



Sweet Home



Anne-Marie von Sarosdy

We can witness the moment, when kitsch becomes art in front of the camera of a German photo artist of Hungarian origin. She has been preparing the cover pages of booklets containing German romantic, patriotic novels for long years, from which about one hundred and forty million pieces are sold a year.

Anne-Marie von Sarosdy is not unknown for Hungarian public liking photos; we could see her pictures last time in 1998, at her exhibition organised in Mai Manó House. Though in Hungary we usually know her black and white expressive nude compositions, she is considered a well-known creator in other fields of fashion photography as well. She received the first purchase order from the German Bastei publisher nearly twenty years ago for preparing the cover page photos of patriotic novel booklets and the series is still going on. For Hungarian eyes it is interesting to look at the syrupy, romantic photos also because in socialism we used to imagine the rich rural region of West Germany like this, although some of the pictures were not prepared in Germany at all, ... with Hungarian models.



Might we say that you are a romantic soul? Is this characteristic for your photography as well?

Yes, I am hopelessly romantic. I believe in the goodness of people, in love, hope, beauty and in the unity of things and the pure pleasures of small delights. Happiness hides within us, we just like to put it outside. But we are ourselves to decide about happiness or sorrow – each and every day. I am no ascetic of art. I shun any unattractive, absurd things, the radical Evil. I do not shock with my pictures and I do not dance at the pleasure of time spirit or art market. I like soulful pictures and if I want to shock at all, I do it with beauty.

Your „Sweet Home” photo series started originally with the order of a publishing house. What did inspire you to make the photos?

Contemplation about ourselves and society is the precondition to art work. The world opened up. Today we can surf on or buy through the Internet even on the smallest island of the Southern Pacific. But the big and quick happiness and ubiquity in the digital world catches many people unprepared. In such a case it leads to homelessness and the loss of value and identity, instead of cultural enrichment. This cultural shock results in the loss of orientation, frustration, meaning-

lessness and mental isolation. People of this kind are defenceless victims of consumer society, who follow wrong political and religious leaders easily and without thinking.

At the same time critical attitude towards storming industrialisation, and globalisation becoming a huge melting pot lead back all nations to their own ancient culture and traditions. This is the reason why the strong desire for fatherland, love, origin, family and raillery, felt by everybody, became extremely important.

This tells us, who we are, this is guiding and protecting us. We draw strength



from it. Nevertheless, we, German people, loathe our history and at the same time – unfairly – the raillery to our fatherland and our national self-confidence. Unlike other cultures, which celebrate their folklores with bright variety. This is why I chose the subject of “Patriotism”, with sweet pictures of the typical German clichés for my work (in the name of every nation). There are still many things to discover in this splendid multicultural world with its versatile art, because we are so wonderfully different. However, this is only possible, if we keep our roots alive. We need clear self-estimation and the individual recognition of who we are

and what we are composed of, so that we can share and exchange it with others. “What people instinctively desire, Love, unity, stableness, sense and goal, are realised in fatherland.” (Nietzsche)

Was it not difficult to implement the subject of patriotism in pictures for a photographer, who is not of German origin? Do you see Germany from inside or rather from outside?

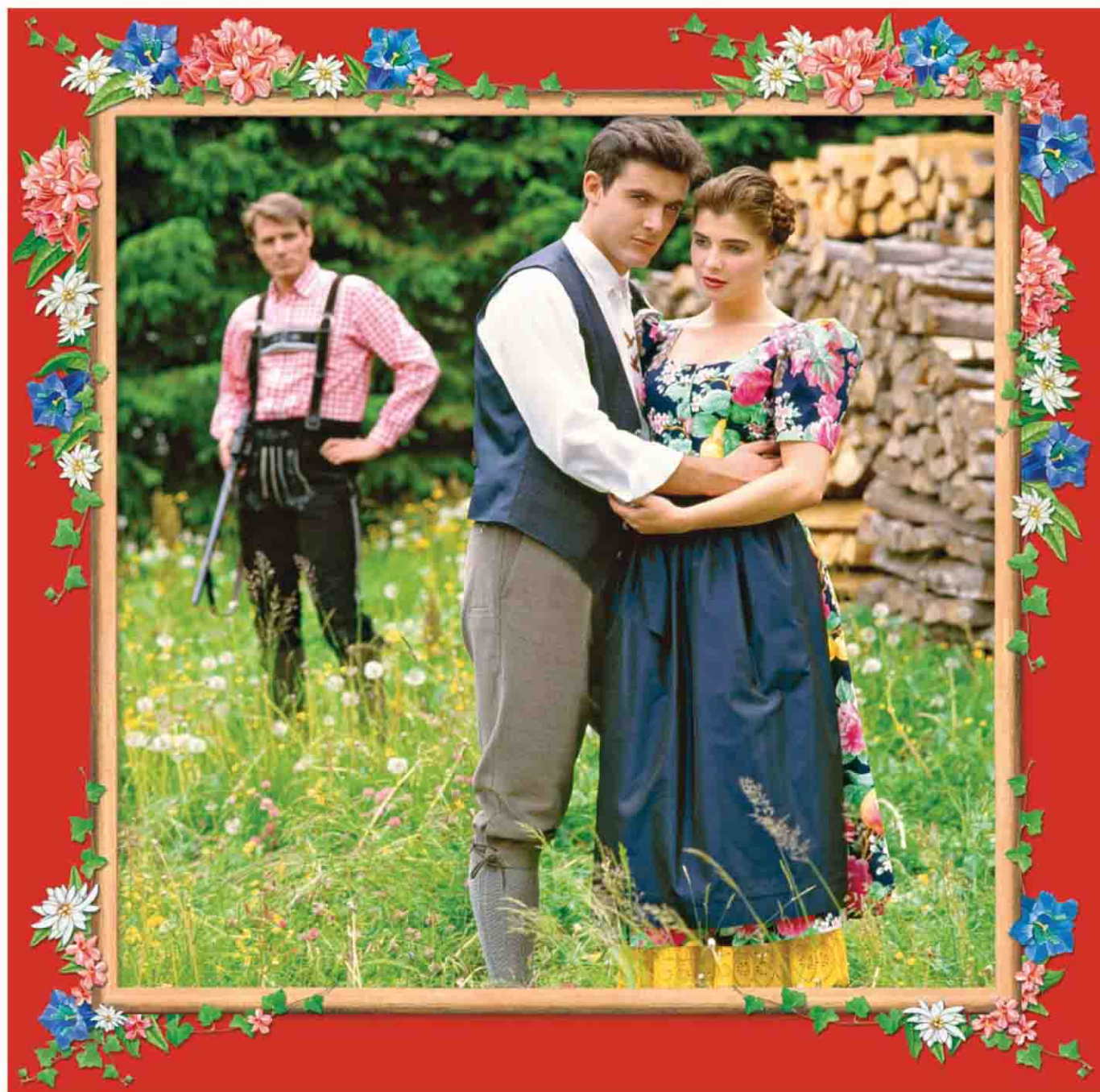
No, I believe it was actually easier for me, because I could look at Germany from both sides!

I was born and raised in Germany. Yet being of Hungarian origin – both of my pa-

rents are Hungarian –, having lived and studied in the US for many years and through my extensive travels throughout the world, I am quite able to see Germany from inside with a loving closeness and at the same time from outside at a critical distance.

Your previous works have nothing to do with this kitschy, syrupy world. Can the kitsch become a true artistic form?

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I never follow any artistic form intentionally, when I do my freelance work. I have to do that, nevertheless, when I shoot for my commercial clients. The rest is my hobby if you wish, and I do it for the artistic child hiding in me... I let the child play. When I happily showed my colourful, sweet almost dreamlike super size images to the public for the first time, the press attacked me that I was doing KITSCH! They said it in such a manner that I thought I had actually done something wrong. Then I started to read about it: Quotation from Gregory Fuller's "Kitsch-Art. Wie Kitsch zur Kunst wird.":

"Kitsch is a kind of expression of the right demands. Modern consciousness creates in Kitsch an independent form of expression for exactly the emotional world, which cannot be liquidated by modern rationalism: faith, love, hope and beauty. Kitsch in itself, as it can be identified as kitsch from the very beginning, makes possible delights which conscious modern people should give up otherwise: clearness, prosperity, pure eroticism, smooth, beautiful bodies, heroes, saints and the pure pleasures of small delights. But kitsch becomes an aesthetic value particularly if it manages to combine with childish innocence."

"The art of kitsch entices the viewer back to the world of childhood all of a sudden. Kitsch artists take seriously the colourful, merry, candied world of childhood. The human being is living in innocence, before rules will be hammered into its head and it has to learn suppressing its feelings. Kitsch artists like Zwilling, Koons, Palestine, Pierre et Gilles and Plumcake reveal their childish selves. We cannot welcome enough this positive message in a society, where an always higher and higher performance is demanded. Kitsch, no matter what it is, tastes like sugar. Though it is no food of full value, it is still some kind of daydream. The art



of kitsch bows before the dream, but it also wakes us at the same time."

If you look at my nudes – and actually at all my commercial work –, you will find, that I always show only the beauty of my model before the lens. I think this is why my clients like me and book me. And yes... why to deny, I like Kitsch!

If we look at Germany from here, the living standards seem to be extremely high. What is your experience, is Germany really looking like the land of promise today? Florian Langenscheidt, the publisher of "The Best in Germany" told the follo-

wing very important thing about this: "If we talk about our country with our foreign friends during our travels, and we complain about unemployment, the ageing of population, the lack of innovation and the missing economic growth, our business partners often think we are talking about another country. For them Germany is still heaven itself from many aspects. No other nation has ever been so rich and so unhappy at the same time. We are still struggling for our identity, dealing with our 20th century history and we will always feel ashamed due to such history. All this is very real and distressing. No one can and should

suppress it. But focussing one-sidedly on this will not help us further and will not solve our difficult problems either. Reality always consists of two sides: sunlight and shadow, strengths and weaknesses. Germany needs an emotional change. There are so extremely many things we can like and we can be proud a bit of. If we accomplish switchover to positive self-estimation, we can release a regene-

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rating force unsuspected so far. It is certainly not about an utterly empty national pride. No, it is much more about gratitude, well-founded self-consciousness, a constructive attitude vis-à-vis ourselves and an optimistic attitude vis-à-vis the world. It is namely true that we decide, whether the country will sink complaining into mediocrity or work on a better world independently and consciously, in harmony with all nations."

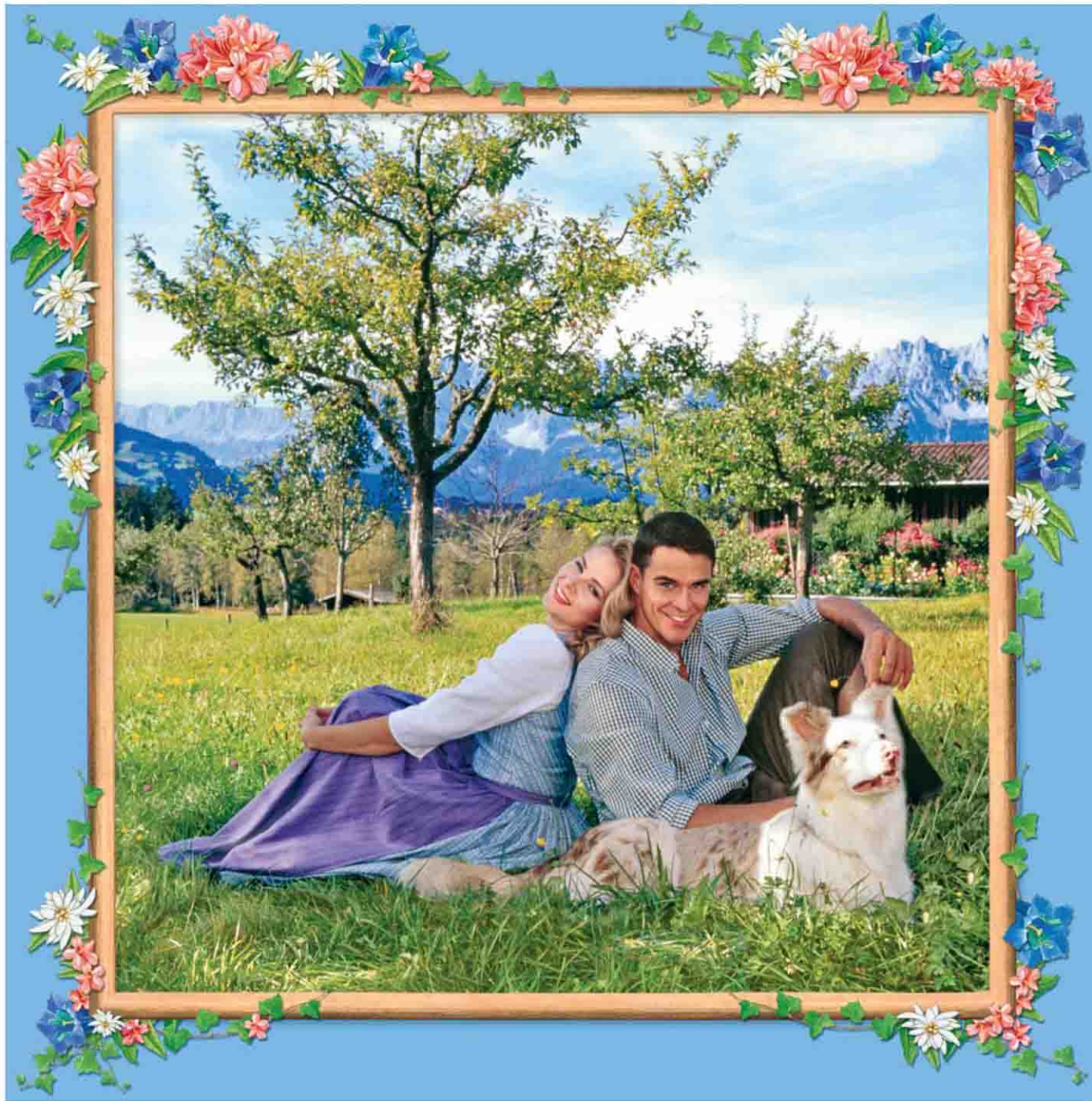
After this it is a poetical question: Does a country actually need such romantic idylls?

We are living in the age of neo-styles, of neomodernism and maybe neoromanticism, namely in an age, when we comment and quote. We use quotations, from both romanticism and idylls, to make something clear, which has or should have a meaning in our society, whether because of the complete lack or uselessness of desire, or because of the necessary alienation, discreditation or the split off emotions. In this sense all countries and all people need both romanticism and idyll.



Was Germany the scene of the photos? Most of the images were obviously shot in Germany. Some were produced in Austria and some, believe it or not, were shot in Budapest at Normafa. It is like in the movies. The opening scene shows the landscape shot at site, and the rest is done in the studio. It is an illusion you create. It is only important, what you want to let the viewer see and believe. After all the images serve ab ovo another purpose, a commercial one, and in the real business world the budget counts!

Some of the models do not seem to bear typically German characteristics. Again, my art series „Sweet Home“ was originally a commercial one and not my childish self's work. But then again believe me, in contrast to common belief, not all Germans are blond and blue eyed! There are Germans with brown hair and brown eyes. The pretty dark haired model has something a too exotic look for German clients, yet they bought the intriguing dark beauty in this case. She then became the dangerously beautiful



Gypsy girl, with whom the son of a rich farmer fell in love, putting the family in shame, risking to tear the family apart, risking the heritage, risking all... Well, do you think this story would have been possible in Hungary as well? Don't we always blame somebody else? Don't we judge all the time the ones we cannot understand? First we have to love and understand ourselves, in order to be able to love and understand others. That is my lesson in the art work.

What is the role of the decorative frames of the photos? Maybe they separate reality from dream?

First I created my own frame because I did not want people to frame the images themselves, maybe totally ruining them with the wrong frame. I chose a wooden frame but I did not like it. Then I decorated it over and over with Enzian, Edelweiss and Roses of the Alps. I digitally enhanced the colours to the maximum and all of a sudden I stood before my own star gate... leading the viewer into a magical, almost surreal dreamland, where everything was possible. It is still Germany, but the grass is greener, the sky is bluer, the apples are red and ripe, the girls have rosy cheeks and their red lips smile to a

handsome, strong, loving protector, surrounded by a blooming, majestic landscape untouched by industry, pollution or global warming. As a dia-sec (Photo behind Acryl on Aluminium) the viewer sees his own reflection in the middle of all this.

I feel a kind of subtle irony behind the perfection of the German dreamland. Was it by chance or was it your intention that the photos have such an effect? Obviously I digitally overdraw my images in colour, content, and message. It is no coincidence that in size and style

they look like movie posters. Everybody will say, "but reality is different", so he will promptly start reflecting about the real world. I think this is a much better and cleverer way to make people aware of things, than showing them again pollution, poverty, epidemics or war scenes. Sad enough to say those images hardly touch us any more. So, like I said, I shock viewers with beauty. After all, I show real people in real sceneries, and it is up to us to make the grass greener again. And I am very optimistic about it. Where there is no hope there is no future!

I am interested in whether you would make such a series about Hungary as well? If yes, what are the themes you would choose?

I think this is a wonderful, brilliant, challenging idea (and I only wish we could find a sponsor for that)! Again, being both German and Hungarian, I feel I have a view of Hungary from inside and outside, although my inside view is rather an emotional one. I remember my first visit to Hungary in the eighties. I saw a country of great heritage! But what struck me most of all, was the

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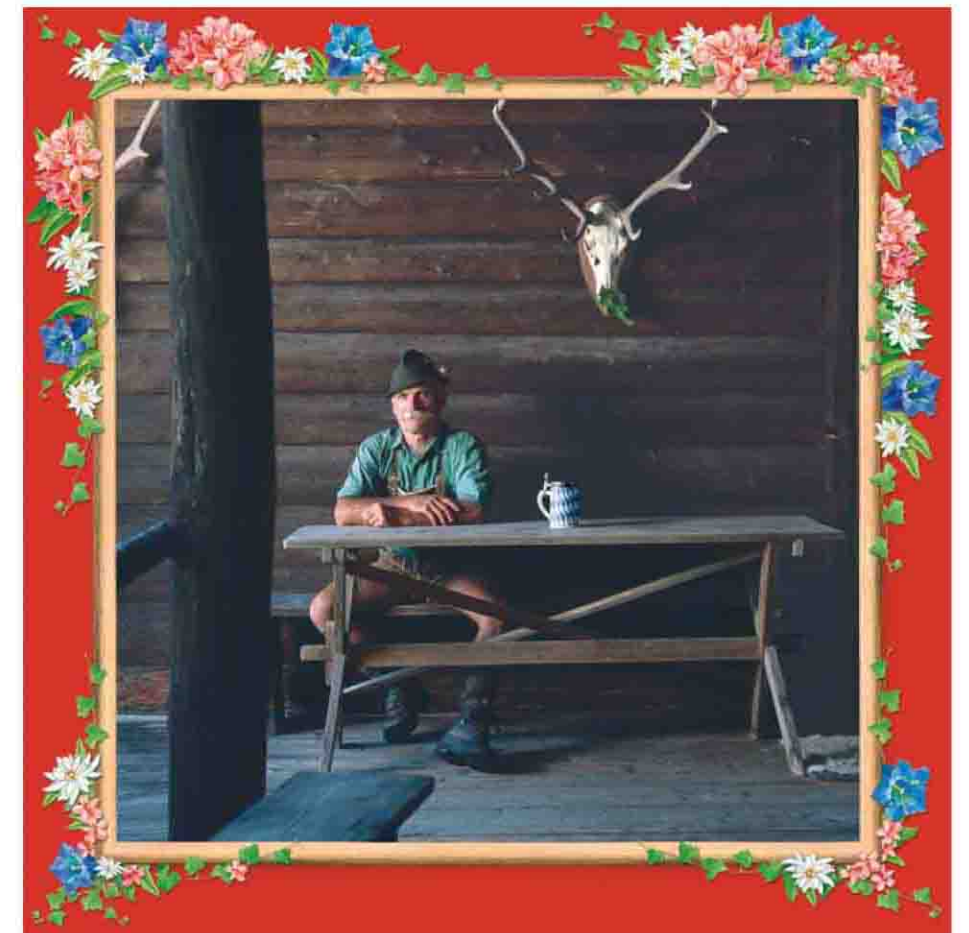
temperamental delight in life, sensuality and friendliness of people. Yes, they had sometimes nothing, but they were willing to share everything. I encountered such kindness and I saw they could find happiness in little things. Women were elegant and men were charming (gallant). For the first time in my life a man kissed my hand greeting me. I will





never forget it! Or the old woman on the street giving me flowers and refusing to take money. (Or my aunt cooking for me the best meal I ever had, or my grandmother spending all her money to buy me a small Herend porcelain I will cherish forever, or seeing my mother cry when the violin started to play...)

More than twenty years later I miss that feeling in Hungary. Yes, the buildings are beautifully restored, you see all kinds of European cars in the streets of Budapest, you can buy everything you want, but I feel Hungarian soul disappeared behind world brands and international commerce. I am not saying this is wrong or this isn't the case in many countries of the world, I just wish to find again the roots of Hungary, the traditions, so that we foreigners can experience all this not only as a tourist show. And I wish of course for all Hungarians, especially young people, to discover their traditions again. You have so much to offer! We can love Hungary for many reasons: its characteristics, people, products, landscapes, buildings, mu-



sic and feasts. If I think about a photo journey in Hungary, first the Danube, the villages with a single church and thatched peasant houses, the joyful dancing people in colourfully embroidered national costumes, the flower gardens of the houses, the geese, the shepherds in long coats, Piroshka and the paprika, kolbász, the wine and bacon, the horses on the puszta and the loyal hussars in their beautiful uniforms come to my mind.

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