

April 23, 2020 – Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*

One of the twentieth century's most powerful, important and emotionally challenging operas, Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* (*Dialogues of the Carmelites*) is featured on this week's WCPE Opera House. Based on a play by Georges Bernanos, it was premiered in 1957 at La Scala in Milan.

Set against the terrifying backdrop of the French Revolution in Compiègne and Paris, the opera tells the story of a young noblewoman who becomes a nun, against the wishes of her father, the Marquis (bass-baritone **José Van Dam**), and brother, the Chevalier (tenor **Jean Luc Viala**). Blanche de la Force (soprano **Catherine Dubosc**) is deeply afraid of the terror of the world in which she finds herself and joins a Carmelite convent in an attempt to find refuge where she can live and work without fear. Now known as Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ, she is horrified when the simple nun Sister Constance (soprano **Brigitte Fournier**) tells her of her premonition that the two of them will die together. Her fears are aggravated by the anguish of the dying Prioress, Madame de Croissy (mezzo-soprano **Rita Gorr**). The convent is attacked by a mob, and the sisters, now led by Madame Lidoine (soprano **Rachal Yakar**), decide to accept martyrdom. Sister Blanche flees but, as the nuns go serenely to the guillotine, she emerges from the crowd and joins them in one of the most emotionally powerful scenes in all musical theater.

Kent Nagano conducts the Orchestra and Chorus of the Lyon Opera in this 1993 recording.

From a 2004 La Scala production, here's the final, horrifying scene:
<https://youtu.be/Cd9EFJaURml>.

On Saturday, April 25th at 1:00 p.m., we're presenting a rebroadcast of the Metropolitan Opera's January 30, 2016 performance of Giacomo Puccini's final, unfinished opera, *Turandot*. **Nina Stemme** portrays the icy Chinese princess and **Marco Berti** is Calaf, the unknown prince who risks his life for her love. **Anita Hartig** is Liù, who commits suicide rather than reveal Calaf's identity, and **Alexander Tsymbalyuk** is the elderly Timur. **Paolo Carignani** conducts.

Be sure to join us next Thursday evening, April 30th, for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*). Belmonte (**Peter Schreier**) rescues Konstanze (**Arleen Auger**), Blondchen (**Reri Grist**), and Pedrillo (**Harald Neukirch**) from a Turkish harem despite roadblocks placed by Osmin (**Kurt Moll**). **Karl Böhm** conducts this 1973 Deutsche Grammophon recording.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed online world-wide at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, and you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House