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MARCH - MAY 2015

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THE FIVE STAR CITY GUIDE

## VISITING BUDAPEST

## MAX EMANUEL CENCIC

AN OPERA STAR WITH A CENTRAL EUROPEAN CULTURAL BACKGROUND

TEXT } JUDIT RÁCZ PHOTO } BEETROOT

As artistic director of Parnassus Arts Productions, Max Emanuel Cencic assists with numerous productions of Italian baroque operas: his sensational "rediscovery" of Leonardo Vinci's final opera, *Artaserse*, brought him tremendous success. His most recent production returns Johann Adolf Hasse's opera *Siroë* to the stage after a hiatus of 200 years. On 18 March, this work by the prolific baroque opera composer will also come to the Budapest Spring Festival.

**You sing the title role and also direct. The set design is amazing, the costumes are beautiful and the stage acting is powerful. Why did you choose this opera, practically known only by music historians?**

The music is extraordinarily virtuosic, with difficult coloratura parts, exciting melodic phrasing, and well drawn characters. In many respects it resembles Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, since it too is a clash between the old system and the new, in this case embodied by the conflict between father and son. Also, since it is set in Persia, I had the perfect opportunity to put something in the style of the *Arabian Nights* on the stage, since it is, after all, a fairy tale.

**Hungarians like to boast, somewhat tongue in cheek, that every great person is actually of Hungarian origin. In your case, however, there is some truth to it, since you are descended on your mother's side from the Vojnich family of Vojvodina.**

Yes, you could say I'm part Hungarian, and my mother, grandparents and other relatives spoke Hungarian at home, as did I. I still understand it somewhat. Part of the family always lived in Budapest, with relatives in Szeged and Baja. My cultural background, therefore, is entirely Central European. When I joined the Vienna Boys' Choir as a child, we went to Austria, and when the Yugoslav Wars broke out, we had to stay there, leaving everything behind. I visit my Budapest relatives when I can, but unfortunately can never stay more than a day or two.

**If a visitor were to ask you how to spend a few days in Budapest, what would you suggest?**



By walking along the Danube banks you will find yourself in the middle of a beautiful sight. The National Gallery and other museums have excellent collections. The Parliament is a lovely building inside and out. Discover the centre of Pest, bustling with cafés and take in the fascinating details of the 19th century buildings. Don't forget to try the traditional Dobos torte at the Gerbaud confectionary: that's what I always order. And of course, the thermal baths are also fantastic – this is the greatest form of relaxation after walking around the city. If only I had more chances to visit!

## } Career trajectory

Raised in the Vienna Boys' Choir, Max began his solo career as a countertenor in 2001. A number of his recordings have earned major awards, with several receiving Grammy nominations; his joint CD with Philippe Jaroussky was a huge success. He tours the world singing material from his *Venezia* and *Rokoko* albums and regularly works with outstanding conductors such as William Christie, René Jacobs, Jean-Christophe Spinosi and Riccardo Muti. His appearances in operas by Monteverdi and Handel were particularly memorable.