



2016. March
April

Lili Felméry

Die Walküre

Disruption in the Seraglio

Il trovatore

La serva padrona

Sleeping beauty

Planet in Turmoil | The Martian Chronicles

Sir Peter Wright

Ildikó Komlósi

Balázs Kocsár

Charlize Theron



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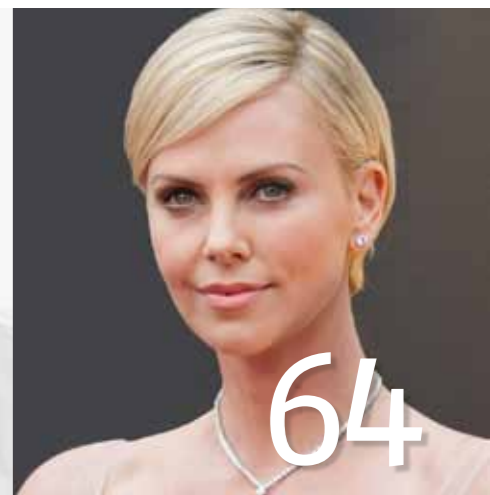
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OPERA

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You have to enjoy every role!

At performances of the Hungarian National Ballet since 2010, audiences have been able to see Lili Felméry, who last year was chosen Étoile for the 2015/16 season. Our conversation covered a short account of her life so far, which might offer some insight into the lesser-known dimensions of a ballerina's existence.

Márk Gara

Photo by László Emmer



ANNA KARENINA | Photo by Pál Csillag

Photo by Tamás Gács



- How much does it mean to you to receive the title of Étoile?

- This recognition is very important to me. I'll admit that I never counted on getting it. Naturally, the joy was immense when it came out that I would be the one getting the prize. I am grateful to Szilveszter Ókovács and to Tamás Solymosi, who said after the Night of Stars gala that he greatly appreciates my perfectionism in any task. This honour also proves to me that it was worth choosing this career.

- What challenges from recent years stand out? Since not every task must have been equally pleasant.

- I'd mention a few pieces, especially *Onegin* and *Manon*. Anyone who gets to dance a solo part in these should feel very thankful. In addition, the Seregi ballets remain an important part of my life, and so I'm very pleased that *Romeo and Juliet* was included on the programme again. And not not to dwell on the past,

Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty* is also a dream part, one of the most difficult tasks for a ballerina, and one that I've always wanted to dance. My Russian former teacher, the late Elvira Kokorina, said that she saw me as *Sleeping Beauty*. And now it's in memory of her that I can be glad that Aurora has found me. I also have pleasant memories of *La Sylphide*, which was a special experience for me, and our recently Premiered revamped *Nutcracker* also got the entire ensemble tremendously energised. There are always new inspiring assignments coming along, and as long as this remains the case, I'll continue to enjoy it.

- You learned the role of Julia from László Seregi himself. What experiences did that period bring?

- When I was 18 years old, and Katalin Hágai took my hand and said, let's give it a try, it was like a miracle being revealed to me. I got to know the master up close, and even now his words and

Ildikó Kaszás's instructions both echo in my ears. Fortunately, at the time I had plenty of time to learn the character and immerse myself in her. In the six years that have passed since, I have "aged" a lot, and changed a great deal. Every performance is a new encounter with Juliet: something different about her always becomes more important to me. I could also put it this way: both my life and the role are growing more deeply intertwined within me.

- What has changed since the debut?

- For example, the nervous excitement that had a paralysing effect on me has vanished. I'm much better at separating my energy from my psyche. Nowadays I get into the life of this female character with substantially more awareness.

- And it's at the side of more than one Romeo that you've taken the stage...

- Each year I cause the deaths of more and more men. (Laughs.) This



○ ROMEO AND JULIET | Photo by László Emmer



○ NUTCRACKER | Photo by Zsófia Pályi

years I had Gergely Leblanc at my side, dancing Juliet with him for the first time. In previous years István Simon, Máté Bakó and Levente Bajári had been my partners.

- What do you think László Seregi gave to Hungarian dance?

- When I was getting to know the Master, he might not have had as much energy as at the height of his career, but even so, I greatly admired him. He was a man of great bearing, who if he walked into the studio, everyone would attempt to outdo themselves to the greatest extent possible. He inspired me a great deal, and I miss him. I believe that, during the performances, he is with us even today, and I'm lucky that Juliet is not the only one of his characters I've had the chance to play, but Bianca and Sylvia as well.

- How receptive are you to contemporary choreographies?

- I'm essentially a classical dancer, and

that is closest to my heart. I do pay attention to contemporary trends.

- Which artistic tasks appeal to you most? And how have you gotten this far without having danced the dual lead in *Swan Lake*?

- So far I have danced in the pas de trois and as a little swan. It's a wonderful challenge dancing in the corps, one that places a different kind of responsibility on the dancer. Since in group dances, multiple people are creating a unity, they have to adapt more to each other. *Swan Lake* itself is a kind of classical work in which it's a joy to portray any of the characters.

- Did you have, or do you have, any role models?

- Several. Just to mention one: Katalin Volf has definitely stood out for me. When I could, I would watch her. Among foreign dancers, there are many to admire. When I spent a year in London, I attended innumerable performances

and "fell in love" with several dancers, and if they are still active, I try to follow them.

- What is it that an Étoile longs for most of all?

- I don't dream about specific tasks. What comes and touches my soul, I'll try to be happy about those. In addition, out of superstition, I don't say things out loud, in case that prevents them from taking place. I had a knee injury that taught me all kinds of things. One of them is that if something is in store for me, then I have to be glad about it. What doesn't work out or doesn't happen, that I have to be able to let go. I consciously attempt to concentrate on my current tasks and to always seek the good in everything. ○

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Sleeping Beauty, wake up!

– At Tamás Solymosi's request, you met with the company last October in order for the cast selection to take place simultaneous with the other preparations. What were your first impressions?

– My assistant, Dennis Bonner, and I met with the dancers together personally, watched them rehearsing and performing, for example, in *Swan Lake*. A few days later we decided whom to choose, and set up not one, but four casts. I can take total responsibility for

the choreography, in part because it's based on Marius Petipa's version. He created *Swan Lake*, and as such, wrote the bible on classical ballet.

– Nevertheless, it's not a Petipa choreography we're going to see. You've made a lot of changes to it.

– Naturally I did, but I still must say that what will be premiered in Budapest in April is the variation closest to Petipa. You know that many different productions of *The Sleeping Beauty*

"I first met Sir Peter Wright in Amsterdam, and the first breathtakingly beautiful *The Sleeping Beauty* was an unforgettable experience. That's why I invited him, so the opera would have the loveliest version," said Tamás Solymosi, director of the HNB, to justify his decision in again mounting the classic after a hiatus of several decades. We asked the former choreographer for the Birmingham Royal Ballet about the singularly beautiful production under development.

Anna Braun

exist and have existed around the world, and everyone modifies it to suit their own tastes, some even rewriting every last movement. I believe that we should retain the original version as much as possible. We all know that much has changed since Petipa's time: the techniques, dynamics, and the standards. At the same time, it's a relief to see that classical ballet still means the same thing in every big city in the world. There was no point in changing the gestures, since some-

where deep down the style, customs and the manner in which ballet dancers move on the stage is the same. But at the same time, we still have to update the movements somewhat, because if we use the same material Petipa did back then, people in the auditorium would laugh. I should add that *The Sleeping Beauty* would not be what it is without Philip Prowse's sets and costumes or Tchaikovsky's music.

– When you meet with the company, do you change the steps or rigorously stick to the piece as written?

– What I insist on is the style, the way a classical ballet should look and the way the dancers have to hold their elbows and their heads, how they should exist on the stage, and live and die there. That's the most important thing for me. Drama and preparedness. A good choreography, an excellent piece, has an impact on the viewer, who sees the world slightly different afterwards.

– Your assistant returned in February to teach the choreography in seven intensive weeks. How do you collaborate with Dennis Bonner? Is there a division between sense and sensibility?

– Dennis was 17 when he first saw the *Giselle* I had staged, and later was a dancer when I was his ballet director. Towards the end of his dancing career, he learned dance notation, and I invited him back, because his work is wonderful. His tempo and effectiveness are brilliant, and he always knows exactly what his task is. He thinks that the Opera House is a beautiful theatre, almost as if it were built for *The Sleeping Beauty*, and seeing it on the stage there will be a huge experience. This version will also be good for the dancers,

because it demands something much different from their bodies than what they're used to.

– Like everywhere else in the world, there is much debate in Hungary about what is good for dancers. The professional community has most recently been divided about requiring the dancers to undergo a mid-season qualification examination. What is your opinion about this idea?

– It's by all means important for there to be certain standards that a dancer must meet under all circumstances.

It's also true that not all dancers are equally diligent, and it always helps, always supplies additional motivation, if they know that they will have to prepare for an examination. If the result is the standard that I see, then everything will be fine. The benchmark has risen to a high level, but everyone at this Hungarian ensemble exceeds it. ○



© Photo by Birmingham Royal Ballet



A real ride,
without
real horses

The 6 March premiere of *Die Walküre* continued the Opera's Ring cycle that commenced last year. With Géza M. Tóth again directing, the principal role in the visual design belonged to his projections, now already familiar from *Das Rheingold*, while the changes taking place in the musical drama were emphasised.

Viktória V. Nagy

Following last year's new *Das Rheingold*, there was great anticipation preceding the premiere of the second part of Wagner's monumental opus at the Opera House, since for many people, *Die Walküre* is the loveliest and most beloved evening of the tetralogy, as well as the one that is often taken out and staged independently of the others. The Opera, of course, has set out to mount the entire *Ring of the Nibelung*. Adding a new Ring was already overdue, and preferably in the kind of production that would not only entice the well-populated camp of Wagner fanatics, but also gain new fans for the German master and his legendary *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

With his staging of *Das Rheingold*, Géza M. Tóth has made it clear that he is not presenting the ancient Germanic mythological side of the four-night story, but rather the fairy-tale aspect and its socio-critical message. That he is assuring creative freedom while at the same time creating a stylistic unity. This is why they have fitted out the spaces with several projected and different transparent, opaque and semi-transparent materials to shape them as a given scene

or act dictates. "We undertook to treat the tetralogy as a whole, and to develop a style that would last, both dramaturgically and in terms of the visual effect on stage, for all four parts. Therefore, we naturally wanted to preserve the form of expression that had already been established in *Das Rheingold*," the director says.

"It's not just the story of *Die Walküre* that continued where *Das Rheingold* left off, but the visual style," added head animator Miklós Gerdelics. "In part, we returned to the kinds of visual elements that had already been included in *Das Rheingold*; for example, the appearance of Valhalla. But since the story is expanded with new characters, the visual design was also enriched with new components." The most important new aspect is how the human characters and the half-human, half-god characters appear, and their relationship with each other. In the final moments of *Das Rheingold*, we got a bit of a taste of the shoppers madly rushing around with shopping trolleys, so it's no surprise that *Die Walküre* started off with the "storm of consumption" that flashed by there. Seeking his place in this in this





© DIE WALKÜRE | Photo by Attila Nagy

free-for-all was Siegmund, the son of a god, and out of this same chaos, we wind up in the micro-medium inhabited by Hunding, one of the most important constituent and driving elements of the entire world that Wotan has created. In the director's conception, Hunding is the average person (the consumer, or if you like, the voter), the embodiment of the citizen, whereas Siegmund, who is half divine and half human, is the redemptive figure. He is the one who lives outside of hierarchical relationships, withdrawn from society, because in order for him to repair the system corrupted by the god (that is, by his own father), precisely this kind of outsidership is required.

From the very beginning, the director and his conceptual-creative team strived to make sure that the projections would not have a cinematic impact, but instead would create a shifting visual presence on the stage. "The projection is not a substitute for scenery, but instead what we were trying to achieve was to have the

projected image become the ongoing video medium of the entire drama on stage, and for the flow of visuals to also help depict the work's mystical nature," Géza M. Tóth explains. This solution offers innumerable possibilities, but still visually synthesises the massive 14-hour story. The director's aim is for all of this to aid in the story-telling, and for there to always be something to look at on stage – without the spectacle distracting one from the singers, the dramatic acting, and of course, from the music. As Miklós Gerdelics puts it, "We were constantly experimenting to find the right balance to make sure that the visual effect on stage would be a spectacular one, but not at the expense of the music, and not to simply illustrate it, but to be in a relationship with it. And also, for the visual world to be an abstract one, but still comprehensible.

Developing the visual world for *Die Walküre*, or more precisely, the brainstorming, actually began on the day after the premiere of *Das Rheingold*, that is, we were working

on it for a year," continues Ágnes Molnár, the production manager. "We kept a lot of the devices used in last year's premiere, but of course there are some that changed, since we had to relate a new story here." What remained constant, however, was the studio's own development, the so-called score animation, which was used to synch the projection from one performance to the next. "We had hypothetical material as to what rhythms the production would be performed at, but since the conductor never conducted it exactly the same way two nights in a row, the projection had to be constantly realigned to this," Ágnes Molnár explains. "The score animation made this process easy, because it helped show precisely where the orchestra was, and we were able to synch the visuals to that."

Screens over here, and tulle over there. Nevertheless, there are certain emblematic props in *Die Walküre* that no production can omit. "In the cases of certain topoi, like Wotan's spear, the sword stuck in the trunk of the ash tree and Brünnhilde's sword, I think it would have been flippant to leave them out or replace them with something else," the director explained. From the point of view of the visual appearance, the greatest challenges were posed by the classic peaks of the musical drama, the emotionally rich turning points: Siegmund and Sieglinde's love, the death-prophecy scene, the battle between Siegmund and Hunding, the moment when Sieglinde learns that she's going to have a child, and of course the moving closing, Wotan's farewell to his most beloved daughter, Brünnhilde, and the Magic Fire Music. And of course, the most frequently cited passage, the Ride of the Valkyries, to which Géza M. Tóth said simply: "It really was quite a ride – without real horses." ○

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Verdi's Tale of Cain and Abel

The audience at last year's Bartók Plus Opera Festival in Miskolc were enchanted by the new theatrical version, modern in its allusions, of *Il trovatore*, which also made its debut on the stage of the Erkel Theatre on 18 March.

András Oláh

The renewal of the Opera, aimed at aligning the productions of the widely beloved core repertoire to contemporary theatrical approaches, continued this spring with the new premiere of one of the most beloved works of the entire operatic literature. Although Judit Galgóczy dislikes the labels "modern" and "current", her Miskolc production, where the principal roles were performed masterfully by Alexandru Aghenie, Hector López Mendoza, Gabriella Létay Kiss, Andrea Ulbrich and László Szvétek, reflects the present in every sense.

Verdi's opera, still played more often than his others, was born in the 1850s, when Europe was again quiet after

its spent revolutions, but underneath the surface the continent was still seething against the existing power structure. During this creative period, in order to thwart the censor and fight his way out of poverty, Verdi depicted the tragic results of the wanton exercise of power through works treating personal conflicts (*Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*).

From his correspondence with Salvatore Cammarano, *Il trovatore's* librettist, we know that Verdi explicitly requested that this author of routine theatrical works be as bold as possible in his reworking of 19th-century Spanish dramatist Antonio García Guitérrez's play *El trovador*. Born as a result is a

thoroughly romantic work that dispenses with the triple unity of space, time and plot, and which still has a vivid effect today. "Although it also appears in Shakespeare, it is a Brechtian approach for a piece to start with a major narrative, giving us, instead of action, a portrait. For example, when Richard III or Iago comes in and tells us what is going to happen. In *Il trovatore*, it is the old soldier Ferrando, in this version confined to a wheelchair, who opens the performance," says Galgóczy. "We see a crazy old man, who it turns out has lived out his life in the midst of a three-generation tale of revenge. Retaliation, prejudice, stigmatisation, love and civil war all go hand in hand in this story set in 15th century Spain."



○ GABRIELLA LÉTAY KISS AND LÁSZLÓ SZVÉTEK | Photo by Attila Nagy



○ LÁSZLÓ SZVÉTEK | Photo by Attila Nagy

○ NADIN HARIS AND GABRIELLA LÉTAY KISS-
Photo by Attila Nagy



○ LÁSZLÓ SZVÉTEK | Photo by Attila Nagy

some notion about it. As a consequence, my actions can become embroiled in a story which, as events progress, turns into something that is chimerical, and in the end I have no chance to ask. I simply kill my brother."

Although many feel that the opera's plot is difficult to follow, Galgóczy believes it's quite clear what is happening on stage. "This is a Cain-and-Abel story, accompanied by antagonism in love and ideology. The difficult in the part is caused by the fact that there are five principal characters, and thus the task of the production is either to pick one of them, or else to depict the precise motivations very clearly. Another modern aspect: practically without exception, the characters learn about their own fates through narratives in the same way that in our own time, nobody has time to stop and ask who they really are. Either I've been told, or I just have

In fitting with the concept for the production, Katalin Juhász sought to emphasise the contemporaneity of the opera with costumes reminiscent of modern dress, sets consisting of gigantic multi-functional and interconnecting portals. "The apertures are theatrical portals opening one on the other which, in their structure and appearance, evokes the Spanish influence," the director explained about the concept. "The viewer couldn't expect castles and knights: this is theatre within a theatre, within a theatre, and so on. But we did evoke the grand architects familiar from dictatorships, from

Spanish history and from Stalinist times, who created structures that dwarfed people with their monumentality."

As Enrico Caruso put it, in order to stage a successful *Il trovatore*, all you need is to sign up the world's four greatest singers, and the Budapest premiere had nothing to be ashamed about. With two cast lists including Mihály Kálmándy, Alexandru Aghenie, Kamen Chaney, Gabriella Létay Kiss and Ildikó Komlósi, Verdi's classic was in skilled hands. ○



○ GABRIELLA LÉTAY KISS | Photo by Attila Nagy

For all things, there comes a time

Still appearing in new roles, Ildikó Komlósi has an extremely busy schedule. At the end of last season, the mezzo-soprano was awarded the title of Chamber Singer of the Hungarian State Opera, and on 15 March she received the Kossuth Prize. We managed to catch up with her "along the way".

Tamás Pallós

○ DIE FRAU OHNE SCHATTEN | Photo by Péter Heilmann

○ AIDA | Photo by Zsófia Pályi

– In March, you appeared as Azucena in *Il Trovatore* at the Erkel, where in December you also shone in the atypical role of the Princess in *Suor Angelica*.

– When I am asked which is my favourite role, I always feel that it is the one in which I am at the time. I can get very immersed in whatever my current task is. I was the same way with the Princess. I haven't sung in *Madama Butterfly*; I am not a Suzuki type, so in the Puccini repertoire, it's only *Suor Angelica*'s Princess that could come into consideration. If the production called for making me a grey, elderly woman stiffly leaning on a cane, I am not sure that I would have been as happy with it, but the character inspired by Ferenc Anger made this role an exceptional adventure for me. The other performers and I felt very good, that we were creating a really strong performance. We also started the rehearsal from the point where the Princess appears in the piece. I had to play a bored, arrogant, but very elegant, aristocratic woman of 45 or 50.

– Both visibly and audibly, you have shaped your career deliberately and carefully.

– In order to renew myself, I need new roles. If a singer hurries too much and tries to devour everything at once, she will not have time to really "identify" with the given characters.

Budapest, 15 March 2016 | Opera singer Ildikó Komlósi, soloist with the Hungarian State Opera, receives the Kossuth Prize from President János Áder at the ceremony awarding Kossuth and Széchenyi prizes, as well as the decorations for the Hungarian Order of Merit, in the Central Hall of the Parliament Building on 15 March 2016, the anniversary of the start of the 1948/49 revolution and struggle for freedom. The head of state is flanked by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. MTI Photo: Noémi Bruzák

A voice also has its own maturation process. I have said many times that I love to sing so much that I can't let myself deteriorate physically. I am not the same mezzo-soprano as the 30-year-old ready with a voluminous, dark-toned voice. For me, maturing as an artist takes place equally in the emotional and technical sense. As I progress in my career, I find true challenges, the dramatic tasks and the manner of portraying characters to be more and more important. These days, unusual, modern productions have become trendy.

– Your Verdi repertoire last year expanded to include *Il Trovatore*, which you first sang in the Mikhailovsky Theater in Saint Petersburg. Why did you wait until then?

As I mentioned with *Angelica*, the stereotypical, schematic characters don't attract me, and in reality it wasn't the theatre, rather the director of the work, Dmitri Tcherniakov, who invited me. It was an unsettling production requiring special acting ability, in which Azucena appears as a rich woman who rents a castle. Here, she and her guests recall an old event and try to solve what might have really happened at the time. I identified with Tcherniakov's approach, his

well-thought-out middle-aged, sensual *Azucena*'s personality's complexity and richness. She is the real protagonist of *Il Trovatore*, with the ability to "work out" or influence the events. An exciting personality, who seems almost to have written the script, practices her role, and when the time comes, starts to play it...

– This spring you sang the same role in Budapest in a new production.

– I was looking forward to working with Judit Galgoczy. I didn't prepare for her vision or watch her production at the festival in Miskolc last year because I was confident that we would approach the work from a psychological point of view. Generally I feel comfortable in a medium where, aside from my voice and the musicality, my acting can develop properly. In the meantime, around that time, I still had *Aida* coming up. I am a perfectionist; it is important for me to have enough time for preparation, so I am glad that I had sung this role abroad, because the experience helped a great deal. I knew where the difficulties lay, where and how much I had to give. Sometimes I felt a lump in my throat from feeling like crying: that is how upsetting this story is, especially *Azucena*'s narration. In this opera, a certain kind of Janus face is very important.

– Few people know that no Hungarian artist has been engaged to sing at the Verona Arena more than you in its entire history. You have been appearing there regularly since 2006. Are you going this year as well?

– They invited me again for *Carmen* and *Aida*, the latter, however, will not be Zeffirelli's production, but rather Basio's. The question came up whether I would like *Il Trovatore*, but I felt that as long as they think of me as *Carmen* at the Arena, I would rather stay with that. As at the Opera House, every night in Verona is a miracle, the performers partake in the magic, they can get as emotionally charged up as the audience. I am grateful and thankful to be part of this. ○

○ DAS RHEINGOLD | Photo by Péter Rakosy

Children's Play

○ ANDRÁS DECSI, CECÍLIA SZÉLL,
ESZTER ZEMPLÉNYI, DÁNIEL KELEMEN,
ÁGNES TÖRÖK, KÁROLY SZÍVÓS
Photo by Zsófia Pályi



Singers inside puppets, stages within stages, puppets within puppets, puppet on screen, and stages inside puppets... Developed for performing for primary school children on the Opera House's Royal Staircase is a revised version of Mozart's comic opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* renamed *Disruption in the Seraglio*. Rick Zsófi

Last season, to great acclaim, Moltopera performed Haydn's opera *Lisola disabitata* at this same venue, making it inevitable that General Director Szilveszter Ókovács would offer the company the chance to stage another co-production this season as well. It was likewise his idea to have János Novák, director of the Kolibri Theatre, stage the production. The married puppeteering couple of Károly Szívós and Ágnes Török had staged this work at the Kolibri years ago, performing and singing all of the roles themselves using Czech rod marionettes, enabling them to control more than one puppet at a time. They used the same technique this time around, but now the stage (since there are human opera singers in addition to the puppets) was made out of polystyrene and completed with beautifully

painted giant puppets, into which the singers hid and played the roles. Klauudia Orosz's set designs, however, had the bases of the giant puppets open up to reveal miniature puppet stages, which became the arenas for the marionettes. János Novák had already directed several operas for younger age groups. His view is that one can talk about anything with them – love, death, lies – as long as one sticks to the heart of the matter so as not to overload them. One doesn't have to de-emphasise the music in favour of the plot, liveliness and humour. "I noticed that the more the action on stage was linked to musical gestures, the more easily it kept the children's attention. If the visual solutions are good, then the set and the music each reinforce the impact of the other, and whichever way they look, the theatri-

cal and musical events keep them rapt. This version gave them three tracks to follow the plot: the singers, the puppets and the projections. The production, directed by Csaba Tóri, used singers from the flexible and independent Moltopera, with no permanent members but around 40 young opera singers suited for different role types to select from for a given production. This loosely structured team changes from year to year, since some go abroad or sign with the Opera or another theatre. This opera was a major test for them, since usually they work with minimal sets in order to be able to perform anywhere, from spacious cultural institutions to ruin pubs.

In this production, the children got to meet five young singers. One of the loving couples (Konstanze and Belmonte) was portrayed by Cecília Széll



○ ÁGNES TÖRÖK AND KÁROLY SZÍVÓS
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

and Béla Turpinszky Gippert), both of whom had performed with Moltopera previously: Széll having performed coloratura parts in Ravel's opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, and Turpinszky the role of Turiddu in its performances of *Cavalleria rusticana* at the National Theatre of Pécs, among other parts.

The second couple (Blonde and Pe-drillo) was played by Eszter Zemlényi and András Decsi. The latter is one of Moltopera's founders, while recent Annie Fischer Scholarship-winner Zemlényi appeared before the audience as Zerlina two years ago. Dániel Kelemen, who played Ozmin, may be a familiar name to theatre-goers, since in addition to his work at the Opera House, there is a scarcely a Hungarian company outside of Budapest with whom he hasn't sung in re-

cent years, although he also regularly appears at the Operetta Theatre and occasionally in independent productions. "He is a bass blessed with extraordinary depths," László Ágoston, who played Bassa Selim in this production, said of his colleague. "Ozmin, in terms of the vocal material, is already one of the deepest roles. For those of this vocal type, the low D is the pivotal point, but Dani has depths that go even lower than this. I'm glad that such a strong team could be assembled for this great production!" ○

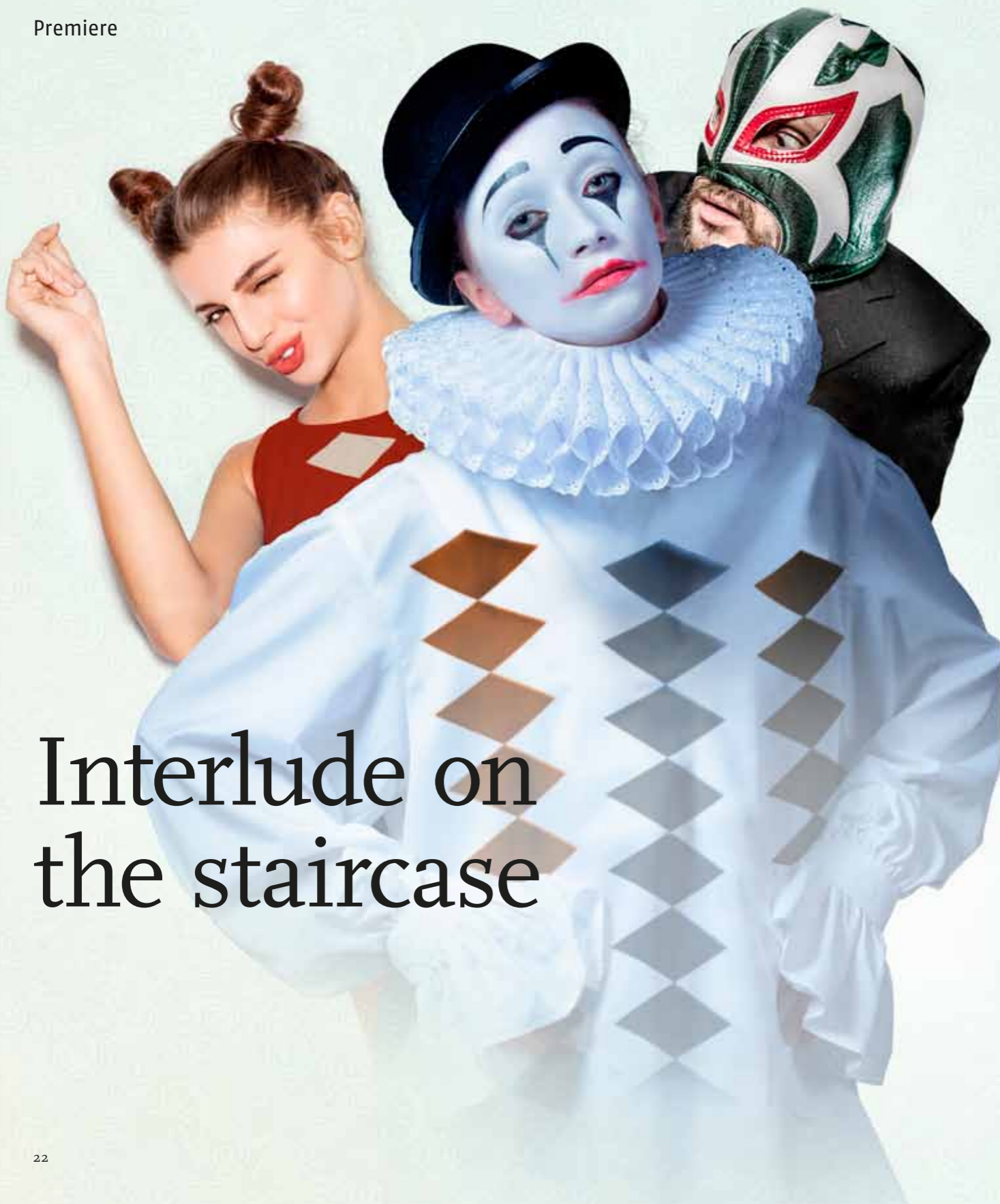


○ KÁROLY SZÍVÓS AND
LÁSZLÓ ÁGOSTON
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

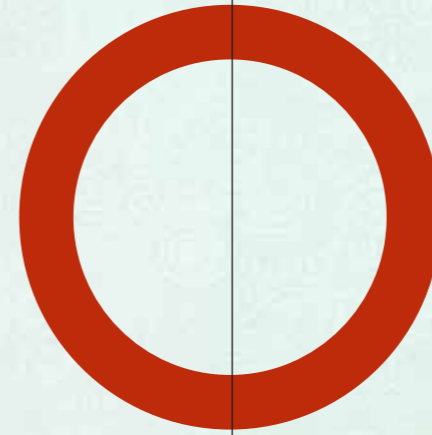


○ ANDRÁS DECSI, CECÍLIA SZÉLL, ESZTER ZEMPLÉNYI,
DÁNIEL KELEMEN, KÁROLY SZÍVÓS AND
BÉLA TURPINSZKY GIPPERT
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

○ ESZTER ZEMPLÉNYI | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



Interlude on the staircase



A masterpiece by a 23-year-old composer as staged by a 23-year-old director: the youthful atmosphere at the 2 April premiere of *La serva padrona* can already be considered guaranteed.

László Ferenc

“Among the students of the famous music teacher Francesco di Feo, there was a flamboyant 23-year-old boy of delicate nerves named Pergolesi(!)” This is how Mór Jókai has Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736) the short-lived genius of 18th century musical literature make an appearance in the opening sentence of his curiously atmospheric late novel *An Old Man is not a Tottery Man*. Jókai then goes on to relate a sorrowful and deeply romantic anecdote about how the Italian composer died from composing his final sacred musical work, the famous *Stabat Mater*. The parallel practically jumps out: dead from both consumption and self-consumption, Pergolesi forms a precursor to Mozart, who wrote the notes to his *Requiem* on staff paper as he lay on his deathbed. And if one takes a closer look, it’s not just this elegiac ending that links the two masters in kinship, but also their multifaceted musical talent, evident from early on, and their passion for writing operas, as well as the painful fact that their lives were so short. And by accomplishing what he did in the genre of comic opera, Pergolesi truly performed an imperishable service for the composers of posterity, and at the same time became a forerunner

to both Mozart and many others of his profession to come later.

For even though Pergolesi always wished to win the favour of the demanding Neapolitan audience with serious opera, that is, with *opera seria*, he had much more resounding theatrical success with the merry little works that he had intended, as intermezzos, to be diversions between acts.

Il prigionere superbo – today this title is mostly only known because it was in the intervals of the three-act *opera seria* (featuring Goth and Norwegian kings and a Danish prince) that Pergolesi in 1733 premiered his soon-to-become-famous, and even legendary, intermezzo *La serva padrona*. And even if in recent years, mostly since the end of the millennium, the (re)discovery of Pergolesi’s serious operas has begun, his cheerful vocal work of practically puritanical simplicity still dominates, at least as far as musical drama is concerned, the memory of Pergolesi, who despite being sickly throughout his brief life, nevertheless composed music of such sunniness.

A grumpy elderly gentleman, his fiery maidservant and his servant (a silent role), who is in league with her: there are

only three characters in this popular little opera. And its storyline isn’t anything complex either: the sly Serpina puts her master, Uberto, under her domination and the yoke of marriage. A short overture, four arias, one duet, some minor ariosos and, of course, recitatives – truly scant, but offering the performers and other creative artists involved alike a plethora of opportunities to shine.

Although it is generally agreed that Pergolesi’s opera buffa can never grow old, it can’t hurt if those breathing life into a given production are themselves young and view the creation by the 18th century twenty-something with fresh eyes. And that is how it will be this April too, at the Opera House’s Royal Staircase, where Péter Péter Varsányi, a student in the directing and puppeteering department of the University of Theatre and Film Arts will stage it. Therefore it will be 23-year-old director managing the action at the bottom of the stairs, with an equally appealingly young artist, Ágnes Bobor, managing the visual design work. At the same time, having Orsolya Sáfár and András Kiss in the two (by default, principal) roles ensures not only a youthful performance, but also humorous acting, graceful singing, and the right tone for the parts. ○



Photo by Attila Nagy

More than a homage



This year, the Hungarian State Opera is again organising a cross-border gala event in honour of Iván Nagy, the ballet dancer and former chief consultant to the Hungarian National Ballet who died two years ago. On this evening, a new award established for youngsters will find a deserving owner.

Anna Braun

Arriving in Budapest as a guest at the gala scheduled for the last day of March is Yonah Acosta, the Cuban-born dancer with the English National Ballet who, following in the footsteps of his famous uncle Carlos Acosta, can count on a similarly ambitious career. Although dance history is rarely written at rehearsals, this is what happened the year before last when he and his uncle were preparing together for a production in which

Carlos Acosta would star as Romeo, Yonah Acosta as Mercutio, while Juliet would be created by the ENB's then 40-year-old artistic director, Tamara Rojo. Yonah Acosta became a soloist with the English ensemble in 2011, and then a principal dancer in 2014, and in the last few years has been appearing in the classics of the ballet literature. In Budapest, he will be dancing a special version of the black swan's pas de deux from the van Dantzig-van Schayk-Tchaikovsky *Swan Lake* together with Korean-born Royal Ballet soloist Yuhui Choe. They will later also perform the Petipa-Drigo *Talisman Pas de Deux*.

Another Cuban-born star, this one with the Norwegian National Ballet, will also be a guest in Budapest on this evening: Yoel Carreno will be performing, with Hungarian National Ballet dancer Elizaveta Cheprasova,



IVAN ZAJCEV | Photo courtesy of Mihailovsky Theatre

the pas de deux from *Le Corsaire*, which choreographer Anna-Marie Holmes and Ballet Director Tamás Solymosi are staging for the first time this year.

Also taking the stage will be one of the one of the Mihailovsky Ballet's leading dancers, Ivan Zajcev, who also worked with the Boris Eifman Ballet earlier. Eifman first noticed the young dancer when he took part in a 2009 International ballet competition in Moscow. Although Zajcev didn't place then, he did get the chance to start working with the world-famous Russian choreographer, and in 2010 won the grand prize at the Arabesque International Ballet competition. His partner at the gala will be Angelina Vorontsova, who after graduating from the Moscow Ballet Academy, started dancing in the Bolshoi Ballet in Vladimir Vasiliev's choreography of *The Curse of the House of Usher*. In 2013 she joined the Mihailovsky Ballet Company. The pair will here present

the pas de deux from Don Quixot and the Duato-Schubert work *Without Words*.

Although the world's leading dancers were invited to the ballet gala, naturally the local audience's favourites will also appear, including both dancers from the HNB and the young stars of the Hungarian Dance Academy. The occasion has a special surprise in store for the youngsters, because Tamás Solymosi will be giving out the first Solymosi Artistic Award, with which he aims to aid the careers of the young dancers in the revamped *Nutcracker* production. "The *Nutcracker* is the first large-scale production in which I took part as a choreographer, and I decided to give up my royalties in order to support outstanding talents. It was Iván Nagy whom I managed to convince to come home after his retirement in order to help the HNB's work with his broad professional knowledge gained in the international ballet world. After his death in 2014, the current management has organised a gala performance each year. Quality,

integrity, truthfulness: that's what the Master always said. In order to preserve this idea and to cherish his memory, I wanted to recognise the young dancers in either the corps or in solo roles who create a quality production on the stage," said Solymosi.



YUHUI CHOE | Photo by Tristram Kenton, © ROH



ANGELINA VORONKOVA | Photo by Jack Devant, courtesy of Mihailovsky Theatre



YOEL CARRENO | Photo by Erik Berg

There's no place for you outside of yourself

Those condemned to uncertainty, to live with their fears – those who seek a new home anywhere at all – are never released from themselves – two cult creative works: dance adaptations of a film and a book confront visitors to the Erkel Theatre with this weighty theme in a production entitled *Space Fantasy*.

Anna Braun

Photo on page 4 by Stewart Cohen ○ PHILIP GLASS | Photo by Raymond Meier

It has been 33 years since Godfrey Reggio's experimental film *Koyaanisqatsi*, about alienation, modernity and the loss of balance, triumphed on the big screen. This visual tone poem without dialogue or narration, however, continues to say at least as much about our lives as any contemporary novel or music, while its music was by the most exciting composer of the period, Philip Glass.

"The film is characterised by a rivetingly Baroque visual and emotional style and amazing music, which, in my impression, has seeped into everybody's consciousness. For me, the musical experience had an even more intensive impact than the images, because its texture is so powerful, I still feel confident with it," said choreographer Dóra Barta, who is staging the one-act dance work *Planet in Turmoil* that she wrote to the original film score at the Erkel. "The world has changed a great deal over the last 30 years, and life has been automatised and is defined by technology. For me in this work, it's humanity itself which is of value, as well as its relationship with the environment, and to those visible and invisible dangers that dangle over its head like the sword of Damocles. The lack of balance and the insecurity of people today is caused by the constant conflicts that they themselves did not create and the wars being waged without them. This is why, starting from this new sense of life, I attempted to formulate the work, and thus make it contemporary," said Barta, who tried to avoid simply reproducing the theme. She found her central theme in the relationships of the insecure and vulnerable person aware of being under threat,

which she made into the frame for emotionally rich dance and a minimalist set faithful to Glass's music.

But how minimalistic is the music, really? As a world-famous composer of operas, symphonies, music for dance pieces and fusion piano works, Philip Glass defines the intellectual life of our era in a fundamental way. Although his works are generally classified as minimalist, he himself stated when he visited Budapest in 2014 that "If you move past boundaries between genres, it's the same thing as when you sit down to play music with people from different cultural backgrounds, say, Chinese or Indian, or people from Australia: it's terrifically inspiring. (...) That's why I don't like to categorise what I play either: it's not classical music, and it's not popular music. These days, they like to call it "global music", which seems to me to express the idea adequately.

It's not just the film world that has provided Glass with assignments, he has also worked in dance. His repetitive musical structures give choreographers creative freedom: as a result, he has composed ballet music and also worked with contemporary dancers (*12 Pieces for Ballet*, *Les Enfants Terribles*, *In the Upper Room*, *Phaedra*, *The Witches of Venice*), and the New York City Ballet regularly revives the work *Glass Pieces*, choreographed by Jerome Robbins.

A person on Mars is still a person

"The *Martian Chronicles* is about a person who tries to find a new place in outer space, to start a new life

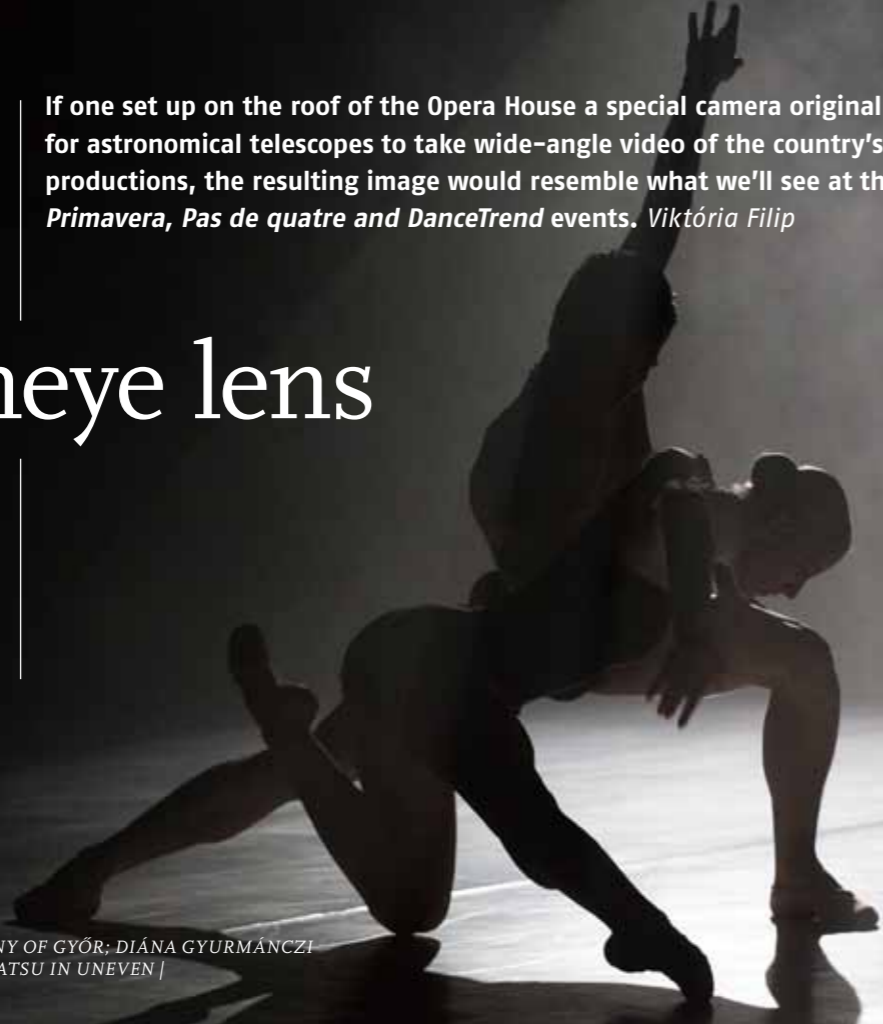
somewhere else, and then realises wherever he goes and whatever he does, he always brings himself with him. He carries with him his own characteristics and his own demons. No matter where he arrives, he always starts to build – and destroy – the same things," says choreographer Béla Földi about the science fiction written for dance that will be the logical piece to follow *Planet in Turmoil* for the second half of the evening. As the story has it, people are forced to abandon the Earth, now gutted and disillusioned, in order to settle Mars. "We attempt to summon those essential emotions we feel thinking about outer space and Martians. Ours are gifted with more refined sensory organs and telepathic abilities, but they also resemble us in many ways, for instance resorting to aggression as a solution for menacing problems."

Ray Bradbury's collection of short stories *The Martian Chronicles* has developed a cult following, and the music written to it three decades ago has not lost any of its appeal, either. The choreographer remains so faithful to the renowned *Solaris*, that the ensemble itself will be taking part in the production, hidden away in the orchestra pit. On the now Mars-like stage, twelve dancers will bring the original stories to life, creating a performance that combines the theme of earthly harmony, a deep intellectual message and contemporary dance intertwined with classical aesthetics. ○

If one set up on the roof of the Opera House a special camera original designed for astronomical telescopes to take wide-angle video of the country's newest productions, the resulting image would resemble what we'll see at the *Primavera*, *Pas de quatre* and *DanceTrend* events. *Viktória Filip*

Fisheye lens

○ BALLET COMPANY OF GYŐR: DIÁNA GYURMÁNCZI AND DAICHI UEMATSU IN *UNEVEN* | Photo by Béla Szabó



Spring brings a breath of fresh country air to the capital with musical productions from the greatest Hungarian theatres in the country and its neighbours. "The Erkel belongs not to the Opera, but to the entire country," said Szilveszter Ókovács at the reopening of the theatre, which since then has functioned as a true community space. In the name of supporting opera performance outside of Budapest, visitors get see these theatres' new productions as part of the one-week Primavera series, now being held for the fourth time. This year, the National Theatre of Szeged will kick off on 5 April by presenting Róbert Alföldi's production of *The Magic Flute*. The next day, that of Győr will mount *Háry János*, staged by Mihály Kerényi. The Cluj-Napoca

Hungarian Opera's production of *Samson et Delila* directed by György Korcsmáros and the Miskolc National Theatre and Gergely Kesselyák's *Tosca* will then follow. On 9 April, Debrecen's Csokonai National Theatre will perform *La traviata*, directed by Nadine Duffaut. On the final day, the National Theatre of Pécs will present both *Cavalleria rusticana* as directed by Viktor Nagy, and a Béla Faragó-János Hay piece entitled *A Glass of Water*.

Three years ago, on the birthday of its namesake, the Erkel Theatre started a new era with the *Pas de trois* ballet recital held featuring three Hungarian companies. Expanded to four since 2014, the event was this year again preceded by great anticipations –

and not just from the viewers. "The initiative that Opera General Direct Szilveszter Ókovács and HNB Director Tamás Solymosi launched in 2013 reflects the kind of openness that is typical of the House's entire outlook," said Győr Ballet Director János Kiss to *Opera Magazine*. It was a great honour and a fantastic experience for us when we got the chance to appear at the reopening of the Erkel Theatre together with Ballet Pécs and the HNB. *Pas de quatre* is always a special experience, a display of dance, collaboration and respect. I greatly value this kind of joint think, because it's good for the artists, the ensembles, the creators, and for the viewers, a group to which we all belong. I'm glad that we can meet every year!

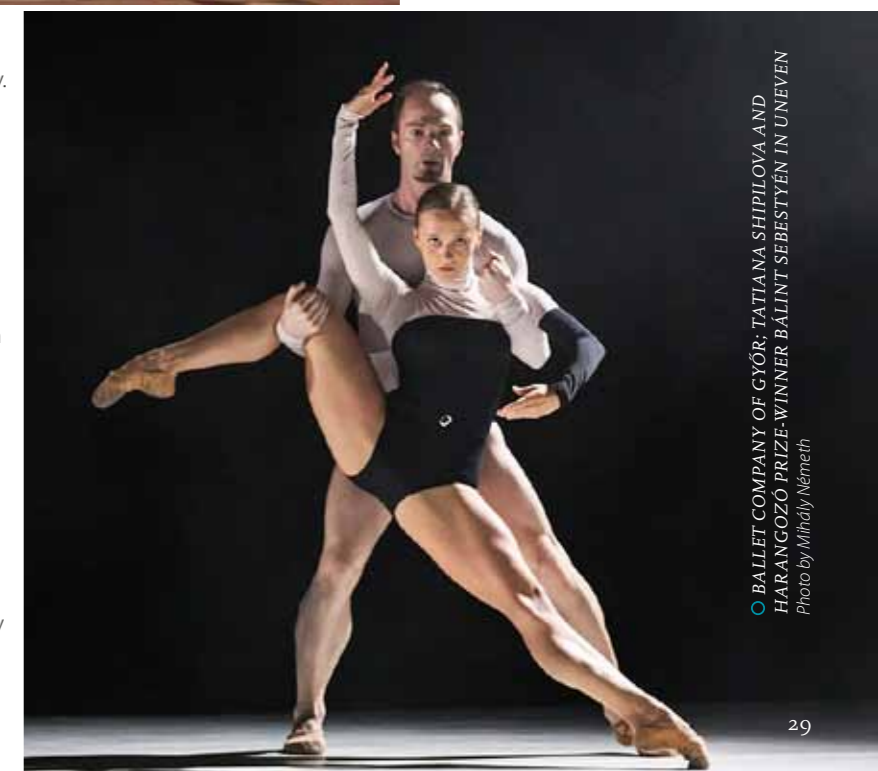


○ TOSCA – NATIONAL THEATRE OF MISKOLC | Photo by Vera Eder

have the country's three largest ensembles after the HNB take the same stage with it. A high-profile dance event like this is also important for the profession, since we can never do enough to popularise dance and its beauties, and a big collective effort really helps with this. In selecting pieces, length is the most important criteria, and in addition to this, we try to present works set to recent music, preferably contemporary, to which our dancers can demonstrate both their artistic and technical skills. This year, *Mimicry* best met all the different criteria. In this otherwise isolated work, it's useful for us to encounter and see each other's choreographies, to see where everyone is right then. The personal gesture is also key, since it shows interest and openness toward each others, and also collective thinking presuming the existence of common goals. These companies perform serious professional work and are pre-eminent bastions of Hungarian dance. Bringing them out

Our programme choices generally embrace the novel and contemporary. This year, in an international spirit, we are presenting *Uneven*, a work by the major Spanish-born choreographer Cayetano Soto. This poses a huge test of strength and challenge for our dancers. I have very fond memories of the previous events, when I saw the dancers watching each other with interest from backstage. We are all rivals with each other, but this is healthy competition. It's a huge thing if we can rejoice in each other's success, no matter if we belong to Pécs, Szeged or Budapest.

Tamás Juronics, artistic director of the Szeged Contemporary Dance Company feels that "it is a great initiative to



○ BALLET COMPANY OF GYŐR: TATIANA SHIPILOVA AND HARANGOZÓ PRIZE-WINNER BALINT SEBESTYEN IN *UNEVEN* | Photo by Mihály Németh



○ BALLET PÉCS – KATALIN ÚJVÁRI AND SZILÁRD TUBOLY IN ORPHEUS
Photo by László Mihály

together isn't a good thing just from the perspective of giving the viewers a fantastically colourful performance, but also sends the message that "dance is complex, but is a consistently operating branch of the arts, one of the most exciting dramatic languages of the 21st century."

"The HNB's invitation is in itself an honour. This appearance has major prestige value, giving the country's best professional dance ensembles the chance to show their stuff in a storied theatre in the capital, before a huge audience," said Balázs Vincze, director of Ballet Pécs. "With a 55-year-old tradition of balancing innovation and tradition, we choose the most progressive possible productions from the given time period, which this year is Cameron MacMillan's choreography *Orpheus*. It's inspiring to see each other's work, and when somebody performs well, this always elicits respect and recognition from the other

ensembles and dancers, and this has a good effect on the dynamic of dance culture. What's most important, though, is that at these programmes, we can show the oneness of our profession, while at the same time the audience can see four completely different styles, temperaments, and conceptual outlooks."

On April 29, the night before Pas de quatre, contemporary dance also gets a go. The Badora Dance Company is bringing a premiere, with artistic director and choreographer, Dóra Barta, saying "the Opera represents the highest professional quality, and naturally it was with the greatest pleasure that I accepted the opportunity to appear at the Erkel Theatre. In creating my dance work *The Devil's Sand*, my aim was for my company to appear in a spectacular, and at the same time, intimate, performance appropriate for the attributes of the stage. A show like this is an extremely inspiring situation

to be in: a true challenge for every artist and a great honour. I believe the premiere will be a key milestone for the Badora Dance Company.

Second to appear on the evening will be the Miskolc Ballet. "It's an extraordinary honour and professional recognition to take part in a noted event together other groups of such prestige," says Artistic Director Attila Kozma. "Our ensemble is all of three years old and is made up of youngsters, and so the kind of attention that we've seen from the Opera and Tamás Solymosi is uplifting for us. The choreography *FelliniÉtude I* chose for this show was originally a studio production. I was looking for a subject that despite being 'already out there', still has more profound aspects to it, and the characters in the story can be well defined. That's how I arrived at Fellini, male-female relationships and an atypical depiction of how they can be put right. Although we also have many appearances coming up abroad in the coming months, participating in DanceTrend was a hot topic among my dancers. This is a step up that poses a technical challenge that we have to prepare for. This goal is truly worth working for all year long." ○



○ SZEGED CONTEMPORARY DANCE COMPANY
Photo by Béla Dusha



Szamos a kultúráért

Idézet Cziffra György: Ágyúk és virágok című könyvéből

„Hála állandóan változó rögtönzéseimnek, hírnevem az ínycseck világában gyorsan elterjedt. Majdnem naponta eljöttek, hogy valami finom habos indiánert vagy rumos süteményt egyenek. A lehető leghosszabb ideig tartson a gyönyörűség, és szívesen fogyasztottak hozzá egy ujjnyi Mozartot, egy uncia Chopint és egy jó csészényi Cziffra-féle bécsieskedést, amit szokásom szerint minden előkészület nélkül, frissen tálaltam.”

A Szamos Marcipán legújabb desszertje egyszerre elegánsan dekoratív, és gyöngéden emlékeztet a viztuóz zongorista kalandos kávéházi korszakára.



Cziffra szelet mazsolával, meggyvelővel

Hommage
- azaz hódolat -
egy zseniális muzsikusk,
Cziffra György
zongorista életműve előtt.

Cziffra György: Ágyúk és virágok című könyve megjelent: 1983., 1984., 2015.

Three years of struggle

When I met with Péter Virág, the Opera's newly appointed technical director, in his office one Monday evening, I was a bit surprised to be received by a young man – albeit one with considerable experience under his belt. *Gábor Mesterházy*



Photo by Attila Nagy



Photo by Attila Nagy



– You graduated as a mechanical engineer in 2000, and then earned your master's in 2010 as an economist engineer in 2010, were the head of the operational division at Duna TV for nearly a decade, but have also worked for a construction company. What did you expect from this new job when you submitted your application?

– I thought that it wouldn't be so different from television, but I was wrong. The technical director at the Opera is the manager of a division of 407 people: make-up artists, hairdressers, prop managers, set developers and builders, lighting technicians, the costume studios, the security service, the IT department, the custodians. The full scope of operations belongs to me.

– These activities are going to move out to the Eiffel Art Studios.

– The challenge isn't just the fact that we're expanding into another site, but moving out the items that form the backbone of the technical directorate: set construction, carpentry, machine,

painting and costume studios and workshops, and all of the sewing centres.

– Will there still be some kind of duty staff remaining at the performance venues?

– The assessment to be made prior to the renovation of the Opera House will show which functions there are that we can't relocate 100%. We still have to leave space, for example, for set maintenance and minor on-site repairs, but 98% of the studios and workshops are moving out of the Opera House, because currently we are testing the limits of spatial feasibility. The enormous tools in carpentry shop are being taken out, and the ceiling of the machine shop is also not high enough for the elements that we produce, which means that there is no place other than the stage to test them out. The Eiffel Art Studios, however, will provide the opportunity for this, because there the painting, carpentry and machine workshops will all be located one next to the other, as will be the main assembly area.

– So this means it will be possible to try out the sets.

– This is the great opportunity being afforded by the Eiffel Art Studios: the rehearsal centre. On a stage that corresponds to the size of the stage at the Opera House, in a huge auditorium suitable for seating 300 viewers, and which we can "accompany" with nearly full sets. While we aren't able to install all of the technology over there all at once, having rehearsals with the sets actually in place will have a big impact. The orchestra will get to work next door, and the early rehearsals can get started in the meantime, and it will be enough to move the scenery to the stage one week before the premiere. The technical staff will already know which piece attaches to what, and the construction time will be shorter here as well.

– Do you have the feeling that you are again managing an external company, or a service provider?

– As if there were several enterprises within the company. One of them pro-



Photo by Attila Nagy





vides background support, while the other operates all the infrastructure.

– Which is the bigger challenge? Organising the new system or figuring how to operate it in its interim state?

– The two cannot be separated. We have to work out the new system so that we can also operate the current one. The move is a big challenge, and so is the renovation itself.

– The renovation is going to be done by an outside company. How much does the technical directorate have to participate in this?

– On a daily basis, since we can't abandon our colleagues. With the Eiffel project, there is a design firm, a technical consulting company to help with the scheduling and material planning, and the third is a project management and engineering firm, which puts

everything together, carries out the inspections and frames the decisions to be made, but the final word stays with the general director and ourselves. At the beginning of the year, in any case, we started the assessment for renovating the Opera House and the implementation study. The two are related, because what gets moved out of the Opera House will be moved into the Eiffel Art Studios. Also, we want to switch to container-based set storage, but the logistics for this are also something that needs to be planned out.

– What about the scheduling?

– There are also things that need to be done that don't involve us. The plans were completed at the end of December, but one thing is still missing for the building permit: the readiness of the site. A government decree says we have to share the plot with the Hungarian National

Asset Management Inc. (MNV Zrt.). Now the dismantling is going to start, and this is also MNV's job. But to avoid delays, we have initiated an amendment to the decree so that we can get the building permit before then. Ideally, the construction plans will be ready by the end of April, and then we can tender proposals from the contractors as well. With the building plans, we'll be able to get the precise details ready, including the material ones. Ideally, we'll have a contractor by the end of June, and the work can start in July, with the handover then possible on 1 April 2017. Certain aspects of moving in can take place earlier, and we plan rehearsals there starting from April, with events in front of an audience scheduled for May. Now they've appointed me to a three-year period in which more things are going to happen than did in the past three decades together. ◦

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Ha komolyan szórakozik...



To keep step, tirelessly

Az Opera pazar látványt nyújtó, gazdagon kidolgozott előadásai az ötlet megszületésétől a tervezésen és a kivitelezésen át a színpadra állításig szakemberek tucajainak gondos munkáját igénylik. Most a cipésműhelybe látogatunk el, ahol már egészen korán elkezdődik a munka – nem véletlenül.

András Várhegyi

A racket of hammering, polishing and sewing machines emanates from the Révai Street workshop, where the Opera's shoemaking staff have worked for more than half a century, only a few steps from the theatre on Andrásy Avenue. In the tiny premises, the diligent hands begin the shift unusually early, in order to be able to make the necessary repairs before the 10 o'clock rehearsal. Any footwear damaged the previous evening is collected each morning by the head shoemaker, Gyula Pauscher, who with the help of his six colleagues then returns them to perfect condition for the performing artists.

As he tells me, in addition to the repairs, their main task is preparing the shoes used in the Opera's new premieres, which considering that there are around 30 premieres held in a season – means constant hard work. "Sometimes for operas, they hire external master craftsmen, but the ballet slippers are always our work," adds the head shoemaker.

Before any footwear is made for a singer or ballet dancer, a cast is made of their foot, on which basis their foot size is established on the cobbler's last. Although traditionally these were made of

wood, nowadays they have mostly been replaced by plastic ones, which is much easier to work with. "There are some who come here to us, but often I try to grab the artists in the rehearsal hall or by the dressing room, whether it's Erika Miklósa, Andrea Rost, or the ballet dancers," notes Gyula Pauscher. If the design is all set, then implementation usually requires three days," says Éva Libor, who works with the shoes' uppers. "Often they want it yesterday, but a shoe can't be done in so little time, since the part called the counter needs to dry out properly in order to hold it," she says.

It's no surprise that the ballet dancers' shoes wear out the soonest, and so these are what they make the most of. Fortunately, these can be manufactured relatively quickly, since the material is light, the soles are thin and no stiffeners are used for them. Sometimes we're

making them for five or six productions at a time. Currently we are working with the Baroque-style footwear for *The Sleeping Beauty* ballet, trying to select components that are light. The verisimilitude is important in our work as well; in the case of a buckle, for instance, we don't use metal. We generally use cardboard, even though this can't be seen beyond the orchestra pit anyway,"

"There once was a time when there were 14 people working here at once," recalls László Bokros, who has been a member of the Opera's team of shoemakers since 1983, and previously there was a blue-dyeing works operating in their spot. "The workshop moved in here in the '60s, and before that, the noted representatives of this profession had been housed in the cellar of the Opera House, where they primarily



made practice shoes," he says.

The trade is constantly being transformed, with innovation beyond the foundations laid down by the masters of old being of critical importance, since the technology and materials have to adapt to the ever more acrobatic and difficult choreographies. When it comes to future development, Gyula Pauscher hopes that the move to the Eiffel Art Studios will mean they have more space and will be able to continue monitoring their equipment.

Currently in this small space, however, the tables and workbenches constructed for the different processes are chock-a-block against each other, and anywhere one or another colleagues isn't bustling around, there stand various machines, such as a polishing machine, a sewing machine and a darning

machine. As the head shoemaker remarks: "Today our tools are already more modern than they used to be, and we can work with them faster and meet the designers' requirements more quickly." The connecting link between the costume designer and the employees in the workshop is the fabricator, who assists the master shoemakers get themselves oriented with drawings and photos, but often even this isn't enough. "Sometimes they come to us with extreme requests. In *Die Königin von Saba*, for instance, we spent a week on each piece of footwear. When the designer outlines his or her ideas, we look at it to see how easily it can be implemented and whether it's possible to walk in it. And if needed, we try to reach a compromise. On one occasion we had to incorporate a roller into a man's shoe so that it would pop





out when he moved. We worked on it for a long time, took the wheels out of a children's model and finally managed to get it to ready. It worked perfectly, too. The only problem was that the artist would only have had a very short time to practice in it, so it didn't end up being included in the production," the head shoemaker relates.

Naturally, when time permits, the shoemakers also go watch the Opera's productions, and while most of the audience is delighting in a bravura dance move or a sustained note, their gaze, quite understandably, often strays toward the artists' feet. "There are a few special productions that are always good to watch. For me, one of them is *Little Magic Flute*, since it has everything that pertains to this profession: the lines of the shoes, the materials, the colours,

and the visual style that was created on the stage based on the ideas of Katalin Juhász. That was our best work so far," says Gyula Paucher as he points to the wall, where photos of the footwear featured in the production hang in a line.

The gratitude is mutual, and the designers always thank the employees in the shoemakers' workshop for their work, while from the performers could there come any greater recognition than the fact that they're regularly happy to take them home, since they fit so well. One of the loveliest gift of all came from László Seregi, who thanked the "most beloved" workshop for its efforts with an enormous picture. It's no wonder then, that even if it's not part of the Opera's repertoire, a master shoemaker can truly respond to these gestures with the words: "It's music to my ears." ◦



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2016
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○ ATALA SCHÖCK

Librettist:
Lee Hall

Composer:
Sir Elton John

Original director:
Stephen Daldry

BILLY ELLIOT

THE MUSICAL



Translator:
Ferenc Bárány, István Puller

Set designer:
István Szlávik
Costume designer:
Yvette Kovács
Lighting designer:
János Madarász „Madár”
Scenist:
János Szűcsborus

Choreographer:
Ákos Tihanyi
Conductor:
Géza Köteles, István Silló
Assistant to the choreographer:
Ferenc Molnár, Anita Zádori
Director's associate:
Eugénia Vaszielenko

Director:
Tamás Szirtes

Billy:
Dávid Borka, Zalán Kamarás, Olivér Lukács, McAllister John, Dániel Pál, Áron Vizlendvai
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Mum:
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Mr. Braithwaite:
Bálint Ekanem, Zoltán Mező, Pál Öböli

Children trained and prepared in part by:
Zsuzsanna Fehér, 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 July 2016, Erkel Theatre
Further dates: 2016. 30 and 31 July, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21. August 2016
Erkel Theatre

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Photo by Zsófia Raffay

Mosaics in place

At the start of March, a new principal music director took up his post at the Opera. Balázs Kocsár is setting to work with two and a half decades on the podium, more than 80 operas in his repertoire, and conducting experience from numerous institutions in Hungary. He arrives for our conversation after teaching his conducting class at the University of Pécs. Viktória Filip

– Was it a long trip?

– From Pécs to Budapest is just a few hours, but for a musician to get this kind of chance, he has to travel a long journey. I should add that for now, this is an acting position, and legally the Opera soon has to open it to competition, and if I win, my status can be made final. Going back to the beginning, you know my career started with Hungarian Television's 1989 International Conducting Competition, where I took third place as a third-year Music Academy student, then József Gregor invited me to work as opera

conductor at the National Theatre of Szeged. The first time I conducted at the Opera House was in 1992, and after two performances, Ádám Medveczky, who was then principal music director, offered me a conductor's post, but when the director András Békés told me that they were looking for a new music director in Debrecen, I quickly accepted after a short discussion.

– So it didn't take much to convince you.

– No, because as a conductor, in the wonderful world of the theatre, it's not just conducting that interests me. Finding the pieces and the right performers, shaping the sound, staging the work together with the director: these are the most exciting things for me. That's where and when I could learn all that in a medium where I was my own boss. Those seven years at the Csokonai Theatre served as the basis for the achievements I've had in Hungary and abroad, for which this professional expertise was critical. The Opera is the longed-for holy of holies for every conductor, but with the perspective of decades, I can say that I now have the strength and adequate skill for the job.

– After the Debrecen years, you served as first conductor at Oper Frankfurt, and took on challenges abroad in major cities in Italy, Germany and Belgium. How did these experiences change your outlook?

– My experience abroad enabled me to see the functioning of the Opera not as someone who was socialised here, but rather like I'd assess any opera house anywhere in the world. Knowing the musicians,

instruments, singers and chorus members here, if we can couple that with appropriate organisation, a system typical of German theatre, then we can exponentially increase the standard of the productions, not just individual performances. The principal music director is responsible for all the musical pieces in a given theatre as well as for everyone involved on the stage, the orchestra pit and the preparatory work. There are relatively few institutions in the world that can mount a comparable number of productions to the Hungarian State Opera, but we have to be able to see this matrix. I'd like it if my work here lives some kind of imprint.

– In your Liszt Prize-winning career, who has influenced you the most?

– As a child, I'd play with toy cars in my father's – Miklós Kocsár's – room while he composed, so contemporary music seems like a natural medium to me. Later, learning conducting at the Music Academy, I got to study with Ervin Lukács. I had the chance for two weeks to observe Claudio Abbado working as he rehearsed the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester. His radiant personality and the magical way he worked, that is, simple, direct, yet precisely methodical, and how he opened up to the musicians answered many questions for me, including how to make a performance a good one, for which my joint staging of *Bluebeard's Castle* together with Péter Eötvös at the Bartók Seminar in Szombathely supplied the key. His characteristic high-level professional expertise and his incredible knack for getting to the heart of the matter taught me how to know

exactly what I wanted to achieve. Further, I have to specify those technical points that make the individual parts, fragments, properly speaking, come together to make a working whole.

– What is the conductor's credo?

– At first glance, the conductor's position looks like a dictatorship, but it's also possible to create a situation in which a team starts to function the way I want by itself. As musicians, we wish to provide the audience each evening with an experience that lifts them from their everyday lives. They call this a catharsis. For this, you have to play music, work and perform with a sense of fullness, an unbelievably stressful state. My primary task is to create an environment in which everybody can freely give the best of their skill, and thus is able to free the audience. That's what I believe. ○

On 1 February, Principal Music Director Péter Halász informed General Director Szilveszter Ókovács that he wished to terminate his director's contract with the HSO; the other, his five-year conducting agreement remains unaffected. Pursuant to this, he will certainly be conducting performances at the Opera until June of 2018, including premieres, the Ring cycle, and will remain one of the house's key artists, with 20–25 performances a year. The general director has great respect for Halász's past two and a half years of work. Both the orchestra and the Opera's repertoire can thank him for numerous memorable successes, including conducting the Hungarian premiere of Die Frau ohne Schatten, the premieres of Così fan tutte and Der Freischütz, and he also started to build the new Ring cycle. The outgoing principal music director conducts Die Walküre in March 2016, Der Freischütz and Die Frau ohne Schatten in April and The Tempest in May. Szilveszter Ókovács personally regrets this decision, but respects it, all the more so because the conductor remains contracted with the Opera. "Péter Halász bestowed wonderful productions on the House, and I'm glad this streak won't end in the future either," he said.

Old and new traditions

The Opera's chorus and orchestra do more than simply perform opera. The Budapest Philharmonic's Monday concerts are a special part of life of the House, while the chorus is going to become the driving force for a new undertaking: on May 8, there will be a "DayOfSingers" festival at the Erkel Theatre. *Gábor Mesterházi*



"After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Ferenc Erkel was the first president of the National Hungarian Choral Society, which united a large number of choirs. He was also the chief conductor, but this wasn't only an honorary title: he actively participated in the work, raising the reputation of the association. The idea of preserving the tradition of the choir movement by arranging for a choral celebration in the theater named for Erkel came from General Director Szilveszter Ókovács.

The initiative is also supported by KÓTA and its president, Zsuzsanna Mindszenty, said Kálmán Strauss, the HSO's chorumaster.

"Applying choirs get to perform on the Erkel's stage, and also the *Easter Chorus* in the afternoon performance of *Cavalliera Rusticana* created for them. Originally we planned the choral celebration to last two days.

I was much too cautious, thinking not enough choruses would apply. Fortunately, I was wrong. 54 choirs indicated their intentions to participate by the January deadline, so around 900 singers will congregate in the Erkel on Sunday, 8 May. State Secretary Peter Hoppal, who is a qualified choir director, agreed to direct the joint chorus." Recalling times past, the chorus director said, "I remember when, in the golden age of the choir movement, I conducted 2000 singers in Debrecen. There also big joint events in the Small Stadium. From the replies I've seen, it seems there is also a great need for this today: the amateur singers have taken a fancy to collective singing and to the opera. All this requires tremendous logistics. Travel and dressing rooms, among other things, must be provided for members arriving from as far away as Debrecen and Zalaegerszeg.



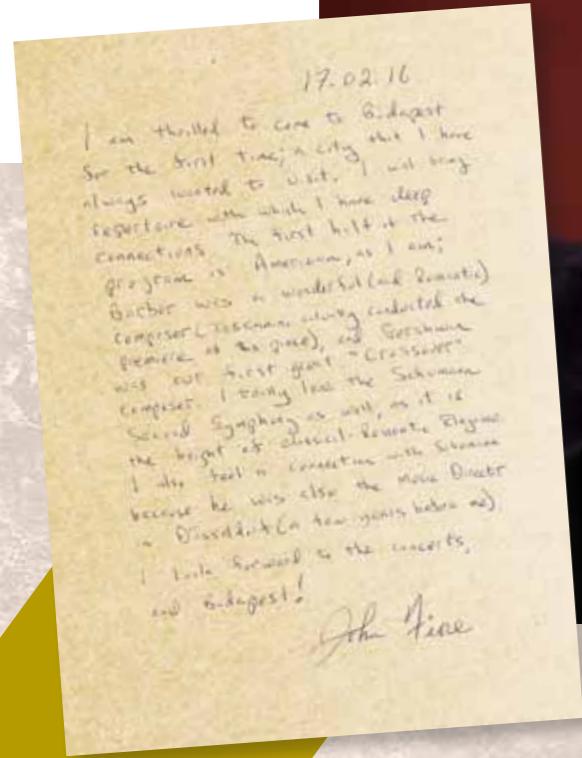
We will continue the initiative next season as well, with *Va pensiero* from *Nabucco* planned. I hope we will create a new tradition, with the amateur singers becoming enthusiastic attendees of the Erkel's other performances as well."

Notable among the orchestra's programmes is the seldom-heard piece directed by John Fiore on 14 March: Samuel Barber's (1910-1981) *First Essay*, which is paired with his *Adagio for Strings*. These two musical compositions were played together in 1938 by the NBC (National Broadcasting Company) Symphony Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini. (This was the *First Essay's* premiere.)

Prior to this, Toscanini had hardly ever directed an American composition, but Barber's music won his approval from the first rehearsal: "Simple and beautiful," he observed. This period was the golden age of

radio, also shown by the fact that Toscanini's ensemble was attached to a radio network, although in practice, it was created for Toscanini personally. Barely eight minutes long, this wonderful composition emits a unique feeling of anxiety, which before WWII, incidentally, before emigrating in 1938, Arturo Toscanini often appeared at the Erkel Theatre, or as it was known then, the City Theatre, where he gave legendarily memorable performances, directing either the Wiener Philharmoniker or the New York Philharmonic. He performed there for the first time in May 1930 when he directed the New York Philharmonic in a Rossini overture, a Beethoven symphony, Debussy's *La Mer* and Kodaly's *Summer Evening*. In October of 1933, he conducted the Viennese orchestra, with the concert broadcast on radio as well.

"We can only say that Toscanini's concert today surpassed even the previous one, and now one can speak of the master of masters, as well as his superb orchestra, only with reverence," wrote István Péterfi in *Magyar Hírlap*. One year later, in October 1934, he arrived again with the Viennese, so in addition to Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, he could also put Kodaly's *Psalmus Hungaricus* on the programme. He also played a Beethoven symphony in each December 1935 and October 1937, along with diverse works ranging from Vivaldi to Sibelius. In the City Theatre, in spite of the increased price of admission, he was always welcomed with a full house. The '30s were the period when Toscanini, Furtwängler, Bruno Walter, Mengelberg and Weingartner, that is to say, probably the greatest of the great conductors, were practically alternating with one another on the Budapest stage.



"I am thrilled to come to Budapest for the first time; a city that I have always wanted to visit. I bring a repertoire with which I have deep connections. The first half of the program is American, as I am; Barber was a wonderful (and Romantic) composer (Toscanini actually conducted the premiere of this piece), and Gershwin was our first great "Crossover" composer. I also love the Schumann Second Symphony, as it is the height of Classical-Romantic Elegance. I also feel a connection with Schumann because he was also the Music Director in Düsseldorf (a few years before me). I look forward to the concerts, and Budapest!"

John Fiore

The Budapest Philharmonic has continued this tradition ever since, featuring the most extraordinary artists on the stage with them. Like on on April 11 this spring, when Pinchas Steinberg directs Mahler's *Fifth Symphony* and Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*. The soloist, a 30-year veteran of the orchestra and knowledgeable about its habits, will be first clarinet Beata Varnai, who during her studies attended the lectures of Béla Kovács, Ferenc Rados, and György Kurtág, who recently celebrated his 90th birthday. She perfected her skills through experiences with many ensembles, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, so that she could put her knowledge at the

service of the traditions back home. The 9 May concert also promises to be a true novelty. With Steinberg conducting Borodin's well-known *Polovtsian Dances*, and Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 11*, Czech harpist Jana Bouskova will also play a harp concerto by Glière. From Prague, she completed her studies at Indiana University and has won countless awards at competitions. During her career, she has worked together with such artists as Maxim Vengerov, Mstislav Rostropovich and Christian Tetzlaff. She has appeared at New York's Lincoln Center, Vienna's Musikverein, the Theatre Châtelet in Paris, and, together with three other soloists,

in Moscow, during the world premiere of a contemporary composition, she got the chance to salute Yuri Bashmet on his 50th birthday. Now she is arriving in Budapest to continue Toscanini's concert tradition, which always stressed quality encounters with new musical works. ○

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Conductor ► **Pinchas Steinberg**
Featuring ► **Pinchas Steinberg – clarinet**

9 May 2016, 7:30 pm

Borodin ► **Polovtsian Dances**
Glière ► **Harp Concerto**
Shostakovich ► **Symphony No. 11 "The Years 1905", op. 103**

Conductor ► **Pinchas Steinberg**
Featuring ► **Jana Boušková – harp**

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Humorous bonbon

Everyone faced the revival of *Don Pasquale* differently: the director with adoration, the lead with enthusiasm, and the audience with great anticipation. Using Sándor Fischer's brilliant Hungarian translation, the comic opera sparked more brilliantly than ever.



© ORSOLYA SÁFÁR | Photo by Attila Nagy

"Catching melodies, true hits and bravura arias come one after the other in *Don Pasquale*, while the singers have plenty of wherewithal to act crazy. Now – after two years of rolling across the country – Csaba Káel's production of the comic opera has come to the Erkel Theatre, with Gábor Káli conducting the cheerful, energetic and familiar work.

Reviews don't usually start by praising the costume- and set-designers (Anikó Németh and Éva Szendrényi), but this time it seems warranted to me: they might be ones who did the most for the production, pushing it most creatively out of its century-old straits. Éva Szendrényi created an openable storybook, in which items blown up to many times their original



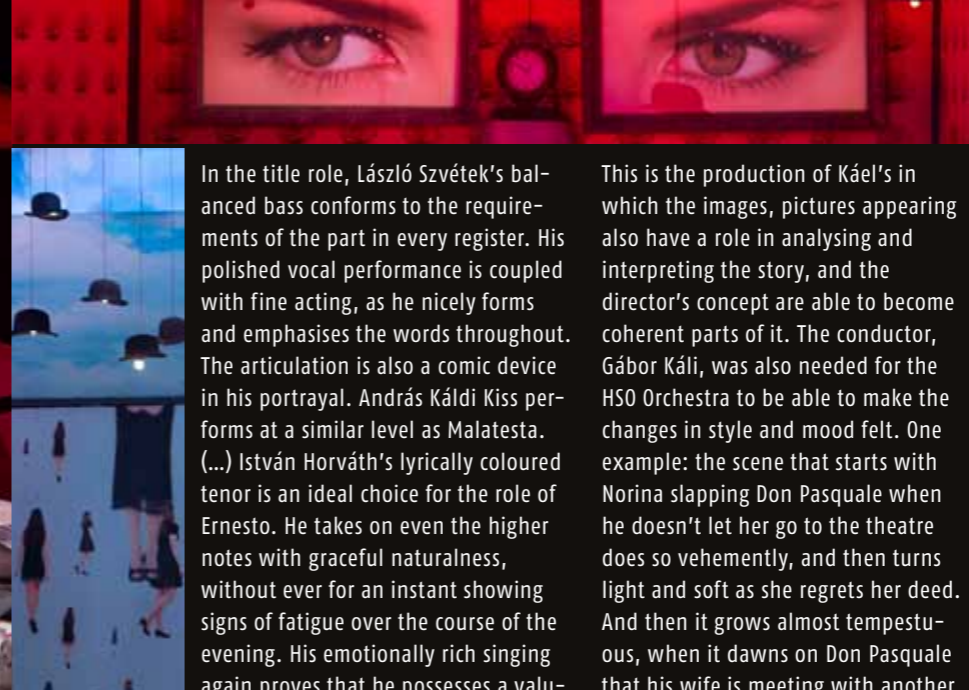
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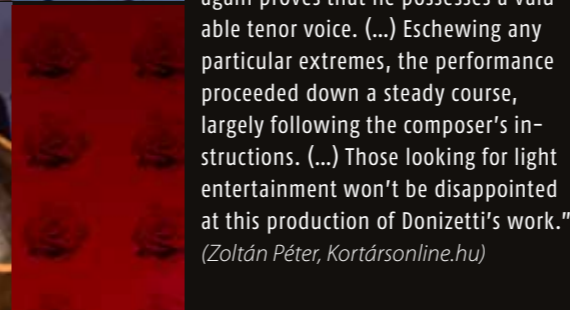
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size (the typical belongings of a lonely old man) acquire new functions, while Anikó Németh creates characters with costumes – and more than one at the same time in Norina's case.

Csaba Káel places the emphasis primarily on the acting, the comedy, and allows his singers to evolve. *Don Pasquale* and Malatesta's duet in the third act, for example, already has a built-in encore – and deservedly so. The singers (László Szvétek, István Horváth, András Káldi Kiss and Orsolya Sáfár) honour the director's gesture and provide the Erkel Theatre's audience with a memorable evening." (Sándor Nadas, 168 Óra)



In the title role, László Szvétek's balanced bass conforms to the requirements of the part in every register. His polished vocal performance is coupled with fine acting, as he nicely forms and emphasises the words throughout. The articulation is also a comic device in his portrayal. András Káldi Kiss performs at a similar level as Malatesta. (...) István Horváth's lyrically coloured tenor is an ideal choice for the role of Ernesto. He takes on even the higher notes with graceful naturalness, without ever for an instant showing signs of fatigue over the course of the evening. His emotionally rich singing again proves that he possesses a valuable tenor voice. (...) Eschewing any particular extremes, the performance proceeded down a steady course, largely following the composer's instructions. (...) Those looking for light entertainment won't be disappointed at this production of Donizetti's work." (Zoltán Péter, Kortársonline.hu)



© TAMÁS SZÜLE AND ORSOLYA SÁFÁR | Photo by Péter Rákossy



This is the production of Káel's in which the images, pictures appearing also have a role in analysing and interpreting the story, and the director's concept are able to become coherent parts of it. The conductor, Gábor Káli, was also needed for the HSO Orchestra to be able to make the changes in style and mood felt. One example: the scene that starts with Norina slapping Don Pasquale when he doesn't let her go to the theatre does so vehemently, and then turns light and soft as she regrets her deed. And then it grows almost tempestuous, when it dawns on Don Pasquale that his wife is meeting with another man: the man's despair – nearly to the point of losing his mind – is quite palpable. This scene depicting important emotions as they fluctuate within a generous range played out fascinatingly before us, to great effect: in truth, almost like a phenomenon of nature. The successful implementation, in terms of the acting, was also partly due to the wonderful László Szvétek (*Don Pasquale*), whose vocal attributes are also quite good, and to the Norina, sung softly and supply, but still charmingly, by Orsolya Sáfár. (...)

Early I mentioned that everyone in the piece inflates themselves, making themselves bigger than they are, making it easier to grasp the meaning and substance of the closing image. That is, in Káel's production, the garden is a swamp populated by the chorus members as frogs. After one of the most beautiful scenes in the piece, the incredibly liberated singers cavort around." (László Kolozsi, Színház.net)



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A new start

In January, Erika Miklósa celebrated the 25th anniversary of the start of her career with a major gala concert, leading the audience through pieces from several genres from the stage of the Erkel Theatre, where the emblematic Queen of the Night has sung Adele in *Die Fledermaus* and Maria in *West Side Story*. Joining her on stage were some of her friends, there to get the next quarter century, which promises to be similarly unforgettable, started on a solid footing.

Photos by Péter Rákossy



Between two poles

○ Photos by Szilvia Csibi, Attila Nagy and Zsófia Pályi



○ FALLING ANGELS: ADRIENN PAP, RITA HANGYA, ELIZAVETA CHEPRASOVA, ANNA KRUPP, EMI UEHARI, NIKA CRNI, LEA FÖLDI AND KARINA SARKISSOVA

The contrasts between woman and man, and light and shadow, are the main themes of the White, Black dance programme, in which two Jiří Kylián choreographies were seen for the first time on a Hungarian stage. Subtitled *Opposites in Attraction*, the dance suite features both loudly vocalising men and fallen angels.



○ ÉTUDES



○ ÉTUDES

○ ÉTUDES: DMITRY TIMOFEEV, KARINA SARKISSOVA, IEVGEN LAGUNOV



○ SARABANDE: MARK JAMES BIOCCA AND IURI KEKALO



○ FALLING ANGELS: JESSICA CARULLA LEON, ÁGNES KELEMEN AND KRISTINA STAROSTINA

"While I could see *Falling Angels* in two different all-female versions – and both succeeded wonderfully – the lads danced *Sarabande* only with a single cast, which might reveal which is the stronger gender at the Hungarian National Ballet, whose current restructuring in a quite positive direction is taking place under the leadership of Tamás Solymosi, its director since 2011. (...)

"Just one cast of six men was chosen for *Sarabande*, whereas I saw two different groups of eight women in *Falling Angels*; which may speak volumes about the relative gender strength-in-depth within the Hungarian National Ballet, now undergoing an upwardly-mobile transformation under the leadership of Tamas Solymosi, who has been in his post as director since 2011...



○ SARABANDE: PIERPAOLO D'AMICO

○ FALLING ANGELS: SARKISSOVA, KARINA



The last time I saw this company, at this theatre, was in 2007, when both the ensemble and the venue seemed in dire need of renovation. Since then, the Erkel has undergone a major transformation to become an attractive modern theatre (twinned with Budapest's elegant nineteenth-century opera house) with a sumptuous box-like proscenium and unimpaired visibility throughout the auditorium. It seems clear that Solymosi is the architect of a similarly effective metamorphosis of Hungary's national (and only) ballet company. Back in 2007, it was a stale, stereotypical, central European purveyor of atrophying classical productions; now, here is a company that is clearly aspiring to – and achieving – a true international standard with a diverse repertoire to match." (Graham Watts, *Bachtrack.com*)

○ ÉTUDES: TATIANA MELNIK



○ ÉTUDES: DMITRY TIMOFEEV

Pitch-black world

"Lear has long been on the wish list of General Director Szilveszter Ókovács, a greater admirer of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Adopting the original production for the world premiere wholesale, giving the task of recreating in Budapest the directing of the since-deceased Jean-Pierre Ponnelle and the sets to Ferenc Anger and Gergely Zöldy Z, who also reconstructed Pet Halmen's original costumes.

Stefan Soltász, former music director and intendant at Essen's Aalto Muktheater had already conducted Lear there, allowing him to realise the extreme tonality of Reimann's score while also switching between the darkest notes and the stirring and soaring passages full of delicate and tranquil melodies, which is needed to reduce the horror of the plot. Almost 38 years after the world premiere, the sevenths and ninths of Reimann's post-serial music definitely have an intense impact

on the listener when played by Stefan Soltész and the HSO Orchestra. (...) Éva Bátorfi was amazing as Goneril, and Szilvia Rálik was superbly wicked, her sharpness a fine expression of her outward ambition. Both of them far surpassed, in their vocal expressiveness and acting ability, Helga Dernescht and Rita Shane in the 1982 Munich recording. Caroline Melzer, a member of the Wiener Volksoper, had already sung the role of Cordelia, the third daughter, at Berlin's Komische Opera, enabling her to jump in to replace the ailing Eszter Sümegi, and her glittering soprano did not lag behind her two dramatic sisters. (...) The composer was visibly moved when he came out to take his bows and received an ovation from the audience."

(Harald Lacina, *Der neue Merker*)

"With no weak links in the cast, which was complemented by the first-rate all-

After nearly 40 years, Reimann and Ponnelle's treatment of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is appearing on the Budapest stage, in its original form. Following the winter run, viewers will have another chance to see the dramatic production during the Shakespeare 400+ Festival.

○ MATTHEW SHAW AND FRANK VAN AKEN
Photo by Szilvia Csibi



○ ÉVA BÁTORTI AND ANDRÁS KÁLDI KISS
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

male chorus, the big roles all received strong performances. Éva Bátorfi as Goneril was a fruity-voiced witch and Szilvia Rálik sensationally out-of-control as Regan. Everything about her was frighteningly spiky, from her bodkin-prick coloratura to her razor-sharp nails. There was also superb singing and acting from the Gloucester clan. András Palerdi, his bass smooth and resonant, exuded dignity as the Earl of Gloucester... As his illegitimate son, tenor Frank van Aken domineered with vocal power and condensed energy."

(Jenny Camiller, *Bachtrack.com*)



○ CAROLINE MELZER AND TÓMAS TÓMASSON
Photo by Szilvia Csibi



○ TÓMAS TÓMASSON
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

With Stefan Soltész conducting the Opera's orchestra, the music, chequered with colouristic post-serial effects, sounded expressive and confident, as did the Honvéd Male Choir. Outstanding parts included the storm scene, the rising clusters at the close of the second act and the dominant brass presence throughout the entire opera. Holding back his voice in the first act to reflect the humiliation of his weakening character, Tómas Tómasson was truly a spectacular Lear in the second act."

(Máté Csabai, *Revizoronline.com*)

"Reimann was really able to get to the heart of what Shakespeare wanted to convey in *King Lear*. The Opera could not have put on a more worthy Shakespeare adaptation in this quatercentenary year. (...) I also can't judge, of course how much Ferenc Anger and Gergely Zöldy Z had to get involved in the sets and costumes, when the original directing was adapted for conditions in Budapest, and Reimann most appreciatively declared how well they reflected the visual effect at the world premiere.



The singers in the minor roles also contended with their tasks splendidly. Zsolt Haja's Duke of Albany confronted his wife with a lovely voice and the required determination. Isván Kovács and Gergely Ujváry gave unerring portrayals of the King of France and the Duke of Cornwall. The prose role of the Fool was satisfyingly played by András Káldi Kiss with natural stage movement."

(Zoltán Péter, *Operaportál.hu*)



○ HAJA ZSOLT AND ÉVA BÁTORTI
Photo by Szilvia Csibi

"But making up the truly great task given to Cordelia's portrayer are the long legato melodic arcs, and not necessarily as a singer, but as a stage actress: the halts and the pauses to think

suggest that, struggling with her tears, Cordelia is assessing the state of this world as well. After the destruction, nothing has remained but a barren, flat land. Eszter Sümegi showed no trace of illness (after she missed the premiere): her Cordelia was gentle, vulnerable and endlessly sad."

(László Kolozsi, *Fidelio.hu*)

"Ponnelle was the genius of directing unobtrusive opera that was nevertheless, nearly always of revelatory power, and this is what showed vividly now at the Opera House. The way its theatricality raised the temperature of the production instead of having an alienating effect; how the totality of Shakespeare's tragedy practically fit (with Anger's aid as well) into a single stage gesture; how the frightening plot turned into a grim and moving theatrical rite before our eyes – all attested to Ponnelle's greatness as a director, even posthumously. And of course all this was effectively proved by this work by Aribert Reimann, 80 years old this year and appearing for a curtain call. (...) And for once let the critic also praise that the indispensable and invisible collaborator: the prompter! During the bows, there were many who leaned down to squeeze the hand of the authority residing in the prompter's box: there's no dispute where the credit for this performance goes to."

(Ferenc László, *Magyar Narancs*)



○ FRANK VAN AKEN AND ANDRÁS PALERDI
Photo by Szilvia Csibi



○ ESZTER SÜMEGI
Photo by Attila Nagy

Greek fire

The Opera has continued its *LateNight* series for viewers over 18 for a third year, offering eyes and ears two readings, from Gluck and Bertoni, of the Orpheus myth. The now traditional late-night performances took place at the Ferenc Liszt Music Academy's Georg Solti Hall.

○ ÉVA VÁRHEGYI | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



○ INGRID KERTESTI | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



as an old man obsessed with dreams of his old love. Amor appears before us as a nurse, and Euridyce as an elegant and worldly woman (a madame?). (...)

Éva Várhegyi interpreted with Orpheus an intense and dynamic performance. Although her singing was sometimes slightly colourless, it was always expressive. It was not only Eszter Wierdl's stage presence that made her ideal for the Eurydic-promoted-to-madame role: her acting performance also gave the character credibility. All paired with emotion-laden vocal performance. As Hymen, Ingrid Kertesi once again showed her great experience with the stage, playing a kind and loving nurse, who not inci-

○ ESZTER WIERDL AND ÉVA VÁRHEGYI
Photo by Zsófia Pályi



○ ZOLTÁN DARAGÓ | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



○ ZOLTÁN DARAGÓ | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



○ RITA RÁCZ AND ZOLTÁN DARAGÓ | Photo by Zsófia Pályi

"By her own admission, Zita Szenteczki's Gluck production took inspiration from contemporary Scottish poet Carol Ann Duffy's work *Eurydice*, whose title character wants to escape her relationship with Orpheus. The musician's narcissistic personality, however, is incapable of accepting that his love wants to leave him. The minimalist production's simple devices (empty stage, black and white contrasting colours, and the female torso fashioned out of iron mesh) reflected the mystical character of the mythological story very well. (...)

Zoltán Daragó is a talented and promising young counter-tenor who portrayed Orfeo with emotional richness and refined vocal technique. Eurydice's opening aria,

Che farò senza, performed with sensitive musicality, created the loveliest and most inspired moments of the entire evening. In addition to his superb musicality, Daragó also exhibited fine dramatic abilities: every single movement on his part was saturated with longing for his lost love. Ágnes Molnár was also a good choice for the role of Eurydice. Her soprano might have been a bit sharp at times, but was balanced and rich in colour in every register, while dramatically, she played the character splendidly. Rita Rácz gracefully appropriated the role of Amor, confidently singing as the lovers' celestial helper. (...)

Helga Lázár's directorial concept of Bertoni's *Orfeo* takes place in a home for the elderly: the minstrel is portrayed

dently sang with solid technique and a lovely soprano voice. (...)

Like last season, we can put down the Opera's chamber performances in Solti Hall as a positive initiative all in all. Once again, young directors got the chance to mount rarely performed pieces. The first half of the evening was an all-round successful production. I'm interested to learn whether the series will continue next season, and with which pieces. (Zoltán Péter, *Operaportál.hu*)

○ Photo by Zsófia Pályi



○ ZOLTÁN DARAGÓ AND ÁGNES MOLNÁR | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



A Princely Evening

The fact that the February Shakespeare ball was turned into a gala in January only increased the interest in the event. In only a few days after the announcement, all of the more than 1200 tickets were sold. After all, who could resist Plácido Domingo's personal magic and the experience promised by a first rate production of total art?

"Of course, Domingo is more than just a star: this was probably the opera world's last great, larger-than-life personality visiting Budapest. And in the same way Edita Gruberová showed the feminine quality at an extraordinarily high level for us at her 31 January concert, the Spanish singer's flawlessly elegant, and still relaxed, bearing satisfied the lasting but seldom-expressed yearning of viewers to see men, at least on the (opera) stage. Domingo, whom unkind tongues incessantly insinuate is older than his official age, is still a fine example of his gender: dignified and spry, introspective, making conquests with his exterior. Someone who, far from incidentally, sings with full power to this day, incorporating for the past few years baritone roles into his uniquely rich repertoire. (...)

The voice is unmistakable even today, and this is certainly more important than the quibbling about Domingo's supposedly insubstantial low notes.

Arriving on the stage with a princely bearing, the elderly gentleman demonstrated the high-level school of singing and acting opera, but this practically doesn't matter, because regardless of how odd the thought may sound, Domingo, even silently, without opening his mouth, and sitting idly in a darkened corner, would still prove to be a great artist. Of course, he sang, two arias and a zarzuela hit (from Torroba's *Maravilla*, composed in 1941, Domingo's birth year) and then *Besame mucho*, now with a microphone and reaching, touching tenor heights." (Ferenc Laszlo, *Magyar Narancs*)

"The Maestro received thunderous applause simply with his entrance, but the audience grew silent as he started the first aria. The voice of the 75-year-old tenor is fascinating even for those unfamiliar with the opera world. (...) After *Besame mucho*, the audience gave a 15-minute standing ovation for

Domingo, who then took the role of conductor and conducted the *Brindisi* from *Traviata*." (ermiz, *index - Divany.hu*)

"This year the doors to the beautiful Opera house were opened to both opera lovers and those simply seeking entertainment. The evening's star, singing in the Opera house for the first time, got a colossal standing ovation. One of the Three Tenors debuted with the aria from the fourth act of Verdi's *Macbeth*." (Fruzsina Gondor, *Origo - Life.hu*)



PLACIDO DOMINGO | Photo by Attila Nagy

"The artists practically besieged the evening's guest star: everyone wanted to take a picture with him. The star is kind, approachable, and has time for all." (Origo-Life.hu)



Photo by Attila Nagy

AUDIENCE OPINIONS

"It was a marvelous evening! It will remain in my memory forever (...). The most beautiful *Besame mucho* I've ever heard!" (Anna Flóra Fogarasi)

"The experience of a lifetime. Grazie mille, Maestro. Many thanks for the ballet, the unique production, naturally to the soloists, the orchestra and all the employees at the Opera house. For many of us, a dream came true that day." (Надежда Бокшан)

"Today's evening was an unforgettable adventure for all music lovers, thank you for this...." (Katalin Laszloné Palfalvai)

"Fantastic! One of my life's greatest experiences. I have been attending the opera for a long time, but I'd never heard a standing ovation go more than five minutes. The ensemble was brilliant, as well." (Katinka Nagy)

"Anyone who got to participate in this extraordinary programme should be very happy." (Gizella Kolozsi)

"This was a world-class gala, with superb local artists and a passionate Domingo. Bravo to Szilveszter Ókovács!" (Zoltán Asztalos)

"It is marvellous that with the ball becoming a gala, many were able to see this wonderful production. The audience was excited. I am grateful. (...) Thank you to the Opera's management for striving to bring serious music to so many people." (Mária Tóthné Sulcz)



THE TAMING OF THE SHREW | KRISTINA STAROSTINA AND BENCE APÁTI | Photo by Attila Nagy



PÉTER BALCZÓ, ORSOLYA SÁFÁR, PLÁCIDO DOMINGO, ZITA SZEMERE, SZILVIA RÁLIK AND ERIKA GÁL | Photo by Zsófia Pályi

CSABA SZEGEDI | Photo by Attila Nagy



SIX DANCES | Photo by Attila Nagy

Parallel stories

After Salzburg and Shanghai, now Budapest is putting on the production of *La bohème* created by one of the most exciting opera directors of our time. The secret sauce in the programme editing is that Damiano Michieletto's version in a modern setting is running in parallel with the nearly eight-decade-old Nádasdy masterpiece with its traditional concept.



ORSOLYA SÁFÁR | Photo by Attila Nagy



ZSOLT HAJA AND ZOLTÁN NAGY | Photo by Attila Nagy



"Mimi and Rodolfo have just headed out for the Christmas street festival, but their voices raise hymns to the heavenly joy their life together promises. Framed by a vast open window, the stage hosts a holiday shopping scene in the Quartier Latin. For a few seconds, I'm touched. The windows suit the shape of the Erkel's stage, extending the fan-like shape of the auditorium. How beautiful this theatre is and how marvellously serviceable the stage is! The rousing music rings out: Act II of *La bohème* has started! (...)

After numerous smaller roles and a notable prior career as an operetta *bon vivant*, I am now seeing Gergely Boncsér in his first true lead. (...) Vocally, he is deserving of praise and recognition, with lovely ligatures, a confident and fine-sounding upper register, including – if I heard correctly – the high C in the aria. (...)



With him, the contemporary Parisian street scene, the discount clothes, the internet and Google maps and the references to superhero mania and Christmas shopping madness, verging on the idiotic, complete with Santa Claus, simply help us perceive the characters at the heart of the timeless events of the libretto as flesh and blood people with whom we, especially the young, can identify: here we have the videoblogger, his penniless flatmates, and Mimi, the average girl next door. In this sense, nothing has changed in the world. (...)

The second act's duet between Gergely Boncsér (Rodolfo) and Orsolya Sáfár (Mimi) was a beautiful gift to the audience, and the singing of the bohemians – Zsolt Haja (Marcello), András Kiss (Colline), Zoltán Nagy (Schaunard) and Ildikó Szakács (Musetta) also satisfied the requirements. (...) The orchestra played very nicely under János Kovács, and together with the performers, we can feel that the opera works splendidly with this cast, in this milieu." (Eszter Veronika Kiss, Magyar Nemzet)



ZOLTÁN NAGY | Photo by Attila Nagy

ZOLTÁN NAGY, ANDRÁS KISS, ZSOLT HAJA, ORSOLYA SÁFÁR AND GERGELY BONCSÉR | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



As Schaunard, Zoltán Nagy is now in his place, both dramatically and vocally. This is the kind of role that his attributes predestine him for. András Kiss's Colline displayed his most attention-grabbing vocal qualities all night long. As in his previous minor roles, I once again, I had to note his substantial volume, a true bass tone, among today's microscopic voices. (...) Another singer who bears mentioning is Gábor Gárday as Benoît, true to form a fine developer of character with powerful vocal and dramatic abilities. (...) "Redirected" from the German repertoire to the Italian, János Kovács did superb work." (Café Momus, IVA and pppp)



ANDRÁS KISS AND GÁBOR GÁRDAY | Photo by Péter Rákossy



ILDIKÓ SZAKÁCS, LAJOS GEIGER, ZOLTÁN NAGY, ANDRÁS KISS, ORSOLYA SÁFÁR AND GERGELY BONCSÉR | Photo by Zsófia Pályi



ORSOLYA SÁFÁR AND GERGELY BONCSÉR | Photo by Péter Rákossy



ILDIKÓ SZAKÁCS | Photo by Péter Rákossy



All in all, I expected a more striking interpretation from Michieletto, but don't mind at all that his ideas are more likeable than astonishing. It's not on the visuals or on the rewired interpretation that he places the emphasis, he doesn't update it, and doesn't even depart from the plot.

ORSOLYA SÁFÁR AND GERGELY BONCSÉR | Photo by Attila Nagy



Hollywood chameleon

While in Budapest recently to shoot her latest film, Oscar-winning actress Charlize Theron was twice a guest on both sides of the curtain at the Opera House to watch ballet, a genre she has adored since childhood.

György Jávorszky

Theron was six when she took her first ballet lesson, and by age twelve her parents had enrolled her in a Johannesburg boarding school. "In high school, I was completely focused on ballet. I attended an art school where I was dancing eight hours a day, with no time for anything else," she said in an interview. Along with classical dance, she studied flamenco, Greek and contemporary dance, appearing in classical works like *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*. South Africa, however, does not offer ballet dancers much acclamation.

Winning a Johannesburg beauty contest sent her straight from South Africa to Italy, where she took another first place. She modelled all over Europe, but after a year moved to New York to sign up with the famous Joffrey Ballet School, but had hardly turned 18 when a knee injury forced her to end her ballet career forever.

At first losing her cherished dream of conquering the world's stages as a ballerina sent her into a deep depression. Her difficult childhood, however, had matured her into a tough and tenacious woman, and with her mother's help she soon decided to try her luck in the film industry. After flying to Los Angeles, she happened to meet a successful agent and won several minor roles each year, with the big breakthrough close behind. In 1997, starring with Al Pacino and Keanu Reeves in *The Devil's Advocate*, acclaimed by both critics and audiences, brought her world fame. Her 2003 performance in *Monster* won her an Oscar.



TAMÁS SOLYMOSSI AND CHARLIZE THERON
Photo by Zsófia Pályi

Dance remains important in her life. The exercise regime that she follows to keep herself in such wonderful shape was designed to give its practitioners the supple, powerful and beautiful body of a ballerina. Her childhood dream was also briefly realised in 2013, at the Oscar ceremony, when she performed a spectacularly successful dance interlude with Channing Tatum, her co-star in the earlier film *Battle in Seattle*. Critics say their production evoked Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Her experience in classical ballet also paid dividends in filming her latest 2015 film, *Mad Max: Fury Road*: the fusion of refined movement and athleticism helped her credibly portray the action heroine Furiosa. "As a former ballerina, Charlize has all the physical attributes and incredible awareness and self-discipline that enable her to nuance her characters with finely shaded gestures," said George Miller, the film's director.

For two months this winter, Theron was in Budapest filming *The Coldest City*, a spy drama set during the Cold War, and spent free time at the Opera House, where she watched *The Nutcracker* with her mother and young son. "It's unusual to spend so much time with a shoot away from home," Theron told Ballet Director Tamás Solymosi before the performance. "I also don't have much time to relax," she added, "so I try to find substantial entertainment when I do."

The film star to this day considers the ballet a dream world, and so was happy to accompany Solymosi backstage after the performance. "Charlize is very direct, as if she always belonged her," said the ballet director. Theron, who found the performance enthralling, congratulated the dancers after the curtain calls and joined the HNB company for a joint photo. Later she wrote a personal note thanking them for

the experience and the hospitality: "Tamas & Company, You guys are incredible!!! We had the best time and the performance was truly breathtaking. Thank you so so much for the best seats in the house and taking the time to say hello afterwards. Lots of love, Charlize".

And as proof of her enthusiasm, Theron returned to the Opera House in January to watch László Seregi's classic ballet for Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. Theron, who once trained to dance ballet, instead became a multifaceted and deservedly popular actress due to an injury. Such transformations are not unknown in Hungary either, where there are examples of trading a career in sport for the stage of the Met. This ability, however, is always deserving of admiration, since only the very greatest are capable of such great changes. ○



Photo by Zsófia Pályi

JELLEN A KULTÚRÁÉRT!

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1, 3, 7, 9, 14 and 16 April 2016	The Queen of Spades <i>Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky</i>
2, 3, 9 and 23 April 2016	LA SERVA PADRONA <i>G.B. PERGOLESI</i>
2 and 23 April 2016	Royal Music Hall
6, 8, 10, 13, 15 and 21 April 2016	The Rake's Progress <i>Igor Stravinsky</i>
11 April; 9 and 30 May 2016	Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra Concert
16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27 and 28 April 2016	THE SLEEPING BEAUTY <i>MARIUS PETIPA</i> / <i>SIR PETER WRIGHT</i> / <i>SIR FREDERICK ASHTON</i> / <i>PYOTR ILYCH TCHIKOVSKY</i>
27 and 30 April; 5 and 8 May 2016	Die Frau ohne Schatten <i>Richard Strauss</i>
1, 4, 6 and 7 May 2016	Onegin <i>J. Cranko</i> / <i>P. I. Tchaikovsky</i> / <i>K.-H. Stolze</i>
7 May 2016	Song Recitals on Dalszínház Street
12, 13, 14, 15, 18 and 20 May 2016	The Taming of the Shrew <i>K. Goldmark</i> / <i>F. Hidas</i> / <i>L. Seregi</i>
19, 21, 25 and 28 May 2016	THE TEMPEST <i>THOMAS ADÈS</i>
22 and 26 May 2016	Macbeth <i>Giuseppe Verdi</i>
24 and 27 May 2016	Otello <i>Giuseppe Verdi</i>
21 May 2016	ARTISTS UNMASKED series with Éva Bátor
29 May 2016	Lear <i>Aribert Reimann</i>

ERKEL

1 April 2016	Il trovatore <i>Giuseppe Verdi</i>
2, 17 and 24 April 2016	Leander and Linseed <i>Zs. Tallér</i> / <i>A. Szilágyi</i> / <i>B. Szöllösi</i>
2, 10, 15, 17 and 27 April 2016	Cavalleria rusticana; Pagliacci <i>P. Mascagni</i> ; <i>R. Leoncavallo</i>
5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 April 2016	Primavera '16 - a panorama of premieres from Hungarian opera companies
9 and 30 April; 28 May 2016	OpeRaport
14, 16, 22 and 24 April 2016	Der Freischütz <i>Carl Maria von Weber</i>
16 April 2016	ARTISTS UNMASKED series with Éva Bátor
21, 23 and 28 May 2016	SPACE FANTASY (PLANET IN TURMOIL; THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES) <i>DÓRA BARTA</i> ; <i>BÉLA FÖLDI</i> - <i>SOLARIS</i>
29 April 2016	DanceTrend ,16
30 April 2016	Pas de Quatre '16
4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 May 2016	OperaAdventure – The Magic Flute <i>Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart</i>
19 May 2016	Hamlet <i>Sándor Szokolay</i>
20 and 22 May 2016	Falstaff <i>Giuseppe Verdi</i>
22 and 25 May 2016	West Side Story <i>Leonard Bernstein</i>
23 May 2016	I Capuleti e I Montecchi <i>Vincenzo Bellini</i>
24 and 31 May 2016	DIE LUSTIGEN WEIBER VON WINDSOR <i>OTTO NICOLAI</i>
27 and 29 May 2016	SLY <i>ERMANNO WOLF-FERRARI</i>
28 May 2016	Roméo et Juliette <i>Charles Gounod</i>
30 May 2016	The Sea in Drops: Shakespeare Arias

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27 and 29 May 2016	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM <i>BENJAMIN BRITTEN</i>
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