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## HUNGARY

<u>CULTURE</u>	(0800)
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# VIEWS OF A HUNGARIAN SINGER

SOURCE STOCKHOLM: RFE News Bureau.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: August 1956.

EVALUATION COMMENT: This interesting report gives a good picture on the mood of people in BUDAPEST after the fall of RAKOSI.

It may be pointed out that after the unsuccessful performances of the football-players, the Regime has initiated another campaign to produce hard currency: the export of Hungarian folklore groups. It is to be presumed that Western countries will be flooded in the near future with touring artist groups.

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This spring I was called to the Ministry of Culture and told there that they were assembling a troupe of folk-dancers and -musicians to tour abroad in the summer and autumn. They asked me whether I should like to join the troupe. Actually folk-songs are not my genre, to date I have sung in the radio, a few concerts and in cafés, always operetta arias and the so-called chansons. This, however, was no obstacle, the official told me: I was to study a few folk-songs quickly, accompanied by a gipsy band.

As the official said that our first engagement was for STOCKHOLM and GOTHENBURG and I would be paid 100 Swedish kronas per evening, I agreed gladly to join the troupe. Later we were told that we had always to transfer half of

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our fee to Hungary via the National Bank in BUDAPEST, the equivalent of which money we would receive on our return to Hungary, reckoned on the basis of the official rate of exchange. The other half we could spend abroad -- even buy anything we liked if something was left after the expenses of our living had been paid. Even the customs would be less strict toward us, as we, being artists, had requirements beyond those of ordinary folk. However, if we could save some currency against our return, the National Bank would buy it from us at a more favorable rate of exchange. Another advantage was that we would get passports for two years and would be permitted to go abroad even alone with these passports after the end of the tour.

I was naturally extremely glad over this engagement. I had never been abroad and needed moreover some clothes urgently. In my first marriage I had been married to Sándor LESTYÁN, a well-known journalist and writer. He had joined the Party already in 1945 and worked at the paper "Szabad Nep", but as he was apolitical and no convicted Marxist, he was soon transferred to the unimportant "Ez is Ujsag." I, too, come from a bourgeois family, my father had a large ironmonger's shop in Berliń Ter (now Marx Square) before the war and I have had no political training. Thus it was almost impossible for me to get a long-term contract at any theater. In my second marriage I am married to the second musical conductor at the radio. He is not a Party member either, so he cannot help me, I can only sing over the radio from time to time.

Before we left, the whole troupe was collected and our instructor told us that a comrade from the Ministry would call. Actually two men came, one was the official who had spoken with me the first time, his name is ERDELYI if I remember right. Both looked at our program and were satisfied, there was only some small fault with the costumes which were not "popular" enough, so the seamstresses had to correct some details. Otherwise the entire program was approved. Then ERDELYI made a short speech that the Hungarian People's Republic expected us to remain loyal and true even abroad, etc. The other man was, we were all convinced, a detective or police officer. He made a speech too and told us that if we met Hungarians abroad, we should speak about conditions in Hungary in a manner to induce them to repatriate, i.e., we should not criticize the regime or the conditions. If anybody wanted to jump off, he (she) ought to consider that his (her) relatives would be held responsible. He assured us we would be watched everywhere and the authorities in Hungary would know all about what we said and did.

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As from August 1 we are giving performances in "Tivoli" in STOCKHOLM every night. Unfortunately the weather has been so bad that we have had but small audiences but the press reviews were good, and as from September 1 we shall give performances in GOTHENBURG where the directors of the "Lise-Berg" theater have engaged us. An official courier is accompanying us, he sees to the formalities connected with our passports and permis de séjourn, he receives our fees from the theaters and it is his task to find new engagements and sign contracts. His name is RADO and he is a former employee of a theatrical agency in BUDAPEST. RADO is no Communist but he has a family at home and he earns probably a lot of money on this tour; therefore he adheres to all the rulings he has got from the Ministry. He is clever and speaks German and English and he helps us to make our purchases, find suitable lodgings, etc. Just now he is negotiating with a variety theater in COPENHAGEN where we shall maybe be giving performances as from October 1. He hopes that we shall have further contracts later on, he should like to remain abroad as long as possible and he has told us that it is not only his wish but also the wish of the Ministry, as the Hungarian authorities should like to procure as much foreign currency through our tour as possible. RADO told us privately that the Hungarian Government had ordered many pictures from Hungarian painters, all with Hungarian motives, and that a firm in South America and the USA was selling these very cheaply, but for foreign currency. Likewise, the Hungarian Government has sold some museum pieces to private collectors in Switzerland for currency.

I personally have signed a contract for two months only; now I have got an offer from Nils POPPE to take a role in LAJTAI's operetta "The Bluejackets" in HELSINKI. LAJTAI, too, has promised to help me through his connections in BUDAPEST so that I would be permitted to prolong my stay here and act in HELSINKI for two months. I hope I shall get the permission if I engage myself to pay half of my fee to the National Bank. RADO said he would not put any obstacles in my way but ask the Ministry to send another singer to COPENHAGEN.

In STOCKHOLM I get 100 kronas per evening, half of it goes to the National Bank in BUDAPEST, the other half is paid out to me. I pay four kronas per day for my lodgings, sharing the room with Agi SZOLLOSI. We eat cheaply and spend the rest of the money buying ready-made clothes, fabrics and stockings, mostly at sales. I have not seen much of STOCKHOLM as I spend my days mostly in shopping,

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but still I have seen that the living standard is here fantastically high, I have never believed that people could live so well abroad. After BUDAPEST, life here seems to be a fairy-tale. But I must add that despite this great wealth STOCKHOLM must be a boring city. In the beginning we tried to go to some restaurant or café after our performance, but as it was after 1130 hours, we could not get any food anywhere. The Swedes seem to be disinterested, it must be difficult to be a young woman here. In BUDAPEST we are poor and always worried, but life is much more amusing there all the same and pretty young women are always noticed.

I had arranged with the radio journal in BUDAPEST to report on our tour, to date I have written only one article where I criticized the Swedish women, as they do not know how to walk beautifully, they wear ugly shoes with flat heels and the young girls are too heavily-made-up. I get 200 forint per article which is considered a good fee for an article in BUDAPEST.

By the way, I am convinced that this tour, and particularly my playing a role in the operetta in HELSINKI if I get the chance, will open up a career for me in BUDAPEST. When an artist is successful abroad, he (she) cannot be ignored in BUDAPEST either. Generally speaking, the era of Party protection and "bourgeois descent" seems to be over in BUDAPEST — now people relegated into the background are coming forth again and getting back the jobs they can do better than the new Party guys.

This is true also in my profession. Earlier only strictly "orthodox" operettas and songs were permitted. Now only one such "orthodox" operetta is being played in BUDAPEST — "Somewhere in the South." The libretto is by one Laszlo TABI, an editor of "Ludas Matyi", and it is pure propaganda, idiotic and primitive and the music is no better either. It is played alternately with "The Csardas Princess." As nobody wants to see the new "orthodox" operetta, the management of the theater decided that the factories and offices would get group-tickets for "The Csardas Princess" only if they would order the same number of tickets for "Somewhere in the South" simultaneously. But the workers protested so much that the theaters had to discontinue with this system.

Two-three years ago they also tried to arrange matters so that "orthodox" playwrights and composers would collaborate with the old good authors. This was a failure as the old authors-composers refused to collaborate with the new ones. Today there are two separate camps in BUDAPEST — the old

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and good ones on the one hand and the new ones on the other. As the theaters are now supposed to work at a profit, just like the publishers, the new authors, like Laszlo TABI, Szilard DARVAS, etc., have less and less scope while the old authors come forward again. For instance, János ERDŐDY, who had worked at an office since 1949, is now writing again since a year ago, he writes texts for operettas, songs, radio plays, etc., and earns much money. As there are not enough old writers, the theaters and publishers play and print works which were out of question before, being "not orthodox."

I have heard that they want to procure new operettas and songs from abroad but that the National Bank has no currency for the purpose. Otherwise it is no longer forbidden to play foreign music. It often happens that we hear a foreign hit on a gramophone record, then we (my husband and I) let somebody write down the musical score, somebody writes an appropriate Hungarian text and then we, the singers, sing it. Naturally, the foreign composers do not get any royalties, but who will know abroad that somebody has played or sung their songs in a café in BUDAPEST?

Gramophone records are now obtainable in BUDAPEST, naturally only in the black market and at exorbitant prices. Still, Louis ARMSTRONG e.g. is wellknown and popular in BUDAPEST. The greatest fashion are now WAGNER operas on long-playing records.

I cannot say much about politics, I am not interested in them. I know only that people in Hungary are waiting for great changes, they believe that the Russians will leave Hungary. Now they are for Imre NAGY and believe that NAGY would bring about greater freedom and better living conditions. A typical example: some days ago Mrs. LAJTAI told us the Swedish papers had written that Imre NAGY had been taken back into the Party. This news excited our gipsy musicians very much and already the next day they asked at the Legation whether it was really true that Imre NAGY was a cabinet member again. The cultural attaché, KOVÁCS was very much astonished and instead of replying he asked us where we heard it, was it authentic.

Our friends in BUDAPEST -- musicians, journalists, actors, -- feel all a great tension, they believe that Hungary will regain its independence in a near future. People in BUDAPEST speak quite freely against the present regime. It is an open secret that the journalists have revolted and that the papers, in particular "Magyar Nemzet," do not write

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what is demanded by the Party leaders. One can already often read how much better life is in West Europe, how much higher the cultural level, etc. Yugoslavia, however, is not very much appreciated, many Hungarians have visited that country and it is generally known in BUDAPEST that life in Yugoslavia is no better than in Hungary. It can be seen everywhere that former great Communists have suddenly grown very meek and careful, and so have the authorities. These people -- as my husband says -- are now trying to establish an alibi as they know that changes are unavoidable. Many intellectuals have their private lists of Stalinists and in society you can not infrequently hear somebody saying -- I shall not forget this man, he is on my black list.

We listen often to Radio Free Europe. I think their broadcasts are very good but a little too political. We should like to hear more about new plays in the West, new books and fashions. The broadcasts are mostly very much jammed, but can be heard over the 16 meters band, which we can take in because we have a large receiving set, with an extended short wave scale. All musicians and singers listen to foreign broadcasts, they are eager to hear about novelties in their field.

End

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