ERKEL

1837... At the Hungarian theatre of Pest, a young, enthusiastic orchestra leader, Ferenc Erkel conducts a sweet, sentimental rokoko-opera. His mind is on the performance, the soaring coloratura, the graceful ballet, the shepherd-romance. Around him, however, beyond the walls of the theatre, the atmosphere is tense and the rumour spreads like fire through the theatre that the greatest son of the Hungarian nation, Lajos Kossuth, the steadfast fighter for peace had been arrested and imprisoned by the Austrians. The rokoko shepherd-romance comes to an end, the curtain descends and a young law-student, called Béni Egressy, brings the news of this revolting act of tyranny to Erkel, receiving the congratulations of his admirers. This is how the great Hungarian musical film “Erkel” bringing to the screen the life and work of Ferenc Erkel, the creator of the Hungarian national opera, the contemporary of Ferenc Liszt, one of the greatest Hungarian musicians, begins.

Erkel hears the news about Kossuth’s imprisonment with surprise and indignation. Again the flames of the revolution soar high in Hungary, this shameful act of Austrian oppression moves Erkel too. The time for action has come, everybody has to take arms, everybody has to fight for the nation, for the people, for liberty: and Erkel’s friends make him realise that he, too, has a powerful weapon in his hands: his music. He must join the ranks of those who awake the nation: he must carry his music into the front-line. “Give songs, Erkel, to the mute nation” — they urge and persuade him. And Erkel muses: To give voice to the mute...? The task is a difficult one, but Erkel undertakes it. And he writes his first opera entitled “Mária Báthory”. But “Mária Báthory” is only an experiment, not the composition Erkel wanted to create. There are a few Hungarian melodies in it here and there, but he wants more: he wants to create a complete Hungarian opera out of Hungarian tunes, create music to a revolutionary libretto in which the nation recognizes its sorrows, joys and duties. But this won’t be easy: Erkel fights alone for his ideals, only a few faithful friends stand by him. Metropolitan musicians turn against Erkel, laugh at him, try to dissuade him of his mission, they think it impossible that anyone should be able to compose a real chef d’œuvre out of the music of “inns and village weddings”. But Erkel wants to follow the road he chose — and he is really launched when he receives appreciation, encouragement and help from Ferenc Liszt. He writes “László Hunyadi” his second opera, which is already revolutionary in contents and completely Hungarian in music. The nation appreciates him. His tunes are forged into weapons of the 1848 revolution, they soar high on the glorious 15th of March, they are dreaded even later, after the defeat of the revolution, by the oppressors. And Erkel gives another song to his nation, to the revolution: the national anthem. Dark night falls upon the nation after the defeat of the War of Independence. Everything is silent, everything seems dead. Erkel feels that to work is useless, that he, too should keep silent. Slowly, however, he comes to realize that if he continued to keep silent, he would betray his mission — and he writes his masterpiece, his most revolutionary opera both in music and in content, his “Bánsk Bán”. The opening night of unequalled success sets the hearts again aflame. Erkel has been taken once again by the love of his heart. But the Austrian oppressors take revenge: they dismiss him from the National Theatre, they make it impossible for him to work. But Erkel can never again be discouraged: he knows that he is not alone, that he is supported by the whole nation. To the threats of the reactionary forces he replies with a still more courageous, still more revolutionary deed: he composes a new opera about György Dózsa... And when, after long years of suffering, people assemble to express their appreciation and gratitude for his life and work, the gray-haired Liszt shakes his hand saying: “You were right. You gave voice to the mute...” Erkel is a great musical film. Beside various episodes of Erkel’s life it also brings to the screen the most effective scenes of the most beautiful operas. We hear and see parts from “Mária Báthory” , “László Hunyadi”, “Bánsk Bán” and also the most beautiful aria of the opera “György Dózsa”, Erkel’s oath of allegiance to his nation, to his people.

The opera-parts are sung and played by the best artists of the Hungarian Operhouse.
Screenplay: István Békeffy and Gábor Thurzó
Music compiled by: Jenő Kenessey
Cameraman: István Elben
Sets: Zoltán Pábyry
Sound engineer: Gyula Rónai
Producer: Elza Vitéz

Sándor Pécsi, Kossuth Prize winner
Eva Szörényi, Kossuth Prize winner
Miklós Gábor
Iván Darvas
Andor Ajtay
Gábor Rajnay
Zoltán Várkonyi
Tamás Major, Kossuth Prize winner, outstanding artist of the Hungarian People’s Republic
János Zách
György Solthy
Margit Makay
Sándor Szabó
Tivadar Uray
Lajos Mányai

The orchestra of the Hungarian State Operahouse is conducted by János Ferencsik, Kossuth Prize winner.

THE SINGERS ARE:

Mária Gyurkovics, Kossuth Prize winner, worthy artist of the Hungarian People’s Republic
Julia Osváth, Kossuth Prize winner, worthy artist of the Hungarian People’s Republic
János Fodor, worthy artist of the Hungarian People’s Republic
Mihály Székely, Kossuth Prize winner, outstanding artist of the Hungarian People’s Republic
Endre Rösser, worthy artist of the Hungarian People’s Republic
Klára Palánkay, Tibor Udvardy, György Melis, Andor Lendvay, József Simándy

DIRECTOR:
Márton Keleti, Kossuth Prize winner