



Hungarian soprano Judit Molnár will perform in this year's Canberra Symphony Orchestra Prom Concert, *Hungarian Rhapsody*.

Photo: Melissa Adams

Soprano is Hungary for more

The Canberra Symphony Orchestra's Prom Concert has more than a dash of paprika, **Philip O'Brien** writes

Despite an exhausting 36-hour journey, Hungarian soprano Judit Molnár was in good spirits when she arrived in Canberra on Tuesday afternoon. The dry chill of pressurised air cabins can play havoc with singers' voices but she was well-prepared with warm clothes and plenty of water. It's just as well for, in a few days, she will step onto the stage in front of the largest audience in her short career.

Molnár is one of the guest soloists in this year's Canberra Symphony Orchestra Prom Concert, conducted by Australian composer Richard Mills, which takes place in the grounds of Government House on Saturday, February 19. Supported by the Embassy of the Republic of

Hungary, the program is entitled *Hungarian Rhapsody* and will include works by Liszt, Brahms, Johann Strauss II and Franz Lehár.

A popular visitor to Australia in recent years, Molnár has performed at the Australian Hungarian Cultural Convention, in 2007 and 2010, and in specialist recitals in Sydney, the Gold Coast, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. Saturday's Prom Concert, with an expected attendance of as many as 6000 people, will be the biggest concert in which she's performed.

"The largest audience I've sung in front of was 3000 people at the International Opera Festival in Hungary," she says. "So I'm nervous but very excited."

A former student of the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest (2011 marks the 200th anniversary of Liszt's birth)

Molnár has, in the three years since graduating, maintained a steady career as a soloist and opera performer in Europe. She has also released two CDs: a Christmas album, *Holy Night*, and *My Beautiful Homeland*, a collection of popular Hungarian songs and arias.

On Saturday she'll perform three songs. One is Johann Strauss II's *The Sounds from My Homeland* from the operetta *Die Fledermaus* (1874). The other two are by Franz Lehár: *Vilja's Song* from *The Merry Widow* (1905) and *My lips kiss you so warmly* from *Giuditta* (1934).

Several of the works in Saturday's Prom Concert have a gypsy flavour – such as Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, influenced by the Hungarian folk music, particularly gypsy melodies, which the composer

heard in his youth – and Spanish composer Pablo de Sarasate's *Gypsy Airs* (1878). However Molnár, like many Hungarians, is keen to dispel a popular misconception. "True Hungarian music is much more than gypsy music," she says. "Gypsy culture is just one influence. There are many other folk influences on Hungarian music." What makes Hungarian music distinctive is its personality as much as its origins, she says. "This can be seen in the three female characters whose songs I'll be singing on Saturday." These are: the fiery but alluring Giuditta from Lehár's opera *Giuditta*; the wealthy widow Hanna Glawari in Lehár's *The Merry Widow* and the scheming Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus*.

"Hungarian music is notable for its extremes," Molnár says. "One

moment it is sad, the next it is joyful. Rosalinde's song from *Die Fledermaus* – in *czárdás* format – typifies this. The first part is slow and sentimental and the second is fast, full of joy and happiness."

And this swift change of moods is not just a characteristic of Hungarian music, she adds. "There's also something of this nature in the Hungarian character. There's a saying: 'We cry while we are partying.'" Now, that's typically Hungarian."

■ **CSO Prom Concert 2011:** *Hungarian Rhapsody* at Government House gardens on February 19 at 5pm. Gates open at 3.45pm. Bookings: Canberra Ticketing (6275 2700 or www.canberraticketting.com.au) or CSO direct (6262 6772). Family tickets are for two adults and an unlimited number of children.