

NAXOS

Ferenc

ERKEL

(1810-1893)

King Stephen

(István király)

Soloists

King Stephen

Opera Chorus

Budapest Symphony

Orchestra MÁV

Valéria Csányi

2 CDs



Ferenc
ERKEL
(1810-1893)

King Stephen (István király)

Opera in Four Acts

Libretto by Antal Váradi (based on Lajos Dobsa's drama *I. István király*)

István, the king of Hungary János Gurbán, Baritone
Gizella, the queen, his wife Jutta Bokor, Alto
Imre, the prince, their son Zoltán Nyári, Tenor
Crescimira, a Croatian princess, his fiancée . . . Zsuzsanna Bazsinka, Soprano
Vazul, István's cousin Kázmér Sárkány, Baritone
Sebős, a courtier Tamás Daróczi, Tenor
Jóva, a lady-in-waiting Jolán Sánta, Alto
Zolna, her daughter, a lady-in-waiting Ildikó Szakács, Soprano
Barang, a shaman Tamás Szüle, Bass
Gellért, a bishop Ferenc Valter, Bass
Péter, István's nephew Ákos Ambrus, Baritone
Hunt, a German knight;
Endre, a prince, son of Vazul Sándor Kecskés, Tenor
Pázmán, a knight; Béla, a prince;
Csanád, a general; Asztrik, an abbott János Fátrai, Baritone
Vencelin, a knight; Levente, a prince;
a soldier; a herald Dömötör Pintér, Bass

László Deák, Organ

István Király Operakórus (King Stephen Opera Chorus)

Ákos Somogyváry (Chorus-master)

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV

Valéria Csányi

CD 1**75:11****Act One**

- 1 No. 1: Ég áldd meg a királyt
(God save the King) 8:52
(*Chorus, István, Hunt, Pázmán, Vencelin, Péter, Vazul, Endre, Béla, Levente, Imre, Gellért, Csanád, Asztrik*)
- 2 No. 2: Ó atyám, szétzúzva boldogságom
(Oh Father, my happiness is shattered) 6:52
(*Imre, Gellért, Chorus, Gizella*)
- 3 No. 3: Hódolva jó ím hű fegyvernődök
(Your devoted, loyal squire arrives) 5:46
(*Sebős, Gellért, Gizella, Imre, Jóva*)
- 4 No. 4: Finale: March: A boldog hír szárnyra kelt
(The happy tidings have taken wing) 6:33
(*Asztrik, Csanád, Chorus, Hunt, Pázmán, Vencelin, Vazul, Endre, Béla, Levente, Gellért, Gizella, Imre*)

Act Two

- 5 No. 5: Hullámzó folyam (Billowing waves) 3:55
(*Sebős*)
- 6 No. 6: S most merre asszonyom? Előre ezen úton
(Whither now, my lady? Ahead, upon this path) 5:04
(*Soldier, Jóva, Zolna, Sebős*)
- 7 No. 7: Átok reád, Árpádok háza
(Curse on you, House of Árpád) 3:53
(*Sebős, Vazul*)
- 8 No. 8: Finale: Megértse mindenki szavunkat
(May that our words be clear to all) 10:43
(*Herald, Chorus, István*)
- 9 És most az Úrnak templomába
(And now to the church of the Lord) 3:15
(*István, Chorus, Asztrik, Gellért, Gizella, Csanád, Hunt, Pázmán, Vencelin, Endre, Béla, Levente*)
- 10 Szíved titkát meglestem
(I have discovered the secret of your heart) 4:38
(*Sebős, Péter, Chorus*)
- 11 Drága magyar föld, új hazám
(Dearest land of Hungary, my new country) 3:26
(*Crescimira, Chorus, Gellért, Asztrik, Csanád, Hunt, Pázmán, Vencelin, Endre, Béla, Levente*)

Act Three

- 12 No. 9: Most elhagyunk, maradjatok
(We take leave now, you stay) 5:33
(*Chorus, Imre, Crescimira*)
- 13 Boldogtalan leány (Hapless girl) 6:40
(*Imre, Crescimira*)

CD 2**66:49**

- 1 No. 10: Oh, bosszúálló égnek istene
(Oh, vengeful God) 5:10
(*Crescimira, Zolna*)
- 2 Bosszúdnak angyala (Angel of your revenge) 7:21
(*Péter, Crescimira, Chorus, Sebős*)
- 3 Nos, miért e zavart tekintet?
(Well now, why these troubled looks?) 6:23
(*Péter, Crescimira, Chorus*)

Act Four

- 4 Scene 1, No. 11: Itt e hely, itt kell várnom reá
(Here is the place I must wait for him) 7:23
(*Zolna, Chorus*)
- 5 No. 12: A hajnal érkezik, kelet világa közelg
(Dawn arrives, the world of the east approaches) 12:58
(*Barang, Vazul, Chorus, István, Gellért, Asztrik, Csanád, Hunt, Pázmán, Vencelin, Endre, Béla, Levente*)
- 6 Scene 2, No. 13: Ó, hozza vissza diadallal a nagy királyt az ég
(Oh may that Heaven return the great King with triumph) 3:01
(*Gizella, István, Chorus, Jóva*)
- 7 Csak daloljatok (Just sing) 5:38
(*Crescimira*)
- 8 Megtört szívemnek első gondja hazám
(My homeland is my broken heart's main concern) 6:38
(*István, Chorus, Csanád, Endre, Béla, Levente*)
- 9 Most a végcsapást (Now the final blow) 7:58
(*Sebős, István*)
- 10 Uram, bocsásd el hű szolgádat
(Lord, let your faithful servant depart) 4:21
(*István, Chorus, Csanád, Asztrik, Gellért, Hunt, Pázmán, Vencelin*)

Ferenc Erkel (1810-1893)

King Stephen (István király)

For Hungarian music the life and work of Ferenc Erkel (1810-1893) are of almost immeasurable importance. Like the chess player that he was – namely one of the best in Hungary – he built up and directed the musical life of Hungary as a strategist of genius. As a performer he was one of the best conductors of his time. Beginning in 1838, he was the director of the opera company at the Hungarian National Theatre for thirty-six years; through his persistent hard work he raised Hungarian operatic performance to an international level. Before the middle of the 1840s there was no better pianist living in Hungary. His work as a piano teacher reached its zenith at the Music Academy, established by Liszt and Erkel together in 1875 with Liszt as the president and Erkel as the director. In 1853 he founded the country's first permanent concert-giving orchestra, the Philharmonic Society, which still operates today. In 1867 he founded the National Hungarian Choral Association which in terms of its membership was the largest civil organization in the country, and still is through its modern legal successor. As a composer he wrote the Hungarian national anthem, which found its way into hymnbooks as a sacred song of the Church. He also wrote virtuoso instrumental works, incidental music for the theatre, choral works and cantatas, but in his work as a composer he put opera above everything.

He composed nine operas – why so few? Well, did Verdi work as the main conductor of a theatre, with no deputy? Did Donizetti have to found and conduct an orchestra to give concerts? Did Rossini help establish and then direct a music academy where he had to teach as a professor with the greatest number of classes? Did Puccini found his nation's choral society? Indeed, which nation's leading opera composer had to grapple all his life with the fact that he was without a patron in his own country? Is there another composer of whose eleven children, four sons (Gyula, Sándor, Elek and László) figure in their own right in the country's music history books?

Erkel fought for the cultural, political and economic independence of Hungary within the Habsburg Empire as did Verdi in an Italy struggling against Habsburg rule. The bloody defeat of the revolutions of 1848 and the cruel reprisals that followed were never forgotten by the different peoples of the empire. Italy gained its independence after the Battle of Solferino in 1859, whereas Hungary eight years later, in 1867, managed to secure an ambiguous compromise, following Austria's defeat at the Battle of Königgrätz in 1866 during the Austro-Prussian War. Erkel did not follow political fashion, and until the end of his life remained faithful to the Reform Era (1825-1848) of his youth, a period of socio-political modernisation.

Dezső Legányi, in his monograph on Erkel the opera composer, wrote: 'We cannot simply describe Erkel's development as a road leading from the "number opera" of Italy towards the continuity of Wagnerian opera; of course it is foolish to deny the external influences that affected the composer, but these in themselves were not the trigger that caused his transformation as a composer – they were merely its colouring. Erkel's development was influenced in part by an organic inner change, during which his style was increasingly and more deeply influenced by Hungarian features and forms; and in part by the librettos he chose as support for his changing musical style, librettos that were always modern in their approach. Apart from his two comic operas, all his librettos are based on Hungarian historical dramas, in each of which we see evidence of the composer's development: Erkel's interest moved gradually from individuals and their tragedy towards the popular Hungarian plays whose often heroic characters portray human destiny in terms of national drama, or indeed daily life in the countryside.' Erkel's librettos can be understood anywhere in the world; they are rooted in dramatic clashes between sin and virtue. As such they are not specific to one nation, but convey a message of general validity.

The creation of national art music in eastern Europe

went down two roads: either the musical forms established by the great foreign masters were given a national content by making use of the music of the people, or new forms were created using the rhythms specific to the national language. In his early operas Erkel introduced the Hungarian musical element into existing operatic forms. In *King Stephen* he experimented with transferring the specific rhythms of Hungarian words into his music. He achieved his goal: without any elements from popular music he wrote music that is Hungarian through and through. This is what lends the work its real importance in the history of music.

Crowned in the year 1000, Stephen was Hungary's first Christian ruler and founder of the Hungarian state. He was canonized in 1083, the feast of St Stephen being 20th August. Erkel had planned as early as 1846 to compose an opera on King Stephen but, in the end, it became Erkel's last completed opera. He began writing it in 1874 and by 1875 he had finished two acts, whereupon he stopped. In 1880 he had the libretto revised and by 1882 the work was down on paper. The orchestration was done in part by Erkel's sons and finished by the summer of 1884. Although the opera was intended for the opening of the Budapest Opera House that year, the première eventually took place half a year later, on 14th March 1885, to huge success. It was given twelve more times that year, a feat unmatched to my knowledge by any other Hungarian opera. In 1896, after the death of their father, Erkel's sons revised it, expanding it with fourteen new items. Following the work's revival in 1910 it was then only performed in the 1930s, at which time the work was cut to half its length entirely without justification. Between 1945 and 1990 it was not possible to perform it under an atheist dictatorship for political reasons. In 1993 a performance broadcast on the radio was recorded and a television film made of the opera, but the work had been subjected to ruinous alterations. The libretto was completely re-written, the plot changed, the music reduced, and new items were written to be inserted. No opera by Erkel has given rise to so many errors, false interpretations, posthumous denigration and negative assessment as *King Stephen*. It was precisely this that

prompted the creators of this recording to revive the opera, 125 years after its première, in the form in which its composer conceived it. After eighteen months of preparation the première took place in Komárom on 10th July 2010, the bi-centenary of the composer's birth.

The present recording has been made using Erkel's manuscript score and parts. Items subsequently added have been removed and the cuts made in the 1930s restored. Most of the extensive ballet music of Act Two has been omitted since this part of the work was not performed at the original première. The music was learned using a vocal score reflecting the form of the opera at its première. Chorus parts that were illegible had to be deciphered and a score made for the chorus. We wish to express our thanks to the Music Department of the National Széchényi Library for providing us with facilities for research, and to the staff of the Opera House's music library, without whose help we could not have carried out the work of preparation, in particular the reproduction of copies.

To understand the libretto a few historical facts need to be clarified. The plot is only partially fictitious. The main characters of the opera were real people, with the exception of the main conspirator Sebős. On stage are five key figures from Hungarian history: the Hungarian 'holy family', namely King Saint Stephen, Queen Blessed Gisela, and their son Prince Saint Emeric (Imre), as well as Bishop Saint Gerard (Gellért) Sagredo who was Prince Emeric's tutor, and the Archbishop of Esztergom, Saint Astrik.

Stephen is remembered as the founder of the Hungarian kingdom. He concluded an alliance with the semi-independent local princes, and those who rebelled against him he put down with a strong hand. Faced with the ancient religion of the Hungarians or one of the rites of Christianity (Apostolic, Byzantine or Roman) he chose to align the country with Rome. As far as we know he had two sons, the first of whom died young, hence the heir to the throne became his second son Emeric.

According to legend, Saint Emeric betrothed himself to the Virgin Mary in a vow of chastity. Despite this he married Princess Crescimira (Patricissa, daughter of King Krešimir III) of Croatia. The saint's legend says they lived a so-called Josephite, or spiritual, marriage – named after

the marriage of the Virgin Mary to Joseph, and not uncommon among ruling families in the Middle Ages. Their marriage remained unconsummated.

According to the opera's plot, Emeric was murdered on his cousin Peter Orseolo's orders, as was another legitimate heir to the throne, Vazul. As fiction it is credible, since he had an interest in both of their deaths. It is true that after the death of Stephen, Peter came to the throne. A violent ruler, he was twice deposed, only managing to regain the throne with the help of the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad II, and in the end dying a terrible death. But according to historians it was Vazul who tried to assassinate Stephen, and when this failed Stephen himself made sure he was incapacitated as a ruler.

Little of certainty is known about the religion of the pagan Hungarians. According to hypothesis it resembled Christianity in its structure, but differed from it in its content. They believed in one god whose name was 'Öregisten' – Great God, or Atyaisten – Father God. The name 'Hadúr' – God of War – is a romantic invention of early nineteenth-century literature which, however, is widespread in Hungary even to this day. A significant number of Hungarians were already Christian at the start of Stephen's reign.

Synopsis

King Stephen – unlike Erkel's other operas – does not portray a political figure who fails as a consequence of his bad decisions; it portrays a saint. A saint who in all circumstances comes to the right decision when the actions of all around him are governed by their emotions. The story involves conflict between a vow made to God and the filial obedience required to act responsibly as a ruler, but beyond that an important rôle is played by passionate and proud love, wounded vanity, unbridled careerism and the lust for power. To these can be added the clash of the pagan and Christian worlds. Eventually everything around Stephen collapses, but he preserves his faith and when he dies he is glorified.

CD I [1] Act One Scene 1 shows the Diet of Hungary in session. The King wants to resolve the danger of war

threatening from the south as well as the question of the succession to the throne by his son marrying Princess Crescimira, daughter of the King of Croatia. Imre bows to the will of his father. The Diet greets the plan with unanimous approval and Stephen sends his cousin Peter Orseolo to fetch the bride. [2] The despairing Imre remains alone with his tutor Bishop Gellért. The Queen arrives with her ladies-in-waiting who rejoice at the news of the wedding. The Prince, after the ladies have left, confesses to his mother and Bishop Gerard that he is secretly betrothed to the Virgin Mary. He has taken a vow of chastity of which he may tell no one. The Bishop advises him to obey his father, and at the same time keep his vow. [3] Sebős, Emeric's squire, enters to congratulate him on his betrothal, but is interrupted by Jóva, one of Gisella's ladies-in-waiting. She is agitated, and complains to the Queen that her daughter Zolna has been abducted. On seeing Sebős, she recognizes him as the culprit; it then emerges that not only is he an abductor, he is also a pagan worshipper of idols. As Gisella consoles her lady-in-waiting, Emeric banishes Sebős from court until he repents of his misdeeds and converts to Christianity. As the guards drag him off, Sebős swears revenge. [4] A crowd scene follows in which all are celebrating, except for Emeric.

[5] Act Two opens before dawn beside the Danube. Alone, Sebős utters curses and bewails his fate, he has lost his beloved and is in disgrace. [6] Zolna arrives with her mother. The young couple declare their passionate love. Her mother is ready to yield to her daughter's pleading, but the warning sound of a church bell summoning the faithful to Mass at dawn is heard. Both implore Sebős to convert, but in vain. [7] Sebős remains alone. His curses are interrupted by the arrival of Vazul. Sebős sees in this loyal relative of Stephen the means to execute his revenge. Making use of Vazul's pagan religion, he stirs up in him a lust for power. In the meantime dawn breaks on the day of the wedding. [8] A herald arrives, and announces to the people that King Stephen has invited everyone to attend his son's wedding. The King and his son enter in procession, and Peter and Crescimira arrive on board boats. [9] The wedding guests enter the church in procession. [10] Peter remains

outside. He has fallen love with Emeric's bride, and Sebős addresses him. The two conspirators join forces: Peter desires for himself both Crescimira and the throne, while Sebős is animated by his vengeful hatred of Christianity and the ruling house of Arpád. The wedding guests come out of the church. ¹¹ Crescimira professes that in future she will be a loyal daughter of her new homeland.

¹² Act Three takes place in the newly-weds' room. The chorus of wedding guests sings a beautiful farewell to the married couple. Crescimira sings an aria to Emeric declaring her love. ¹³ He, however, tells her that he cannot belong to her. Since he cannot reveal his secret vow, Crescimira erupts in an outpouring of wounded feelings and jealousy. **CD II** ¹ After their duet Emeric departs. Crescimira's second aria follows, portraying the young wife's state of mind, ranging from a burning desire for revenge to profound despair. Zolna arrives, and seeing Crescimira's distracted state, she lets Peter in through a hidden door, and escapes with her beloved. ² The conspirator goads Crescimira increasingly: her husband has spurned her, and his heart belongs to another. He persuades her she should murder Emeric, and gives her a phial of poison. Outside the commotion of armed men is heard, rushing into battle against the pagans. Crescimira rushes out in agitation. Through the hidden door Sebős arrives. He has let King Stephen know that Vazul – instigated in fact by Sebős himself – is marching against him at the head of the pagans. Sebős departs through the hidden door. ³ Crescimira returns in agitation, hesitating. Peter eagerly enquires what has happened. As Crescimira confesses her terrible deed, she exultantly reveals that she knew about Emeric's vow made to the Virgin Mary; she heard it from Sebős. Crescimira becomes deranged. The act closes with the commotion of armed men.

⁴ Act Four Scene 1 begins with an aria sung by Zolna, who has abandoned her mother and left her religion for the sake of her lover. The two are due to meet before dawn in the forest, in front of the pagan altar. ⁵ Presently a pagan army arrives led by Prince Vazul and the shaman Barang, intending to perform a sacrifice to the God of War. The sacrificial rite is interrupted by the arrival

of the King and his followers. The passions of this scene almost lead to fighting, but Stephen puts a stop to it by laying down his arms and praying. He then steps towards the sacrificial fire of the God of War and puts it out by touching it with the Cross. According to the pagan religion the God of War's fire will devour everything, and all who attack the God of War will be struck dead. But this does not happen, and the great bonfire goes out immediately. The pagans stand shaken in their belief, and Stephen's soldiers prepare to attack them. The King, however, waves them back, and announces a general pardon. The pagans along with Vazul are converted, and together with Stephen's followers sing a hymn of the Holy Cross. ⁶ Scene 2 begins with Gisella's prayer in the palace. The triumphant King enters in a procession having successfully restored the unity of the nation without bloodshed. At that moment Jóva enters with the news of the death of Emeric. ⁷ Crescimira enters from the other side in a frenzy, seeing her husband in a vision. ⁸ Stephen worries over the fate of Hungary and is about to appoint Vazul as heir to the throne when General Csanád arrives with news that Vazul, who had converted, has been murdered by Peter's assassins when he tried to establish the King's peace. Stephen dismisses the court except for the three princes Endre, Béla and Levente. He can no longer defend them and instructs them to go into exile until the evildoers are avenged by God. An off-stage chorus laments the death of Emeric, and Stephen seeks God's consolation. ⁹ Sebős steals in intending to murder the King. On hearing Stephen pray for his enemies, Sebős realizes the consequence of his actions and collapses. He asks for death from the King. Stephen forgives him, but banishes him. For the first time in the opera we hear the words Saint Stephen from the lips of the broken Sebős. ¹⁰ Stephen asks God to show him the future in order to see whether his sufferings have been in vain. Accompanied by incidental music, four grand visions unfold on the stage. The first is the fall of Peter. The second is the handing over of the Golden Bull, Hungary's Magna Carta and Europe's second constitution, issued by King Endre II in 1222. The third is the apotheosis of King Matthias, whom Hungarians still today refer to as 'the just' and who was one of the most glorious rulers of Hungarian

history. The fourth vision is when the Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa asked for the support of the Hungarian magnates in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) in melodramatic fashion at the Diet in Pressburg in 1741, which was granted. Erkel's opera ends with the apotheosis of King Stephen: Oh, be thou the guardian of our nation, King Saint Stephen above in heaven!

István Kassai

English translations by Paul Merrick and Nicholas Bodóczy

János Gurbán



The baritone János Gurbán was born in 1956 and received his musical education as a private student under Ferenc Révhegyi and Mircea Breazu. He has served as a soloist of the Szeged National Theatre until 1989, when he joined the Hungarian State Opera. He appeared in numerous West European cities and in Japan as a member of the company or as a guest soloist. He has sung the main rôles of Italian and German repertoire, including Wagner (The Dutchman, Wotan, Wanderer, Alberich, Amfortas, Kothner and Sachs), Verdi (Macbeth, Nabucco, Rigoletto, Posa, Don Carlos, Amonasro, Germont, Ferrando, Iago and Ford), Puccini (Scarpia, Alfio, Tonio), Richard Strauss (Jochanaan, Faninal) and Berg (Wozzeck), some fifty rôles in all.

Jutta Bokor



Jutta Bokor entered the Liszt Academy in Budapest in 1979 as a student of Márta Ónody. She joined the Hungarian State Opera, and in 1985 won second prize in the Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, followed by a contract with the Viennese Volksoper. Since then she has performed in almost all European countries. Her main rôles include Sesto, Cherubino, Dorabella, Carmen, Rosina, Amneris, Preziosilla, Meg Page, Octavian, Zipra, Nancy, and Niklausse. She has appeared in opera films, made television, record and radio recordings and found further scope for her abilities in broadcasting and as the designer and presenter of interactive programmes for children.

Zoltán Nyári



Zoltán Nyári began his musical studies on the violin. Ten years later he was admitted to the University of Drama and Film of Budapest, where he graduated as an actor in 1993. He started his professional training as a singer after university, and singing gradually assumed an important rôle in his career. He studied singing with Magda Nádor, and was a member of the Operetta Theatre of Budapest between 1996 and 2006, touring with the company. He won the Jászai Mari Prize in 2005 and has been a soloist of the Hungarian State Opera from 2005. He won the Best Male Performer as well as the Audience Prize at the 2009 Opera Competition with Mezzo Television. He has been a soloist at the Dresdner Semperoper since 2010.

Zsuzsanna Bazsinka



Zsuzsanna Bazsinka studied at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest under József Simándy and Éva Andor and made her début in 1989 as an understudy in the rôle of Silvana in Respighi's *La Fiamma*. Since then she has been a soloist at the Hungarian State Opera. She has also sung in theatres throughout Germany and been a guest soloist in Luxembourg, France, Sweden, Slovakia, Romania and Japan. She has appeared in the major concert halls of the world and has a repertoire of over sixty operas, ranging from the baroque to the contemporary, including Cleopatra, Pamina, Konstanze, Lucia di Lammermoor, Marguerite, Mimi, Liu, Manon, Madama Butterfly, Gilda, Violetta, Elena, Leonora, Daphne, and Chrysothemis, among others.

Kázmér Sárkány



The baritone Kázmér Sárkány started his career in the Honvéd Male Chorus. A pupil of József Simándy at the Liszt Academy of Music, he first sang Fiorello in *The Barber of Seville*, and since 1986 has been a soloist of the Hungarian State Opera with a repertoire of more than fifty rôles, from Papageno and Figaro to Alberich and Beckmesser. He often appears on the concert stage and has been seen in opera films and heard on records and as a singing voice in cartoons. He has been a guest soloist in almost every European country, in the United States, Canada and Japan.

Tamás Daróczi



Tamás Daróczi was born in 1954 in Árpástó, Transylvania, and received his musical training in Cluj where he obtained his diploma in 1980. In the same year he made his début at the Cluj State Opera as Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. He first appeared in Budapest in 1983, singing Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* at the Erkel Theatre. He has toured Europe, Israel, Egypt and Japan, was a permanent guest soloist of the Komische Oper in Berlin, and has been a member of the Hungarian State Opera since 1988, with a repertoire ranging from Mozart (Belmonte, Tamino, Titus) and Verdi (Oronte, Alfredo, Don Carlos) to Puccini (Cavaradossi, Des Grieux, Rodolfo).

Jolán Sánta



Jolán Sánta was born in Kalocsa and studied in Debrecen and at the Liszt Music Academy. She has been a member of the Hungarian State Opera since 1985, having made her début at the Erkel Theatre as Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* in 1983, followed in 1984 by her début at the Opera House as Olga in *Eugene Onegin*. She was awarded first prize at the Pavarotti International Singing Competition in 1988 in Philadelphia and has performed as a popular interpreter of oratorios in Hungary and abroad. During her career she has sung countless major and semi-major rôles, in standard and contemporary repertoire.

Ildikó Szakács



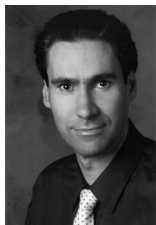
The soprano Ildikó Szakács studied at the Liszt Academy of Music, graduating in 2007. She is a member of the Bel Canto Opera group and in 2007 gave a solo recital organized by La Gesse Foundation at the Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall in New York. She won the Annie Fischer grant for musicians in 2010 and 2011, and in 2011 was a finalist in the Armel opera competition in Szeged, which rewarded her with the rôle of Gilda in *Rigoletto* at the Opera House of Plzen. In the 2012/2013 season she was a soloist of the Hungarian State Opera House.

Tamás Szüle



Tamás Szüle studied at the Liszt Academy of Music until 1979, from which date he has been a soloist of the Hungarian State Opera. He has sung the main bass rôles of the operatic repertoire, including Henry the Fowler, Sarastro, Leporello, Don Pasquale, Bartolo, Sparafucile, Ferrando, Fafner and Baron Ochs. His concert repertoire ranges from oratorios by Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Mendelssohn to the works of contemporary composers. In 1990 he sang Osmin at the Drottningholm Palace Theatre, followed in 1992 by guest appearances in Rossini's *Il turco in Italia* in Nancy and a series of engagements abroad.

Ferenc Valter



Ferenc Valter was born in 1961 in Budapest. He participated in the master-classes of Sylvia Geszty in Austria and Ugo Benelli and Nikolai Gjuzelev in Italy. In 1993 he won first prize at the First International Singing Competition of Budapest in the rôle of Sarastro. In the same year he made his début at the Hungarian State Opera in the same rôle. He has since sung over fifty rôles, including Gurnemanz (*Parsifal*), Hunding (*Die Walküre*), Friar Lawrence (*Roméo et Juliette*), Timur (*Turandot*), Pimen (*Boris Godunov*), The Commendatore (*Don Giovanni*) and the bass solo in *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*.

Ákos Ambrus



Ákos Ambrus was born in Budapest in 1961 and began his musical education at the Leo Weiner Music School in 1969. He obtained his first diploma (composition) at the Liszt Academy of Music in 1981 and from 1985 onwards studied singing as a private student of Erika Sziklay and András Mikó. In 1992 he joined the Hungarian State Opera as a soloist and has participated in commercial recordings and stage performances in a wide repertoire, including numerous contemporary Hungarian operas. He has received the Artisjus Prize three times. As a composer his most often performed work is a children's opera, *Bogáncs* (Thistle), based on Ferenc Baranyi's libretto.

Sándor Kecskés



The tenor Sándor Kecskés was born in Váchartyán in 1943. He studied at the Béla Bartók Music School between 1969 and 1973 under István Kapitánffy. He was a member of the National Theatre of Pécs from 1974 to 1977 and of the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen from 1977 to 1985. He made his début at the Hungarian State Opera House in the rôle of Ottó in Erkel's *Bánk bán* in 1988. He has been under contract with the Opera House since 1989, where he has performed a number of character tenor rôles.

János Fátrai



János Fátrai was born in 1974 in Veszprém and graduated in vocal teaching, singing and chamber music at the Teacher Training Institute of the Liszt Academy of Music in 2004. He continued his education privately with Magda Nádor and Emese Kármán. He has performed at numerous festivals and has been soloist of the Honvéd Male Chorus since 2007, where he sang baritone and bass solos in many oratorios. His opera rôles range from Leporello to the title rôle in János Nagy's *The Puppeteer*.

Dömötör Pintér



Dömötör Pintér was born in 1979, graduated as a mathematician and studied music at the Szombathely Conservatory, majoring in trombone and music theory. He later studied singing privately with Péter Pálinkás, Boldizsár Keönc, Annamária Schmiedt and Kornélia Bakos. He has been a professional singer since 2006, and since 2011 has been a member of the Hungarian National Choir. He made his début as a solo opera singer in 2010.

László Deák



László Deák obtained his diplomas with distinction in organ and piano with Ferenc Gergely and Jenő Jandó at the Liszt Academy in Budapest. He completed his studies at the Paris Conservatoire with Marie-Louise Langlais. The recipient of various prizes and awards in international competitions, he has given recitals at music festivals around Europe. He is head of organ studies at the Szent István király Conservatory of Music in Budapest, and organist of the Franciscan Church there. He has recorded works of French Romantic composers, contemporary music and works of Ferenc Liszt.

István Király Operakórus (King Stephen Opera Chorus)



Cantate, with the participation of renowned soloists and the orchestra of the Opera House at the re-opening of the Erkel Theatre in Budapest.

The ensemble was founded in December 2009 from nine Budapest choirs, on a voluntary basis, specifically for the performance of Erkel's opera *King Stephen* in Komárom on 10th July, 2010. The opera forged the choir into a choral community that has participated in other productions, both independently and as a partner of the Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV. In 2012 the International Classical Music Awards (ICMA) nominated their Erkel Choral Works CD, with Ákos Somogyváry conducting, among the ten best recordings of its category. Most recently it presented Erkel's almost unknown *Magyar*

Ákos Somogyváry



Ákos Somogyváry is the artistic director of the Caritas Collectio Chamber Orchestra, the Cistercian St Alberik Choir and the King Stephen Opera Chorus, and is the great-great-grandson of Ferenc Erkel. He has dedicated two decades to the choral works of Erkel and his contemporaries. Throughout his professional career of 25 years, he has collaborated with almost 50 choirs from Hungary and other countries, as well as with numerous soloists, singers and instrumentalists. Several previously unknown oratorical works were premièred and recorded under his direction and he has contributed to recordings in Hungary and in New York. Somogyváry has been the president of the Ferenc Erkel Society since 2012.

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV



Centre. The orchestra has also participated in several European festivals, in Lourdes, Vienna, Thessaloniki, Rome and Assisi. In September 2012 Péter Csaba became the orchestra's new Artistic Director and Chief Conductor.

Valéria Csányi



Born in Budapest in 1958, Valéria Csányi completed her piano studies at the Bartók Conservatory in 1977, continuing at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, where she gained her chorus-master degree in 1982 and conducting degree in 1984, with further study in Vienna and Salzburg. In 1983 she joined the Hungarian State Opera, first as a répétiteur, later as conductor. Since 1995 she has worked mainly in ballet, having been appointed First Ballet Conductor in 2003. Her career has brought tours with the Hungarian State Opera and a number of appearances with the Stockholm Strauss Orchestra. For Naxos she has recorded the operetta *Fürstin Ninetta* by Johann Strauss II [8.660227-28].

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Booklet notes and synopsis in English

Ferenc Erkel was the father of Hungarian grand opera, as well as an accomplished conductor, pianist and administrator. The last of his nine completed operas, *István király*, is a tale of passionate emotions, love, jealousy, power struggles and murder in which King Stephen, the founder of the Hungarian state and its first Christian ruler, is portrayed as a saint amidst the clash of pagan and Christian worlds. After 125 years of ruinous cuts and alterations to the music and the libretto, this recording is the first to restore the opera to the resoundingly successful form conceived by its composer.

Ferenc
ERKEL
(1810-1893)

King Stephen (István király) (1874-1884)

Opera in Four Acts

Libretto by Antal Váradi, based on Lajos Dobsa's *I. István király*

István, the king of Hungary	János Gurbán, Baritone
Imre, the prince, his son	Zoltán Nyári, Tenor
Crescimira, a Croatian princess, his fiancée	Zsuzsanna Bazsinka, Soprano
Vazul, István's cousin	Kázmér Sárkány, Baritone
Sebős, a courtier	Tamás Daróczy, Tenor
Zolna, a lady-in-waiting	Ildikó Szakács, Soprano
Péter, István's nephew	Akos Ambrus, Baritone

Soloists • King Stephen Opera Chorus

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV • Valéria Csányi

CD 1	75:11	CD 2	66:49
1-4 Act One	28:03	1-3 Act Three (contd.)	18:53
5-11 Act Two	34:54	4-10 Act Four	47:56
12-13 Act Three (Beginning)	12:13		

A detailed track and cast list can be found inside the booklet.

The Hungarian libretto can be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/660345.htm

Recorded at Rottenbiller Street Studio of Hungaroton, Budapest, Hungary,

on 26th and 27th August, 2012 • Producer: János Bojti • Engineer and editor: János Györi

Booklet notes: István Kassai • Manuscript score and parts held in the Hungarian National Library

Cover photograph: *Statue in St Stephen's Basilica, Budapest* by Peter Aczel