

Hunyadi László

Opera in three acts

Music: Ferenc Erkel

Libretto: Béni Egressy

Historical Background

János Hunyadi was voivode of Transylvania and a number of southern regions, one of the central Hungarian military and political figures during the 15th century. He prevented Ulrik Cillei from ascending the Bosnia throne in 1443. Appointed by Diet (legislative institution in the medieval kingdom of Hungary) as Captain in Chief (1445), and subsequently as regent with the title of governor, he was responsible for the administration of state affairs until minor László V comes of age. He resigned from this position in 1452, and has been awarded with the first hereditary title in the Kingdom of Hungary by the grateful sovereign.

Under leadership of János Hunyadi the united Hungarian, Czech and Polish forces fought against Sultan Mehmed II and his huge army during the siege of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) in summer 1456. For many reasons the battle was strikingly uneven: sixteen years old László V fled to Vienna, surrounding countries refused to support Hungary against powerful Ottomans and Hungarian nobles were more interested in managing local conflicts than to take part in the the mobilization ordered by the Diet. The victory was unexpected and therefore even more triumphant: processions to celebrate Hunyadi were organized even in Oxford and Venice. Until then, the Ottoman Empire seemed to be unstoppable. However, the crusaders' camp have been stricken by plague soon after the final battle. In effect János Hunyadi died on August 11th, leaving his wife Erzsébet Szilágyi and two sons: László and Mátyás.

Who is who

László V King of Hungary	tenor	Tibor Szapannos
Erzsébet Szilágyi widow of János Hunyadi	soprano	Klára Kolonits
László Hunyadi her son	tenor	László Boldizsár
Mátyás Hunyadi László's brother	mezzo-soprano	Krisztina Simon
Mihály Szilágyi brother of Erzsébet	bass	Sándor Egri
Miklós Gara the count palatine	baritone	István Kovács
Mária Gara his daughter	soprano	Erika Miklósa Rita Rácz
Ulrik Cillei the regent	bass-baritone	Krisztián Cser
Rozgonyi an army officer	baritone	András Káldi Kiss

Synopsis

Act I - The death of Cillei.

Castle of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade), November 1456.

Picture I

Young Mátyás Hunyadi gathers with his uncle Mihály Szilágyi and the family's supporters in the in the legendary Nándorfehérvár castle. They are aware of the upcoming visit of the King László V and his suite, whom they do not respect because of his unsteadiness (chorus: *Nem leszünk mi hű kutyái*). When the older of Hunyadi brothers, László, brings a message that the king nominated Ulrik Cillei for the regent, they openly admit that the monarch is not welcome in the castle (chorus: *Mint tébolyult, se lát, se hall*). Hunyadi, however, is faithful to the king. In that moment, a Serbian spy is brought in by the guards: he has been caught with a letter. László Hunyadi reads out the lines, in which Cillei is promising the heads of both Hunyadi boys to his monarch - and father-in-law - Serbian despot György Brankovics. The herald trumpets can be heard: here comes László V (scene: *Látlak végre, te hős Nándorfehérvár!*), assisted by Cillei. Hunyadi welcomes the king with respect and offers the castle keys (scene: *Uram, Királyom, üdvözöllek*) - but the monarch orders László to keep them as a proof of his gratefulness towards his late father János. They enter further into the castle followed by the King's suite. The castle guards close the gate in front of the German mercenaries who follow the monarch. They declare that they would defend the king themselves if needed, out of their respect and faithfulness, in contrary to the Germans who are employed by Cillei and paid for their obedience (double chorus: *Most Isten hírével el*).

Picture II

In one of the rooms, King László V speaks to Cillei. He is scared about the fact that his soldiers were not allowed to enter and asks for an advice. The regent tries to convince the King that Hunyadis are dangerous rebels and manipulates the young monarch to give him the royal ring being the sign of full power (duet: *Hányszor kell mondanom, te rászédett király*). A moment after, while fearful and confused László V goes to the pray in the chapel, Cillei triumphantly stamps a letter with the ring.

In the meantime, László Hunyadi is dreaming about his betrothed, Mária Gara (aria: *Van végre egy pár nyugodt pillanat!... Ó szállj hozzám*). Rozgonyi interrupts with warning: Cillei is plotting to kill him. László calls his friends and supporters, who hide in the surrounding halls. Soon after the regent himself appears, announcing the king's invitation for the dinner. Hunyadi confronts him over the intrigue and Cillei draws his sword to attack, but László's men burst into the room and kill the regent. The King, alarmed by the rumour, comes into the terrible murder scene. He feels forced to announce his forgiveness, but feels unsure and scared. Supporters of Hunyadi celebrate the miserable end of the intriguing regent and declare their faithfulness to the King (chorus and finale: *Meghalt a cselszövő*)

Act II - The king's oath.

Temesvár (Timișoara), Residency of Hunyadis

The court ladies are gossiping about the upcoming king's visit (chorus: *Nyári est, nyugalmas est*). When they see arriving Mátyás they go back to their work. A moment later Erzsébet Szilágyi enters into the room. She is not sure if the act of forgiveness was genuine and has terrible visions of her son's death (aria: *Mint a tenger, úgy viháرزik*). Stricken by terror she collapses and faints, the ladies in waiting surround her with care and comfort. When László V arrives, all court gathers to welcome him. In reply to dramatic pleas of Erzsébet, the king remarks that he considers young Hunyadi guilty, but for the sake of his father he decided not to look for vengeance. In the meantime, he sees Mária Gara and is

immediately enchanted by her beauty. Miklós Gara, father of Mária, decides: he will give his daughter's hand to the king instead of László Hunyadi, so that his power increases (aria: *Az égen csillagom hadd gyűljön egymaga!*)

While the king and his escort are getting settled, Erzsébet can finally embrace her children (terzetto: *Ím újra nálam vagytok, gyermekim*). The joyful and moving scene is interrupted by Miklós Gara: László V summons both Hunyadi boys to him. Erzsébet remains alone, again tortured by fear and fatal presentiments (aria: *Nagy Ég! Remegek...*). However, Mátyás brings good message: the king indeed forgave them. Erzsébet expresses her joy and relief (cabaletta: *Szép reménységár*), then exits. László enters with Mária. They talk about their upcoming wedding and whisper words of love (duet: *Mily szép vagy édesem*) During the ceremony held at dawn in the chapel, László V makes an oath that he won't seek revenge for the murder of Cillei. He regards Erzsébet his mother and calls both Hunyadi boys his brothers. After the ceremony, altogether they take the road to Buda Castle.

Act III - Intrigues and execution.

Buda, March 1457.

Picture I

The young King stays awake in his bedroom. Feeling alone and lost, he is dreaming about Mária (aria: *Én, bábja vad kezeknek*). Miklós Gara enters and presents his plan, taking advantage of the monarch's weakness: presents Hunyadi as the King's adversary, and therefore he offers his daughter, previously promised to Hunyadi, to the King: and traitor shall die. László V after short hesitation agrees on the plan and exits, leaving all power to triumphant Gara (aria: *Az égen csillagom*).

Picture II

The castle garden. Wedding of Mária Gara and László Hunyadi. The girl expresses her happiness and joy (cabaletta: *Szememben mámor, s öröm ragyog*). The court ladies and gentlemen celebrate the young couple and dance (ballet: *Palotás*). Idyllic scene gets interrupted by Miklós Gara, who accuses László of treason and orders to imprison him.

Picture III

Cell in the prison of Buda castle. László Hunyadi reflects on his destiny, missing his love and freedom. He believes in the king's grace and justice. Suddenly, Mária enters: she paid the guards to let her in. László swears, that he is innocent. A moment later Miklós Gara bursts into the cell with armed men. In a moving scene the two bid farewell and Gara curses her daughter (tercetto: *Áldjon meg az Isten*)

Picture IV

Szent-György square in Buda, storm is approaching. Armed forces are keeping the crowd out of the central part of the square. Erzsébet Szilágyi struggles to come closer to scaffold (finale: *Hol van ő? Hol a fiam?*), but the guards refrain her. Voice of László Hunyadi can be heard: he declares his innocence. The axe falls on his neck three times - yet he remains untouched, which is considered a divine intervention and means grace for the prisoner. The crowd and Erzsébet are begging mercy. The King remains in silent indifference and Miklós Gara gives the final order. At the fourth strike László Hunyadi falls dead.