

SONGLINES

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Márta Sebestyén I Can See the Gates of Heaven

World Village 450009

Full Price (53 mins)



Big talent makes a welcome return – loud and clear



Márta Sebestyén is foremost amongst Hungary's traditional vocalists. She came to international fame thanks to her recordings

with the band Muzsikás, released on Joe Boyd's Hannibal Records in the late 80s and 90s. No longer working with Muzsikás, I think this is the first album from Sebestyén since *Live at the Liszt Academy* in 2004.

It's a personal selection of songs loosely linked by a religious theme, accompanied by two very accomplished musicians. Mátyás Bolya plays *koboz* (lute) and zithers, while Balázs Szokolay Dongó plays all manner of winds – shepherd's flutes, deep reedy *tárogató* and bagpipes. Many may miss the dense sawing string sound of Muzsikás' Transylvanian music, but there's something fresh and delicate about the music here.

The transparent arrangements let Sebestyén's voice sound crystal clear.

The first track features two songs from the Csángó Hungarians of Moldavia, which are long-time favourites of the singer. Many of these songs have particular meanings or associations for Sebestyén. It's typical that, playing a concert before Prince Charles and Queen Elizabeth II, she picked a song she heard in Moldavia about Hungary's first king, Stephen. I particularly like the 'Valiant Knights' group of songs, based around the theme of national liberation, and featuring the clarinet-like *tárogató*. There's a classical purity to the performances here and I miss the rough edges of the traditional folk repertoire, but I hope this marks a return for Sebestyén to the international scene.

Simon Broughton