



In the northern Hungarian city of Miskolc, there's an impressive theatre with five stages and a busy program of opera, ballet, drama and music every day of the week. In the sleepy, seaside suburb of Sandgate, there's a pretty, heritage-listed town hall with pressed tin walls and ceilings, and an events schedule dominated by community groups and amateur theatre nights.

The connection between the two is soprano Judit Molnar. She's a Hungarian talent who has settled in Brisbane with her husband Zoltan and is one of the headline acts at Sandgate's annual Music by the Sea festival in January.

Judit was a regular on the Miskolc stage, and at theatres across Europe, but she's nevertheless excited to be part of the highly regarded Sandgate event.

"The hall is a beautiful building with a very good acoustic, and the atmosphere is very intimate. This festival is just a few days but with very high-quality music, so it's my pleasure to be a part of it," Judit says in her careful, precise, lightly accented English.

Judit and Zoltan have been visiting Australia almost annually since 2006, when she performed at a Hungarian cultural convention in Sydney.

But it took Europe's economic woes and the anniversary of a deceased Hungarian composer to make the move permanent.

"Last year, I sang in Canberra for the anniversary of (Franz) Liszt. The Hungarian ambassador asked me to be a soloist. After that I got more and more invitations to sing in Australia, and in November we decided to move here. I think the possibilities are easier here than in Europe," she says.

Zoltan happily left a stressful job as a news cameraman to become his wife's manager, organising trips interstate – and back to Europe – to perform.

Brisbane's music community is welcoming the elegant soprano, who will take to the QPAC Concert Hall stage for the first time this month as part of the Queensland Pops Orchestra New Year's Eve Gala.

"I'm lucky because Hungary has a huge tradition in music, and I think musicians here appreciate my background," Judit says.

"It's a good feeling. All the musicians in Hungary knew each other and I think Brisbane is the same – I hope we will all know each other soon."

MUSIC BY THE SEA, Jan 11-13, whole day tickets from \$50, Sandgate Town Hall, cnr Cliff and Seymour Sts, Sandgate.
www.musicbythesea.com.au

Moving repertoire

The fresh face of Brisbane opera has come a long way