

April 11, 2019 – Ferenc Erkel's *Hunyadi László*

On this week's WCPE Opera House, I'm pleased to present "the first important Hungarian opera," Ferenc Erkel's *Hunyadi László*. Based on a play by Lőrinc Tóth, it was premiered in Budapest on January 27, 1844. The opera not only made Erkel a national hero but established Hungarian opera as an independent genre. So popular was Erkel that his setting of Ferenc Kölesey's poem "Hymnus" was adopted in the same year as Hungary's national anthem. In Hungary Erkel is best remembered, however, for his 1861 opera *Bánk bán*.

The heroic László Hunyadi (tenor **Dénes Gulyas**) receives in his castle King Laszlo V of Hungary (tenor **András Molnár**), who is under the sinister influence of the regent, Count Ulrik Czilley (baritone **István Gáti**). Using László Hunyadi's refusal to admit the King's entourage of German mercenaries as pretext, Czilley persuades his master of the Hunyadi's disloyalty. Dreaming of his beloved Mária Gara (soprano **Magda Kalmár**), daughter of the Palatine of Hungary, László is interrupted by a friend, Rozgonyi (baritone **Miklós Mersei**), who reveals Czilley's plotting, and when Czilley later attacks László he is cut down by the loyal Hungarians.

Laszlo's mother Erzsébet Szilágyi (soprano **Sylvia Sass**) pleads with the King for her sons' lives; in acknowledgement of the Hunyadis' past services to the nation, the King relents. He is, however, attracted to Mária, a fact which her father, Miklós Gara (baritone **Sándor Sólyom-Nagy**), notes could be turned to his own advantage. Gara offers to trade his daughter's hand for László's life. László's wedding to Mária is brusquely interrupted and he is imprisoned. Despite an abortive rescue attempt by Mária, he is led to his execution.

János Kovács conducts the Hungarian State Opera Orchestra and Chorus, and the Male Chorus of the Hungarian People's Army in this 1985 Hungaroton recording, CD number 12581.

From a 2012 performance with the Hungarian State opera, conducted by **Domonkos Héja**, tenor **Daniel Pata** sings László's Act III aria: <https://youtu.be/inFZxflb81Y>.

This Saturday, April 13th, at 11:30 a.m., please join us for the Metropolitan Opera's production of Richard Wagner's *Siegfried*, with **Stefan Vinke** singing the title role, **Christine Goerke** as Brünnhilde, and **Michael Volle** as The Wanderer. Heard in other principal roles are **Karen Cargill** (Erda), **Gerhard Siegel** (Mime), **Tomasz Konieczny** (Alberich), **Dmitry Belosselskiy** (Fafner), and **Erin Morley** (Forest Bird). **Philippe Jordan** conducts.

Please join us next Thursday, April 18th, for a special extended edition of the WCPE Opera House when we rebroadcast Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio**. It features **Peter Hofmann** in the title role, **José Van Dam** as Amfortas, **Dunja Vejzovic** as Kundry, and **Kurt Moll** as Gurnemanz. **Herbert von Karajan**

conducts the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the German State Opera Chorus in this 1980 recording.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed "live" online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps..

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House