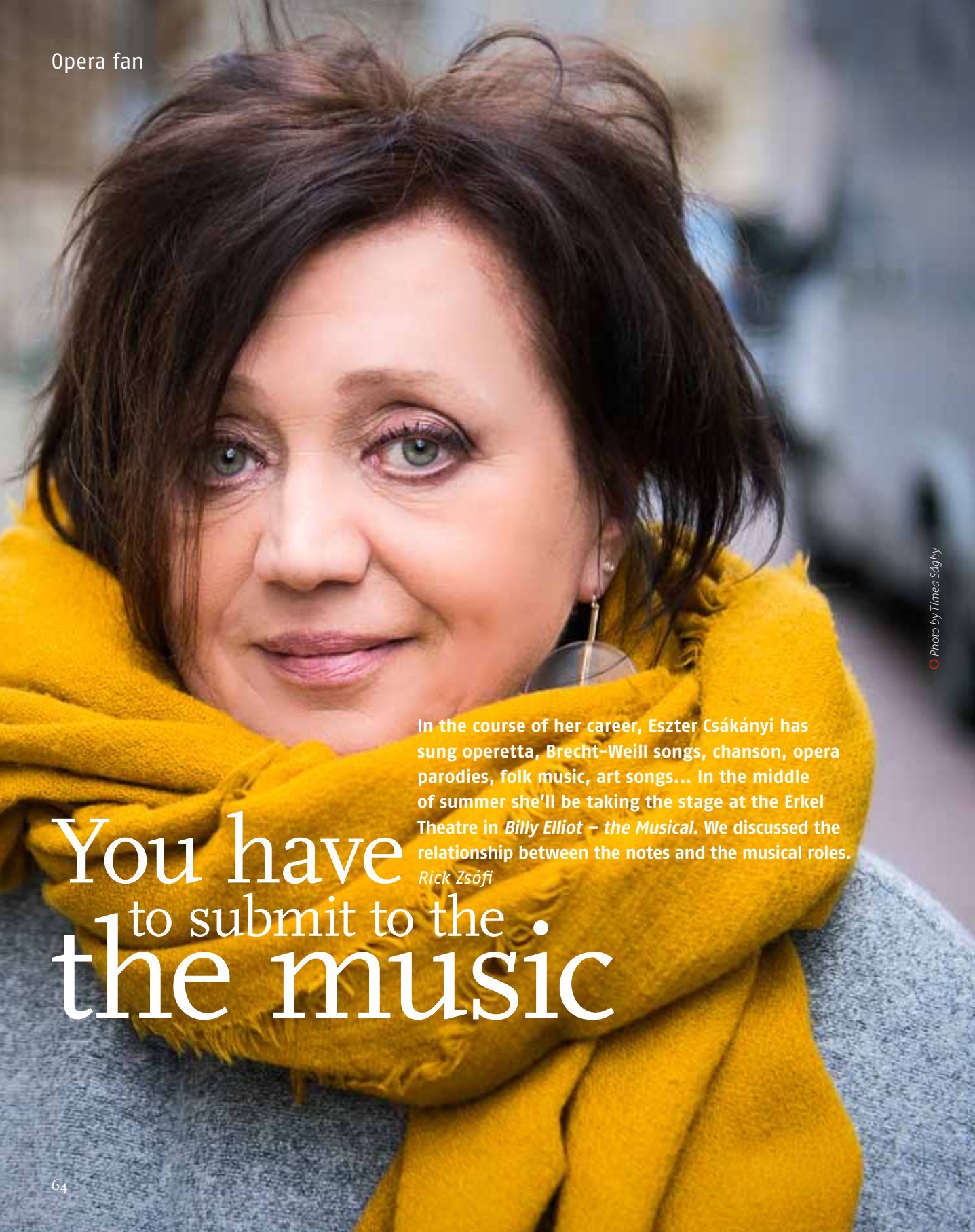
ALEXANDRA KOZMÉR

BUDAPEST DANCE THEATRE

BUDAPEST DANCE THEATRE

ALEXANDRA KOZMÉR, MIKLÓS DÁVID KERÉNYI, ISTVÁN KOHÁRI, KSENIA KULIKOVA

ISTVÁN KOHÁRI, KSENIA KULIKOVA , OBENGÜL GEZMIS POLEN



© Photo by Tímea Sághy

You have to submit to the music

In the course of her career, Eszter Csákányi has sung operetta, Brecht-Weill songs, chanson, opera parodies, folk music, art songs... In the middle of summer she'll be taking the stage at the Erkel Theatre in *Billy Elliot – the Musical*. We discussed the relationship between the notes and the musical roles.

Rick Zsófi

– Countless times on the stage and on the screen, you've burst into song or portrayed music-loving characters. In your "civilian" life, what is your relationship with music?

– An essential part of my existence. I was raised for this ever since I was very small: I was six when I started to study piano, I'd listen to opera records with my grandmother in the evening, and we had a ballet subscription at the Opera. Later on, this faded a bit, and even though I played piano until age 13, I wasn't around music so much any more, as I was as a young schoolgirl. It came back when I wound up in Kaposcár in the '70s, where nearly every production had contemporary Hungarian composers like Zoltán Jenes, István Márta, György Selmeczi, László Melisa and László Sáry actively involved with the company. I owe a lot to Piroska Molnár, too: she introduced me to Péter Eötvös and his works, and to the songs of Tamás Cseh. Both then and now, I look for what is behind the voices, what arouses my curiosity, offers something new, and why. The finest theatrical production cannot provide the same kind of catharsis and overwhelming experience that music can.

– Does it matter if it's instrumental or vocal?

– Actually, yes. For example, I try to make it to the Budapest Festival Orchestra's concerts, but I also listen to Balázs Szokolay Dongó, who always sends me his latest albums. Somehow he knows that I want to follow what he's doing, but only rarely get to hear him live. The opera is in an entirely different category. I think you need time for it. As a child, I didn't understand it at all, but now I like it more and more. I like the work of Peter Sellars and similar directors; next to them a 40-year-old adaptation looks terribly dated.

– Did your childhood experiences with music help in Kaposvár?

– It was more that Kaposvár reinforced this kind of openness. Through music, I understood how important it is to let things act on my emotions. You just have to let it touch you, and notice where exactly it hits you. I really need good music. I want to and work to understand it and make it part of me. This helps in my acting to this day. I'm sure that if my voice was better, I'd have chosen some kind of singing career.

– Was it hard to recognise this and not stick with it?

– My voice teacher wouldn't be so happy to hear this, but my great deficiency was my narrow range. No matter what we tried, I don't have the attributes to be a serious musical performer. I recognised this early in my career, and decided to become an actress who can also sing. But in musical roles, the dramatic acting is primary. Of course, I learn the notes, but the interpretation and correctly performing the situation are more important for me, and this is when acting helps. I maintain my voice and go to lessons; I don't let myself go. What I know I won't be able to do, I don't undertake. Although there is difficult musical material planned, it's within the limits that my abilities can tolerate. I wouldn't take on something that I might fail at.

– In Billy Elliot – the Musical, you got the role of the Grandma through auditioning. Wasn't it strange that the director, Tamás Szirtes, clearly knew that you could sing the songs, but still called you in for a try-out.

– The audition isn't about proving whether I can sing or play something. It's about whether there's a harmonic relationship developing between the director and the team. When I came out of the hall, I knew that I had done everything I could and it was no longer up to me. I had sung the way I wanted to, and if they didn't need me, that wouldn't mean I'd done badly. In the end I got it, which made me very happy, and I'm having a go. The premiere will be at the end of July, with 50 performances running until December with a triple cast. I'm happy because I've never worked with such a big team before, with such a large crew and so many dancers, but obviously it will be very professional. I'm curious how it will turn out too. O



O *ESZTER CSÁKÁNYI, TAMÁS SZIRTES | Photo by Zsófia Pályi*

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HUNGARIAN STATE OPERA

2015 2016

June
July
August
September

OPERA HOUSE

1 June	THE TEMPEST | *THOMAS ADÈS*
2 June	Bryn Terfel Recital
4 June	Song Recitals on Dalszínház Street
5, 6 June	Anna Karenina | *Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (production of the Eifman Balett)*
17, 19, 21, 23 June	THE FAIRY QUEEN | *HENRY PURCELL*
28, 29, 30, 31 July and 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 August	BILLY ELLIOT – THE MUSICAL *SIR ELTON JOHN / LEE HALL*
17, 18, 24 September	I pazzi per progetto | *Gaetano Donizetti*
17, 18, 24 September	The Telephone | *Gian Carlo Menotti*
17, 18, 24 September	Il campanello | *Gaetano Donizetti*
21 September	István Széchenyi225
23, 24, 28, 30 September	LA TRAVIATA | *GIUSEPPE VERDI*
25 September	Second Éva Marton International Singing Competition Gala

ERKEL

3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 June	Snow White and the 7 Dwarfs *Gyula Harangozó Jr. / Tibor Kocsák*
16, 18, 22, 24, 26 June	Rigoletto | *Giuseppe Verdi*
30 June	Festival of Dance and Song50
6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 September	Billy Elliot – the Musical *Sir Elton John / Lee Hall*
16, 17, 18 September	West Side Story | *Leonard Bernstein*
19 September	Flying Start - Recital by Gyula Orendt
23, 29 September	KYLING IT | *JIŘÍ KYLIÁN, JOHAN INGER*
25 September	Simándy100 - With Jonas Kaufmann
26 September	Zsura60
30 September	London Philharmonic Orchestra

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