

at the opera performances themselves, the auditorium was full. Perhaps opera has finally found a niche in Graubünden after all.

CHRIS WALTON

UKRAINE

Lviv

What links music history and the French Revolution? Some may think of the development of the guillotine: replacing a semicircular blade with a more efficient one shaped like a harpsichord plectrum was an innovation introduced by Tobias Schmidt, a harpsichord maker. In the era of mass terror this optimization was vital. Or some may point out that as a result of revolutionary events music came out of theatres, halls and salons into the streets, leading to the development of richer, louder sounds. In 1956 Francis Poulenc brought music and the Revolution together in his opera *Dialogues des Carmélites*, based on Georges Bernanos's play about the martyrs of Compiègne—a musical drama telling of human tragedy and of eternal, timeless concepts: sacrifice and faith, fear and violence, hope and salvation, and hope for salvation.

The story of the execution of 16 Carmelite nuns by French revolutionaries resonates with our present times, especially here in Ukraine. The forces of terror against the defenceless— isn't this the reality that Ukrainians face every day? Destruction of dissidents— isn't this what Russia has been inflicting upon Ukraine for years? Fear, a constant sense of danger, anxiety, horror—who in Ukraine hasn't experienced these? At the same time, the search for support, help for our neighbours, faithful service and sacrifice in the name of ideals— this is what we experience every day.

On June 16 LVIV OPERA took itself into the international arena by staging the first production in Ukraine of Poulenc's musical drama—a big step for the company, and for opera in

The first Ukrainian production of 'Dialogues des Carmélites' in Lviv



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Ukraine. The war will end and Lviv Opera will remain a company that looks towards Europe and invites comparison with other European houses, with its balance of national and world repertoire.

An important factor in the great success of the production was the way in which Vasyl Vovkun's stage direction updated it in the context of modern Ukrainian reality. His staging not only drew parallels between the events of the late 18th century and the first decades of the 21st; it also had a philosophical dimension, portraying the idea that God ultimately accepts sacrifice and bestows favour upon the believer. In his set designs, based on a palette of black, white and red, Mykola Molchan limited himself to ascetic symbols and hints, enhanced by accents in the lighting (by Oleksandr Mezentsev).

Lviv Opera now boasts a fantastic ensemble of soloists, and this cast handled this opera's particular demands well. It included Marianna Tsvetinska (Blanche), Liubov Kachala (Mère Marie), Anastasiia Polishchuk (Madame de Croissy), Kateryna Mykolaiko (Madame Lidoine), Natalia Stepanyak (Soeur Constance), Roman Trokhymuk (Chaplain), Yurii Shevchuk (Marquis de la Force) and Maksym Vorochek (Chevalier de la Force). The orchestra, too, deserves the highest praise. The sarabande rhythms that permeate Poulenc's score were vividly highlighted by the conductor Ivan Cherednichenko, adding distinctive colours to the palette of the performance. The final scene was well done, an apt culmination to a production evoking a sense of timeless monumentality—a feeling further emphasized by the arrangement of the final, multi-figure sculpture composition: Christ, who turned his face to us, and a line of martyrs who did not betray their belief.

YURII CHEKAN