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# ***The Record Collector***

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**Giuseppe  
Lugo**

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**Béla  
Környey**

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**Mária  
Németh  
Discography**

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**Lydia  
Kindermann**

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**Record &  
Book Reviews**

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*A Quarterly Journal of Recorded Vocal Art*

Deever' and 'I Am a Roamer' from *Son and Stranger*. LT cannot play about on his low register as Radford and McEachern – and even Dawson – can, but he trumps them all with a splendid trill (Radford does a shake on one word and a brief trill on another in 1907 but leaves them blank in 1904 and 1924). Ormandy's Detroit Symphony plays with amazing virtuosity for LT.

Disc 10 is launched by a Finnish War Relief concert conducted by Goossens. Passing quickly over Malotte's setting of 'The Lord's Prayer', we come to a fine 'Defend Her, Heav'n' from Handel's *Theodora* (I agree with CLO that the version from the last Victor session is even better). A song by Laforge with Wille's piano is pretty average, then LT is joined by distinguished Scandinavians – a Norwegian, a Swede and a Dane – in 'Suomi'. After that, it is farewell to Victor, on 4 January 1940, with the faithful Wille in attendance. A stylish 'Where'er You Walk' leads to the *Theodora*, then comes a pleasing account of *The Bailiff's Daughter*, perhaps LT's riposte to Bispham's 'On the Banks of Allan Water'. Strangely it was coupled with 'Goin' Home', which had been held since 1936 – the intention must have been to pair it with a second version of *A Kingdom by the Sea*, but in the event the Somervell remained unpublished, a shame. LT's great Victor run ends with marvellous renderings of Schubert's 'Der Wanderer' and 'Die Allmacht'. A few radio things remain, including 'Ballad for Americans', Gounod's Tennyson setting 'Ring Out Wild Bells', forthrightly sung, and Rachmaninov's 'To the Children', sensitively done.

Three and a half months later, we come to the last track, 'Urna fatale' from the Telephone Hour of 8 March 1943. The Met revived *La Forza del Destino* that January and Don Carlo was LT's last new Verdi role; we are lucky to have two broadcasts, albeit truncated – CLO mentions 'two arias' but in fact the Met stupidly cut the tavern scene, so Tibbett never sang 'Son Pereda'. He seems to make heavy weather of 'Urna fatale', even though to my ears he comes across as still a singer of consequence. But ... is his slightly woebegone mien due to Marston's source, where the opening orchestral fanfare sounds a little tinny? Ward Marston says this recording is the same as the one played in Programme 17 of Lionel Barrymore's *Concert Hall*, and I think he is right. I had always dated this programme to 1942, listing Frank Black as the conductor, but it appears LT made his recording on the date above, with Donald Voorhees. My source is an acetate which I obtained because Adolf Busch was also on the *Concert Hall* programme, and Tibbett sounds much more like himself on it; there is surface crackle but the orchestra is also more lifelike. If you own Symposium 1294, *The Stars were Shining*, you can hear for yourself, as Eliot Levin stole 'Urna fatale' off my acetate without asking me!

To sum up, Lawrence Tibbett should have made more records, but the same can be said of virtually every baritone except Dawson and Fischer-Dieskau. Whatever the reason for his vocal decline in his mid-40s – and CLO expends many words on speculating about it – when he did shine, he shone very brightly. The proof is in this essential box.

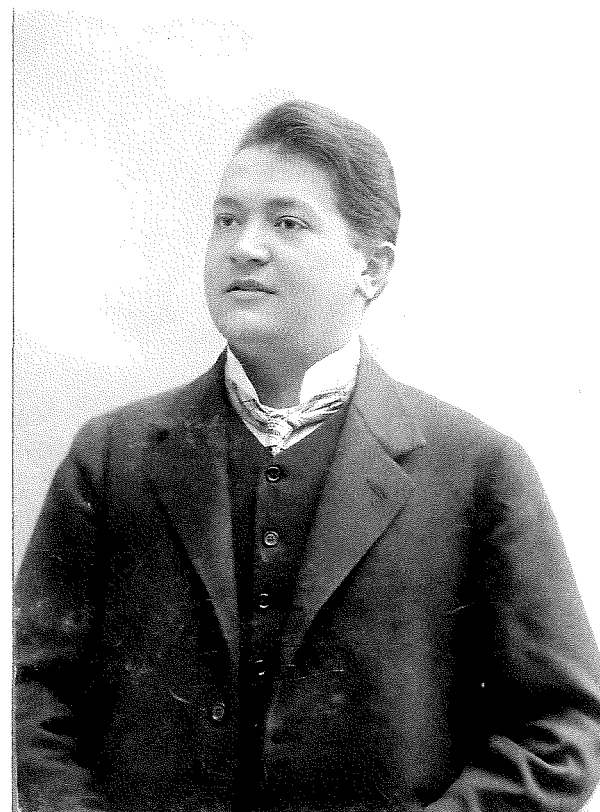
**Tully Potter**

## BÉLA KÖRNYEY

### The First Hungarian *Heldentenor* (1873–1925)

by

**Ferenc János Szabó**



Experts in early operatic recordings – almost regardless of nationality – have almost certainly come across Béla Környey's name on some early Hungarian or international record label's release. Although the number of his recordings is exceptional (more than 300), his international reputation is hampered by the fact that the vast majority of his recordings feature a specifically Hungarian repertoire.

Béla Környey [pronunciation: Bayla Kernyaee] (or, as his name was frequently written, Környei) was one of the most significant Hungarian opera singers of his era. Yet there is no reliable publication about his entire career and

artistry. This article is intended to be a first attempt, but it is obvious that it cannot be complete; there is still much research to be done. Nevertheless, the 150th anniversary of the singer's birth in 2023 justified the need to research him. Hopefully, much new data will come to light before 2025, the centenary of his death.

This excellent singer performed dramatic roles, opera and operetta in many important Hungarian theatres and made recordings for almost all the record companies present in Hungary at the time. An overview of his career and discography is therefore not only useful for his own sake, but also to provide an insight into the Hungarian musical culture and recording history of the period.

## Biography

Környey recalled his career as follows: "I was told in writing that I was a 'Hungarian tenor'. [...] it is true that I am Hungarian, but by a strange coincidence of circumstances I was born in the Czech land (Krumau); it is also true that I am a tenor – but I was a bass-baritone first!"<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Béla Környey was born in Český Krumlov (at the time: Krumau) on 18 May 1873, into an old Hungarian noble family. His father was a military officer, who was stationed in Krumau with his troops at the time of Környey's birth. Béla Környey was two years old when they moved to Hungary.

Most sources tell of a legendary start to his career: he was working as a house painter when, around 1896, Lajos Evva, director of the Népszínház [Folk Theatre], heard him singing during his work, and persuaded him to take to the stage. However, Környey himself, in an interview in Vienna, told a more prosaic story (*Neues Wiener Journal*, 21 October 1915): he had studied to be an artist, and a family friend noticed his voice while he was singing a Hungarian song at home, accompanying himself on the piano. Initially he sang in the choir of the Népszínház (The People's Theatre) – in the bass section. In 1897 he appeared already at the newly opened Magyar Színház [Hungarian Theatre], where he was a member of the choir and had small solo roles in operettas. Although he could have moved up the ranks in the Budapest theatre scene, he did not stay long in the capital but moved to the countryside to take more serious roles, even though the salary was lower.

Although before 1908 Béla Környey was known primarily as an operetta singer, initially he also played dramatic roles; this segment of his career is hardly documented and is mostly unknown. He had the following to say about his early career: "There was not a single musical folk play in which I did not perform in the countryside. I appeared in comedies and dramas, and in *Bánk bán* [a play by József Katona], I was discovered as a dramatic actor by the newspapers and the public. They said I was a great dramatic actor. I played Svengali in *Trilby*, Tarján in *A dolovai nábob leánya* [The daughter of the nabob of Dolova]."

It is almost impossible to compile a complete list of his operetta roles due to the peculiarities of the Hungarian theatre of the time. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the territory of Hungary was divided into theatre districts, which were supplied with theatre performances by travelling companies year after year. These companies usually performed in two locations. In winter, they played in a bigger city with a heated theatre, while in summer they performed in any theatre in a city and in smaller towns in the surrounding area. The stage playbills, especially for the travelling companies in the countryside, have hardly survived, and although the daily press regularly reported on the performances, the brief accounts sometimes do not even tell us which role a singer played. What we do know for certain about Környey is that he was a member of several companies, performed a lot, learned many roles and became increasingly successful. And not only did he perform in operettas and folk plays, he also sang baritone roles in operas. The history of provincial operatic performance in Hungary before 1950 is

<sup>1</sup> Vilmos Somogyi: "Környey Béla. 1873-1925." *Muzsika* 5/3 (March 1962): p. 21

almost completely unexplored. The repertoire of the travelling companies that performed in the various theatres is not even fully known. However, if we look only at Környey's currently known opera roles, the repertoire is already impressive.

He first signed a contract with the theatre company of Péter Deák in the southern part of Hungary. The company performed in Baja, Zombor [Сомбор/Sombor, today in Serbia], Nagybecskerek [Зрењанин/Zrenjanin, today in Serbia], Lugos [Lugoj, today in Romania], Versec [Вршац/Vršac, today in Serbia] and Nagykikinda [Киkinда/Kikinda, today in Serbia] etc.

From 1899 he sang in the company organised by János Komjáthy in and around Debrecen. It shows Környey's growing reputation that his first appearance in Debrecen was already in a title role: he debuted as Rip van Winkle on 4 April 1899. The period he spent in Debrecen was significant not only for his career but also for his private life: it was here that he married his first wife, the singer Paula Galyasi, and his first child, Paula Környey (1899–1996), who became a Hungarian actress and poet, was born. According to a later anecdote, he once even fought a duel in Debrecen, against none other than Endre Ady, who later became one of the most important modern Hungarian poets. As a member of Komjáthy's company, Környey performed mainly in operettas and folk plays, but it was also the first time that he sang an operatic role (the role of the marquis in a then popular Hungarian opera, *Ninon* by Jenő Sztojanovits). The company had to serve a wide range of audiences, so they performed a large and varied repertoire. Környey later recalled his years in Debrecen as follows: "In Debrecen, there was a lot of action: in the afternoon Conte di Luna, in the evening Laci Csorba in the folk play *Sárga csikó* [The Yellow Foal], or *Rigoletto* in the afternoon, *Rip van Winkle* in the evening!"

From 1901 the audience of Budapest could hear him again, at least in the summer: he was signed to Lajos Makó's company which was active in Temesvár [today Timișoara, Romania] and Buda [the western part of the Hungarian capital city, Budapest]. In 1901, already in Temesvár, his second child was born, Béla Környey Jr., who later became a composer and regular piano accompanist of the Hungarian Radio.

From the following season, the actor Ignác Krecsányi (1844–1923) was granted the opportunity to perform in Buda and Temesvár, and several singers from Lajos Makó's company joined him, including Környey. Krecsányi was also one of the most important theatre directors of the turn of the century. Throughout his career, he performed with his company in ethnic and bilingual towns of Hungary. During his most important period he appeared in Buda in summer and in Temesvár in winter. His musical repertoire was of an extremely high standard, and he was perhaps the only provincial theatre director to have a broader operatic repertoire. In the autumn of 1902 alone, for example, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Ernani*, *Rigoletto*, *Traviata*, *Il Trovatore* and *Pagliacci* were performed. Krecsányi was the first to premiere Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Der fliegende Holländer* in several provincial cities in Hungary. Several later important Hungarian musicians appeared in Krecsányi's company for a longer or shorter period. For example, when Környey was engaged, Ernő Mihályi (later a member of the Royal Hungarian Opera) was the tenor, Környey the baritone, and

the conductor of the company was the composer Zsigmond Vincze, with whom Környey later made several recordings in Budapest.

In Krecsányi's company Környey appeared in folk plays, operettas and operas. He was generally praised in the press. Thanks to Krecsányi, Környey's operatic repertoire was surprisingly wide, ranging from *bel canto* operas (*Norma*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), through Verdi (*Ernani*, *I due Foscari*, *Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*), to baritone roles in French and German romantic operas (*Faust*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *Carmen* and *Zar und Zimmermann*). His musical development was marked by the fact that in 1904, in Temesvár, he sang Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* and even Scarpia in *Tosca*. Surprisingly, he also appeared in a tenor role, singing the role of King László V in Ferenc Erkel's opera *László Hunyadi*. Although the press praised his voice as a baritone in this role, there is no record that the role may have been transposed for him.

However, his greatest successes were in operettas. The number of new operetta roles he learned was impressive: fourteen in 1902, nine in 1903 and four in 1904, including classical operettas by Jacques Offenbach, Robert Planquette and Johann Strauss, as well as Austrian and Hungarian operettas of the period. The baritone role of Marquis Henry in *Les Cloches de Corneville* by Robert Planquette was a particular success, sung on 30 consecutive nights, to such an extent that people from Pest (the Eastern side of Budapest, divided by the Danube) came to Buda to admire it. Among those who crossed the Danube was the theatre director László Beöthy, who – after a guest appearance in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in June 1904 – signed Környey to the Király Színház [King Theatre] from the spring of 1905.

The Király Színház, opened in 1903, was the most significant operetta theatre in Budapest in the first third of the 20th century. Környey was a member of the theatre for three years, and appeared in Hungarian, French and Austrian operettas, performing not only baritone but also tenor roles. His greatest success was in the tenor main role in Ákos Buttykay's operetta *A bolygó görög* [*The Flying Greek*], parts of which he soon recorded for The Gramophone Company and Favorite. Director László Beöthy recalled that "Especially in *A bolygó görög*, many of us felt at the time that this was the first real brilliant performance of his great singing talent. It was then that Béla Környey, the new Hungarian *Heldentenor*, was discovered. He was phenomenal. The sensual magic of his voice and his wonderful musical culture really captivated the public." Környey's success is shown by the fact that during the revival of this operetta in December 1909, and again at the 50th performance (12 January 1910) he was invited to sing the main role, then as a guest.

Környey sang at the Király Színház at the beginning of the 1907-1908 season, but in December 1907 he cancelled his contract and joined the new company of the Népszínház-Vígopera [People's Theatre – Comic Opera] in Budapest. In the short-lived musical theatre, which lasted only one season, he sang mainly tenor roles in Johann Strauss's *Der Zigeunerbaron* and other operettas, as well as in Domenico Monleone's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a rarity in opera history. By then he was one of Budapest's best-known singers, whose voice was regularly recorded on gramophone records. The Népszínház-Vígopera went bankrupt due to insolvency at the end of the season, but Környey did not remain without a

contract: from the following season he was a member of the Hungarian Royal Opera.

From 1908 onwards, Környey was a key member of the Royal Hungarian Opera for over a decade and a half. Apart from summer breaks and the forced closure due to the First World War, there was hardly a month when he did not perform at the Opera. He was first reported to have made his debut as Don José, but it was in the Hungarian première of *Tiefland* by Eugen d'Albert that the audience of the Opera first encountered him. As Pedro he had an overwhelming success – so much so that reviews claimed that it overshadowed that of d'Albert's opera itself. The critics enthusiastically welcomed the new Hungarian *Heldentenor*. Although some thought his singing was still naturalistic, the freshness and spontaneity he brought from the operetta stage had a novel effect in the more rigid stage atmosphere of the Opera House.

He continued to learn roles at an impressive rate: within five years he had mastered a huge number of operatic tenor roles, and almost every new role he took on was a sensation. After his debut in 1908, he appeared in six further tenor roles in 1909, including Don José, Canio, Fra Diavolo and Rodolfo. His first performance of *Carmen* at the Opera was a memorable one: the opera choir had gone on strike before the performance, so most of the choruses were omitted, with some exceptions sung by soloists and some of the strike-breaking members of the choir. In 1910, after the title role in *Lohengrin*, his popularity soared to such heights that he was able to secure a new contract on very favourable terms. His first new role as a newly signed member was in the most famous Hungarian opera of national romanticism, *Bánk bán* by Ferenc Erkel, in which he enjoyed one of his greatest and longest-running successes.

In 1911, he added Mario Cavaradossi and Alfred from *Die Fledermaus* to his repertoire, along with main roles in some less successful operas, and in 1912 he appeared for the first time in roles such as Dick Johnson (rehearsed by Puccini himself), Turiddu and Manrico, to which he added Radames, another of his most successful roles, in 1913. He also continued to make regular guest appearances in operetta productions – it is not surprising that the Royal Hungarian Opera chose him for the role of Hadschi Stavros in the 1910 Hungarian première of Ferenc Lehár's *Das Fürstenkind*.

At the Hungarian première of *Tiefland*, the female main role was sung by the great Hungarian mezzo-soprano Elza Szamosi (1881–1924). In the years that followed, Szamosi and Környey appeared together in many operas, including *Carmen* and *La Bohème* (1909), *Das Fürstenkind* (1910), *Tosca* (1911), *La Fanciulla del West*, *Der Zigeunerbaron* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1912), and in the Hungarian première of Waltershausen's opera *Oberst Chabert* (1913). The relationship between these two outstanding singers, the passionate mezzo-soprano and the masculine tenor, eventually went beyond professional boundaries, leading – as far as Elza Szamosi's life was concerned – to a serious tragedy, the madness and suicide of Szamosi's husband. Környey and his first wife had been living apart since 1908 (this could be due to, among other things, a love affair Környey had while still working at the Népszínház-Vígopera), and the tenor filed for divorce from Paula Galyasi as early as June 1910. The divorce proceedings dragged on for several years, and Elza Szamosi and Béla Környey

were not married until October 1914, a time when neither of them could perform on the stage of the Royal Hungarian Opera.

After the outbreak of the First World War, the Opera House was closed and the contracts of the members of the company were terminated. The company of the Népopera [People's Opera], founded in 1911, continued to operate for its own benefit, and the more popular artists of the Opera House, including Szamosi, Környey and the baritone Lajos S. Rózsa (1879–1922), were invited to appear as guests at the performances. Környey appeared there in performances of *Carmen*, *Il Trovatore* and in the musical play *A vörös ördögök* [*The Red Devils*]. The Opera House remained closed until March 1915. At the re-opening, on 21 March 1915, Ferenc Erkel's opera *Bánk bán* was performed, with Környey in the title role.

The situation at the beginning of the First World War determined his career for years. A new wave of popularity of the operetta genre began in Budapest. Although Környey continued to be primarily an opera singer, and performed regularly on the operatic stage – in 1915 he expanded his repertoire with the main tenor role in *Un Ballo in Maschera* – he also made more frequent guest appearances in operetta theatres. In February 1915, he sang at the Hungarian première of Ferenc Lehár's *Endlich allein* (together with Szamosi) at the Király Színház, and in April 1916 he appeared as Schubert at the Hungarian première of Heinrich Berté's *Dreimäderlhaus* (this time as a partner of Emmi Kosáry [1889–1964]) at the Vígszínház [Comic Theatre]. *Dreimäderlhaus* was a huge success in Budapest, and for more than two months Környey could be heard only at the Vígszínház in Budapest. He sang the role of Schubert more than 100 times, in 1918 at the Városi Színház [City Theatre] (with Valborg Svärdström [1879–1972]) and in 1924 at the Király Színház.

It is probably also due to the First World War that Béla Környey had the opportunity to make an international career. He had certainly made guest appearances abroad before – the literature mentions performances in Berlin, Munich and Dresden – but further research is needed to find out more about these. In October 1915 he appeared as a guest at the Vienna Hofoper, singing Radames with great success. Most critics welcomed his performance, praising in particular his voice and the naturalness of his performance. A few days after, *Neues Wiener Journal* published an interview with the perhaps somewhat exaggerated comment that no singer had made such a successful debut in Vienna since Enrico Caruso and Georges Baklanoff. There followed seven more guest appearances in the 1915–1916 season, in which Környey sang the roles of Don José and Manrico, as well as Radames. After this, he was engaged by the Hofoper from the autumn of 1916.

He was a member of the Vienna Hofoper for two seasons, which was perhaps not the most fortunate time in the history of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, namely from 1 September 1916 until its collapse on 30 November 1918. He shared the stage with such distinguished tenors as Alfred Piccaver, Leo Slezak and Erik Schmedes. He did not sing quite the same repertoire in Vienna as he had in Budapest: in addition to the roles he sang in his guest appearances, he appeared in 1916 in *Les Huguenots*, in a new production of *Il Trovatore*, in Korngold's *Violanta* and in the world première of the new version of *Ariadne auf*



Cavaradossi

*Naxos* by Richard Strauss. In 1917, he added Des Grieux from Massenet's *Manon* and Assad in *Die Königin von Saba* to his repertoire. Of his most successful Budapest roles, Pedro was sung by Georg Schmieter, Erik Schmedes and Karl Ziegler during this period in Vienna, while *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Pagliacci*, *Tosca* and *La Bohème* were not performed, probably due to the events of the First World War.

However, Környey did not abandon the Budapest Opera House during his Vienna years, returning regularly to Budapest for guest performances, even taking part in operetta productions. Fortunately for him, the Austrian and Hungarian capitals were close to each other and, despite the war conditions, transport was easy. When the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy collapsed in November 1918, he returned to Budapest permanently. This was probably a decision of his own free will, as he was still scheduled to perform Massenet's *Manon* in Vienna on 1 December 1918, but he did not

appear in that performance. At the end of November, the distinguished baritone Dezső [Desider] Zádor (1873–1931), who directed the Budapest Opera House for a short period, initiated negotiations with him, and then, assuming that the contracts of the Vienna Opera House had automatically been cancelled by the collapse of the Monarchy, Környey signed his Budapest contract on 1 December 1918.

The question may arise as to why he chose the internationally more isolated Budapest Opera instead of the Vienna Hofoper, one of the best opera houses in the world. Several of his interviews from Vienna show that he consciously maintained his Budapest connections, not wanting to separate himself from the Hungarian capital. It is questionable whether, if he had remained in Vienna after the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, he would have been allowed to travel so much between Budapest and Vienna. Although he argued strongly in interviews that the Vienna Hofoper was Europe's top opera house, he also mentioned in

several others the more reserved attitude of Viennese audiences, juxtaposed with the enthusiasm of Budapest audiences. It seems that he was used to constant and immediate success on the operetta stage and needed an intimate relationship with the audience.

Another aspect may have contributed to his decision to come home: he initially lived in Vienna with his second wife, Elza Szamosi, but by the spring of 1918 their marriage had broken down, they had moved apart and then had divorced. It is possible that he was also attracted to Budapest by a young mezzo-soprano, later to become his third wife, Mária Sándor (1892–1964, the younger sister of the *K. u. K. Kammersängerin* Erzsí Sándor [1883–1962]), with whom he had appeared in several *Tiefland* performances in Budapest since April 1916.

His post-1918 career is ambivalent. During these critical years for Hungary, he was one of the most successful artists of the Budapest Opera, and in addition to his opera performances he regularly appeared not only in concerts (including orchestral and song recitals), but also in various operetta theatres in the capital. His popularity was uninterrupted and, in 1923, along with Erzsí Sándor, Anna Medek (1885–1960) and Ferenc Székelyhidy (1885–1954), he was elected a life member of the Opera House. It is telling, however, that, although he sang regularly at the Royal Hungarian Opera between 1918 and 1925, after 1918 he only took one major opera role (*Otello*, in 1919) into his repertoire. And if we look at Környey's international career, we have to say that its upward trend, which had been rising steeply between 1908 and 1918, seems to have been broken. This can partly be explained by the complicated international situation after the war; for example, it is known that in 1919 he was invited to Prague to perform as a guest in *Aida*, *Les Huguenots* and *La Bohème*, but was unable to travel there because of the closed borders.

In 1921 he married for the third time, and the following year went on an American tour with his new wife, Maria Sándor. This, however, did not fulfil expectations, at least not professionally. The couple were in the US from April to December 1922. They performed in opera and operetta performances, gave concerts with mixed programmes and, according to Környey's own account, he made gramophone recordings in America (nothing is known of these recordings at present).

The details of the tour need further research, but from the information currently available it seems that they had been deceived by the manager in charge of organising the tour. Since the planned concert tour did not materialise, a Hungarian theatre company was assembled, and Környey participated in its performances not only as a singer but also as a director. They performed in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Cleveland, among other places, and their repertoire consisted mostly of Austrian and Hungarian operettas (works by Carl Millöcker, Johann Strauss and Ferenc Lehár). In April 1922, they appeared at the Lexington Theatre in New York in a performance of *Pagliacci* with fellow Budapest opera singers, including Lajos S. Rózsa, then a member of the Metropolitan Opera, who died tragically shortly afterwards at a young age. According to the advertisement, the performance featured the Choir and the Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera, under the Hungarian conductor Oszkár Halmi.

Környey died unexpectedly, almost 'at work'. In early April 1925, he had a guest appearance in Bratislava. According to newspaper reports, it was the first time that a Hungarian singer had sung in Hungarian at a Czech performance (two years earlier Erzsí Sándor had to sing her roles in Italian and French in Bratislava). On 21 April Környey appeared in *Aida* at the Opera House in Budapest, the title role being sung by Mária Németh (1897–1967). That evening he became ill with erysipelas [a form of cellulitis and potentially serious]. He died on the following day, 22 April 1925, at a point where he had several projects in the pipeline: a gala performance of *Die Fledermaus*, in which he was to sing the role of Alfred was being prepared for 25 April, a revival of *Tiefland* was scheduled for the end of May; he was invited to Košice for a guest performance of *Tosca* in June, and we know from one of his obituaries that he was learning the role of Eléazar in April 1925.

At his funeral (30 April), the Orchestra of the Royal Hungarian Opera played the funeral march, not from Richard Wagner's *Siegfried* (as was customary for *Heldentenors* at the time), but from Ferenc Erkel's opera *László Hunyadi* – a fitting tribute to the 'most Hungarian of singers'. Thousands of people accompanied the singer on his last journey. It is almost symbolic that with his death, an era of the Royal Hungarian Opera also came to an end: on 1 May 1925, the young composer Miklós Radnai (1892–1935) was appointed director of the Opera House, finally stabilising the institution after years of crisis.

### The repertoire of Béla Környey

The following list contains all of the known roles in which Béla Környey appeared during his career. I have grouped the roles chronologically, according to the theatre companies and theatres, and, in the first half of his career I have separated the operatic roles from those in operetta. Although I am aware of the fact that the Hungarian stage versions of German, Austrian, French and English operettas may differ from the original productions, where possible, I have written the title of the work and the name of the role as it is in the original, and not in the – sometimes different – versions of the Hungarian production. I have left the Hungarian title or role name only in cases where I could not find information about the original work, or the role was not identifiable. The date in brackets is the date of Környey's first known performance in the given production..

#### Magyar Színház (Budapest)

François (Louis Varney: *Le Papa de Francine*, 22 April [?] 1898)

#### Company of Péter Deák (Baja etc.)

[unknown role] (Johann Strauss jr.: *Der Zigeunerbaron*, [?] October 1898, Nagybecskerek)

#### Company of János Komjáthy (Debrecen etc.)

Opera:

Márki (Jenő Sztojanovits: *Ninon*, 23 February 1900, Debrecen)

[unknown role] (Giuseppe Verdi: *Il Trovatore*, 16 May 1900, Nyíregyháza)

Operetta:

Rip (Robert Planquette: *Rip van Winkle*, 4 April 1899, Debrecen)  
 [unknown role] (Sidney Jones: *The Geisha*, 30 April 1899, Debrecen)  
 Maximin (Audran: *La Poupée*, 24 May 1900, Nyíregyháza)  
 Absolon (Goldfaden: *Szulamit*, [?] August 1900, Debrecen)  
 Jan (Carl Millöcker: *Der Bettelstudent*, [?] November 1900, Debrecen)

**Company of Lajos Makó (Buda–Temesvár)**

Opera:

[unknown role] (Friedrich von Flotow: *Martha*, 31 August 1901, Buda)

Operetta and Hungarian folk play:

[unknown role] (József Dóczi: *Liliom Klári*, 15 May 1901)  
 Adam (Carl Zeller: *Der Vogelhändler*, 19 May 1901)  
 Radziwill (József Konti: *Királyfogás*, 3 June 1901)  
 Achilles (Jacques Offenbach: *La Belle Hélène*, 9 June 1901)  
 Diomed (Sidney Jones: *A Greek Slave*, 5 July 1901)  
 Fátyol Ferkó (László Rátkay: *Felhő Klári*, 29 July 1901)  
 Gábor deák (Johann Strauss jr.: *Der Zigeunerbaron*, 6 August 1901)  
 Faziani (Victor Roger: *Les Fétards*, 20 September 1901)  
 de Wett Péter (Izsó Barna: *Budapest szépe*, 20 July 1901)

**Company of Ignác Krecsányi (Buda–Temesvár)**

Opera:

Don Carlo (Giuseppe Verdi: *Ernani*, 19 July 1902, Buda)  
 George Germont (Giuseppe Verdi: *La Traviata*, 27 August 1902, Buda)  
 Conte di Luna (Giuseppe Verdi: *Il Trovatore*, 4 September 1902, Buda)  
 [unknown role] (Vincenzo Bellini: *Norma*, 1 October 1902, Buda)  
 Valentin (Charles Gounod: *Faust*, 3 January 1903, Temesvár)  
 Escamillo (Georges Bizet: *Carmen*, [?] February 1903, Temesvár)  
 Figaro (Gioacchino Rossini: *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, 8 April 1903, Temesvár)  
 Lindorff, Coppelius, Miracle (Jacques Offenbach: *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*,  
 27 June 1903, Buda)

[unknown role] (Giuseppe Verdi: *I due Foscari*, 21 July 1903, Buda)  
 Valentin (Charles Gounod: *Faust*, 24 July 1903, Buda)  
 Conte di Luna (Giuseppe Verdi: *Il Trovatore*, [?] December 1903, Temesvár)  
 King László V (Ferenc Erkel: *Hunyadi László*, 4 June 1904, Buda)  
 Zar Peter I. (Albert Lortzing: *Zar und Zimmermann*, 10 June 1904, Buda)  
 Wolfgram (Richard Wagner: *Tannhäuser*, 4 March 1904, Temesvár)  
 Scarpia (Giacomo Puccini: *Tosca*, [?] December 1904, Temesvár)  
 [unknown role] (Gaetano Donizetti: *Lucia di Lammermoor*, unknown date)

Operetta:

Gaetano (Charles Lecocq: *Le Coeur et la Main*, 6 May 1902)  
 Rip (Robert Planquette: *Rip van Winkle*, 12 May 1902)  
 Henry (Robert Planquette: *Les Cloches de Corneville*, 16 May 1902)  
 Leonetto (Franz von Suppé: *Boccaccio*, 17 May 1902)

Diomed (Sidney Jones: *The Greek Slave*, 27 May 1902)  
 Marton (Carl Zeller: *Der Obersteiger*, 28 May 1902)  
 Aristeus (Jacques Offenbach: *Orphée aux Enfers*, 12 June 1902)  
 Leonetto (Lionel Monckton: *A Runaway Girl*, 14 June 1902)  
 Don Braseiro (Charles Lecocq: *Le Jour et la Nuit*, 3 July 1902)  
 Achilles (Jacques Offenbach: *La Belle Hélène*, 5 July 1902)  
 Plinchard (Hervé: *Lili*, 11 July 1902)  
 Adam (Carl Zeller: *Der Vogelhändler*, 12 July 1902)  
 Pippo (Edmond Audran: *La Mascotte*, 28 July 1902)  
 Andris (Carl Millöcker: *Das verwunschene Schloss*, 11 September 1902)  
 Tviddles (Gustave Kerker: *The Belle of New York*, 3 May 1903)  
 Falke (Johann Strauss jr.: *Die Fledermaus*, 6 May 1903)  
 Fairfax (Sidney Jones: *The Geisha*, 16 May 1903)  
 Champlatreux (Hervé: *Mam'zelle Nitouche*, 20 May 1903)  
 Bobbie (Sidney Jones: *San Toy, or The Emperor's Own*, 13 June 1903)  
 Jan (Carl Millöcker: *Der Bettelstudent*, 17 June 1903)  
 [unknown role] (Sándor Major: *A bűnös asszony*, 26 July 1903)  
 [unknown role] (József Bokor: *Kurucfarsang*, 26 June 1903)  
 Pompa di Matadores (Jacques Offenbach: *La Vie Parisienne*, 12 September  
 1903)

Lord Lancaster (Jenő Huszka: *Bob herceg*, 3 October 1903)  
 [title role] (Edmond Eysler: *Bruder Straubinger*, 29 January 1904, Temesvár)  
 Narciss (Louis Varney: *Les Mousquetaires au Couvent*, 7 May 1904)  
 Pietro (Franz von Suppé: *Boccaccio*, 12 July 1904)  
 Nicsánó Munolle (Carl Millöcker: *Apajune, der Wassermann*, 30 July 1904)

**Király Színház (Budapest)**

Opera:

Figaro (Gioacchino Rossini: *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, 15 June 1904, as guest)

Operetta:

Bagó (Pongrácz Kacsóh: *János vitéz*, 7 May 1905)  
 La Galetto (Justine Clérice: *L'Ordre de l'Empereur*, 5 October 1905)  
 Ulysses (Ákos Buttykay: *A bolygó görög*, 19 October 1905)  
 The king (Rudolf Dellinger: *Don Cäsar*, 10 April 1906)  
 Fritz (Jacques Offenbach: *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*, 13 September  
 1906)

Rákóczi (Pongrácz Kacsóh: *Rákóczi*, 20 November 1906)  
 Edward Layton (Ákos Buttykay: *A csibészkirály*, 21 February 1907)  
 Beppo (Jenő Huszka: *Aranyvirág*, 8 May 1907)  
 Siegfried (Oscar Straus: *Die lustigen Nibelungen*, 30 August 1907)  
 Rosillon (Ferenc Lehár: *Die lustige Witwe*, 1 October 1907)  
 Dali Bertók (György Verő: *Falusi madonna*, 6 November 1907)

**Népszínház-Vígopera (Budapest)**

Opera:

Turiddu (Domenico Monleone: *Cavalleria Rusticana*, 17 January 1908)

Operetta:

Barinkay (Johann Strauss: *Der Zigeunerbaron*, 31 January 1908)  
 Adhemar (Ferenc Lehár: *Der Mann mit den drei Frauen*, 31 March 1908)  
 Sylvaine (Claude Terrasse: *Pâris, ou Le bon juge*", 23 May 1908)

**Royal Hungarian Opera (Budapest) (1908–1915)**

Pedro (Eugen d'Albert: *Tiefland*, 17 November 1908)  
 Don José (Georges Bizet: *Carmen*, 9 January 1909)  
 Canio (Ruggero Leoncavallo: *Pagliacci*, 30 January 1909)  
 Fra Diavolo (Daniel Auber: *Fra Diavolo*, 17 April 1909)  
 Rodolfo (Giacomo Puccini: *La Bohème*, 22 September 1909)  
 Miklós Toldi (Ödön Mihálovich: *Toldi szerelme*, 14 November 1909)  
 The prince (Ede Poldini: *A csavargó és a királyleány*, 4 December 1909)  
 Lohengrin (Richard Wagner: *Lohengrin*, 29 April 1910)  
 Bánk bán (Ferenc Erkel: *Bánk bán*, 26 November 1910)  
 Hadschi Stavros (Ferenc Lehár: *Das Fürstenkind*, 20 December 1910)  
 Deli urfi (Béla Szabados: *A bolond*, 14 March 1911)  
 Mario Cavaradossi (Giacomo Puccini: *Tosca*, 2 April 1911)  
 Clare Angel (Frederic d'Erlanger: *Tess*, 19 April 1911)  
 Andrea (Albert Delmár: *Carmela*, 18 November 1911)  
 Alfred (Johann Strauss jr: *Die Fledermaus*, 8 December 1911)  
 Dick Johnson (Giacomo Puccini: *La Fanciulla del West*, 29 February 1912)  
 Turiddu (Pietro Mascagni: *Cavalleria Rusticana*, 10 October 1912)  
 The king (Ákos Buttykay: *Hamupipőke*, 26 October 1912)  
 Manrico (Giuseppe Verdi: *Il Trovatore*, 15 November 1912)  
 Count Ferraud (Hermann Waltershausen: *Oberst Chabert*, 2 March 1913)  
 Radames (Giuseppe Verdi: *Aida*, 13 November 1913)  
 Riccardo (Giuseppe Verdi: *Un Ballo in Maschera*, 9 May 1915)

**Népopera (Budapest)**

Arias in *A vörös ördögök* (8 October 1914)  
 Don José (Georges Bizet: *Carmen*, 9 January 1915)  
 Manrico (Giuseppe Verdi: *Il Trovatore*, 16 January 1915)

**Hofoper (Vienna)**

Radames (Giuseppe Verdi: *Aida*, 17 October 1915)  
 Don José (Georges Bizet: *Carmen*, 22 November 1915)  
 Manrico (Giuseppe Verdi: *Il Trovatore*, 21 January 1916)  
 Alfonso (Erich von Korngold: *Violanta*, 7 September 1916)  
 Der Tenorist, Bacchus (Richard Strauss: *Ariadne auf Naxos*, 4 October 1916)  
 Raoul (Giacomo Meyerbeer: *Les Huguenots*, 28 December 1916)  
 Des Grieux (Jules Massenet: *Manon*, 26 March 1917)  
 Assad (Karl Goldmark: *Die Königin von Saba*, 19 December 1917)

**Royal Hungarian Opera (Budapest) (after 1919)**

Der Tenorist, Bacchus (Richard Strauss: *Ariadne auf Naxos*, 19 April 1919)  
 Otello (Giuseppe Verdi: *Otello*, 8 June 1919)

Des Grieux (Jules Massenet: *Manon*, 23 November 1923)  
 András (Zsigmond Vincze: *Az erősebb*, 29 March 1924)

**Guest appearances in operetta productions in Budapest (after 1915)**

György (Ferenc Lehár: *Endlich allein*, 20 February 1915, Király Színház)  
 Schubert (Heinrich Berté: *Dreimäderlhaus*, 23 April 1916, Vígszínház)  
 Schubert (Heinrich Berté: *Dreimäderlhaus*, 13 April 1918, Városi Színház)  
 Paltics (Jean Gilbert: *Die Frau im Hermelin*, 1 July 1920, Vígszínház)  
 Rip (Robert Planquette: *Rip van Winkle*, 14 May 1921, Scala Színház)  
 Nero (Bruno Granichstaedten: *Die Bacchusnacht*, 15 February 1924, Városi Színház)  
 Schubert (Heinrich Berté: *Dreimäderlhaus*, 23 August 1924, Király Színház)

**Further guest appearances (selection)**

Pozsony [Bratislava], January 1906 (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*)  
 Buda, 8 June 1909 (*Carmen*)  
 Buda, 3 and 5 June 1912 (*Carmen*, *La Bohème*)  
 Szeged, April 1913 (*Der Zigeunerbaron*, *Les Cloches de Corneville*,  
*La Bohème*)  
 Pécs, April 1913 (*Carmen*)  
 Miskolc, February 1923 (*Tosca*, *Aida*)  
 Szeged, February 1925 (*Tosca*, *Carmen*)  
 Bratislava, April 1925 (*Il Trovatore*, *Aida*, *Tiefland*)

**Környey's sound recordings and his singing**

Many of Béla Környey's recordings have survived. His first recordings were made in 1906 and between 1906 and 1910 he sang for the Budapest recording sessions of The Gramophone Company every year. The only independent Hungarian record company of the acoustic era, Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár [First Hungarian Record Factory, hereinafter: EMH], made an outstanding number of recordings with him in 1908 and the following years. In 1910, in a special recording session, Környey and Elza Szamosi went into the Budapest studio of Odeon together and took turns singing arias into the horn. In the spring of 1913, the Lindström company (and its Hungarian series, released on the Diadal Record label) signed an exclusive contract with him for 100 recordings. Given the large number of his recordings, it is strange – and as yet unexplained – that, according to our current knowledge, only a few recordings were made with him in 1911 and 1912, and we do not know why The Gramophone Company did not employ him after 1910 (all the more so as GC's Hungarian recordings between 1911 and 1914 contain hardly any tenor singers or opera excerpts).

He sang a wide variety of repertoire not only on stage but also in the recording studio: opera and operetta arias, as well as Hungarian folk-inspired art songs (in Hungarian: *magyarnóta*). Unfortunately, he did not record any opera arias as a baritone. His recorded repertoire was limited to operetta excerpts and *magyarnótas* before 1908, except the recording of the duet from Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, which is, however, dubious because at the time of the recording he was still a baritone, he never sang this tenor role on stage, and his

partner on this recording is an operetta singer (unfortunately I could not get access to a copy of the recording). As a member of the Royal Hungarian Opera, he continued to record operettas and *magyarnótas*, besides operatic arias.

It shows his popularity in the genre of operetta that he occasionally joined the cast of an operetta after the stage première, only for the recordings. In April 1910, as a singer at the Royal Hungarian Opera, he recorded a selection of Lehár's *Der Graf von Luxemburg* for The Gramophone Company (matr. 10718L to 10731L), with the artists of the Király Színház (the Hungarian première of *Der Graf von Luxemburg* was at the Király Színház in January 1910, but Környey did not appear in the production). Similarly, the Hungarian première of Emmerich Kálmán's *Zigeunerprimas* took place at the Király Színház in January 1913 without Környey, but he recorded a selection of the popular pieces of that operetta in March 1913 for Lindström.

Among his records, the number of *magyarnótas* is outstanding. This genre, the folk-inspired art song was extremely popular in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and for a significant part of society, including the wealthier gramophone owners, it was a staple of Hungarian music. This was the reason why in the first decades of the recording history, not only *magyarnóta* singers, but also opera singers – such as Mihály Takáts (1861–1913), Vilmos Beck (1868–1925), Lajos S. Rózsa, etc. – made a large number of *magyarnóta* recordings accompanied by piano or gypsy orchestra in Hungary. The fact that a significant part of Környey's discography contains *magyarnóta* shows the popularity not only of the genre but also of the singer.

But in general, all of his records were extremely popular. He recorded some *magyarnótas* and operetta arias (for example, excerpts from *A bolygó görög*, or arias from Robert Planquette's operettas) for various record companies around the same time. Several record companies used his name to advertise their new releases in newspapers, for example, the Budapest Branch of The Gramophone Company listed Béla Környey's name alongside that of Enrico Caruso, Nellie Melba, Luisa Tetrazzini, Selma Kurz, Mihály Takáts and Teréz Krammer (1868–1934) in its advertisement for Christmas 1908 as "The World's Greatest Artists", and in Columbia's 1917 Hungarian catalogue we read this sentence: "Anyone who has ever heard Környey sing will certainly buy the records listed here. Never before has such a beautiful lyric tenor [sic!] been heard in Hungarian from the stage of the Opera House."

He is one of the few Hungarian singers who made only acoustic recordings, but whose recordings remained known and played after his death. His recordings continued to be distributed among Hungarian Americans in the late 1920s, and the Hungarian Radio regularly broadcast his records, dedicating special programmes to him, for example, in 1929, 1934, 1937 and even in 1975. It is therefore not surprising that some of his recordings have also been made available on LP, and in 2004 a portrait CD of Béla Környey's recordings was released (Pannon Classic PCL 8020). The strangest reissues, however, are the two recordings released in December 1937 under the Odeon label on 78rpm discs as 'electrical re-recordings' with the Reganaphon system: the original acoustic sound recording was newly overlaid with some instrumentalists in Berlin, thus creating a new, clearer-sounding orchestral accompaniment around the singer,



*Das Fürstenkind* (?) Lehár

Környey to be the greatest Hungarian tenor of all time, whose art, in his opinion, "was born precisely from his rooted Hungarianness. His wonderful diction [was] the unique and instinctive art of Hungarian *rubato* singing, which brings the melodic line to life along with the Hungarian speech."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Környey was able to sing truly impressively the Hungarian translations which were not always easy to match with the Italian, French or German operatic arias. Fine examples of his

who could no longer be heard live – but, in fact, these manipulated (re)recordings were aesthetically very poor.

What kind of performer was Béla Környey? Contemporary reviews, memoirs and literature all emphasise his powerful voice, which sounded bright in the high register, his direct, natural acting and his excellent diction. In 1931, in reviews of the Budapest première of *Song o' My Heart*, John McCormack's voice was perceived as similar to Környey's. His voice had a significant power and shine: in his 1909 recording of an excerpt from *Tiefland* with orchestral accompaniment (GC, matr. 5873), his voice can be heard above the large orchestra.

The distinguished Hungarian bass Mihály Székely (1901–1963), who had the opportunity to sing with Környey in his youth, considered

<sup>2</sup> Mihály Székely: "Környey." In: Imre Demeter (ed.): *A Fészek. Emlékkönyv a Fészek Klub alapításának 60. évfordulójára*. [The FÉSZÉK. A book commemorating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the FÉSZÉK Artist's Club]. (Budapest: Gondolat, 1962): p. 84.

clear and intelligible articulation are the two arias of *Tiefland*, recorded with piano accompaniment in 1909 (EMH 1403 & 1404), 'Winterstürme' from the same year (GC, matr. 5876r), the 1913 recording of 'E lucevan le stelle' (Lindström, matr. 58693), or the three recordings of 'Un tal gioco' from *Pagliacci* (1909, GC [matr. 5871r], EMH [matr. 1407] and 1913, Lindström [matr. 58983]). The Hungarian aesthete and music critic Géza Fodor, in his review of the Környey portrait CD, after analysing the arias of *Pagliacci* and *Lohengrin*, dares to ask the question: "Could Környey have been the greatest Hungarian tenor of the last hundred years?"

It is remarkable that it was his voice which was usually praised in operatic roles. His acting, on the other hand, was most often met with praise on the occasions when he had to play a *verismo* role like Pedro in *Tiefland*. In the role of Canio, for example, he showed a markedly new quality. Similarly to some of his Hungarian contemporaries (such as, Elza Szamosi, Ilona Szoyer [1879–1956], Lajos S. Rózsa or József Gábor [1879–1929]) he learned the realism of acting on the operetta stage and brought it to the Opera House. His spontaneity sometimes worked well in the midst of rigid operatic acting, but sometimes he could not be noble enough. After the performance of Auber's *Fra Diavolo*, for example, several critics commented that he played the robber chief well, but not the Marquis. When he played the Marquis, there was not enough nobility in his acting and appearance. However, as the robber chief he really hit the tone of the piece: according to Aurél Kern (1871–1928, later the director of the Royal Hungarian Opera), "Béla Környey was the closest to the style; the operetta singer succeeded, not only with his brilliant tenor, but also with the warmth and directness of his performance, with the real spiritual radiance that is also present in the piece."

However, it did not bother Környey that he seemed to be successful mainly because of his singing voice. In his first interview in Vienna (*Neues Wiener Journal*, 21 October 1915), he was particularly proud that a former tenor of the Hofoper had commented on Környey's debut that, although the Hungarian singer did not look good on stage, he *had* a voice and *could* sing. Later, also in an interview in Vienna (*Neues Wiener Journal*, 6 January 1917), when the journalist asked him about his favourite role, he replied that he preferred roles in which he could *sing*, not just declaim. The focus on vocality also shines through in his recordings. In operetta arias and in his few recordings of lighter *chansons*, contrary to contemporary performance practice, he did not use his speaking voice but sang throughout.

Although his singing voice was praised during most of his career, it was also criticised at times. Critics in Budapest, especially in his first season at the Opera, criticised him for his 'open' singing. Later, in reviews in Vienna, some critics suggested that the already accomplished artist should continue his studies. In fact, Környey's singing was more instinctive than conscious. We have only rather vague anecdotes than accurate information about his studies, and according to our current information he did not take part in regular, institutional singing tuition. His most important teacher was Eduard Gärtner, whom he visited regularly in Vienna from 1905. Since this period coincides with Környey's change from baritone to tenor, many assume that Gärtner was responsible for Környey's

transformation. However, it is certain that they worked together even during Környey's time in Vienna.

Nevertheless, several contemporary and retrospective accounts agree that it was not education that made Környey into a great artist. At the time of his death, a Budapest journalist wrote of him: "He was the kind of diamond that polishing had not worn much off. Indeed, it was not polished much. [...] Rather, studying only added style and musical culture, so that he could understand each piece of music in its true sense. But the voice, this pure, brilliant, heroic tenor, was not compromised or improved." And Mihály Székely, looking back from the second half of the 20th century, also believed that Környey's "culture and intelligence are not the result of hard work, because the manifold richness of his spirit was born with him."

Regarding his repertoire, its narrow spectrum is striking. Both as a baritone and as a tenor, he sang mainly Italian and French operas, and of course he was also popular in Budapest in Hungarian works. When asked about his best roles, he himself mentioned Pedro, Bánk bán, Canio, Cavaradossi, Otello, Radames and Manrico. Although he was regarded as a *Heldentenor*, German opera is almost entirely absent from his repertoire. In 1910, after only a few months on the operatic stage, he embarked on the role of Lohengrin without having sung any of Mozart's or Weber's more powerful tenor roles.

But his ambition to perform Lohengrin was no mere coincidence: it was almost forced upon him by the contemporary opera scene in Budapest. After the première of *Tiefland*, the press almost unanimously heralded him as 'the first Hungarian Wagner tenor'. The operetta composer Imre Kálmán, still working as an opera critic in 1908, wrote with palpable enthusiasm: "The great Hungarian tenor, the first Hungarian Siegfried, has arrived. He played the role of the foolish shepherd, and the audience felt that the first great, truly Hungarian Wagner singer of the future was addressing them tonight; as we said, the first Hungarian Siegfried." However, he only sang Lohengrin in four performances at the Royal Hungarian Opera, and he never appeared again in any Wagner roles in Budapest or in any other city. Although he was considered for the role of Parsifal in 1912 and Siegmund in 1913 in Budapest, these performances were finally given with a different cast. In this respect it is more surprising that he recorded three Wagner excerpts, 'Winterstürme' in 1909 (GC, matr. 5876r), and Lohengrin's two farewells in 1914 (Lindström, matr. 58029–58030). Nevertheless, his Wagner singing is truly convincing on these recordings.

The reason for Környey's popularity is precisely that all the actors of the Budapest opera scene, including the management of the Opera, the journalists and the audience, hoped to find in him the first Hungarian *Heldentenor*. The journal *Pesti Napló* wrote after Környey's death that "the outstanding artist who passed away was the only Hungarian *Heldentenor*. [...] He is the great Example [sic!] that will be the exemplar for the Hungarian *Heldentenors* of the future." Indeed, in the Royal Hungarian Opera, until Környey's debut, Wagner roles were sung predominantly by foreign singers (some of whom became almost Hungarian and were very successful, such as Julius Perotti, František Broulík, Karel Burian and Georg Anthes). If the management of the Opera tried to assign Wagner's heroes to a Hungarian singer, at best they found the great lyrical tenor

Dezső [Desider] Arányi (1859–1923); at worst they had to give up on the singer after one or two trial performances.

Moreover, the German repertoire was in a peculiar situation in Budapest at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries: one side of the problem was that operas were basically sung in Hungarian at the Royal Hungarian Opera, the other was that a foreign guest singer could sing in any other language in Budapest, except German. The reason for this was an unwritten rule dating back to the Habsburg repression of Hungary in the 19th century: no German words were allowed to be performed on the Hungarian national stage. The first singer to be allowed to sing in German on the stage of the Royal Hungarian Opera – with permission from the Ministry of the Interior – was the tenor Alexander Kirchner, who was a guest performer in Budapest in 1915. Until then, even the German tenor Georg Anthes had sung Wagner's heroes mainly in Italian or in Hungarian. This sometimes led to some rather absurd situations: at the Hungarian première of *Tristan und Isolde*, the Czech Karel Burian sang Tristan in Italian, while the Italian-born Italia Molina-Vasquez (1869–1944), long-time member of the Royal Hungarian Opera, sang Isolde in Hungarian. In this context, Béla Környey's clear and tasteful singing in Hungarian must have been not only enjoyable, but really sensational. In fact, Környey was the first singer to sing several popular leading tenor roles – such as Radames and Mario Cavaradossi – in an intelligible Hungarian on the stage of the Royal Hungarian Opera.

Környey thus embodied 'The Hungarian' singer almost on his own. It was also thanks to all this that he was able to be so successful in the role of *Bánk bán*, a heroic tenor part between the Italian *bel canto* style and the French *grand opéra*, with some elements of the Hungarian music. Most critics highlighted this role in their obituaries of him. But even almost half a century after Környey's death, Mihály Székely wrote: "If I were to choose the role in which he most fully displayed his artistic and human powers, I would mention *Bánk bán* first. His masculinity, his clarity of diction, his full experience of the poet's message, his elemental perception of historical Hungarian fate reached its breathtaking climax in this never-to-be-forgotten portrayal [...]"

At Környey's death, journalists mourned not only him, but also Hungarian-language singing and the unborn Hungarian heroic tenor roles. According to Viktor Lányi, composer and journalist, the tragedy of Környey's career is that no truly successful, large-scale Hungarian operatic tenor role was written for Környey's voice. (The only Hungarian opera of the 1910s to become world-famous, Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, has no tenor role.) Obviously, the modern Hungarian composers of the 1910s and 1920s no longer sought the Italian-French romantic tenor ideal in their works. Környey was thus given much lesser – though sometimes excellent – tasks in Hungarian music history: the tenor roles in some not particularly significant Hungarian operas, or the performance of songs set to Endre Ady's poems by Hugó Beretvás. From this point of view, it is understandable that, although he sings predominantly Hungarian works on his recordings, these are not operas but operetta excerpts and primarily folk-inspired art songs, that is, *magyarnótas*.

His recordings illustrate the process of how Környey became a tenor opera singer from a baritone operetta singer. Of course, the following observations

should be treated with caution, since even small changes in the playback speed of 78rpm discs can result in distortion of timbre, and very often the original recording and playback speeds of early record companies are not known. It would be necessary to have good quality, controlled transfers for a more accurate analysis. There has probably always been a lighter timbre in Környey's baritone voice, and an ambition to a higher register, as it is evidenced by the fact that he was described as a "tenor-baritone" as early as April 1904 during a guest appearance in *Les cloches de Corneville*. His recordings from 1906 show a singer with a slightly open voice, which becomes brighter in the higher register, but which has an unambiguous baritone timbre. The recordings made in 1908–1909, that is, around his operatic debut, show him at his most special moment: his voice is a really heroic tenor, with a baritone-like timbre. At that time, he indeed would have been suitable for Wagnerian roles; however, it is questionable how he would have borne the extremely demanding *Heldentenor* parts. The same tone can be heard in his only recording in which he sings an excerpt from *Bánk bán* (ITM/Odeon, matr. Ho 446c, 1910–1911). However, in the recordings from 1913–1914, we notice that the dark colour has disappeared from his voice. The voice is still bright, but it has become more Italian-French, even sometimes slightly sweet. His 1913 recording of the Flower aria from *Carmen* (Beka, matr. 58694) shows this almost too light-hearted way of singing, which sometimes evokes the way the songs were sung in Hungarian sound movies of the interwar period. On the basis of his recordings of 1913–1914, one could hardly count Környey among the Wagner tenors of the period. However, these recordings make it clear why it was primarily the French and Italian heroic tenor repertoire that he was able to perform in Vienna.

Béla Környey's name is still known among Hungarian opera fans and record collectors. His records have kept his singing alive. This, as well as the singer's personality, is reflected in the recollection of his daughter, the actress Paula Környey, which is worth recalling as a conclusion: "Only we, his children, know what a direct [and] kind man he was. After every performance, he waited for his children to come to congratulate him. He almost demanded it. I remember how many times he sat backstage in his Radames costume on some crate eating soft-boiled eggs. There was no tenor-like posing in him. That is why everybody loved him. [...] Sometimes, when I put the record of one of his roles on the gramophone, my heart sinks because I hear the old Béla Környey, whose voice still rings like a silver column."

### Discography of Béla Környey

Compiled by Ferenc János Szabó and Christian Zwarg

The following discography lists all of Béla Környey's currently known recordings in chronological order. It can be seen that there are gaps between some numbers (especially with the *Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár* [EMH] and Beka/Diadal matrix numbers), and it is possible that the intermediate matrix numbers also contain Környey's recordings. The author of the article welcomes any additions and corrections (e-mail: szaboferencjanos@gmail.com).

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, April 1906, 17 cm, w. Pno.**

1. Kit gyászol a fecske madár (József Dóczy)  
2536k 72812
2. *Rip van Winkle*: Bordal (Planquette)  
2537k 72804

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, 1906, 25 cm, w. pno.**

3. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: A márkí dala (Planquette)  
3836L 72162 V.\*4-102669 V.\*102669 4-102669
4. *A bolygó görög*: A tengerész dala (Ákos Buttykay)  
3837L 72163 272130
5. *A bolygó görög*: Belépő (Ákos Buttykay)  
3838L 72164 272131
6. *Don Cäsar*: Szerenád (Rudolf Dellinger)  
3839L 72165 V.\*4-102670
7. *Helyre asszony* (folk play): A hajdú dala  
3840L 72166 V.\*4-102671
8. *Don Cäsar*: Király-dal (Rudolf Dellinger)  
3841L 72167 V.\*4-102672

**Favorite, Budapest, ca. April 1906, 25 cm, Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)**

9. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: Mit ér nekem a márkiság? (Planquette)  
2689-f 1-25679
10. *A bolygó görög*: Ulysses belépője (Ákos Buttykay)  
2690-f 1-25680
11. *A bolygó görög*: A tengerész dala (Ákos Buttykay)  
2691-f II 1-25713
12. *A bolygó görög*: Vége van szép cziczám (Ákos Buttykay)  
2692-f II 1-25714
13. *Don Cäsar*: Szerenád (Rudolf Dellinger)  
2693-f 1-25697
14. *Don Cäsar*: Szerelmi dal (Rudolf Dellinger)  
2694-f 1-25715
15. *Rip van Winkle*: Rip belépője (Planquette)  
2695-f 1-25698
16. A pásztorfiú (Huber Sándor)  
2696-f 1-25716

**Favorite, Budapest, ca. April 1906, 25 cm, Géza Marthon (pno.)**

17. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: Szállj ifjú bátran (Planquette)  
2712-f 1-25724

**Columbia Double-Face, Budapest, 1906–1907, 25 cm, w. Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)**

18. *János vitéz*: A fuszulyka szára (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
12806 D-3227
19. *János vitéz*: Én a pásztorok királya (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
12807-1 D-3228 E 317 E 1105
20. *János vitéz*: Egy rózsaszál (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
12808-1 D-3229 E 285 E 286
21. *János vitéz*: Furulya nóta (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
12809 D-3230
22. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: A márkí dala (Planquette)  
12810 D-3230
23. A faluban a legárvább (József Dóczy); Zöldre van a rácsos kapu festve;  
Vékony deszka kerítés (Zoltán Tayber)  
12811-1 D-3227 E 324

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, November–December 1906, 25 cm, w. pno., all issued on Zonophone**

24. Rózsa ha volnál (Géza Marthon)  
2218r X-2-102166
25. Házam előtt nyiladozik (József Dóczy)  
2234r X-2-102178
26. Rózsa hajnal  
2235r X-2-102179
27. Magas a kaszárnya  
2236r X-2-102180

**International Talking Machine Co./Odeon, Budapest, 1906–1907, 27 cm, w. pno.**

28. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: Mit ér nekem a márkiság (Planquette)  
Hx 1046 35336
29. *A hajdúk hadnagya*: Egy szép szempár, egy kék szempár (Károly Czobor:)  
Hx 1048 35337

**International Talking Machine Co./Odeon, Budapest, 1906–1907, 27 cm, w. Odeon Orchestra**

30. *Rákóczi*: Búcsú-dal (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
Hx 1262 53068
31. *Rákóczi*: Rákóczi megtérése [Hazámba vágyom] (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
Hx 1264 35365

**Beka, Budapest, ca. early 1907, 25 cm, w. pno.**

32. *Rákóczi*: Rákóczi megtérése [Hazámba vágyom] (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
46004 Olympia 46004

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, May 1907, 25 cm, w. pno.**

33. Kurucz dal (József Dóczy)  
5310L 72447 V.\*4-102673
34. Házam előtt nyiladozik (József Dóczy)  
5311L 72448 V.\*4-102674
35. Kakukk madár jövendölte (József Dóczy)  
5312L 72449 V.\*4-102675
36. Tisza partján van egy csárda (József Dóczy)  
5313L 72450 V.\*4-102676
37. Édesanyám, kösse fel a kendőt a fejére (József Dóczy)  
5314L 72451 V.\*4-102677 4-102677
38. Sötét erdő sűrűjéből kakukk madár hallik (József Dóczy)  
5315L 72452 V.\*4-102678 4-102678
39. Mandulafa (József Dóczy)  
5316L 72492 V.\*4-102679
40. A Grand Caféban  
5317L 72493 V.\*4-102680
41. Barna kislány levelet írt (József Dóczy)  
5318L 72494 V.\*4-102681
42. Falu végén zúg a malom  
5319L 72495 V.\*4-102682
43. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: Rémy belépője (Dans mes voyages)  
5320L 72453 (Planquette)
44. A korcsmából boros fővel (József Dóczy)  
5321L 72532 V.\*4-102683
45. *Helyre asszony* (folk play): Nem teremtet soha Isten különbet  
5322L 72533 V.\*4-102684

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, May 1907, 25 cm, w. pno.**

46. Rám ismersz-e szép leány? w. Emma Komlóssy (soprano)  
5429L 74052
47. *Rip van Winkle*: Ah drága nőcském, kit imádlak (Planquette) w. Komlóssy  
5430L 74053
48. *La Mascotte*: Mikor meglátlak kedvesem (Audran) w. Komlóssy  
5441L 74048 Zono. X-104477
49. *La Mascotte*: Táncoz duett (Audran) w. Komlóssy  
5442L 74049 Zono. X-104478
50. *Lili*: Trombita kettős (Hervé) w. Komlóssy  
5443L 74054 Zono. X-104479
51. *Der Bettelstudent*: Kettős (Carl Millöcker) w. Komlóssy  
5444L 74055 Zono. X-104480

52. *Rip van Winkle*: Echo-dal (Planquette)  
5445L 72522 V.\*4-102685
53. *Cserkészleány*: Ott a kéklő bérczenen túl (Albert Metz)  
5446L 72523 V.\*4-102686

**Beka, Budapest, ca. Summer 1907, 25 cm, w. pno.**

54. *Ein Walzertraum*: Piccolo, piccolo, csin, csin csin (Oscar Straus)  
47098 Scala 47098
55. *Ein Walzertraum*: Halkan száll (Oscar Straus)  
47099 Beka 47099 Scala No. 47099
56. *Ein Walzertraum*: Halkan száll (Oscar Straus)  
47099a Diadal D 636
57. Isten veled, kis angyalom (Béla Fráter)  
47102 Scala 47102
58. Debreczeni kaszárnnyában temetnek (Arany)  
47104 Scala 47104
59. Késő este a temetőn künn járok (Géza Marthon)  
47105 Scala 47105
60. *A hajdúk hadnagya*: Egy szép szempár, egy kék szempár (Károly Czobor)  
47109 Scala 47109 Diadal D 636
61. Ütött kopott rongyos csárda (Géza Marthon)  
47129 Scala 47129
62. Rózsa ha volnál (Géza Marthon)  
47130 Diadal D 624
63. Költözik a darumadár (Antal Beleznyay)  
47132 Scala 47132 Diadal D 628
64. *A Runaway Girl*: Bölcsődalom üdv hallanom a távolból (Lionel Monckton)  
47133 Scala 47133

**Beka, Budapest, September 1907, 25 cm**

w. the Gypsy Band of Elek Vörös at the Fővárosi Orfeum

65. Cserebogár, sárga cserebogár  
47163 Beka 47163 Scala 47163 Diadal D 630
66. Végigmentem az ormódi temetőn (Imre H. Füredi); Maros vize folyik  
47165 Diadal D 632 csendesesen
67. Hull a zápor (József Dóczy); Nincs a pusztán rózsabokor (József Dóczy)  
47166 Diadal D 630 Scala 47166
68. Darumadár útnak indul (József Dóczy)  
47167 Diadal D 632 Scala 47167
69. Kit gyászol a fecske madár (József Dóczy)  
47168 Rena R 148

**Beka, Budapest, September 1907, 25 cm, w. pno.**

70. Nádfedeles kis házikóm (József Dóczy)  
47169 Diadal D 626
71. Felednélek, felednélek (József Dóczy)  
47170 Scala 47170 Diadal D 626
72. Sötét erdő (József Dóczy)  
47173 Scala 47173 Rena R 148
73. Barna kislány levelet írt (József Dóczy)  
47174 Beka 47174 Scala 47174
74. Dombon van a babám háza (József Dóczy)  
47176 Scala 47176 Diadal D 628

**Favorite, Budapest, September 1907, 18 cm, w. Gyula Revere (pno.)**

75. Kurucz dal [Pogány török rabja] (József Dóczy)  
[?] Favorite 25616
76. Van nekem egy szép szeretőm (József Dóczy)  
[?] Favorite 25617
77. *Helyre asszony* (folk play): Nem teremtet soha Isten különbet  
[?] Favorite 25618
78. Barna az én babám  
[?] Favorite 25663
79. Tisza partján van egy csárda, de rongyos (József Dóczy)  
[?] Favorite 25667

**Favorite, Budapest, September 1907, 18 cm, w. Gyula Revere (pno.)**  
All with Ilona Harmath (voice)

80. *Der Bettelstudent*: A lángeszűt e nagy világban (Carl Millöcker)  
[?] Favorite 29512
81. *Der Bettelstudent*: Csak ez egyszer légy kegyes (Carl Millöcker)  
[?] Favorite 29513
82. *Roméo et Juliette* [?]: Szerelmi kettős (Gounod)  
[?] Favorite 29514

**Favorite, Budapest, September 1907, 25 cm, w. Gyula Revere (pno.)**

83. Rózsa ha volnál  
[?] Favorite 1-25779
84. *Rákóczi*: Rákóczi nagy áriája (Pongrác Kacsóh)  
[?] Favorite 1-25782

**Favorite, Budapest, September 1907, 18 cm, w. Gyula Revere (pno.)**

85. Ha bemegyek boros fővel  
418-n Favorite 27543

**Favorite, Budapest, September 1907, 25 cm, w. Gyula Revere (pno.)**

All with Ilona Harmath (voice)

86. *Die lustige Witwe*: Tisztességes asszony e nő (Franz Lehár)  
3600-0 Favorite 1-29598
87. *Die lustige Witwe*: Dal a pavilonról (Franz Lehár)  
3601-0 Favorite 1-29599

**Lyrophon, Budapest, before October 1907, 25 cm, w. pno.**

88. *Ein Walzertraum*: Niki belépője (Oscar Straus)  
6799 Lyrophon U 6799

Further titles attributed to Béla Környei are found in the advertisement of 29 March 1908 for Mór Goitein, a record store in Kaposvár:<sup>3</sup>

89. Sírok, sírok te utánad
90. Ahol te jársz, rózsa nyíljék (virágének)
91. Tele van a város akácfa virággal

**Lyrophon, Budapest, before October 1907, 25 cm, w. Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)**

92. Tisza partján van egy csárda (József Dóczy)  
6877 Lyrophon U. 6877
93. Édesanyám, kösse fel a kendőt a fejére (József Dóczy)  
6878 Lyrophon U. 6878

**Lyrophon, Budapest, before October 1907, 25 cm, w. pno.**

94. *Ein Walzertraum*: Piccolo, piccolo, csin, csin csin (Oscar Straus)  
6900 Lyrophon U. 6900
95. *Ein Walzertraum*: Keringő (Oscar Straus)  
6981 Lyrophon U. 6981
96. *Die lustigen Nibelungen*: Rajna kincse keringő (Oscar Straus)  
6982 Lyrophon U. 6982

**Dacapo, Budapest, 1907–1908, 25 cm, w. Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)**  
both with Ilona Harmath (voice)

97. *Der Bettelstudent*: Belépő duett (Carl Millöcker)  
7001 O-7001
98. *Der Bettelstudent*: Duett (Carl Millöcker)  
7002 O-7002

**Dacapo/Szabadi, Budapest, 1907–1908, 25 cm, w. pno.**

99. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: Mit ér nekem a márkiság (Planquette)  
40035 Szabadi Record 57

<sup>3</sup> Somogyvármegye IV/74 (29 March 1908), 14.

100. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: Szállj ifjú bátran (Planquette)  
40037 Szabadi Record 57

**Columbia, Budapest, between January and May 1908, 25 cm**  
w. Orchestra and Eugenia Della Donna (soprano)

101. *Der Zigeunerbaron*: Ki esketett? [Wer uns getraut] (Johann Strauss)  
12922-1 E 634

**Dacapo, Budapest, January 1908, 25 cm**, w. Izsó Barna (pno.)

102. *Der Göttergatte*: Mulató istenek keringő (Lehár)  
5166 O-5166
103. Felednélek, felednélek (József Dóczy)  
5167 O-5167
104. Nádfedeles kis házikóm (József Dóczy)  
5168 O-5168
105. A pásztorfiú (Sándor Huber)  
5169 O-5169
106. Hull a zápor künn a pusztán (József Dóczy)  
5170 O-5170
107. Darumadár útnak indul (József Dóczy)  
5171 O-5171
108. Kurucz dal (József Dóczy)  
5172 O-5172
109. Édesanyám, kösse fel a kendőt a fejére (József Dóczy)  
5173 O-5173

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, February 1908, 25 cm**  
w. pno.

110. Az alvégi szélmalomnál (József Dóczy)  
4091r 2-72065 V.\*4-102688
111. Felfutott a szederinda (József Dóczy); Iczipiczi nyúl (József Dóczy)  
4092r 2-72064 V.\*4-102687
112. Azt mondják a lányok mind hamisak (József Dóczy)  
4093r 2-72085 V.\*4-102689
113. Hamis a legénynek (József Dóczy)  
4094r 2-72086 V.\*4-102690
114. Barna az én babám (József Dóczy)  
4095r 2-72102 V.\*4-102692
115. Harmadnapja legeltetem (József Dóczy)  
4096r 2-72101 V.\*4-102691
116. Költözik a darumadár (Antal Beleznyay)  
4097r 2-72118 V.\*4-102695 AK 237

117. Hidd el babám (József Dóczy)  
4098r 2-72119 V.\*4-102696
118. Rámás piros csizmát vettem (József Dóczy)  
4099r 2-72126 V.\*4-102697
119. Peng peng peng (József Dóczy)  
4100r 2-72127 V.\*4-102698

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, February 1908, 25 cm**  
w. Orchestra, Leona Ney (voice) (4156-4157, 4170, 4174-4175)

120. *Ein Walzertraum*: Niki belépője (Oscar Straus)  
4153r 2-72043 V.\*4-102667, 4-102667
121. *Der Zigeunerbaron*: Barinkay belépője [Als flotter Geist] (Johann Strauss)  
4154r 2-72110 V.\*4-102693 4-102693 AK 569
122. *Ein Walzertraum*: Halkan száll (Oscar Straus)  
4155r 2-72044 V.\*4-102668 4-102668
123. *Der Zigeunerbaron*: Ki esketett? [Wer uns getraut] (Johann Strauss)  
4156r 74161 V.\*104457
124. *Der Zigeunerbaron*: Oh büvös éj [In dieser Nacht voll herrlicher Pracht]  
4157r 74162 V.\*104458 (Johann Strauss)
125. *A sárga dominó*: Ne higj leány a hiú szavaknak (Albert Szirmai)  
4169r 2-72111 102694
126. *A bálkirálynő*: Teagöz kettős (Albert Szirmai)  
4170r 74163 V.\*104459
127. *A sárga dominó*: Románc (Albert Szirmai)  
4171r 4-102021 Zono. X-4-102021
128. *Die lustigen Nibelungen*: Keringő (Oscar Straus)  
4173r 4-102022 Zono.X-4-102022
129. *Ein Walzertraum*: Piccolo, piccolo, csin, csin, csin (Oscar Straus)  
4174r 74153 Zono. X-104455
130. *Ein Walzertraum*: Csók-kettős (Oscar Straus)  
4175½ r 74154 Zono. X-104456

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, February 1908, 25 cm**  
w. unknown Gypsy Band

131. A csap utcán véges-végig (Lajos Pete)  
4199r 2-102963
132. Maros vize csendesen; A nyáron...  
4200r 2-102964 HMV AK 508
133. A virágnak megtiltani nem lehet  
4201r X-2-102882
134. Miskolcz város szép helyen van  
4202r X-2-102883

135. Jaj de magas az ég; Édesanyám a kendőm  
4203r X-4-102063
136. Eger felől jön egy üveghintó  
4204r X-4-102064
137. Zavaros a Tisza; Széna terem a réten  
4205r X-4-102007
138. Érik a ropogós cseresznye; Kerek ez a zsemle  
4206r X-4-102008
139. Elszállott a fecskemadár  
4207r X-2-102766
140. Tiszán innen Tiszán túl; Minden rendes baka  
4208r X-2-102767
141. Az alföldön halászegény  
4209r X-2-102833
142. Ne nézz rózsám a szemembe  
4210r X-2-102834

**Beka, Budapest, ca. March 1908, 25 cm**, w. piano  
w. Leona Ney (voice) (47324-47326, 47328, 47329)

143. *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*: Barcarolle (Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour)  
47324 Diadal D 726 (Offenbach)
144. *Der Bettelstudent*: Teszem fel azt (Carl Millöcker)  
47325 Scala No. 47325
145. *Der Bettelstudent*: Csak ez egyben (Carl Millöcker)  
47326 Scala No. 47326
146. *Der Zigeunerbaron*: Oh bűvös éj [In dieser Nacht voll herrlicher Pracht]  
47328 Diadal D 724 (Johann Strauss)
147. *Der Zigeunerbaron*: Ki esketett? [Wer uns getraut] (Johann Strauss)  
47329 Diadal D 724
148. Krasznahorka büszke vára (Gr. Andrássy Tivadarné)  
47330 Diadal D 624 Scala 47330
149. Elmegyek a templom mellett (Gusztáv Simkó)  
47333 Scala 47333

**Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár, Budapest, after March 1908, 25 cm**  
w. Gypsy Band of Nándor Sovánka

150. A csap-utczán véges-végig  
1040 1040 (K 1021)
151. Befujta az utat a hó  
1042 1042 (K 1021)

**Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár, Budapest, after March 1908, 25 cm**  
w. Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)

152. *Helyre asszony* (folk play): Sivány buczka tetőn  
1046 1046 (K 1024)

**Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár, Budapest, 1908 [?], 25 cm**  
Label states Alfréd Márkus (pno.); catalogue gives: Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)

153. *Les Cloches de Corneville*: A márkí dala (Planquette)  
1048 1048 (K 1025)
154. *Tangokönnigín*: Álmok és remények (Lehár)  
1051 1051 (K 1025)

**Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár, Budapest, 1908 [?], 25 cm**  
w. Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)

155. *Rip van Winkle*: Echo-dal (Planquette)  
1053 1053 (K 1024)
156. Kurucz dal (József Dóczy)  
1054 1054 (K 1020) Special 1020
157. Édesanyám, kösse fel a kendőt (József Dóczy)  
1055 1055 (K 1020) Special 1020
158. Házam előtt nyiladozik (József Dóczy)  
1056 1056 (K 1022)
159. Darumadár útnak indul (József Dóczy)  
1057 1057 (K 1022) Meteor 1057
160. Barna az én babám  
1058 1058 (K 1023) Phönix 2392a
161. Tisza partján van egy csárda (József Dóczy)  
1059 1058 (K 1023) Special 1023 Phönix 2392b

**Pathé, Budapest, ca. December 1908, 29 cm**  
w. Gypsy Band of Pali Farkas

162. Darumadár útnak indul (József Dóczy)  
39295#1 39295 (34196)
163. Megállok a keresztútnál (János Kurucz)  
39296#1 39296 (34161 R)
164. Sötét erdő sűrűjéből kakukk madár hallik (József Dóczy)  
39297 39297 (34193)
165. Házam előtt nyiladozik (József Dóczy)  
39298 39298 (34194)
166. Felednélek, felednélek (József Dóczy)  
39299 39299 (34192 R)
167. Panaszkodik a furulyám nótája (József Dóczy)  
39360 39360 (34136 R)

**Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár, Budapest, early 1909, 25 cm**

w. Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)

168. *Tiefland*: Pedro álma [Wie ich nun gestern Abend] (d'Albert)  
1401 1401 (K 1015)
169. *Tiefland*: Farkas legenda [Es kam in jeder Nacht ein Wolf] (d'Albert)  
1402 1402 (K 1015)
170. *Tiefland*: Pedro búcsúja [Hast du's gehört... Ich grüss' noch einmal]  
1403 1403 (K 1016) (d'Albert)
171. *Tiefland*: Jöjj velem [Ich soll dich töten] (d'Albert)  
1404 1404 (K 1016)
172. *Carmen*: Virágária [La fleur que tu m'avais jetée] (Bizet)  
1405 1405 Premier 1405
173. *Pagliacci*: Kacagj, bajazzó [Vesti la giubba] (Leoncavallo)  
1406 1406
174. *Pagliacci*: Hej barátim [Un tal gioco] (Leoncavallo)  
1407 1407

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, February 1909, 25 cm**

w. Gypsy Band of Béla Berkes

175. Nem siratlak nem kereslek (János Kurucz)  
5852r 2-72172 V.\*4-102587 AK 563
176. Azt beszélék a faluba (Loránd Fráter)  
5853r 272037
177. Őszi rózsza fehér őszi rózsza (Loránd Fráter)  
5854r 2-72174 V.\*4-102589
178. Elmegyek ablakod előtt (Loránd Fráter); Ütött-kopott a hegedűm  
5855r 2-72175 V.\*4-102590 (Loránd Fráter)
179. A világon az az árva (Béla Fráter)  
5856r 2-72171 V.\*4-102586
180. Ott ahol a Maros vize (Loránd Fráter)  
5857r 2-72173 V.\*4-102588 AK 563
181. Szeretem a ruháskádat (Loránd Fráter)  
5858r 272038 AK 237
182. Várlak várlak karom reszket (Loránd Fráter)  
5859r 272146
183. Száz szál gyertyát száz itcze bort (Loránd Fráter)  
5860r 2-72165 V.\*4-102708 AK 136
184. Sorrentói emlék [Torna a Surriento] (Ernesto de Curtis)  
5861r 2-72142 Victor 67491a AK 236  
272005

185. Holdvilág nóta (Béla Zerkovitz)  
5862r 2-72143 V.\*4-102707

**The Gramophone Company Budapest, February 1909, 25 cm**

w. Orchestra of the Royal Hungarian Opera

186. *Pagliacci*: Hej barátim [Un tal gioco] (Leoncavallo)  
5871r 2-72166 V.\*4-102703
187. *Pagliacci*: Kacagj bajazzó [Vesti la giubba] (Leoncavallo)  
5872r 2-72167 V.\*4-102704
188. *Tiefland*: Pedro búcsúja [Hast du's gehört... Ich grüss' noch einmal]  
5873r 2-72140 V.\*4-102699 AK 574 (d'Albert)
189. *Tiefland*: Farkaslegenda [Es kam in jeder Nacht ein Wolf] (d'Albert)  
5874r 2-72141 V.\*4-102700 AK 574
190. *Fra Diavolo*: Románc (Auber)  
5875r 2-72170 V.\*4-102585
191. *Die Walküre*: Tavaszi dal [Winterstürme wichen...] (Wagner)  
5876r 2-72168 V.\*4-102705 AK 576
192. *Carmen*: Virágária [La fleur que tu m'avais jetée] (Bizet)  
5877r 2-72169 V.\*4-102706 AK 576

**The Gramophone Company Budapest, February 1909, 25 cm**

w. Orchestra

193. *Táncos huszárok*: Zephir keringő (Albert Szirmai) w. Leona Ney (voice)  
5890r 74171 V.\*104460
194. *Táncos huszárok*: Huszár induló (Albert Szirmai)  
5892r 2-72144 V.\*4-102701

**Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár, Budapest, 1909-1910, 25 cm**

w. Zsigmond Vincze (pno.)

195. Hull a zápor (József Dóczy)  
1421 1421 (K 1026) Special 1028
196. Van nekem egy szép szeretőm (József Dóczy)  
1422 1422 (K 1026) Special 1023 Special 1026
197. Panaszkodik a furulyám nótája (József Dóczy)  
1423 1423 (K 1027) Special 1027
198. A kanyargó Tisza partján (József Dóczy)  
1424 1424 (K 1027) Special 1027
199. Pásztorfiú [Nyári estén furulyaszó hallatszik] (Sándor Huber)  
1425 1425
200. *A falurossza* (folk play): Megállok udvarodon  
1426 1426 (K 1029)
201. Költözik a darumadár (Antal Belezna)  
1427 1427 (K 1028) Special 1028

202. Harmadnapja legeltetem (József Dóczy)  
1428 1428 (K 1028) Special 1028
203. Rózsa ha volnál (Géza Marthon)  
1429 1429 (K 1029)
204. Azt beszélnek a faluban (Loránd Fráter)  
1430 1430
205. Ugye most már másnak mondom (Loránd Fráter)  
1432 1432 Phönix 2398a
206. Ott ahol a Maros vize (Loránd Fráter)  
1435 1435
207. Száz száz gyertyát száz itcze bort (Loránd Fráter)  
1436 1436
208. A világon az az árva (Béla Fráter)  
1438 1438 Meteor 1438 Phönix 2398b
209. A fonóba szól a nóta (Béla Fráter)  
1439 1439
210. Tele van a város akácza virággal (Loránd Fráter)  
1440 1440
211. Szeretem a ruháskádat (Loránd Fráter)  
1441 1441
212. Krasznahorka büszke vára (Gr. Andrássy Tivadarné)  
1442 1442
213. Repülj, repülj, árva galamb (Loránd Fráter)  
1443 1443
214. Holdvilág nóta (Béla Zerkovitz)  
1444 1444
215. A léha nótája (Béla Zerkovitz)  
1445 1445

**Pathé, Budapest [?], ca. March 1910, 29 cm**

w. Gypsy Band of Béla Berkes jr.

216. Barna az én babám (József Dóczy)  
39836 39836
217. Két gyászol a fecske madár (József Dóczy)  
39837 39837
218. Szeretőd keresek  
39838 39838
219. Költözik a darumadár (Antal Beleznyay)  
39839 39839
220. Tejbé fürdik az én rózsám  
39840 39840 (53791 GR)

221. Édesanyám, kösse fel a kendőt (József Dóczy)  
39841 39841 (53782 GR)
222. Száz száz gyertyát, száz itcze bort (Loránd Fráter)  
39888 39888 (53743 GR)
223. Künn a pusztán szántok, vetek (Zsigmond Bodroghy);  
Száz száz gyertyát, száz itcze bort (Loránd Fráter)  
39889 39889 (53750 GR)

**The Gramophone Company, Budapest, 7 April 1910, 25 cm**

w. Orchestra

224. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: Luxemburg belépője (Lehár)  
10718L Zono. X-4-102794
225. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: Tréfle en carnat (Lehár)  
10719L Zono. X-4-102795
226. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: A miénk maradj (Lehár) w. Sári Petráss (voice)  
10722L Zono. X-104498 AK 177
227. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: Várj, várj, szép délibáb (Lehár) w. Petráss (voice)  
10723L V.\*104493 AK 182
228. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: Jobbra én, balra ő (Lehár) w. Petráss (voice)  
10724L V.\*104492 AK 182
229. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: Induló-tercett w. Petráss (voice)  
and Sándor Papír (voice)  
10725L V.\*104495 AK 183
230. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: Bohém duett w. Petráss (voice)  
10727L V.\*104496 AK 184
231. *Der Graf von Luxemburg*: Gimbelem, gombolom (Lehár) w. Sári Petráss (voice)  
10728L V.\*104497 AK 184

**International Talking Machine Co./Odeon, Budapest, December 1910 or January 1911, 25 cm**

w. Orchestra of the Royal Hungarian Opera, cond. Henrik Benkő

232. *Das Fürstenkind*: Ringókeringő (Lehár)  
Ho 445x Diadal D 39 (15640) Jumbola 15640 A 113125
233. *Bánk bán*: Románc (Erkel)  
Ho 446c Odeon A 113125 Jumbola 15643
234. *Das Fürstenkind*: Palikám-dal (Lehár)  
Ho 448x Diadal D 39 (15641) Jumbola 15641 A 113126
235. *Das Fürstenkind*: Oh ha tudnád (Lehár)  
Ho 451x Odeon A 113127

**Lindström, Budapest, 1912, 25 cm**

w. Gypsy Band of Béla Berkes jr.

236. Keresem az Istent (Náci Sas [Miklós Áldor])  
58539 Diadal D 1192

**Lindström, Budapest, March 1913, 25 cm**

w. Orchestra

237. *Der Zigeunerprimas*: Vén cigány (Imre Kálmán)  
58623 Diadal D 1174
238. *Der Zigeunerprimas*: Gingalló (Imre Kálmán)  
58624 Diadal D 1178 Diadal D 1174
239. *Der Zigeunerprimas*: Összel, ha leszál a dér (Imre Kálmán)  
58625 Diadal D 1176 w. Margit Soós (voice)
240. *Der Zigeunerprimas*: Lárifári ... (Imre Kálmán) w. Soós (voice)  
58626 Diadal D 1176 Diadal D 1180
241. *Der Zigeunerprimas*: Hacacaré (Imre Kálmán) w. Soós (voice)  
58627 Diadal D 1178 Diadal D 1180
242. Árnys zöld kicsi kertben (István Weiner)  
58628 Diadal D 1188
243. Holnapután (Albert Hetényi-Heidlberg)  
58629 Diadal D 1188
244. *Aranyeső*: Húzik ujjadra fényes karikagyűrűt (Béla Zerkovitz)  
58637 Diadal D 1182

**Beka, Budapest, March 1913, 25 cm**

w. Gypsy Band of Béla Berkes jr.

245. *Aranyeső*: Aranyeső dal (Béla Zerkovitz)  
58638 Diadal D 1182
246. Keresem az Istent (Náci Sas [Miklós Áldor])  
58639 Diadal D 1198
247. ???  
58640
248. Két babonás szép szemednek (Árpád Balázs)  
58641 Diadal D 1196
249. Elrepült a fecske (Sándor Nádor)  
58642 Diadal D 1200 Beka Grand 58642
250. Nem tudom én mi van velem (Náci Sas [Miklós Áldor])  
58645 Diadal D 1198
251. Elhervadt, elmúlt a nyár (Béla Zerkovitz: Aranyeső)  
58646 Diadal D 1192
252. Búsan szól a lélekharang (Bihary)  
58647 Diadal D 1196
253. Daru, gólya, hová szálltok? (Ferkó Vörös)  
58648 Diadal D 1200 Beka Grand 58642

**Lindström, Budapest, May 1913, 25 cm**

w. Lajos Oláh (tárogató: a woodwind instrument commonly used in Hungarian art music) and unknown musician (cimbalom)

254. Gondviselő édes atyám. Bujdosó legény éneke  
58682 Beka 58682
255. Jaj régi szép magyar nép  
58684 Beka 58684
256. Hej Rákóczi, hej Bercsényi  
58685 Diadal D 1274
257. Balog Ádám nótája (Kálmán Thaly)  
58686 Diadal D 1274
258. Őszi harmat után. Bujdosók nótája  
58687 Beka 58687 Diadal D 1276
259. Rákóczi kesergője  
58688 Beka 58688 Diadal D 1276

**Lindström, Budapest, May 1913, 25 cm**

w. Orchestra, Orchestra of the Király Színház (58692)

260. *Puppchen*: Ha egyszer titkos tűzzel ég (Jean Gilbert)  
58690 Diadal D 1282
261. *Puppchen*: Buksim, te drága életem (Jean Gilbert)  
58691 Diadal D 1282
262. Néha néha, ha visszajönnek... (Albert Hetényi-Heidlberg)  
58692 Diadal D 1232
263. *Tosca*: Levélária [E lucevan le stelle] (Puccini)  
58693 Diadal D 1278 Beka 58693,  
Beka-Grand 58693 Parlophon 58693
264. *Carmen*: Virágária [La fleur que tu m'avais jetée] (Bizet)  
58694 Diadal D 1278 Beka 58694,  
Beka Grand 58694 Parlophon 58694
265. *Il Trovatore*: Stretta [Di quella pira] (Verdi)  
58695 Diadal D 1280 Beka 58695  
Beka Grand 58695
266. *La Fanciulla del West*: Ária [Ch'ella mi creda] (Puccini)  
58696 Diadal D 1280 Beka 58696  
Beka Grand 58696

**Regenaphon re-recordings, Orchestra electrically overdubbed in Berlin, 14 September 1936, 25 cm (Unissued)**

267. *Tosca*: Levélária [E lucevan le stelle] (Puccini)  
58693-0
268. *Carmen*: Virágária [La fleur que tu m'avais jetée] (Bizet)  
58694-0

**Regenaphon re-recordings, Orchestra electrically overdubbed in Berlin, 24 August 1937, 25 cm**

269. *Tosca*: Levélárta [E lucevan le stelle] (Puccini)  
58693-0-2 Odeon A 197660a
270. *Carmen*: Virágárta [La fleur que tu m'avais jetée] (Bizet)  
58694-0-2 Odeon A 197660b

**Beka, Budapest, May 1913, 25 cm**

w. Gypsy Band of Béla Berkes jr.

271. Erdő szélén nagy a zsvaj, lárma (Náci Sas [Miklós Áldor])  
58718 Diadal D 1238
272. Egykrajcáros levélpapír (Béla Erőss)  
58719 Diadal D 1238
273. Csak egy kislány (Elemér Szentirmay); Vékony deszka kerítés (Zoltán Tayber)  
58720 Diadal D 1228 Beka 58720
274. Lehullott az őszi rózsa levele (László Kun)  
58721 Diadal D 1228 Beka 58721
275. Sáríka, Sáríka, kis szentem (Ernő Kondor)  
58724 Diadal D 1230 Beka 58724
276. Lakodalom van a mi utcánkban (Gusztáv Simkó)  
58725 Diadal D 1230
277. Dereng az ég alja (Géza Marthon)  
58734 Diadal D 1242
278. Valahol a falu végén (Laci Ányos)  
58735 Diadal D 1242
279. Régi nóták, régi hangok (Náci Sas [Miklós Áldor])  
58736 Diadal D 1232

**Beka, Budapest, October-November 1913, 25 cm**

w. Orchestra, cond.: István Bertha

280. *Die Kino-Königin*: Éjszaka. Two Step (Jean Gilbert)  
58799 Diadal D 1336
281. *Die Kino-Königin*: Karcsú kis médikék. Two Step (Jean Gilbert)  
58800 Diadal D 1336
282. Szerettelek  
58802 [cat. no. unknown]
283. Az Isten önnel (Albert Hetényi-Heidlberg)  
58803 Diadal D 1322
284. Ti füstös, kormos vonatok (Albert Hetényi-Heidlberg)  
58804 Diadal D 1324 Beka Grand 58804
285. *Katonadolog*: Miattad sápadt az arcom (Béla Zerkovitz)  
58821 Diadal D 1340 Diadal D 1326

286. *Katonadolog*: Katonadolog (Béla Zerkovitz)  
58822 Diadal D 1326
287. Visszasírlak (Géza Marthon)  
58823 Diadal D 1324 Beka Grand 58823
288. *Die ideale Gattin*: Gyere már édes kicsi párom (Franz Lehár)  
58824 Diadal D 1330
289. *Die ideale Gattin*: Rég elmúlt valóság (Franz Lehár)  
58879 Diadal D 1330
290. Mikor nem beszél a szív (Alfréd Grósz)  
58883 Diadal D 1322

**Lindström, Budapest, April-May 1914, 25 cm, w. Orchestra**

291. *Szibill*: Illúzió a szerelem, Engedelmével (Jacobi Viktor)  
58979 Diadal D 1350 Diadal D 1348
292. *Szibill*: Van valami (Jacobi Viktor)  
58980 Diadal D 1350
293. *Aida*: Harcra készen [Nel fiero anelito] (Verdi)  
58981 Beka 58981 Diadal D 1388
294. *Aida*: Az ajkam nem fog szólani [Di mie discolpe i giudici] (Verdi)  
58982 Beka 58982 Diadal D 1388
295. *Pagliacci*: Hej barátim [Un tal gioco] (Leoncavallo)  
58983 Beka 58983 Diadal D 1392
296. *Cavalleria Rusticana*: Alfio bátya [Compar Alfio] (Mascagni)  
58984 Beka 58984 Diadal D 1390
297. *Cavalleria Rusticana*: Búcsú az anyától [Mamma, quel vino è generoso] (Mascagni)  
58985 Beka 58985 Diadal D 1390

**Lindström, Budapest, April-May 1914, 25 cm, w. Orchestra**

298. Aludj fiam szép csendesén (Albert Hetényi-Heidlberg)  
58027 Diadal D 1358
299. Ligeti fapadok (Albert Hetényi-Heidlberg)  
58028 Diadal D 1358
300. *Lohengrin*: Búcsú a hattyútól [Nun sei bedankt] (Wagner)  
58029 Diadal D 1394
301. *Lohengrin*: Búcsú Elzától [Kommt er dann heim] (Wagner)  
58030 Diadal D 1394
302. *Pagliacci*: Kacag Bajazzó [Vesti la giubba] (Leoncavallo)  
58031 Diadal D 1392 Beka 58031

**Lindström, Budapest [?], April-May 1914, 30 cm w. Orchestra**

303. *Cavalleria Rusticana*: Bortal [Viva il vino spumeggiante] (Mascagni)  
2-5089 Parlophon U 5089 Parlophon D 2050

304. *Il Trovatore*: Ah si ben mio (Verdi)  
2-5091 Parlophon U 5091 Parlophon D 2051

According to Környei's own account, he made gramophone recordings in the US in 1922, but nothing is known of these recordings at present.<sup>4</sup>

### Béla Környey Reissues

#### LP

Qualiton LPX 11310–11: A magyar operaszínpad csillagai/The Stars of the Hungarian Opera House. 1884–1945 (1969): 264, 303.

Hungaroton LPX 12595: Magyar előadóművészek legszebb Wagner-felvételei/The most beautiful Wagner recordings by Hungarian artists (1983): 191.

Hungaroton LPX 12640–42: A magyar operaszínpad csillagai/Stars of the Hungarian Opera. Vol. I (1984): 189, 303.

Radioton LPX 31005: Régi magyar énekesek (1986): 189, 263.

#### CD

Pannon Classic PCL 8020: A magyar operaszínpad csillagai. Környei Béla/Stars of the Hungarian Opera. Béla Környei (2004): 18, 21, 170, 171, 173, 174, 184, 186, 187, 188, 189, 191, 192, 263, 264, 265, 266, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304.

Pannon Classic PCL 8025: A magyar operaszínpad csillagai. Tenor énekesek/Stars of the Hungarian Opera. Tenor Singers 1903–1955 (2006): 303.

Hungaroton HCD 32661: Opera 125. Stars of the Hungarian Opera. Az Operaház csillagai. 1884–2009. Vol. 1 (2009): 303.

Pannon Classic PCL 8052: Hommage [sic] à Ferenc Erkel. The Historical Recordings (2009): 233.

OperaTrezor MÁO 048: Szamosi Elza és kora/Elza Szamosi and Her Era (2022): 266.

Hamburger Archiv für Gesangskunst 50020: Sänger ABC. Ungarn. Vol. 1: 1901–1925 (s.d.): 189, 303.

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<sup>4</sup> N. N.: "Amerika, a művészek szomorú világa. Környei Béla tengerentúli vendégszerpléséről." *Pesti Napló* LXXIII/285 (15 December 1922), 2.

## BOOK REVIEW

### DER VERDI-BARITON

by Christian Springer. Amazon KDP, 2023, 26pp, 15 b/w illustrations, 11 in the text. E-book. Price: €4.99. In German. Available free of charge from Amazon for members of their Kindle Direct Publishing.

There is much historical and musical sense, along with some things to chew on, in this short and at times engagingly polemical e-book. In its most richly informative section Austrian author Christian Springer traces in detail the pre-history and emergence of a baritone voice-type specific to Verdi. He begins with a discussion of the only two categories of the natural male voice known in Italian opera up to the time of Rossini, the tenor and the bass, their timbral characteristics, vocal ranges and role types. Springer examines the part played by the *baritenor* (a category recently invoked by Michael Spyres to describe his own voice) and the *basso cantante* in a development that spawned the singer whom he terms "the first true baritone in the history of Italian opera", Giorgio Ronconi, the 'creator' of Nabucco in Verdi's opera.

Springer identifies a number of vocal and stylistic qualities that the ideal Verdi baritone should possess. The first is the most generally acknowledged – a strongly developed and highly expressive top fifth of the voice. Command of a wide range of subtly differentiated dynamics constitutes the second essential characteristic, an ability to sing *recitative* vividly with a variety grounded in a deep understanding of the language and the dramatic situation the third. Skill in evoking genuine, noble pathos, sublime rather than lachrymose or pompously solemn, is a further *sine qua non*. Each of these qualities is elucidated with reference to specific roles and passages in Verdi's operas, from *Nabucco* to *Falstaff*, accompanied by often illuminating comments on the characters and their musical depiction. The most detailed of these are reserved for Rigoletto, the part in which the composer developed his personal manner of writing for the baritone voice to its full extent.

So far, so interesting. Herr Springer, however, has some bones to pick. Your reviewer, as an 'Anglo-Saxon' who owes some of his most cherished evenings at the opera to Tito Gobbi, not least as Iago and Falstaff, finds himself among the villains of the piece. Springer abhors Gobbi's singing. He explains why with special reference to the studio recording of *Nabucco*. Few would consider that to be among the singer's finest efforts on record, just as few would be likely to deny the vividness of his characterisation. Springer, who finds it exaggerated to the point of caricature, claims it is English-speaking critics alone who have consistently praised this aspect of Gobbi's art. This, we are told, is because "the English" have no notable operatic tradition of their own, but a rich heritage of spoken drama instead ("not just by Shakespeare")!!!, which leads them to overemphasise the place of words in vocal art." (We do not learn, though, why "the French", who surely do have an estimable operatic tradition, have long cherished singing "off the words".) Springer is, of course, not the first to question Gobbi's vocal credentials as a Verdian or to deplore what one critic has called