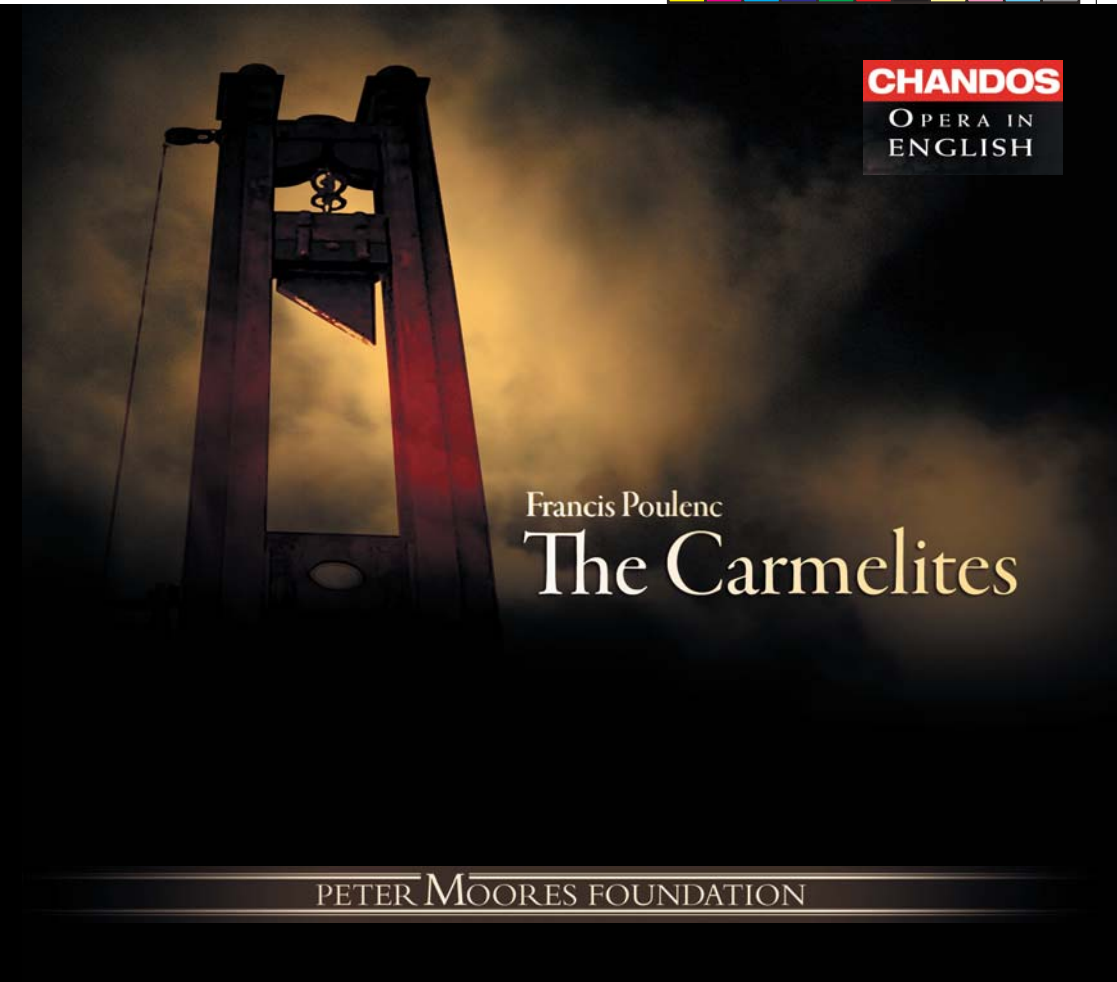


CHAN 3134(2)



CHANDOS
OPERA IN
ENGLISH

Francis Poulenc
The Carmelites

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION



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Francis Poulenc

Francis Poulenc
The Carmelites





Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

The Carmelites

Opera in three acts

Libretto by the composer after Georges Bernanos' play *Dialogues des Carmélites*,
revised English version by Joseph Machlis

Marquis de la Force Ashley Holland *baritone*
Blanche de la Force, his daughter Catrin Wyn-Davies *soprano*
Chevalier de la Force, his son Peter Wedd *tenor*
Thierry, a valet Gary Coward *baritone*
Off-stage voice Natalie Herman *soprano*

Madame de Croissy, Prioress Felicity Palmer *mezzo-soprano*
Mother Marie of the Incarnation, assistant Prioress Josephine Barstow *soprano*
Madame Lidoine, the new Prioress Orla Boylan *soprano*
Sister Constance of Saint-Denis, a young nun Sarah Tynan *soprano*
Mother Jeanne of the Child Jesus Jane Powell *mezzo-soprano*
Sister Mathilde Anne Marie Gibbons *mezzo-soprano*
Chaplain Ryland Davies *tenor*
Monsieur Javelinot, a physician William Berger *baritone*



First Commissioner James Edwards *tenor*
Second Commissioner Roland Wood *baritone*
First Officer Toby Stafford-Allen *baritone*
Gaoler David Stephenson *baritone*

11 Carmelite nuns:

Jane Read, Deborah Davison, Judith Douglas, Lyn Cook, Gloria Crane, Moira Harris, Suzanne Joyce,
Sara McGuinness, Christine Dix, Claire Mitcher, Melodie Waddingham

English National Opera Chorus

Charles Kraus *chorus master*

English National Opera Orchestra

Martin Fitzpatrick *assistant conductor*

Paul Daniel



COMPACT DISC ONE

Time Page

Act I

Scene 1

- | | | | |
|-----|--|------|----------|
| [1] | ‘Where is Blanche?’
<i>Chevalier de la Force, Marquis de la Force</i> | 7:23 | [p. 98] |
| [2] | ‘Blanche, your poor brother was so very impatient’
<i>Marquis, Blanche de la Force, Chevalier</i> | 3:31 | [p. 100] |
| [3] | ‘Her poor imagination always flies from one extreme to another’
<i>Marquis, Chevalier, Blanche, Thierry</i> | 1:43 | [p. 101] |
| [4] | ‘Dear father, there is no incident so small or unimportant’
<i>Blanche, Marquis</i> | 4:05 | [p. 101] |

Scene 2

- | | | | |
|-----|--|------|----------|
| [5] | Prelude | 1:42 | [p. 102] |
| [6] | ‘Do not believe this comfortable chair is a privilege’ | 3:08 | [p. 102] |
| [7] | ‘What has driven you here?’ | 1:31 | [p. 103] |
| [8] | ‘My daughter, the outside world often questions’
<i>Madame de Croissy (Prioress), Blanche</i> | 5:36 | [p. 103] |

Scene 3

- | | | | |
|------|---|------|----------|
| [9] | Prelude | 2:37 | [p. 104] |
| [10] | ‘Oh no, not more beans!’
<i>Constance, Blanche</i> | 7:09 | [p. 104] |

Time Page

Scene 4

- | | | | |
|------|---|------|----------|
| [11] | Prelude | 2:11 | [p. 107] |
| [12] | ‘Would you be so kind as to raise my pillow’
<i>Prioress, Mother Marie</i> | 8:22 | [p. 107] |
| [13] | ‘You may get up my child’
<i>Prioress, Blanche, Monsieur Javelinot</i> | 5:09 | [p. 108] |
| [14] | ‘Monsieur Javelinot, you must know it’s customary’
<i>Prioress, Mother Marie</i> | 3:42 | [p. 109] |
| [15] | ‘Please inform your sisters’
<i>Mother Marie, Prioress, Blanche</i> | 3:08 | [p. 110] |

Act II

Scene 1

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|----------|
| [16] | ‘Qui Lazarum resuscitasti a monumento foetidum’
<i>Constance, Blanche</i> | 2:20 | [p. 111] |
| [17] | ‘What are you doing?’
<i>Mother Marie, Blanche</i> | 2:52 | [p. 111] |

Interlude

- | | | | |
|------|---|------|----------|
| [18] | ‘Dear Sister, I’m afraid that our cross’
<i>Constance, Blanche</i> | 3:55 | [p. 112] |
|------|---|------|----------|



Time Page

Scene 2

- [19] 'My dear daughters, I don't need to remind you'
Madame Lidoine (the new Prioress), Mother Marie 5:41 [p. 113]
- [20] 'Ave Maria'
Mother Marie, Carmelites, Prioress 1:45 [p. 114]

Interlude

- [21] 'What is going on?'
Prioress, Constance, Mother Marie 2:09 [p. 114]

TT 79:50

COMPACT DISC TWO

Scene 3

- [1] Prelude 1:45 [p. 115]
- [2] 'Blanche, why do you behave like this?'
Chevalier, Blanche 7:22 [p. 115]
- [3] 'Compose yourself, Sister Blanche'
Mother Marie, Blanche 1:50 [p. 117]

Scene 4

- [4] 'My faithful daughters, I know that some among you'
Chaplain, Carmelites 3:28 [p. 117]

Time Page

- [5] 'But what will become of you?'
Blanche, Chaplain, Constance, Sister Mathilde, Prioress, Mother Marie 2:51 [p. 118]
- [6] 'Someone is ringing the bell'
Constance, Sister Mathilde, Crowd, Chaplain, Carmelites 1:09 [p. 119]
- [7] 'Open the door, open the door now!'
Voice, Mother Marie, First Commissioner, Second Commissioner 4:09 [p. 120]
- [8] 'My sisters, our Reverend Mother is coming'
Mother Jeanne, Blanche, Mother Marie, Crowd 1:54 [p. 121]

Act III

Scene 1

- [9] 'Father, speak to them'
Mother Marie, Chaplain, Mother Jeanne, Sister Mathilde 4:22 [p. 122]
- [10] 'There is only one vote against. That is enough'
Mother Marie, Sister Mathilde, Constance 3:13 [p. 123]

Interlude

- [11] 'Fellow citizens, we congratulate you'
Officer 2:22 [p.124]
- [12] 'Sister Gerald, we have to warn the priest'
Prioress, Mother Marie 1:46 [p. 124]



	Time	Page
Scene 2		
13	1:53	[p. 124]
14	5:31	[p. 124]
		<i>Blanche, Mother Marie, Woman's voice</i>
Scene 3		
15	4:09	[p. 126]
		<i>Prioress, Mother Jeanne</i>
16	0:36	[p. 127]
		<i>Constance, Prioress, Sister Mathilde</i>
17	2:27	[p. 127]
		<i>Gaoler</i>
18	2:07	[p. 127]
		<i>Prioress</i>
Interlude		
19	1:56	[p. 128]
		<i>Chaplain, Mother Marie</i>
Scene 4		
20	2:41	[p. 129]
21	6:45	[p. 129]
		<i>Prioress, Mother Jeanne, Sister Mathilde, Constance, Carmelites, Blanche</i>

TT 64:25



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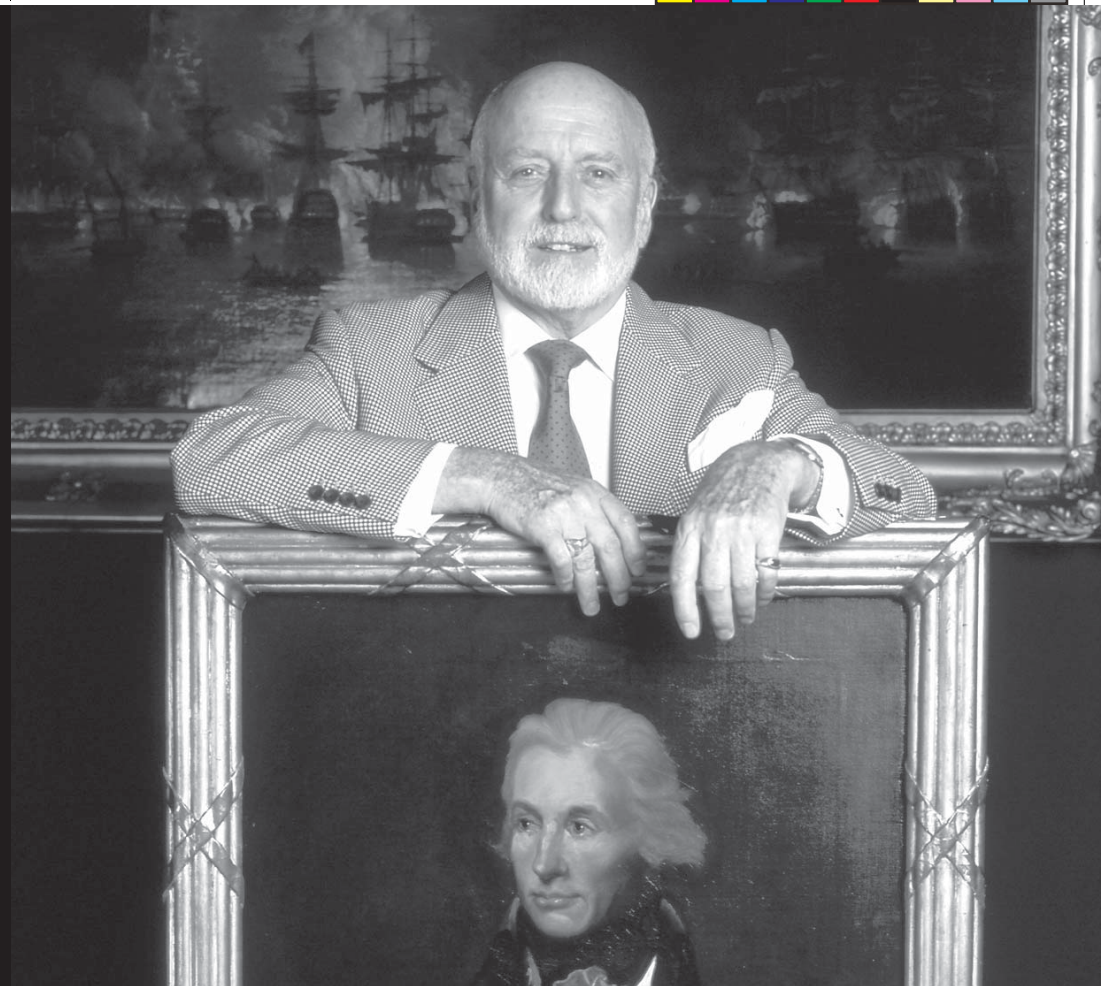
Peter Wedd as the Chevalier de la Force and Catrin Wyn-Davies as Blanche de la Force
in English National Opera's production of *The Carmelites*

Poulenc's depiction of human terror and courage in the face of death is here delivered by conductor Paul Daniel and a magnificent cast, recorded after unforgettable performances at English National Opera. We are proud to be bringing this powerful work to an even wider audience through our Opera in English catalogue.

Peter Moores

September 2006

Sir Peter Moores with a portrait of Admiral Lord Nelson
by Lemuel Francis Abbott, acquired for Compton Verney
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Poulenc: The Carmelites

Poulenc's only serious opera was premiered at La Scala, Milan on 26 January 1957 (sung in Italian); the French premiere was given at the Paris Opéra on 21 June of the same year. Behind these bald statistics, as often with opera, lies a multitude of hopes, problems, desires and disasters, leading finally to what, nearly fifty years on, we may fairly call a triumph.

Francis Poulenc was born in Paris in 1899, and so grew up in the heady days when Debussy and Ravel were challenging Germany's musical leadership. His family was well-off and his mother a talented pianist, while one regular visitor was the great French lyric tenor Edmond Clément, renowned for his Don José in *Carmen* and especially his Des Grieux in Massenet's *Manon*. Poulenc's father insisted on him receiving a full traditional education, and so he emerged at the end of the First World War determined to be a composer, but with no formal musical training behind him. He took private lessons with Charles Koechlin and was obviously a very quick learner, but the charge of being an amateur among professionals took a long time to wear

off, and we may even wonder whether it was the inner strength he drew from combating this charge, and remaining his own man, that allowed him to envisage and carry through this unlikely operatic subject.

Although the world premiere of *The Carmelites* was to take place at La Scala, with further guaranteed performances in Naples, Buenos Aires, London and Berlin, Poulenc, as a Parisian writing a serious French opera, naturally had Paris and specifically the Paris Opéra in his sights. And here was the first element of unlikelihood. When Charles Garnier built the Opéra in the 1860s and 70s, he spoke of the 'impression morale' that should strike the spectators: 'they feel instinctively that a certain dignity is called for and that it would be inappropriate to indulge in too much informality.' This may have been all very well in the late-nineteenth century, but in the flashier 1920s the Opéra stuck out like a sore thumb amid the junketings of the group Les Six, of which the young Poulenc was one of the principal ornaments. The list of operas by living French composers given French premieres in the house and still in the

repertory in the twenty-first century makes for melancholy reading. Before *The Carmelites* you have to go back to Massenet's *Thaïs...* in 1894! So in 1957 Poulenc may have been showing solidarity with Garnier's vision, but the risk of failure was high.

A second unlikely element was Poulenc himself. He first hit the headlines as a nineteen-year-old in 1918 with his little piano pieces, the *Trois mouvements perpétuels*, and further jokey works through the 1920s gave him a reputation as a *farceur* – he was known to English critics as 'le leg-Poulenc' – and this reputation was enhanced by his brilliant comic opera *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, premiered at the more intimate Opéra-Comique in Paris in 1947. So the idea that he was engaged on a serious, full-length opera involving nuns and executions no doubt surprised many. There was also the purely technical question as to whether he could manage the extended developments of material that opera had traditionally demanded. Even in such a recent (and serious) work as the *Stabat mater* of 1953, his tendency on reaching a climax is not to wind down gradually, but simply to stop and then start again.

A third problem was the story's basis in religion. The late nineteenth century had seen a

vigorous campaign of secularisation in France, culminating in 1905 in the official separation of Church and State. When it came to putting religious subjects on the operatic stage, this separation helped nobody: secularists could complain that the Opéra should be a place where they could get away from religion – a place for love stories and tales of derring-do within lavish spectacle – and believers could complain that religious subjects were necessarily tarnished in such a milieu (as happened in many theatres over *Parsifal*; and since *Thaïs* has been mentioned, there are grounds for saying that there the religious aspect only serves to make the sexual excitement more interesting). One way and another Poulenc's opera therefore risked alienating a fair proportion of the house's traditional middle-class audience.

Against these problems, there were at least two highly positive factors to take into account, quite apart from Poulenc's genius and the fact that, as well as the *jeux d'esprit*, he had also composed works of deep religious feeling, such as the *Litanies à la Vierge noire*, the *Stabat mater* and a number of motets. The first of these factors was his own absorption in the story, to a level that maybe surprised even him. In letters and other accounts he gives a graphic account of this involvement.



George Bernanos wrote the play, based on a novel by Gertrude von Le Fort, intending it for a film that was never produced. After his death his executor found it among his papers and put it on in Zurich in 1951. It had 300 consecutive performances in Paris in 1952, which presumably was when Poulenc saw two performances, as well as reading the play on his own. That same year Poulenc was asked by the director of the Ricordi publishing house, Guido Valcarengi, to write a ballet for La Scala and initially he was keen on the idea and began thinking of a saint whose life might serve as a subject. But by March 1953, when he was on tour in Italy with the cellist Pierre Fournier, he had changed his mind and proposed instead an opera on a mystical subject. It was Valcarengi who suggested the Bernanos play. Poulenc takes up the story:

'I had decided to think about the idea later, when I got back to Paris, but the next day, right in the middle of a Rome bookshop window, I saw the *Dialogues*, which seemed to be lying in wait for me. I bought the book and decided to reread it. So I sat down outside the café *Le tre scalini* on the Piazza Navona. It was ten o'clock in the morning. At midday I was still there. At two o'clock I sent a telegram to M Valcarengi, the true begetter of the project,

to say that I would write the *Dialogues*.' A few days later he wrote to a friend: 'I think the subject's made for me. Provided I don't make a mess of it... I prayed to my patron saint Francis in Assisi the day before yesterday.'

By the end of August Poulenc, back at his country house in the Touraine, was hard at work. He wrote to his friend, the singer Pierre Bernac: 'I've begun the Carmelites and have given up sleeping (literally). I've got the tone of the great scene between the Prioress and Blanche [Act I, scene 2], which has an excellent shape: calm at the start, fierce in the middle (rules of the Order), then calm again at the end. It is only the music's absolute identification with the Bernanos *spirit* that can make this work of mine a success. Very light orchestration to allow the words to come through.'

The concern not to 'make a mess of it', to catch 'the Bernanos spirit', not to mention the not sleeping, all show that Poulenc was well aware of the difficulty of the task he had set himself. More than that, he was aware that in other ways he was sharing the suffering of the nuns of Compiègne. His lover Lucien Roubert was ill with heart problems and died in October 1955, just as Poulenc was finishing the fair copy of the vocal score. That

August Poulenc had written to Bernac: 'I have entrusted him to the 16 blessed Carmelites, that they may watch over his death, since he has been so closely bound up with their story. Indeed I began the work, near to him and happy, at Lyon in August 1953. After the terrible torment you know about, I have just completed it near to him, in the last days of his earthly life.' And he then quotes crucial lines from Bernanos's text: 'We do not die for ourselves alone, but we die for each other, or probably even instead of each other. Who knows?'

It is in these lines, sung by Sister Constance at the end of the first interlude in Act II after she and Sister Blanche have been discussing the dreadful death of the First Prioress, that Bernanos introduces the spiritual concept of the transference of grace: specifically here, that the Prioress may have died a terrible death in order to give an easy death to someone else. This is an extension by Bernanos of the Catholic doctrine according to which the saints form a spiritual community in which each member may intercede for the others, and even for sinners. Prayers for the dead belong to a parallel system of belief, as does the value of religious contemplatives who devote their life to prayer. In the opera text no hint is given as

to whose death may be eased by the Prioress's own; but at Constance's words 'I would say there might be someone when she comes to die...' Poulenc quotes Blanche's choral theme (borrowed from the first and last of his piano *Nocturnes*). In Poulenc's own case, transference was not effective. Roubert's death of heart problems did not prevent Poulenc's from the same cause a few years later.

He dealt with the danger of monotony posed by the large predominance of female voices by taking great care over vocal ranges, as his letters testify. In January 1954 he told Bernac: 'Without upsetting the music I've rewritten the role of Constance, which was too low: now for the most part it lies between F [above middle C] and A [above the treble staff].' Of the original play, one critic remarked that 'the apparent theatrical defect of the work – a succession of scenes without any psychological progression – was turned into a virtue, so that the play came to have the suppleness of life itself with the supreme reality visible behind each episode, but never artificially imposed.' Poulenc likewise imposes nothing. There are dissonant moments, certainly, but all deriving from the text; which Bernanos had cut drastically from the film scenario presented to him,



and which Poulenc then cut still further. It has been well noticed that he did not follow Debussy's style of word setting (more recently Henri Dutilleux has claimed that this style, though masterly in itself, has proved a dead end for opera composers); instead he went back to Massenet, no doubt with the elegant voice of Edmond Clément in his ears, and to what has been called Massenet's 'melodisation' of the French language. As for the orchestral accompaniments (and they are mostly accompaniments), the regularly pulsing chords hark back to German lieder and perhaps most of all to Schumann, a composer his mother loved to play and whom the very young Poulenc would listen to from underneath the piano.

The second of the positive factors leading to the opera's success was simply its timing. A story of confrontation with fear and death and of the destruction of a settled way of life by revolutionary forces inevitably struck home to European audiences for whom the Second World War was an all-too-vivid memory. And most of all for the French, whose experiences during the Occupation had, perhaps most frighteningly of all, demonstrated the depths to which some of their own community could sink when faced with torture and execution – a

trauma from which that nation has perhaps still not fully recovered sixty years later. Blanche's good death, whether or not made possible by the Prioress's bad one, presents an image of France as she liked to see herself.

The writer Henri de Montherlant admired Bernanos's play for its 'combination of the simple and the extraordinary'. Poulenc's opera too is simple and extraordinary – extraordinarily simple, and simply extraordinary.

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Synopsis

The setting is mainly the Carmelite convent at Compiègne, and later Paris during the French Revolution and the subsequent Terror, 1789–94.

COMPACT DISC ONE

Act I

Scene 1 *The library of the Marquis de la Force*

[1] The Chevalier de la Force bursts in to his father's library, anxious about the whereabouts of his sister, Blanche. There are mobs outside and reports that Blanche's carriage has been surrounded. [2] Blanche arrives, unharmed but distressed by her experience. [3] On her way

to bed she is frightened by a shadow on the wall and returns to her father and brother, [4] announcing her intention to become a nun.

Scene 2 *The parlour of the Carmelite convent*

[5] Prelude. [6] – [7] Some weeks later the elderly Prioress, Mme de Croissy, questions Blanche about her vocation. [8] She warns her that the convent cannot protect her from the outside world; it is a house of prayer. Blanche's resolve remains unshaken by this interview and she announces the Carmelite name she has chosen: Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ.

Scene 3 *Inside the convent*

[9] Prelude. [10] Blanche has entered the convent as a novice. She and another young nun, Sister Constance of Saint-Denis, are taking in food. Constance chatters on about her happy early life in her Bretagne village. Blanche rebukes such cheerful good humour at a time when the Prioress is dying. Constance suggests that they pray, offering their own lives in exchange for their Prioress's. Blanche is appalled, but Constance declares that she has always felt she would die young and that when she first met Blanche she had a premonition they would die together on the same day.

Scene 4 *The infirmary*

[11] Prelude. [12] The Prioress lies on her deathbed, attended by Mother Marie. For the Prioress, God has become a shadow; all her previous contemplation of death is of no use to her. She has great concern for Blanche and entrusts her to the care of Mother Marie. [13] Blanche enters the sickroom and the Prioress tenderly bids farewell to her youngest and thus most beloved daughter. Mother Marie returns with the doctor who refuses the Prioress further sedatives. [14] – [15] As her death agony increases the Prioress becomes delirious, cries out against God and has a vision of the convent chapel desecrated. Blanche returns to the room to witness the Prioress dying in terror.

Act II

Scene 1 *The chapel, at night*

[16] Blanche and Constance keep vigil over the body of the Prioress. Their watch ends and Constance goes to fetch the sisters who are to replace them. Left alone, Blanche is terrified and wishes to leave. [17] Mother Marie intercepts her and conducts her to her cell.

Interlude *The garden*

[18] Blanche and Constance have been making



a cross of flowers for the Prioress's grave. Constance suggests that we die not for ourselves but for others, that perhaps the Prioress has died in distress and fear so that someone else may face an easier death.

Scene 2 *The chapter room*

[19] The new Prioress, Mme Lidoine, arrives and addresses the Carmelites. She warns them that their days of peaceful security are over and that the future will be full of trials. She reminds them their most important duty is prayer, and that they should not aspire to martyrdom. [20] Mother Marie leads them in the *Ave Maria*.

Interlude *A room in the convent*

[21] The Prioress, Mother Marie and Constance rush in as the doorbell sounds. The Revolution is gathering momentum and the Chevalier de la Force has decided to leave France and wishes to see Blanche. The Prioress says brother and sister may meet, in the presence of Mother Marie.

COMPACT DISC TWO

Scene 3 *The parlour*

[1] Prelude. [2] The Chevalier tries to persuade Blanche to leave the convent. Their father feels

that it is no longer a safe place for her; as an aristocrat and a nun she is doubly in danger of the approaching Terror. The Chevalier believes it is fear – or the fear of fear – that keeps her in the convent. Blanche declares herself dependent on God's will and reiterates her intention to remain. After the Chevalier leaves, Blanche nearly collapses. [3] Mother Marie urges her to have courage.

Scene 4 *The sacristy*

[4] The Father Confessor of the convent leads the sisters in prayer. [5] He says his farewell, having been forced to go into hiding. Mother Marie declares that to preserve the Church the Carmelites have only to offer their lives. But the Prioress corrects her: it is not for the sisters to decide whether or not they are to become martyrs.

[6] The Father Confessor rushes back, seeking refuge from the mob and the soldiers outside the convent. [7] The Commissioners enter and announce that the nuns are to be expelled from the convent. [8] The Prioress leaves for Paris. Seeing Blanche's terror, Mother Jeanne gives her a small statue of the infant Jesus, but, startled by the baying of the mob, she drops the figure, breaking it.

Act III

Scene 1 *The chapel*

[9] The chapel has been desecrated. In the absence of the Prioress, Mother Marie is responsible for the community, and she proposes they take the vow of martyrdom. [10] In a secret vote there is one dissenter: although Blanche is suspected, Constance announces it was she who voted against and asks to change her mind. The sisters take the vow. Blanche's courage fails her and she flees.

Interlude *A street outside the convent*

[11] The Prioress has returned from Paris. An Officer addresses the Carmelites: their community is outlawed and he welcomes them as new citizens of the Republic. [12] The Prioress sends a warning to the priest that it will be too dangerous to say Mass. Mother Marie questions if it is possible to reconcile such caution with their vow of martyrdom.

Scene 2 *The library of the Marquis de la Force*

[13] Prelude. [14] Blanche's father has been guillotined and she has returned to his house as a serving maid. Mother Marie arrives to take her back to the convent, but Blanche is

too afraid to leave. Mother Marie gives her an address where she would be safe.

Scene 3 *The Conciergerie*

[15] The Carmelites have been arrested and are imprisoned in the Conciergerie. The Prioress takes the vow of martyrdom. [16] Constance has dreamt that the absent Blanche will return to her sisters. [17] – [18] The gaoler delivers the judgement of the Revolutionary Tribunal: the Carmelites are condemned to death.

Interlude *A street near the Bastille*

[19] Mother Marie learns from the Father Confessor of the Carmelites' death sentence and resolves to rejoin her sisters. The priest points out that God may have another destiny for her.

Scene 4 *Place de la Révolution, 17 July 1794*

[20] Prelude. [21] The Carmelites are brought to the place of execution, watched by a large crowd. Led by the Prioress, they mount the scaffold one by one, singing the *Salve Regina*. Constance is the last to ascend. As she does so, Blanche steps from the crowd to join her friend, singing alone until she, too, is guillotined.



Ashley Holland (Marquis de la Force) studied at Warwick University and as a postgraduate at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he was a Peter Moores Scholar. He is establishing himself as

one of the most sought-after young baritones for nineteenth-century Italian repertory on both sides of the Atlantic. Following his highly successful debut as Don Pedro in Donizetti's *Maria Padilla* with Minnesota Opera, he was immediately invited back for the role of Orazio in their new production of Mercadante's *Orazi e Curiazi*.

He was for several seasons a principal baritone at English National Opera, where his roles included Zurga (*The Pearl Fishers*), Sharpless (*Madam Butterfly*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Cecil (*Maria Stuarda*), Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*), Lescaut (*Manon*), Ottakar (*Der Freischütz*), Marcello (*La Bohème*), Escamillo (*Carmen*), Ford (*Falstaff*), and Don Carlo (*Ernani*). He also sang the baritone role in English National Opera's co-production with the Mark Morris

Dance Group of Handel's *L'allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato*.

Other engagements include performances for Opera North, The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Chicago Lyric Opera, the Opéra de Paris-Bastille, Cincinnati Opera, Calgary Opera, and in Dresden. His recordings include Belcore (*The Elixir of Love*) and Ford (*Falstaff*) with Paul Daniel, both as part of Chandos' Opera in English series.

Sasha Gusev



Welsh soprano **Catrin Wyn-Davies** (Blanche de la Force) received a degree in Drama and Theatre Studies at Royal Holloway College before beginning her singing training at the Guildhall School

of Music in 1990. Whilst at college she won many prizes including the 1993 Richard Tauber prize and in 1994 the Decca prize at the Kathleen Ferrier Awards.

In 1994 she became a principal with Welsh National Opera. Her roles there have included Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*), Héro (*Béatrice*

et Bénédicte), Ilia (*Idomeneo*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Zerlina and Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Blanche (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) and the title role in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

Other notable appearances have included Zerlina at the Aix-en-Provence Festival; Ilia, Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) and Poppea for The Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich; Donna Elvira, Poppea and Alice Ford (*Falstaff*) for the Deutsche Oper am Rhein; and Mélisande in the Opéra du Rhin's production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in Strasbourg. In the USA she has performed with Santa Fe Opera as Susanna, and for San Francisco Opera in the role of Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*).

In the UK Catrin Wyn-Davies has appeared as Blanche, Ginevra (*Ariodante*) and Tatyana (*Eugene Onegin*) with English National Opera; and Valencienne (*The Merry Widow*) and First Flower Maiden (*Parsifal*) at the Royal Opera House. She sang the role of Miss Jessel in the BBC film of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* directed by Katie Mitchell and conducted by Richard Hickox. On the concert platform she has appeared throughout Europe with conductors including Christoph von Dohnányi, Richard Hickox, Paul McCreech, René Jacobs, Trevor Pinnock and Pierre Boulez.



Catrin Wyn-Davies has recorded sacred music by Vivaldi with the King's Consort under Robert King, and further releases include Weill's *Der Silbersee* with Markus Stenz, and a collection of Beethoven folk-song settings with Malcolm Martineau.

Rachel Lum



Peter Wedd (Chevalier de la Force) studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with William McAlpine and subsequently at the National Opera Studio where he was supported by the Peter Moores Foundation.

He was a Company Principal at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden from 1999 to 2001 and is a regular guest artist for Welsh National Opera. At Welsh National Opera his roles have included Don José (*Carmen*), Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) Alfredo (*La traviata*) and Lača (*Jenůfa*).

Other appearances in the UK and Ireland have included Federico (*L'Arlesiana*) and Pluto (*Orphée aux enfers*) for Opera Holland Park, at the Wexford Festival, Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) at London's Royal Albert Hall,



Tamino for Glyndebourne On Tour, Lensky (*Eugene Onegin*) for Opera Holland Park and, Chevalier de la Force (*The Carmelites*) with the English National Opera. Outside the UK Peter Wedd has sung for European Chamber Opera and the Singapore Lyric Theatre.

Christian Steiner



Felicity Palmer (Madame de Croissy) is one of the most versatile performing artists singing today, equally at home in music as diverse as Handel, Wagner and Berio.

At the Metropolitan Opera, New York, she has sung Fricka and Waltraute in *Ring* cycles, the Countess (*Pique dame*), Geneviève (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) and Mme de Croissy (*Dialogues des Carmélites*). At La Scala, Milan she has sung Mme de Croissy and Klytemnestra (*Elektra*); in Chicago she has sung the Countess, Kabanicha (*Katya Kabanova*) and Madam Begbick (*The Rise and Fall of Mahagonny*); in San Francisco *Giulio Cesare*; in Munich, Eduige (*Rodelinda*) and Klytemnestra; in Berlin, La Zia Principessa (*Suor Angelica*) and Klytemnestra; for

Glyndebourne, Zita (*Gianni Schicchi*) and Mistress Quickly (*Falstaff*); at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, her roles have included Mrs Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*), Juno (*Semele*) and Klytemnestra, and in Paris she has sung Klytemnestra, Countess, Mme de Croissy, Zita, Madam Begbick and Maria Dmitrievna Ahkrossimova (*War and Peace*). She recently returned to English National Opera as Mme de Croissy, and Katisha (*The Mikado*).

She has long distinguished herself in concert performances including the BBC Symphony Orchestra and New York Philharmonic with Pierre Boulez, Sir Colin Davis and Gennady Rozhdestvensky; the English Chamber Orchestra with Sir Charles Mackerras; the London Symphony Orchestra with Michael Tilson Thomas; the Philharmonia and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestras with Giuseppe Sinopoli; the Concentus Musicus Wien with Nicolaus Harnoncourt; the Concertgebouw Orchestra with Edo De Waart; the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos and the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Sir Simon Rattle.

She has made many recordings, including Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* and Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi* with Pierre Boulez, vocal music by Benjamin Britten and two records of Victorian

and Edwardian songs with pianist John Constable. Felicity Palmer was made a CBE in November 1993.



Josephine Barstow (Mother Marie) began her career touring with Opera for All and then won a scholarship to study for one year at the London Opera Centre. She sang Euridice and Violetta for the Sadler's Wells

Opera Company and then began a three-year contract with the Welsh National Company. There her roles included the Countess (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Fiordiligi, Violetta, Mimi, Amelia (*Simon Boccanegra*) and Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*). After singing Violetta (*La traviata*) with English National Opera, she began a long and very rewarding relationship with that company. Notable roles there are Natasha (*War and Peace*), Salome, Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*), Leonora (*The Force of Destiny*), Leonore (*Fidelio*), Jeanne (*The Devils of Loudon*), Katarina (*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*), Tosca, Sieglinde, Senta, Emilia Marty (*The Makropulos Case*),

the Marschallin and Arabella. She has sung regularly at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in roles such as the young woman in Henze's *We come to the River*, Salome, Ellen Orford, Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Santuzza, Leonore, Alice, Lady Macbeth and the Countess (*The Queen of Spades*).

She has travelled the world singing a varied repertoire of Verdi, Richard Strauss, Puccini and Janáček among others and visiting such theatres as Paris, Munich, Vienna, Bayreuth, Berlin, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, South Africa, Japan and Australia.

Josephine Barstow has had a fruitful relationship with Opera North singing such roles as Tosca, Marie (*Wozzeck*), Aida, Medea, Lady Billows, and perhaps most notably, Gloriana, which was also filmed. Elsewhere, recent engagements include Kabanicha (*Katya Kabanova*) in San Diego, Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) in Antwerp and Oviedo, and Mother Marie (*The Carmelites*) at English National Opera. Recordings include Marie (*Wozzeck*) and the Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) as part of Chandos' Opera in English series, as well as *Un ballo in maschera*, *Gloriana*, *Albert Herring*, *Kiss me Kate*, *Oliver* and *Street Scene*.



Born in Ireland, **Orla Boylan** (Madame Lidoine) is a graduate of the D.I.T. College of Music in Dublin, where she studied singing with Mary Brennan. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the

Veronica Dunne Bursary, Ibla Grand Prize and the National Mozart Competition.

Recent highlights include Madame Lidoine (*The Carmelites*) with English National Opera; Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) with New York City Opera; Mahler's Second Symphony with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra under Paavo Järvi, and a recital at Harewood House in Leeds.

Orla Boylan's operatic roles include Jenůfa at Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Opéra de Lyon; her role-debut as Arabella for Garsington Opera; Female Chorus (*The Rape of Lucretia*) and Sieglinde with English National Opera; the Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*) with Angers Nantes Opera; Countess (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at New York City Opera; the title role in *Katya Kabanova* in her debut for Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Mařenka

(*The Bartered Bride*) for Glyndebourne Touring Opera; the title role in the first British staging of Strauss' *Die Liebe der Danae* for Garsington Opera; and Tatyana (*Eugene Onegin*) for the European Union Opera, also recorded on DVD.

Concert engagements include Mahler's *Das klagende Lied* with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra under Laurent Wagner; Verdi's Requiem at St Paul's Cathedral with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, a performance of Act III of *The Valkyrie* with English National Opera at the 2004 Glastonbury Festival, the premiere of Gerald Barry's *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, and her BBC Proms debut as Anna in Weill's *Street Scene* under Barry Wordsworth.



Sarah Tynan (Sister Constance) was born in London and studied at the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music (with Penelope Mackay). At the Royal Academy she was awarded the Queen's

Commendation for Excellence.

Since joining English National Opera her roles have included Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Papagena (*The Magic Flute*), Iphis (*Jephtah*), Atalanta (*Xerxes*), Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*) and Sister Constance (*The Carmelites*). Other operatic engagements include Tytania for La Monnaie Brussels; Bella (*The Midsummer Marriage*) for St Endellion Festival with Richard Hickox; Pretty Polly in Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* at the Teatro Nacional San João in Porto; the Governess in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* for a British Council tour of Russia; Elsie Maynard (*The Yeomen of the Guard*) and Gianetta (*The Gondoliers*) for Phoenix Opera; and Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for Opera Holland Park. Opera appearances at the Royal Academy of Music include the title role in *The Cunning Little Vixen* conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras, Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) conducted by Sir Colin Davis, Drusilla (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) and Feu/Rossignol (*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*).

Sarah Tynan's concert engagements include Eleanora in Salieri's *Prima la musica* and Mlle Silberklang in Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor* with the City of London Sinfonia under Richard Hickox, Mozart's *Requiem* under Sir Roger Norrington at the Spitalfields

Festival, Mahler's Symphony No. 2 with the Netherlands Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jaap van Zweden, *Messiah* with the Halle Orchestra and on a tour of China with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. She also sang the role of Barbarina in Chandos' Opera in English recording of *The Marriage of Figaro*.



Jane Powell (Sister Jeanne) studied at the Royal Academy of Music, and now studies with Lyn Cook. Operatic roles include Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Second Lady (*Die Zauberflöte*),

and Princess Linette in BBC television's production of *The Love for Three Oranges*. At the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden she has performed roles in *Salome*, *Der Freischütz*, *Werther* and *Simon Boccanegra*. She was in the original cast of the West End musical *Chess* and has been involved in many recordings of operas and musicals. Since joining English National Opera she has performed a number of roles.



Anne Marie Gibbons (Sister Mathilde) studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, supported by the Peter Moores Foundation. Recent engagements include Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), Anna (*The*

Trojans at Carthage), Ascanius (*The Trojans*), Ino (*Semele*), and Pitti-Sing (*The Mikado*) at English National Opera, where she is a member of the Young Singers Programme, Pippo (*The Thieving Magpie* for Opera North), and the title roles in *Ariodante* and *La Cenerentola* (Opera Theatre Company). Recordings include Zulma (*Elvida*) and Abra (*Il diluvio universale*) for Opera Rara.

Born in South Wales, **Ryland Davies** (Chaplain) studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music and was made a Fellow of the College in 1971. He made his operatic debut in 1964 as Count Almaviva (*Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Welsh National Opera), and his Glyndebourne Festival Opera debut in 1965 as the Major Domo (*Der Rosenkavalier*), going on to perform



many roles there. His many roles at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden have included Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni, Ferrando, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*), Fenton (*Falstaff*) and Lysander

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

More recently, engagements have included *Turandot* at Geneva Opera; Arbace (*Idomeneo*) and Monostatos (*Die Zauberflöte*) at the Metropolitan Opera, Opera North and Garsington; Le Duc (*Chérubin*) at Covent Garden and Monte Carlo; Monostatos at Santa Fe; Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at Nice Opera, New Israeli Opera, Netherlands Opera and at Glyndebourne; Dr Caius (*Falstaff*) in Israel; Gaudenzio in Leoncavallo's *La Bohème* at English National Opera; Monostatos at Covent Garden; Hauk-Sendorf (*The Makropulos Case*) with Houston Grand Opera; and Basilio at the Chicago Lyric Opera.

James Edwards (First Commissioner) born in Essex and began singing as a chorister at

St Paul's Cathedral, later continuing his studies at the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music. James Edwards joined The Royal Opera's Young Artists Programme in September 2003, and has sung roles including Nicolios (*The Greek Passion*), Pong (*Turandot*), Gastone (*La traviata*), and Albazar (*Il turco in Italia*).

Other operatic roles have included Alfredo (*La traviata*) and Dancaïro (*Carmen*) for European Chamber Opera; Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*), Ralph Rackstraw (*HMS Pinafore*) and Prosper (*Not in front of the Waiter*) for Kentish Opera; Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) for Surrey Opera and Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*) for Opera à la carte. He made his debut with English National Opera as the Novice in Billy Budd.

Roland Wood (Second Commissioner) was born in Berkshire and studied at the Royal Northern College of Music then the National Opera Studio, where he was supported by the Peter Moores Foundation and English National Opera. Engagements have included Count Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for Opera Holland Park, Nick Shadow (*The Rake's Progress*) at Glyndebourne, and Baron Douchol (*La traviata*) for English National Opera.

From 2002 to 2004 he was a Company Principal at Scottish Opera where roles included Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), Marullo (*Rigoletto*), Schaunard (*La Bohème*) and Papageno (*The Magic Flute*). He has taken part in a number of recordings with Chandos and Opera Rara.

Toby Stafford-Allen (First Officer) trained at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he made his international debut singing Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) at the Aix-en-Provence Festival. He joined English National Opera's Jerwood Young Singers Programme, and has since become a company principal. Major roles performed with the company include Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Papageno (*The Magic Flute*), Schaunard (*La Bohème*), and Henry (*The Fairy Queen*).

Further engagements in the UK include Papageno with Glyndebourne Touring Opera, Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*) and Schaunard with Opera Holland Park. International engagements include Henry (*The Fairy Queen*) at the Teatro del Liceu Barcelona, Mars and Euro in Cesti's *Il pomo d'oro* at the Batignano Festival, and Schaunard at the Bregenz Festspiele. As part of Chandos' Opera in English series he has recorded the role of Morales (*Carmen*).



David Stephenson (Gaoler) was born in Aberdeen and trained as an electrical engineer before attending the Royal College of Music.

Operatic appearances include Angelotti (*Tosca*) for Opera Ireland, Malatesta (*Don Pasquale*) and Johann (*Werther*) for Wexford Festival Opera, Morales (*Carmen*) at the Royal Albert Hall, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) for Scottish Opera, Silvio (*Pagliacci*) and Papageno for Welsh National Opera, Marullo (*Rigoletto*) for English National Opera, and other roles for Buxton Festival Opera and Opera Zuid. Recordings include *Messiah* highlights with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Gary Coward (Thierry) graduated from the Royal College of Music and subsequently studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Britten–Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies.

His operatic work has been with such companies as Opera Brava, Kentish Opera, Pavilion Opera, London Opera Players, English Touring Opera and Scottish Opera, with leading roles in Mozart, Donizetti and Rossini; operetta in Strauss and Lehár, but most frequently in Puccini – Marcello, Sharpless and Scarpia, and Verdi – Renato,

Don Carlo, Ford, Iago, Di Luna, Germont Père, Amonastro and Rigoletto. He is a member of English National Opera.

William Berger (M Javelinot) studied at the Royal Academy of Music. He made his professional operatic debut as Ormonte (Handel's *Partenope* at the Göttingen Handel Festival) and returned as Mercurio (*Atalanta*). Other roles include Don Giovanni (Opera East), Papageno (*The Magic Flute* with British Youth Opera) and Oberon (*A Summer Night's Dream* – Mozart/Shakespeare project, Aix-en-Provence). He is a member of English National Opera's Young Singers Programme.

The Chorus of English National Opera is one of the Company's finest assets. In countless English National Opera productions they have thrilled audiences with the power of their singing and the intensity of their acting. The wide range of skills and experience members bring to performances distinguish any production in which they appear. Particular triumphs for the Chorus have been Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Britten's *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes*, Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, Bizet's *Carmen*

and Verdi's *Otello*. Their recording of the last, in Jonathan Miller's production conducted by Mark Elder, appeared on Chandos under the sponsorship of the Peter Moores Foundation, as did their recording of the celebrated 'Ring Cycle' conducted by Sir Reginald Goodall. Other Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation recordings featuring the ENO Chorus are *Falstaff*, *Mary Stuart*, *Julius Caesar*, *Rigoletto* and *La traviata*.

Critically and publicly acclaimed, the **English National Opera Orchestra** has in recent years received several prestigious awards, including the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award and an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera. The Orchestra is at the heart of English National Opera's artistic life, and as well as opera performances at the London Coliseum it has also been seen on the concert platform, at the Aldeburgh Festival (*Peter Grimes* and *The Rape of Lucretia*), and at Glastonbury in 2004 (Act III of Wagner's *The Valkyrie*). Many of the players participate in the work of ENO Baylis, the company's education and outreach department. The ENO Orchestra appears in many recordings as part of Chandos' Opera in English series: *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Otello*, *Ernani*, *Mary Stuart*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Barber*

of Seville, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Werther*, and a recording of the complete *Ring Cycle* conducted by Sir Reginald Goodall.



Clive Bartha

Paul Daniel was Music Director of English National Opera from 1997 until 2005, and he conducted a wide range of repertoire including notable productions of the *Ring*, *Lulu*, *The Trojans*, *War and Peace*, and the

world premiere of Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*.

He was Music Director of Opera Factory from 1987–1990, and of Opera North from 1990–1997, where he attracted critical acclaim for a diverse and challenging repertoire including several world premieres, as well as celebrated productions of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Don Carlos* and *Boris Godunov*.

Other operatic engagements have included the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, La Monnaie in Brussels, the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, the Teatro Real Madrid, and the Geneva Opera.

Symphonic engagements have included the Philharmonia, Orchestra of the Age



of Enlightenment, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre National de France, the Orchestre National de Lyon, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic. In 2005 he conducted the internationally televised Last

Night of the Proms in London with the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Recordings include the Elgar/Payne Symphony No. 3 with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, a series of English music CDs with the Orchestra of Opera North, and *Elijah* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. For Chandos he has recorded Michael Berkeley's *Baa Baa Black Sheep* and, as part of Chandos' Opera in English series, *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Wozzeck*, and highlights from *Boris Godunov*.

Paul Daniel was awarded the CBE in 2000.

On session: Paul Daniel



On session: Catrin Wyn-Davies



PETER MOORES FOUNDATION

British philanthropist Sir Peter Moores established the Peter Moores Foundation in 1964 to realise his charitable aims and, to fulfill one of these, the Compton Verney House Trust in 1993 to create a new art gallery in the country. Through his charities he has disbursed more than £104 million to a wide variety of arts, environmental and social causes 'to get things done and open doors for people'.

Sir Peter's philanthropic work began with his passion for opera: in his twenties he helped a number of young artists in the crucial, early stages of their careers, several of whom – Dame Joan Sutherland, Sir Colin Davis and the late Sir Geraint Evans amongst them – became world-famous.

Today, the Peter Moores Foundation supports talented young singers with annual scholarships awarded through the Royal Northern College of Music, has made it possible for Chandos Records to issue the world's largest catalogue of operas recorded in English translation, and enabled Opera Rara to record rare bel canto repertoire which would otherwise remain inaccessible to the general public.

In live performance, the Foundation has encouraged the creation of new work and schemes to attract new audiences, financed the publication of scores, especially for world premieres of modern operas, and enabled rarely heard works to be staged by British opera companies and festivals.

Projects supported by the Foundation to help the young have ranged from a scheme to encourage young Afro-Caribbeans 'stay at school' for further education, to the endowment

of a Faculty Directorship and Chair of Management Studies at Oxford University (providing the lead donation which paved the way for the development of the Said Business School).

In 1993 the Foundation bought Compton Verney, a Grade I Georgian mansion in Warwickshire, designed by Robert Adam, with grounds by Capability Brown. Compton Verney House Trust was set up by Sir Peter to transform the derelict mansion into a world-class art gallery that would provide an especially welcoming environment for the 'first-time' gallery visitor. The gallery, which houses six permanent collections, a Learning Centre for all ages, and facilities for major visiting exhibitions, was opened in March 2004 by HRH the Prince of Wales. The Compton Verney website can be found at: www.comptonverney.org.uk

Sir Peter Moores was born in Lancashire and educated at Eton College and Christ Church, Oxford. He was a student at the Vienna Academy of Music, where he produced the Austrian premiere of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, and at the same time was an assistant producer with the Vienna State Opera, working with Viennese artists in Naples, Geneva and Rome, before returning to England in 1957 to join his father's business, Littlewoods. He was Vice-Chairman of Littlewoods in 1976, Chairman from 1977 to 1980 and remained a director until 1993.

He received the Gold Medal of the Italian Republic in 1974, an Honorary MA from Christ Church, Oxford, in 1975, and was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Northern College of Music in 1985. In 1992 he was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire by HM the Queen. He was appointed CBE in 1991 and received a Knighthood in 2003 for his charitable services to the arts.

Poulenc: Dialogues des Carmélites

Poulencs einzige ernste Oper wurde am 26. Januar 1957 an der Mailänder Scala in italienischer Sprache uraufgeführt; die französische Premiere fand am 21. Juni desselben Jahres an der Pariser Opéra statt. Hinter diesen nüchternen statistischen Daten liegt, wie so oft bei der Oper, eine Vielzahl von Hoffnungen, Problemen, Wünschen und Katastrophen, die nach fünfzig Jahren schließlich zu etwas geführt haben, das wir mit Recht als Triumph bezeichnen können.

Francis Poulenc wurde 1899 in Paris geboren und wuchs somit in den ungestümen Tagen auf, als Debussy und Ravel die musikalische Vorherrschaft Deutschlands herausforderten. Seine Familie war wohlhabend und seine Mutter eine talentierte Pianistin; ein regelmäßiger Gast des Hauses war der große französische lyrische Tenor Edmond Clément, bekannt für seine Interpretation des Don José in *Carmen* und ganz besonders für seinen Des Grieux in Massenets *Manon*. Poulencs Vater bestand darauf, ihm eine vollständige traditionelle Erziehung angedeihen zu lassen, und so hatte er zu der Zeit, als der Erste Weltkrieg endete,

zwar noch keinerlei systematische musikalische Ausbildung absolviert, war aber trotzdem entschlossen, Komponist zu werden. Er nahm bei Charles Koechlin Privatunterricht und war offensichtlich ein sehr begabter Schüler, doch trotzdem haftete ihm noch lange der Ruf eines Amateurs unter Professionellen an; man könnte sich sogar fragen, ob es nicht die ihm aus der Bekämpfung dieses Vorwurfs erwachsene innere Kraft und begleitende persönliche Unabhängigkeit war, die ihm erlaubte, dieses unmöglich scheinende Opersujet in Angriff zu nehmen und zum Abschluß zu bringen.

Obwohl die Weltpremiere der *Dialogues des Carmélites* an der Scala stattfinden sollte, mit weiteren zugesicherten Aufführungen in Neapel, Buenos Aires, London und Berlin, hatte Poulenc als Pariser Bürger, der eine ernste französische Oper schrieb, natürlich vor allem Paris und speziell die Pariser Opéra im Sinn. Und hier ergab sich das erste Element der Unmöglichkeit. Als Charles Garnier die Opéra in den 1860er und 1870er Jahren erbaute, sprach er von der "impression morale", die die Zuschauer beeindrucken solle: "Sie spüren

instinktiv, daß hier eine gewisse Würde angebracht ist und daß es unangemessen wäre, sich allzu ungewungen zu gebärden." Dies mag im späten 19. Jahrhundert völlig in Ordnung gewesen sein, doch in den grelleren 1920er Jahren wirkte die Opéra schon sehr unzeitgemäß im Vergleich zu den ausschweifenden Aktivitäten der Gruppe Les Six, zu deren wichtigsten Protagonisten der junge Poulenc zählte. Die Liste von Opern zeitgenössischer französischer Komponisten, die an der Opéra ihre französische Premiere feierten und auch im 21. Jahrhundert noch zum Repertoire gehören, wirkt denn auch recht dürftig. Vor den *Dialogues des Carmélites* muß man bis zu Massenets *Thaïs* zurückgehen, also bis 1894! Poulenc mag sich daher 1957 mit Garniers Vision solidarisch gezeigt haben, das Risiko eines Mißerfolgs war jedoch groß.

Ein zweites Element der Unmöglichkeit war Poulenc selbst. Der Neunzehnjährige machte 1918 zum ersten Mal Schlagzeilen mit seinen kleinen Klavierstücken, den *Trois mouvements perpétuels*. In den 1920ern folgten weitere scherzhafte Stücke, die ihm den Ruf eines *farceur* einbrachten – englischen Kritikern war er als "le leg-Poulenc" bekannt (to pull someone's leg = jemanden auf den Arm nehmen) – und diese Reputation wurde

noch verstärkt durch seine brillante komische Oper *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, die 1947 an der intimeren Opéra-Comique in Paris uraufgeführt wurde. Der Gedanke, er könne an einer ernsten, abendfüllenden Oper schreiben, die von Nonnen und Hinrichtungen handelte, muß daher zweifellos vielen überraschend erschienen sein. Hinzu kam die rein technische Frage, ob er mit der ausgedehnten Behandlung des musikalischen Materials zurechtkommen würde, die bei einer Oper traditionell verlangt wurde. Selbst in einem so neuen (und ernsthaften) Werk wie dem 1953 entstandenen *Stabat mater* zeigte sich noch seine Neigung, mit dem Erreichen eines musikalischen Höhepunktes die Spannung nicht langsam abklingen zu lassen, sondern abrupt innezuhalten und sodann wieder neu einzusetzen.

Ein drittes Problem war die religiöse Basis der Handlung. Frankreich hatte im späten 19. Jahrhundert eine vehemente Kampagne der Säkularisierung durchlaufen, die 1905 in der offiziellen Trennung von Kirche und Staat kulminierte. Wenn es also darum ging, religiöse Themen auf die Opernbühne zu bringen, so war mit dieser Trennung niemandem gedient: Säkularisten konnten sich darüber beklagen, daß die Oper doch



ein Ort sein solle, an dem man religiösen Themen entfliehen könne – ein Ort für Liebesgeschichten und Tollkühnheiten mit großem Spektakel –, während die Gläubigen annehmen konnten, daß religiöse Themen in solch einem Milieu grundsätzlich besudelt würden (solche Argumente wurden in zahlreichen Opernhäusern anlässlich von Aufführungen des *Parsifal* geäußert; und da *Thaïs* bereits erwähnt wurde, sei noch angemerkt, daß es durchaus berechtigte Gründe gibt für die Behauptung, der religiöse Aspekt dieser Oper mache die sexuelle Thematik noch interessanter). Auf die eine oder andere Weise riskierte Poulencs Oper daher, einen Großteil des traditionell der Mittelschicht entstammenden Publikums der Opéra zu entfremden.

Aber auch auf der positiven Seite gab es zumindest zwei wesentliche Faktoren zu bedenken, ganz abgesehen von Poulencs Genialität und der Tatsache, daß er neben seinem *jeux d'esprit* auch Werke von tiefempfundener Religiosität komponiert hatte, so zum Beispiel die *Litanies à la Vierge noire*, das *Stabat mater* und eine Reihe von Motetten. Der erste dieser Faktoren war seine eigene Involviertheit mit der der Oper zugrunde liegenden Geschichte, die ihn wohl

selbst überrascht haben dürfte. Von dieser unmittelbaren Betroffenheit geben seine Briefe und andere Berichte ein lebhaftes Zeugnis.

George Bernanos schrieb eine dramatisierte Fassung nach der Vorlage eines Romans von Gertrude von Le Fort ursprünglich für ein Filmprojekt, das aber nie realisiert wurde. Nach seinem Tod fand sein Testamentsvollstrecker das Manuskript unter seinen Papieren und inszenierte es 1951 in Zürich. 1952 wurde das Stück in Paris 300 Mal in Folge aufgeführt, und zu dieser Zeit sah auch Poulenc es wohl zweimal, außerdem las er das Drama. Im selben Jahr beauftragte ihn der Direktor des Verlagshauses Ricordi, Guido Valcarengi, für La Scala ein Ballett zu schreiben; Poulenc fing sogleich Feuer und suchte nach einer Heiligen, deren Leben ihm als Thema dienen könnte. Während einer gemeinsamen Italiertournee mit dem Cellisten Pierre Fournier im März 1953 hatte er sich jedoch bereits anders entschieden und schlug nun eine Oper über ein mystisches Thema vor. Valcarengi selbst brachte das Stück von Bernanos ins Gespräch. Poulenc greift die Geschichte auf:

“Ich hatte beschlossen, über diese Idee zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt nachzudenken, wenn ich zurück in Paris sein würde, doch am nächsten Tag sah ich die *Dialogues* mitten im

Fenster eines römischen Buchladens liegen, geradezu als warteten sie auf mich. Ich kaufte das Buch und beschloß, es ein weiteres Mal zu lesen. Ich setzte mich also vor das Café *Le tre scalini* auf der Piazza Navona. Es war zehn Uhr morgens. Mittags saß ich immer noch da. Um zwei Uhr schickte ich Monsieur Valcarengi, dem eigentlichen Initiator des Projekts, ein Telegramm mit der Zusage, ich würde die *Dialogues* schreiben.” Einige Tage später schrieb Poulenc an einen Freund: “Ich glaube, das Thema ist genau auf mich zugeschnitten. Wenn ich es nur nicht verderbe... Ich habe vorgestern zu meinem Schutzheiligen Franziskus von Assisi gebetet.”

Ende August war Poulenc in sein Landhaus in der Touraine zurückgekehrt und bereits hart an der Arbeit. Er schrieb an einen Freund, den Sänger Pierre Bernac: “Ich habe die Karmeliterinnen begonnen und das Schlafen aufgegeben (das ist wörtlich zu nehmen). Ich habe den richtigen Ton für die große Szene zwischen der Priorin und Blanche gefunden [Erster Akt, zweite Szene], die eine ausgezeichnete formale Anlage hat: ruhig zu Beginn, heftig in der Mitte (die Regeln des Ordens), dann am Ende wieder ruhig. Allein die absolute Identifizierung der Musik mit dem Geist von Bernanos kann

dieses Werk von mir zum Erfolg machen. Sehr leichte Orchestrierung, damit die Worte durchkommen.”

Die Sorge, es “nur nicht zu verderben” und den “Geist von Bernanos” einzufangen, sowie natürlich der Verzicht auf den Schlaf zeigten, daß Poulenc sehr wohl die Schwierigkeiten dieses von ihm begonnenen Projekts sah. Mehr noch, er war sich bewußt, daß er in gewisser Weise die Leiden der Nonnen von Compiègne teilte. Sein Lebenspartner Lucien Roubert litt an einer Herzkrankheit und starb im Oktober 1955, gerade als Poulenc die Reinschrift des Klavierauszugs vollendete. Im August dieses Jahres hatte Poulenc an Bernac geschrieben: “Ich habe ihn den 16 seligen Karmeliterinnen anvertraut, damit sie über seinen Tod wachen, da er mit ihrer Geschichte so eng verbunden ist. Tatsächlich begann ich diese Arbeit, ihm nahe und glücklich, in Lyon im August 1953. Nach den schrecklichen Qualen, von denen Sie wissen, habe ich sie gerade in seiner Nähe vollendet, in den letzten Tagen seines irdischen Lebens.” Und dann zitiert er die folgenden wichtigen Zeilen aus Bernanos’ Text: “Wir sterben nicht nur für uns selbst, sondern wir sterben für einander, oder wahrscheinlich sogar anstelle des anderen. Wer weiß?”



Mit diesen Zeilen, die Schwester Constance am Ende des ersten Zwischenspiels im zweiten Akt singt, nachdem sie und Schwester Blanche über den schrecklichen Tod der ersten Priorin gesprochen haben, führt Bernanos das spirituelle Konzept der Übertragung von Gnade ein, mit dem an dieser spezifischen Stelle gemeint ist, daß die Priorin vielleicht einen schrecklichen Tod sterben mußte, damit jemand anderes einen leichten Tod habe. Damit weitet Bernanos die katholische Lehre aus, nach der die Heiligen eine geistliche Gemeinschaft bilden, in der ein jeder für die anderen Fürsprache einlegen kann, selbst für Sünder. Gebete für die Toten gehören zu einem parallelen Glaubenssystem, ebenso wie die Bedeutung von Menschen, die ihr Leben der religiösen Kontemplation und dem Gebet widmen. In dem Opernlibretto findet sich kein Hinweis darauf, wessen Tod durch das Sterben der Priorin erleichtert werden mag; doch bei Constances Worten "Ich würde sagen, es könnte jemanden geben, wenn sie sterben wird..." zitiert Poulenc das akkordische Thema von Blanche (das er aus der ersten und letzten seiner Klavier-*Nocturnes* entlehnt hat). In Poulencs eigenem Fall war das Prinzip der Übertragung nicht wirksam. Rouberts Tod aufgrund eines Herzleidens konnte nicht

verhindern, daß auch Poulenc einige Jahre später an derselben Krankheit starb.

Der Gefahr der sich aus der weitgehenden Vorherrschaft weiblicher Stimmen ergebenden Monotonie begegnete Poulenc, indem er mit den verschiedenen Stimmumfängen sehr bewußt umging, wie seinen Briefen zu entnehmen ist. Im Januar 1954 teilte er Bernac mit: "Ohne die Musik umzustoßen, habe ich die Rolle der Constance umgeschrieben, da sie zu tief lag; jetzt bewegt sie sich weitgehend zwischen F [über dem eingestrichenen C] und A [der zweigestrichenen Oktave]." Zu dem ursprünglichen Schauspiel bemerkte ein Kritiker, "der offensichtliche dramaturgische Defekt des Werks – eine Abfolge von Szenen ohne jegliche psychologische Weiterentwicklung – wurde in eine Tugend umgewandelt, so daß dem Stück schließlich die Geschmeidigkeit des Lebens selbst zueigen war, d.h. hinter jeder Episode war die absolute Wirklichkeit zu spüren, ohne ihr je künstlich aufgedrängt werden zu müssen." Auch Poulenc erzwingt nichts. Sicherlich gibt es dissonante Augenblicke, doch diese sind alle vom Text abgeleitet, den Bernanos im Vergleich zu dem ihm vorgelegten Drehbuch drastisch gekürzt hatte und den Poulenc dann noch ein weiteres Mal kürzte. Es ist allseits bemerkt

worden, daß er nicht Debussys Methode der Textvertonung folgte (Henri Dutilleux hat in jüngerer Zeit behauptet, daß dieser Stil an sich zwar meisterhaft, trotzdem aber für Opernkomponisten eine Sackgasse sei); stattdessen ging er bis zu Massenet zurück, zweifellos noch die elegante Stimme von Edmond Clément in den Ohren, und zu dem, was man als Massenets "mélodisation" der französischen Sprache bezeichnet hat. Was die Orchesterbegleitung betrifft (und zumeist handelt es sich tatsächlich um reine Begleitung), so erinnern die regelmäßig pulsierenden Akkorde an deutsche Lieder und vielleicht vor allem an Schumann, einen Komponisten, den seine Mutter gerne gespielt hatte, wobei der junge Poulenc unter dem Klavier sitzend zuhörte.

Der zweite positive Faktor, der zum Erfolg der Oper führte, war ganz einfach der gewählte Zeitpunkt. Eine Geschichte, die von der Konfrontation mit der Angst und dem Tod handelt und von der Zerstörung einer angestammten Lebensweise durch revolutionäre Kräfte, mußte einem europäischen Publikum, für das der Zweite Weltkrieg noch eine allzu lebhaft Erinnerung war, unweigerlich nahegehen. Ganz besonders gilt dies für die Franzosen, deren Erfahrungen

während der Besatzungszeit – und dies ist vielleicht das Beängstigendste – die Abgründe gezeigt hatten, zu denen einige Mitglieder ihrer eigenen Gemeinschaft herabsinken konnten, wenn sie sich mit Folter und Hinrichtung konfrontiert sahen – ein Trauma, von dem diese Nation sich auch nach sechzig Jahren vielleicht noch nicht völlig erholt hat. Blanchés guter Tod vermittelt da ein Bild von Frankreich, wie es sich gerne selber sah – ganz gleich ob dieser durch das schreckliche Sterben der Priorin ermöglicht wurde oder nicht.

Der Schriftsteller Henri de Montherlant bewunderte Bernanos' Stück für seine "Verbindung des Einfachen mit dem Außergewöhnlichen". Auch Poulencs Oper ist einfach und zugleich außergewöhnlich – außergewöhnlich einfach und ganz einfach außergewöhnlich.

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Übersetzung: Stephanie Wollny

Synopsis

Die Handlung spielt zunächst vornehmlich im Kloster der Karmeliterinnen in Compiègne und später, in den Jahren der Französischen Revolution und des anschließenden Terrors (1789–1784), in Paris.



COMPACT DISC ONE

Akt I

Szene 1: *Die Bibliothek des Marquis de la Force*

[1] Der Chevalier de la Force stürmt in die Bibliothek seines Vaters, auf der Suche nach seiner Schwester Blanche, um deren Verbleib er sich Sorgen macht. Draußen rottet sich der Pöbel zusammen und man berichtet, Blanches Kutsche sei umringt. [2] Blanche trifft ein, unverletzt aber sichtlich verstört von dem Erlebten. [3] Als sie zu Bett gehen will, erschrickt sie beim Anblick eines Schattens an der Wand; sie kehrt zu ihrem Vater und Bruder zurück [4] und verkündet ihre Absicht, Nonne zu werden.

Szene 2: *Das Empfangszimmer im Kloster der Karmeliterinnen*

[5] Vorspiel. [6] – [7] Einige Wochen sind vergangen. Die betagte Priorin, Mme de Croissy, befragt Blanche zu ihrer göttlichen Berufung. [8] Sie warnt sie, daß das Kloster sie nicht vor der Außenwelt beschützen könne; es sei ein Haus des Gebetes. Blanches Entschluß bleibt von diesem Gespräch unberührt und sie verkündet den Namen, den sie für ihr Leben als Karmeliterin gewählt hat – Schwester Blanche des Leidens Christi.

Szene 3: *Im Kloster*

[9] Vorspiel. [10] Blanche ist als Novizin ins Kloster aufgenommen worden. Zusammen mit einer anderen jungen Nonne, Schwester Constance von Saint-Denis, ist sie gerade beim Essen. Constance plaudert über ihr glückliches früheres Leben in der Bretagne. Blanche verwahrt sich gegen eine solch frohe Stimmung zu einer Zeit, da die Priorin im Sterben liegt. Constance schlägt vor, sie mögen beten und ihr eigenes Leben im Tausch gegen das ihrer Priorin zu opfern anbieten. Blanche ist entsetzt, doch Constance erklärt, sie habe immer gespürt, daß sie jung sterben werde, und als sie Blanche das erste Mal begegnet sei, habe sie eine Vorahnung gehabt, daß sie beide am selben Tag gemeinsam sterben würden.

Szene 4: *Das Krankenzimmer*

[11] Vorspiel. [12] Die Priorin liegt auf dem Sterbebett, umorgt von Mutter Marie. Für die Priorin ist Gott zu einem Schatten geworden; all ihre frühere Kontemplation über den Tod ist ihr nun keine Hilfe mehr. Sie sorgt sich besonders um Blanche und vertraut sie der Fürsorge von Mutter Marie an. [13] Blanche betritt das Krankenzimmer und die Priorin nimmt zärtlich von ihrer jüngsten und daher meistgeliebten Tochter Abschied. Mutter Marie

kehrt mit dem Arzt zurück, der ihr weitere Beruhigungsmittel verweigert. [14] – [15] Als ihr Todeskampf heftiger wird, fällt die Priorin ins Delirium, lehnt sich gegen Gott auf und hat eine Vision der entweihten Klosterkapelle. Blanche kehrt in den Raum zurück um sieht mit an, wie die Priorin in größter Angst stirbt.

Akt II

Szene 1: *Die Kapelle bei Nacht*

[16] Blanche und Constance halten bei dem Leichnam der Priorin Totenwache. Ihre Zeit zu wachen endet und Constance entfernt sich, um die Schwestern zu holen, die sie ablösen sollen. Die allein zurückbleibende Blanche ist voller Angst und will weglaufen. [17] Mutter Marie fängt sie ab und geleitet sie zu ihrer Zelle.

Zwischenspiel

[18] Blanche und Constance haben für das Grab der Priorin ein Blumenkreuz geflochten. Constance gibt zu bedenken, daß wir nicht für uns selbst sondern für andere sterben und daß die Priorin vielleicht in Angst und Qual gestorben ist, damit jemand anderes einen einfacheren Tod haben wird.

Szene 2: *Das Stifszimmer*

[19] Die neue Priorin, Mme Lidoine, trifft

ein und spricht zu den Karmeliterinnen. Sie warnt, die Tage friedvoller Sicherheit seien nun vorüber und die Zukunft sei voller Prüfungen. Sie erinnert daran, daß ihre wichtigste Pflicht das Gebet sei, daß sie jedoch nicht ein Martyrium erstreben sollten. [20] Mutter Marie stimmt das *Ave Maria* an.

Zwischenspiel: *Ein Zimmer im Kloster*

[21] Die Priorin, Mutter Marie und Constance eilen herein, als die Türglocke ertönt. Die Revolution weitet sich aus; der Chevalier de la Force hat beschlossen, Frankreich zu verlassen, und will Blanche sehen. Die Priorin erlaubt, daß Bruder und Schwester sich in Gegenwart von Mutter Marie sehen.

COMPACT DISC TWO

Szene 3: *Das Empfangszimmer*

[1] Vorspiel. [2] Der Chevalier versucht, Blanche zu überreden, das Kloster zu verlassen. Ihr Vater glaube nicht, daß es für sie noch ein sicherer Ort sei; als Aristokratin und Nonne sei sie durch das näherkommende Terrorregime doppelt gefährdet. Der Chevalier nimmt an, es sei die Angst – oder die Angst vor der Angst –, die sie im Kloster halte. Blanche erklärt, sie sei an Gottes Willen gebunden und



wiederholt ihre Absicht, zu bleiben. Nachdem der Chevalier gegangen ist, bricht Blanche fast zusammen. ^[3] Mutter Marie spricht ihr Mut zu.

Szene 4: *Die Sakristei*

^[4] Der Beichtvater des Klosters führt die Schwestern im Gebet an. ^[5] Er verabschiedet sich, da er erzwungen sei, sich zu verstecken. Mutter Marie erklärt, um die Kirche zu bewahren, müßten die Karmeliterinnen nur ihr Leben opfern. Doch die Priorin korrigiert sie: Es sei nicht an den Schwestern zu entscheiden, ob sie Märtyrerinnen werden oder nicht.

^[6] Der Beichtvater eilt zurück und sucht Zuflucht vor dem Pöbel und den Soldaten draußen vor dem Kloster. ^[7] Die Regierungskommissare kommen herein und verkünden, daß die Nonnen aus dem Kloster vertrieben werden sollen. ^[8] Die Priorin will nach Paris gehen. Als sie Blanches Entsetzen wahrnimmt, gibt Mutter Jeanne ihr eine kleine Statue des Jesuskindes, vom Lärmen des Pöbels aufgeschreckt läßt diese die Figur jedoch fallen und sie zerbricht.

Akt III

Szene 1: *Die Kapelle*

^[9] Die Kapelle ist entweiht worden. In

Abwesenheit der Priorin ist Mutter Marie für die Gemeinschaft verantwortlich; sie schlägt nun vor, daß sie das Märtyrergelübde ablegen. ^[10] Bei der geheimen Wahl gibt es eine Gegenstimme; der Verdacht fällt zunächst auf Blanche, doch Constance verkündet, sie habe gegen den Vorschlag gestimmt, nun aber ihre Meinung geändert. Die Schwestern leisten ihr Gelübde. Blanche verläßt der Mut und sie flieht.

Zwischenspiel: *Eine Straße außerhalb des Klosters*

^[11] Die Priorin ist aus Paris zurückgekehrt. Ein Offizier spricht zu den Karmeliterinnen: Ihre Gemeinschaft sei gesetzeswidrig und er begrüßt sie als neue Bürger der Republik. ^[12] Die Priorin läßt den Priester warnen, daß es zu gefährlich sei, die Messe abzuhalten. Mutter Marie stellt in Frage, ob sich solche Vorsicht mit ihrem Märtyrergelübde vereinbaren lasse.

Szene 2: *Die Bibliothek des Marquis de la Force*

^[13] Vorspiel. ^[14] Blanches Vater ist guillotiniert worden und sie ist als Dienerin in ihr Elternhaus zurückgekehrt. Mutter Marie trifft ein, um sie ins Kloster zurückzuholen, doch Blanche ist zu verängstigt, ihr zu folgen. Mutter Marie gibt ihr eine Adresse, wo sie in Sicherheit wäre.

Szene 3: *Die Conciergerie*

^[15] Die Karmeliterinnen sind verhaftet worden und sitzen in der Conciergerie gefangen. Die Priorin leistet das Märtyrergelübde. ^[16] Constance hat geträumt, die abwesende Blanche werde zu ihren Schwestern zurückkehren. ^[17] – ^[18] Der Kerkermeister übermittelt ihnen das Urteil des Revolutionstribunals – die Karmeliterinnen sind zum Tode verurteilt worden.

Zwischenspiel: *Eine Straße nahe der Bastille*

^[19] Mutter Marie erfährt durch den Beichtvater vom Todesurteil der Karmeliterinnen und beschließt, zu ihren Schwestern zurückzukehren. Der Priester weist darauf hin, daß Gott für sie vielleicht ein anderes Schicksal vorgesehen habe.

Szene 4: *Place de la Révolution, 17. Juli 1794*

^[20] Vorspiel. ^[21] Die Karmeliterinnen werden zum Exekutionsplatz gebracht; eine große Menge schaut zu. Von der Priorin angeführt, besteigen sie eine nach der anderen das Schafott, wobei sie das *Salve Regina* singen. Constance steigt als letzte hinauf. In dem Augenblick löst Blanche sich aus der Menge und tritt zu ihrer Freundin; sie singt nun alleine weiter, bis schließlich auch sie guillotiniert wird.

Übersetzung: Stephanie Wollny

Ashley Holland (Marquis de la Force) studierte zunächst an der Warwick University und absolvierte anschließend als Peter Moores Scholar ein Graduiertenstudium am Royal Northern College of Music. Seither hat er sich auf beiden Seiten des Atlantiks als einer der gefragtesten jungen Baritonsänger speziell für das italienische Repertoire des 19. Jahrhunderts einen Namen zu machen begonnen. Nach seinem überaus erfolgreichen Debüt als Don Pedro in Donizettis *Maria Padilla* an der Minnesota Opera wurde er für die Neuinszenierung von Mercadantes *Orazi e Curiazi* für die Rolle des Orazio sofort ein weiteres Mal verpflichtet.

Ashley Holland wirkte während mehrerer Spielzeiten als Erster Bariton an der English National Opera, wo Zurga (*Die Perlenfischer*), Sharpless (*Madam Butterfly*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Cecil (*Maria Stuarda*), Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*), Lescaut (*Manon*), Ottakar (*Der Freischütz*), Marcello (*La Bohème*) sowie Escamillo (*Carmen*), Ford (*Falstaff*) und Don Carlo (*Ernani*) zu seinen Rollen zählten. Außerdem übernahm er den Baritonpart in der gemeinsamen Inszenierung der English National Opera und der Mark Morris Dance Group von Händels *L'Allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato*.



Weitere Verpflichtungen umfassen Auftritte an der Opera North, der Royal Opera in Covent Garden, der Chicago Lyric Opera, der Opéra de Paris-Bastille, der Cincinnati Opera, der Calgary Opera sowie in Dresden. Zu seinen Einspielungen zählen Belcore (*The Elixir of Love*) und Ford (*Falstaff*) mit Paul Daniels, beide erschienen im Rahmen der Reihe "Opera in English" bei Chandos.

Die walisische Sopranistin **Catrin Wyn-Davies** (Blanche de la Force) absolvierte am Royal Holloway College ein Studium in Drama und Theaterwissenschaften, bevor sie 1990 an der Guildhall School of Music ihr Gesangsstudium aufnahm. Noch während ihrer Studienzzeit wurde sie mit zahlreichen Preisen ausgezeichnet, darunter 1993 der Richard-Tauber-Preis und 1994 der Decca-Preis im Rahmen der Kathleen Ferrier Awards.

1994 wurde sie an der Welsh National Opera als Prinzipal verpflichtet. Zu ihren dortigen Rollen zählen die Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*), Hero (*Béatrice et Bénédicte*), Ilia (*Idomeneo*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Zerlina und Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Blanche (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) und die Titelrolle in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

Weitere beachtenswerte Auftritte hatte sie als Zerlina auf dem Festival von Aix-en-Provence, als Ilia und als Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) sowie als Poppea an der Bayerischen Staatsoper in München, als Donna Elvira, Poppea und Alice Ford (*Falstaff*) an der Deutschen Oper am Rhein, sowie als Mélisande in der Inszenierung von *Pelléas et Mélisande* an der Opéra du Rhin in Straßburg. In den USA ist sie an der Santa Fe Opera als Susanna und an der San Francisco Opera in der Rolle der Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*) aufgetreten.

In Großbritannien ist Catrin Wyn-Davies an der English National Opera als Blanche, Ginevra (*Ariodante*) und Tatyana (*Eugene Onegin*) aufgetreten, sowie als Valencienne (*Die lustige Witwe*) und Erstes Blumenmädchen (*Parsifal*) am Royal Opera House. In der BBC-Verfilmung von Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (unter der Regie von Katie Mitchell und dem Dirigat von Richard Hickox) sang sie die Rolle der Miss Jessel. Auf dem Konzertpodium war sie in ganz Europa unter solch namhaften Dirigenten wie Christoph von Dohnányi, Richard Hickox, Paul McCreesh, René Jacobs, Trevor Pinnock und Pierre Boulez zu hören.

Mit dem King's Consort unter Robert King hat Catrin Wyn-Davies geistliche Musik von Vivaldi aufgenommen; zu ihren weiteren

Einspielungen zählen Weills *Der Silbersee* mit Markus Stenz sowie eine Sammlung von Volksliedbearbeitungen von Beethoven mit Malcolm Martineau.

Peter Wedd (Chevalier de la Force) studierte bei William McAlpine an der Guildhall School of Music and Drama sowie anschließend mit Unterstützung der Peter Moores Foundation am National Opera Studio. Von 1999 bis 2001 wirkte er als Prinzipal im Ensemble der Royal Opera in Covent Garden, außerdem ist er an der Welsh National Opera regelmäßig als Gastkünstler zu hören. Zu seinen Rollen an der Welsh National Opera zählten bisher Don José (*Carmen*), Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), Alfredo (*La traviata*) und Laça (*Jenůfa*).

Weitere Auftritte in Großbritannien und Irland umfassen Federico (*L'Arlesiana*) und Pluto (*Orphée aux enfers*) an der Opera Holland Park, im Rahmen des Wexford Festivals, Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) in der Londoner Royal Albert Hall, Tamino für Glyndebourne On Tour, Lensky (*Eugene Onegin*) an der Opera Holland Park sowie den Chevalier de la Force (*The Carmelites*) an der English National Opera. Außerhalb Großbritanniens hatte Peter Wedd bisher

Engagements bei der European Chamber Opera und am Singapore Lyric Theatre.

Felicity Palmer (Madame de Croissy) ist gegenwärtig eine der vielseitigsten darstellenden Künstlerinnen, gleichermaßen vertraut mit solch unterschiedlicher Musik wie die von Händel, Wagner und Berio.

An der Metropolitan Opera in New York hat sie die Fricka und Waltraute in Aufführungen des *Ring*-Zyklus, die Gräfin (*Pique dame*), Geneviève (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) und Mme de Croissy (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) gesungen. An der Mailänder Scala sang sie Mme de Croissy und Klytemnestra (*Elektra*), in Chicago die Gräfin, Kabanicha (*Katya Kabanova*) und Madam Begbick (*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*), in San Francisco *Giulio Cesare*, in München Eduige (*Rodelinda*) und Klytemnestra, in Berlin La Zia Principessa (*Suor Angelica*) und Klytemnestra und für Glyndebourne Zita (*Gianni Schicchi*) und Mistress Quickly (*Falstaff*). Am Royal Opera House in Covent Garden zählten zu ihren Rollen die Mrs Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*), Juno (*Semele*) und Klytemnestra, und in Paris hat sie die Klytemnestra, die Gräfin, Mme de Croissy, Zita, Madam Begbick und Maria Dmitrievna Ahkrossimov (*Krieg und Frieden*) gesungen.



In jüngster Zeit kehrte sie als Mme de Croissy und Katisha (*Der Mikado*) an die English National Opera zurück.

Felicity Palmer kann auf eine lange Karriere als Konzertsängerin zurückblicken. Unter anderem hat sie mit dem BBC Symphony Orchestra und der New York Philharmonic unter Pierre Boulez, Sir Colin Davis und Gennady Rozhdestvensky zusammengearbeitet, mit dem English Chamber Orchestra unter Sir Charles Mackerras, dem London Symphony Orchestra unter Michael Tilson Thomas, der Philharmonia und dem Royal Philharmonic Orchestra unter Giuseppe Sinopoli, dem Concentus Musicus Wien unter Nicolaus Harnoncourt, dem Concertgebouw-Orchester unter Edo de Waart, dem Boston Symphony Orchestra unter Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos und der Los Angeles Philharmonic unter Sir Simon Rattle.

Zu ihren zahlreichen Einspielungen zählen Stravinskys *Le Rossignol* und Messiaens *Poèmes pour Mi* mit Pierre Boulez, Vokalmusik von Benjamin Britten sowie zwei CDs mit viktorianischen und edwardianischen Liedern, die sie mit dem Pianisten John Constable aufgenommen hat. Im November 1993 wurde Felicity Palmer mit dem CBE (Companion of the British Empire) ausgezeichnet.

Josephine Barstow (Mutter Marie) begann ihre Laufbahn auf einer Tournee mit Opera for All und gewann sodann ein Stipendium für ein einjähriges Studium am London Opera Centre. Sie sang die Euridice und die Violetta für die Sadler's Wells Opera Company und schloß anschließend einen dreijährigen Vertrag mit der Welsh National Opera Company. Dort zählten zu ihren Rollen die Gräfin (*Die Hochzeit des Figaro*), Fiordiligi, Violetta, Mimi und Amelia (*Simon Boccanegra*) sowie Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*). Nachdem sie an der English National Opera die Violetta (*La traviata*) gesungen hatte, entwickelte sich eine lange und sehr fruchtbare Zusammenarbeit mit diesem Opernhaus. Zu ihren wesentlichen dortigen Rollen zählen die Natascha (*Krieg und Frieden*), Salome, Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*), Leonora (*The Force of Destiny*), Leonore (*Fidelio*), Jeanne (*The Devils of Loudon*), Katarina (*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*), Tosca, Sieglinde, Senta, Emilia Marty (*The Makropulos Case*), die Marschallin und Arabella. Regelmäßige Verpflichtungen verbinden sie auch mit der Royal Opera in Covent Garden, so zum Beispiel in der Rolle der jungen Frau in Henzes *We come to the River*, als Salome,

Ellen Orford, Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Santuzza, Leonore, Alice, Lady Macbeth und die Gräfin (*Pique dame*).

Josephine Barstow hat mit einem abwechslungsreichen Repertoire unter anderem mit Musik von Verdi, Richard Strauss, Puccini und Janáček die ganze Welt bereist und dabei Paris, München, Wien, Bayreuth, Berlin, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Südafrika, Japan und Australien sowie weitere Aufführungsstätten besucht.

Eine fruchtbare Beziehung verbindet die Sängerin mit der Opera North, für die sie bisher Rollen wie die der Tosca, Marie (*Wozzeck*), Aida, Medea, Lady Billows und vor allem Gloriana gesungen hat, die auch verfilmt wurde. Anderswo zählen zu ihren jüngsten Engagements die Kabanicha (*Katya Kabanova*) in San Diego, Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) in Antwerpen und Oviedo, sowie Mutter Marie (*The Carmelites*) an der English National Opera. Einspielungen umfassen die Marie (*Wozzeck*) und die Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) im Rahmen der Reihe "Opera in English" bei Chandos, sowie *Un ballo in maschera*, *Gloriana*, *Albert Herring*, *Kiss me Kate*, *Oliver* und *Street Scene*.

Orla Boylan (Madame Lidoine) stammt aus Irland und studierte am D.I.T. College of Music in Dublin, wo sie bei Mary Brennan Gesangsunterricht nahm. Sie erhielt zahlreiche Auszeichnungen, darunter der Veronica Dunne Bursary, der Ibla Grand Prize und der Preis der National Mozart Competition.

Zu den Höhepunkten ihrer Arbeit in jüngerer Zeit zählen die Madame Lidoine (*The Carmelites*) mit der English National Opera, Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) an der New York City Opera, Mahlers Zweite Sinfonie mit dem Estnischen Nationalinfonieorchester unter Paavo Järvi sowie ein Recital in Harewood House in Leeds.

Zu Orla Boylans Opernengagements zählen Jenůfa an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera und Opéra de Lyon, ihr Rollendebüt als Arabella an der Garsington Opera, ihre Mitwirkung im Chor der Frauen (*The Rape of Lucretia*) und die Sieglinde an der English National Opera, die Gouvernante (*The Turn of the Screw*) an der Angers Nantes Opera, die Gräfin (*Die Hochzeit des Figaro*) an der New York City Opera, die Titelrolle in *Katya Kabanova* in ihrem Debüt an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Mařenka (*Die verkaufte Braut*) für die Glyndebourne Touring Opera, die Titelrolle in der ersten



britischen Inszenierung von Strauss' *Die Liebe der Danae* an der Garsington Opera sowie Tatyana (*Eugene Onegin*) an der European Union Opera, die zudem auch auf DVD eingespielt wurde.

Zu ihren Konzertverpflichtungen zählen Mahlers *Das klagende Lied* mit dem RTÈ National Symphony Orchestra unter Laurent Wagner, Verdis Requiem in der St Paul's Cathedral mit dem Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, eine Aufführung des Dritten Akts der *Walküre* mit der English National Opera auf dem Glastonbury Festival des Jahres 2004, die Premiere von Gerald Barrys *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* mit dem RTÈ National Symphony Orchestra sowie ihr Debüt auf den BBC Proms als Anna in Weills *Street Scene* unter Barry Wordsworth.

Sarah Tynan (Schwester Constance) wurde in London geboren und studierte am Royal Northern College of Music und an der Royal Academy of Music (bei Penelope Mackay). An der Royal Academy wurde ihr die Auszeichnung "Queen's Commendation for Excellence" zuteil.

Seit sie zum Ensemble der English National Opera gehört, hat sie die Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Papagena

(*Die Zauberflöte*), Iphis (*Jephttha*), Atalanta (*Xerxes*), Yum-Yum (*Der Mikado*) und Schwester Constance (*The Carmelites*) gegeben. Weitere Opernengagements umfassen die Tytania an La Monnaie in Brüssel, Bella (*The Midsummer Marriage*) unter der Leitung von Richard Hickox auf dem St. Endellion Festival, Pretty Polly in Birtwistles *Punch and Judy* am Teatro Nacional San João in Porto, die Gouvernante in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* für eine Rußland-Tournee des British Council, Elsie Maynard (*The Yeomen of the Guard*) und Gianetta (*The Gondoliers*) an der Phoenix Opera sowie Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*) an der Opera Holland Park. Ihre Opernauftritte an der Royal Academy of Music umfassen die Titelrolle in *The Cunning Little Vixen* unter der Leitung von Sir Charles Mackerras, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, dirigiert von Sir Colin Davis, Drusilla in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* und Feul Rossignol in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*.

Sarah Tynans Konzertengagements umfassen Eleanora in Salieris *Prima la musica* und Mlle Silberklang in Mozarts *Der Schauspieldirektor* mit der City of London Sinfonia unter Richard Hickox, Mozarts *Requiem* unter Sir Roger Norrington auf dem Spitalfields Festival, Mahlers Zweite Sinfonie mit dem Niederländischen Sinfonieorchester unter

Jaap van Zweden sowie den *Messias* mit dem Halle Orchestra und auf einer China-Tournee mit dem London Philharmonic Orchestra. Außerdem hat sie in der Einspielung von *The Marriage of Figaro* im Rahmen der Chandos-Reihe "Opera in English" die Rolle der Barbarina gesungen.

Jane Powell (Schwester Jeanne) hat an der Royal Academy of Music studiert und nimmt gegenwärtig Unterricht bei Lyn Cook. Zu ihren bisherigen Opernengagements zählen Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*), die Zweite Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*) sowie Prinzessin Linette in der BBC Fernsehinszenierung von *The Love for Three Oranges*. Am Royal Opera House in Covent Garden hat sie Rollen in *Salome*, *Der Freischütz*, *Werther* und *Simon Boccanegra* gesungen. Sie gehörte zum ursprünglichen Ensemble des im Londoner West End spielenden Musicals *Chess* und hat an zahlreichen Einspielungen von Opern und Musicals mitgewirkt. Seit sie Ensemblemitglied der English National Opera ist, hat sie auch dort eine Reihe von Rollen übernommen.

Anne Marie Gibbons (Schwester Mathilde) studierte mit Unterstützung der Peter Moores

Foundation am Royal Northern College of Music. Engagements der jüngeren Zeit umfassen Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), Anna (*Die Trojaner in Carthago*), Ascanius (*Die Trojaner*), Ino (*Semele*) und Pitti Sing (*Der Mikado*) an der English National Opera, wo sie Mitglied des "Young Singers Programme" ist, sowie Pippo in *The Thieving Magpie* an der Opera North und die Titelrollen in *Ariodante* und *La Cenerentola* für die Opera Theatre Company. Zu ihren Einspielungen zählen Zulma (*Elvida*) und Abra (*Il diluvio universale*) für Opera Rara.

Ryland Davies (Der Geistliche) wurde in Südwest Wales geboren und studierte am Royal Manchester College, wo er 1971 zum Fellow of the College ernannt wurde. Sein Operndebüt feierte er 1964 an der Welsh National Opera als Graf Almaviva (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), 1965 gefolgt von seinem Debüt als Haushofmeister (*Der Rosenkavalier*) an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera, wo er seither noch viele andere Rollen gesungen hat. Seine zahlreichen Engagements am Royal Opera House in Covent Garden umfassen Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni, Ferrando, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*), Fenton (*Falstaff*) und Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*).



Zu seinen Engagements in jüngerer Zeit zählen *Turandot* an der Genfer Oper, Arpace (*Idomeneo*) und Monostatos (*Die Zauberflöte*) an der Metropolitan Opera, Opera North und in Garsington, Le Duc (*Chérubin*) in Covent Garden und Monte Carlo, Monostatos in Santa Fe, Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) an der Oper von Nizza, der Neuen Israelischen Oper, der Niederländischen Oper sowie in Glyndebourne, Dr. Caius (*Falstaff*) in Israel, Gaudenzio in Leoncavallos *La Bohème* an der English National Opera, Monostatos in Covent Garden, Hauk-Sendorf (*The Makropulos Case*) an der Houston Grand Opera und Basilio an der Chicago Lyric Opera.

James Edwards (Erster Kommissar) wurde in Essex geboren und sang zunächst als Chorknabe in der St. Paul's Cathedral, bevor er später sein Studium am Royal Northern College of Music und der Royal Academy of Music fortsetzte. Im September 2003 wurde er in das Young Artists Programme der Royal Opera aufgenommen; seither hat er den Nicolios (*The Greek Passion*), Pong (*Turandot*), Gastone (*La traviata*) und Albazar (*Il turco in Italia*) gesungen.

Weitere bisherige Opernrollen umfassen Alfredo (*La traviata*) und Dancaïro (*Carmen*)

an der European Chamber Opera, Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*), Ralph Rackstraw (*HMS Pinafore*) und Prosper (*Not in Front of the Waiter*) an der Kentish Opera, Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) an der Surrey Opera und Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*) an der Opera à la carte. Sein Debut an der English National Opera feierte er in der Rolle des Novizen in *Billy Budd*.

Roland Wood (Zweiter Kommissar) wurde in Berkshire geboren und studierte am Royal Northern College of Music und anschließend am National Opera Studio; unterstützt wurde er von der Peter Moores Foundation und der English National Opera. Seine Opernengagements umfassen Graf Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) an der Opera Holland Park, Nick Shadow (*The Rake's Progress*) in Glyndebourne und Baron Douphol (*La traviata*) an der English National Opera.

Von 2002 bis 2004 war er Prinzipal des Ensembles der Scottish Opera; zu seinen dortigen Rollen zählten Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), Marullo (*Rigoletto*), Schaunard (*La Bohème*) und Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*). Er hat an einer Reihe von CD-Einspielungen für Chandos und Opera Rara mitgewirkt.

Toby Stafford-Allen (Erster Offizier) studierte am Royal Northern College of Music und feierte noch während seiner Studienzeit sein internationales Debüt als Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) auf dem Festival von Aix-en-Provence. Er wurde in das "Jerwood Young Singers Programme" der English National Opera aufgenommen und ist dort seither zum Prinzipal aufgestiegen. Zu seinen größeren Rollen an diesem Haus zählen Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Schaunard (*La Bohème*) und Henry (*The Fairy Queen*).

Weitere Engagements in Großbritannien umfassen Papageno mit der Glyndebourne Touring Opera sowie Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*) und Schaunard an der Opera Holland Park. Zu seinen internationalen Engagements zählen Henry (*The Fairy Queen*) am Teatro del Liceu in Barcelona, Mars und Euro in Cestis *Il Pomo d'oro* auf dem Batignano Festival sowie Schaunard auf den Bregenzer Festspielen. Im Rahmen der von Chandos herausgegebenen Reihe "Opera in English" hat er die Rolle des Morales (*Carmen*) gesungen.

David Stephenson (Gefängniswärter) wurde in Aberdeen geboren und absolvierte zunächst

eine Ausbildung als Elektroingenieur, bevor er am Royal College of Music studierte.

Seine Opernengagements umfassen Angelotti (*Tosca*) für die Opera Ireland, Malatesta (*Don Pasquale*) und Johann (*Werther*) für die Wexford Festival Opera, Morales (*Carmen*) an der Royal Albert Hall, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) und Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) an der Scottish Opera, Silvio (*Pagliacci*) und Papageno an der Welsh National Opera, Marullo (*Rigoletto*) an der English National Opera sowie weitere Rollen für die Buxton Festival Opera und Opera Zuid. Zu seinen Einspielungen zählen Highlights aus Händels *Messias* mit dem London Symphony Orchestra.

Gary Coward (Thierry) absolvierte ein Studium am Royal College of Music und vertiefte seine Ausbildung anschließend an der Guildhall School of Music and Drama sowie der Britten-Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies.

Opernengagements verbanden ihn unter anderem mit den Ensembles der Opera Brava, der Kentish Opera, der Pavilion Opera, den London Opera Players, der English Touring Opera und der Scottish Opera, wobei er führende Rollen in Opern von Mozart, Donizetti und Rossini sowie Operetten von



Strauss und Lehár innehatte, vor allem aber Puccini – Marcello, Sharpless und Scarpia – sowie Verdi – Renato, Don Carlo, Ford, Iago, Di Luna, Germont Père, Amonastro und Rigoletto – sang. Er ist Ensemblemitglied der English National Opera.

William Berger (Monsieur Javelinot) studierte an der Royal Academy of Music. Sein professionelles Operndebüt feierte er als Ormonte in Händels *Partenope* auf dem Göttinger Händel-Festival, wo er für Mercurio in *Atalanta* ein weiteres Mal engagiert wurde. Zu seinen weiteren Rollen zählen Don Giovanni für Opera East, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) für die British Youth Opera und Oberon in *A Summer Night's Dream* – einem Mozart-Shakespeare-Projekt für Aix-en-Provence. Er ist Mitglied des “Young Singers Programme” der English National Opera.

Der **Chor der English National Opera** ist eine Stütze der gesamten Truppe. In zahllosen Produktionen der English National Opera hat er das Publikum mit der Kraft seines Gesangs und der Intensität seiner Darstellung entzückt. Die weit gefächerten Talente und Erfahrungen, die die

Sängern in ihre Darbietungen einbringen, kennzeichnen jede Inszenierung, an der sie mitwirken. Besondere Triumphe für den Chor waren Prokofjews *Krieg und Frieden*, Schostakowitschs *Lady Macbeth von Mzensk*, Brittens *Billy Budd* und *Peter Grimes*, Mussorgskis *Boris Godunow*, Bizets *Carmen* und Verdis *Otello*. Seine Aufnahme der letztgenannten Oper in der von Mark Elder geleiteten Inszenierung von Jonathan Miller wird unter der Schirmherrschaft der Peter Moores Foundation demnächst bei Chandos erscheinen, ebenso seine Aufzeichnung des gefeierten *Ring*-Zyklus unter der Leitung von Sir Reginald Goodall. Andere Aufnahmen des Chors für Chandos und die Peter Moores Foundation sind *Falstaff*, *Maria Stuarda*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Rigoletto* (Regie: Jonathan Miller) und *La traviata*.

Das von Kritikern und Zuhörern gleichermaßen gefeierte **English National Opera Orchestra** hat in den vergangenen Jahren mehrere begehrte Auszeichnungen erhalten, darunter den Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award und den Olivier Award für herausragende Leistungen auf dem Gebiet der Oper. Das Orchester ist das künstlerische Herzstück der English National Opera und ist

neben den regelmäßigen Operaufführungen im Londoner Coliseum auch auf dem Konzertpodium aktiv; Auftritte in jüngerer Zeit führten das Orchester unter anderem zum Aldeburgh-Festival (*Peter Grimes* und *The Rape of Lucretia*) sowie 2004 nach Glastonbury (Dritter Akt von Wagners *Walküre*). Viele Musiker des Orchesters engagieren sich für die Arbeit von ENO Baylis, der Abteilung für Bildung und Kommunikation. Das ENO Orchestra hat an zahlreichen Aufnahmen im Rahmen der Chandos-Reihe “Opera in English” mitgewirkt – *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Otello*, *Ernani*, *Mary Stuart*, *Julius Caesar*, *Der Barbier von Sevilla*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Werther* sowie eine Einspielung des vollständigen *Ring*-Zyklus unter der Leitung von Sir Reginald Goodall.

Paul Daniel wirkte von 1997 bis 2005 als Musikdirektor der English National Opera und hat in dieser Zeit ein breites Repertoire dirigiert, darunter vielbeachtete Inszenierungen von Wagners *Ring*, *Lulu*, *Les Troyens*, *Krieg und Frieden* sowie die Welturaufführung von Turnages *The Silver Tassie*.

Paul Daniel war von 1987 bis 1990 Musikdirektor der Opera Factory und hatte von 1990 bis 1997 die gleiche Position an der Opera North inne, wo sein vielseitiges und

anspruchsvolles Repertoire – darunter mehrere Welturaufführungen sowie gefeierte Inszenierungen von *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Don Carlos* und *Boris Godunow* – den Beifall der Kritiker erregte.

Weitere Opernengagements führten ihn an das Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, La Monnaie in Brüssel, die Bayerische Staatsoper in München, das Teatro Real in Madrid und die Genfer Oper.

Sinfonische Konzertverpflichtungen haben zur Zusammenarbeit mit der Philharmonia, dem Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, dem London Philharmonic Orchestra, dem Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, dem Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, dem Royal Scottish National Orchestra, der Niederländischen Radio-Philharmonie, dem Orchestre de Paris, dem Orchestre National de France, dem Orchestre National de Lyon, dem Tonhallen-Orchester Zürich, dem Göteborger Sinfonieorchester, dem Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, der Deutschen Kammerphilharmonie, der Los Angeles Philharmonic, dem Cleveland Orchestra und der New York Philharmonic geführt. 2005 dirigierte er die international im Fernsehen ausgestrahlte Last Night of the Proms in London mit dem BBC Symphony Orchestra.



Zu seinen Einspielungen zählen die Sinfonie Nr. 3 von Elgar/Payne mit dem Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, eine der Musik englischer Komponisten gewidmete CD-Reihe mit dem Orchester der Opera North und Mendelssohns *Elias* mit dem Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment. Für Chandos hat er Michael Berkeley's *Baa Baa Black Sheep* sowie in der Chandos-Reihe "Opera in English" *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Wozzeck*, und Highlights aus *Boris Godunov*.

Paul Daniel wurde im Jahr 2000 mit dem Titel eines CBE (Companion of the British Empire) ausgezeichnet.

Catrin Wyn-Davies as Blanche de la Force
in English National Opera's production
of *The Carmelites*



© Stephen Vaughan



Poulenc: Dialogues des Carmélites

L'unique opéra sérieux de Francis Poulenc fut créé en italien à La Scala de Milan le 26 janvier 1957; la première française eut lieu à l'Opéra de Paris le 21 juin de la même année. Derrière ces simples statistiques, comme souvent dans le domaine de l'opéra, se trouvent une multitude d'espoirs, de difficultés, de désirs et de désastres, conduisant finalement depuis près de cinquante ans à ce que l'on peut appeler à juste titre un triomphe.

Né à Paris en 1899 dans un milieu aisé, Francis Poulenc grandit pendant la période enivrante où Debussy et Ravel remettaient en cause la suprématie musicale de l'Allemagne. Sa mère était une pianiste remarquable, et l'un des visiteurs réguliers de la famille était le grand ténor lyrique français Edmond Clément, célèbre pour son Don José dans *Carmen* et tout particulièrement pour son Des Grieux dans *Manon* de Massenet. Le père de Poulenc ayant exigé qu'il suive une éducation classique complète, il se retrouva à la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale sans formation musicale approfondie derrière lui, mais fermement décidé à devenir compositeur. Il prit des leçons particulières auprès de Charles Koechlin et fut

un élève manifestement très doué. Cependant, l'accusation d'être un amateur parmi les professionnels mit longtemps à disparaître, et on peut même se demander si c'est la force intérieure qu'il tira de son combat contre de cette accusation, et en restant lui-même, qui lui permit d'envisager et de mener à terme un sujet d'opéra si peu prometteur.

Bien que la création mondiale des *Dialogues des Carmélites* devait avoir lieu à La Scala, avec la garantie d'autres représentations à Naples, Buenos Aires, Londres et Berlin, Poulenc, en tant que Parisien écrivant un opéra français sérieux, avait naturellement en vue Paris et spécialement l'Opéra de Paris. Et c'est là le premier élément rendant la réalisation du projet peu probable. Quand Charles Garnier construisit l'Opéra de Paris dans les années 1860 et 1870, il parla de "l'impression morale" qui devrait frapper les spectateurs: "Ils sentent instinctivement qu'une certaine dignité est de circonstance et que trop de laisser-aller serait inconvenant." Une telle conception convenait peut-être à l'esprit de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, mais dans les années 1920 plus tapageuses, le Palais Garnier détonnait

au milieu des divertissements du groupe des Six dont le jeune Poulenc était l'un des principaux ornements. La liste des ouvrages de compositeurs français vivants à être donnés en première française à l'Opéra de Paris et figurant encore au répertoire du vingt-et-unième siècle est d'une lecture bien mélancolique. Avant les *Dialogues*, il faut remonter jusqu'à *Thaïs* de Massenet... en 1894! Aussi en 1957, Poulenc manifesta peut-être une certaine solidarité avec Charles Garnier, mais le risque d'un échec était élevé.

Le deuxième élément rendant ce projet peu probable était Poulenc lui-même. Il avait fait la une des journaux pour la première fois à l'âge de dix-neuf ans en 1918 avec ses petites pièces pour piano intitulées *Trois mouvements perpétuels*, et de nouvelles partitions joviales lui attirèrent la réputation de *farceur* au cours des années 1920 – il était connu des critiques anglais par le surnom de "le leg-Poulenc". Cette réputation allait être renforcée par son brillant opéra comique *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, créé dans le cadre plus intime de l'Opéra-Comique à Paris en 1947. Dans un tel contexte, il n'est pas étonnant que l'idée qu'il s'était engagé dans un grand opéra sérieux traitant de religieuses et d'exécutions devait surprendre plus d'un. Il y avait également la

question purement technique de savoir s'il était capable de maîtriser les longs développements thématiques traditionnellement demandés par l'opéra. En effet, même dans une œuvre aussi récente (et sérieuse) que le *Stabat mater* de 1953, il a tendance à s'arrêter et à recommencer après avoir atteint un point culminant plutôt que de décroître progressivement la tension de la musique.

Un troisième problème était la base religieuse de l'histoire. La fin du dix-neuvième siècle avait assisté à une énergique campagne de laïcisation en France, culminant en 1905 avec la séparation officielle entre l'État et l'Église. Quand il s'agissait de mettre en scène un sujet religieux, cette séparation n'aidait personne: les laïcs pouvaient revendiquer que l'Opéra devrait être un lieu où il leur serait possible d'échapper à la religion – un lieu pour des histoires d'amour et des récits de bravoure dans des décors fastueux – et les croyants pouvaient se plaindre que des sujets religieux seraient nécessairement entachés dans un tel milieu (comme cela se produisit dans de nombreux théâtres à propos de *Parsifal*; et puisque *Thaïs* a été mentionné, on peut dire que dans ce cas l'aspect religieux ne fait rien d'autre que de rendre plus intéressante la tension sexuelle de l'histoire). D'un côté comme de



l'autre, l'ouvrage de Poulenc risquait donc de s'aliéner une bonne partie du public bourgeois traditionnel du Palais Garnier.

Face à ces difficultés, il y avait au moins deux facteurs hautement positifs à prendre en compte – tout à fait à part du génie de Poulenc et du fait que, outre les *jeux d'esprit*, il avait également composé des œuvres profondément religieuses telles que les *Litanies à la Vierge noire*, le *Stabat mater* et un certain nombre de motets. Le premier de ces facteurs était son propre engagement dans l'histoire, d'une intensité qui le surprit peut-être. Ses lettres et d'autres documents nous donnent une idée précise de cette expérience.

Georges Bernanos écrit la pièce, inspirée d'un roman de Gertrude von Le Fort, pour un film qui ne fut jamais réalisé. Ses exécuteurs testamentaires la découvrirent parmi ses papiers après sa mort, et la firent jouer à Zurich en 1951. Elle eut trois cents représentations consécutives à Paris en 1952, et c'est probablement l'époque où Poulenc assista à deux représentations et lut également la pièce. Cette même année, le directeur des Éditions Ricordi, Guido Valcarengi, demanda à Poulenc d'écrire un ballet pour La Scala. Séduit par l'idée, il commença à réfléchir au choix d'un saint dont la vie pourrait servir de sujet.

Mais en mars 1953, il changea d'idée pendant une tournée en Italie avec le violoncelliste Pierre Fournier, et proposa d'écrire un opéra sur un sujet mystique. C'est alors que Valcarengi suggéra la pièce de Bernanos. Poulenc raconte:

“J'étais décidé à examiner la chose plus tard, à mon retour à Paris, lorsque le lendemain, en plein milieu de la vitrine d'un libraire de Rome, je découvris les *Dialogues* qui semblaient m'attendre. [...] J'achetai le livre et décidai de le relire. Pour cela je m'installai Piazza Navona, à la terrasse du café des Tre Scalini. Il était dix heures du matin. A midi j'y étais encore. [...] A deux heures, je télégraphiais à M. Valcarengi, véritable sourcier, que j'écrirais les *Dialogues*.” Quelques jours plus tard il écrivit à un ami: “Je crois que c'est un vrai sujet pour moi. Pourvu que je ne me casse pas... J'ai prié mon patron saint François à Assise avant-hier.”

Revenu dans sa propriété de Touraine, Poulenc était en plein travail à la fin du mois d'août. Il écrivit à son ami le chanteur Pierre Bernac: “Les *Carmélites* sont commencées, je n'en dors plus (littéralement). [...] J'ai le ton de la grande scène Prieure-Blanche [Acte I, scène 2] avec une très bonne forme: calme au début, féroce dans le milieu (règles de l'ordre), à nouveau calme à la fin. Ce n'est que

la parfaite identification de la musique avec *l'esprit* Bernanos qui peut me faire réussir cette oeuvre. Orchestration très claire pour laisser passer le texte.”

Le soucis de ne pas rater, de saisir “l'esprit Bernanos”, sans parler du manque de sommeil, nous montre que Poulenc avait parfaitement conscience de la difficulté de la tâche qu'il s'était imposé. Plus encore, il était conscient que d'une certaine manière, il était en train de partager les souffrances des religieuses de Compiègne. Son compagnon Lucien Roubert était atteint d'une maladie de cœur et mourut en octobre 1955, juste au moment où Poulenc finissait la copie au propre de la partition vocale. Deux mois plus tôt, Poulenc avait écrit à Bernac: “Je l'ai confié aux 16 bienheureuses Carmélites pour qu'elles protègent sa fin puisqu'il aura été si étroitement mêlé à leur histoire. En effet, j'ai commencé près de lui, dans le bonheur, cette oeuvre à Lyon en août 53. Après la grande tourmente que vous savez je viens de l'achever près de lui, dans ses derniers jours de vie terrestre.” Puis il cite ces paroles cruciales du texte de Bernanos: “On ne meurt pas chacun pour soi... mais les uns à la place des autres”.

C'est dans ces paroles, chantées par Sœur Constance à la fin du premier interlude à

l'Acte II après sa conversation avec Sœur Blanche au cours de laquelle elles ont discuté de la mort affreuse de la première Prieure, que Bernanos introduit le concept spirituel du transfert de la grâce: spécifiquement dans le cas présent, la Prieure a peut-être subi une mort terrible afin que quelqu'un d'autre puisse connaître une mort paisible. Bernanos développe ici la doctrine catholique selon laquelle les saints forment une communauté spirituelle où chaque membre peut intercéder pour les autres, et même pour les pécheurs. Les prières pour les morts relèvent d'un système parallèle, ainsi que la valeur des religieux contemplatifs qui se vouent entièrement à une vie de prière. Dans le texte de l'opéra, il n'existe aucun indice pouvant nous renseigner sur le ou la bénéficiaire de la mort de la Prieure; mais aux paroles de Constances “Ça veut dire que...” Poulenc cite le thème en accords de Blanche (emprunté au premier et au dernier de ses *Nocturnes* pour piano). Dans le cas de Poulenc, le transfert n'eut aucun effet. La mort de Roubert d'une maladie cardiaque n'empêcha pas Poulenc de mourir quelques années plus tard de la même cause.

Poulenc évita le danger de devenir monotone posé par la large prédominance des



voix de femmes en traitant avec grand soin les tessitures vocales, comme l'indiquent ses lettres. En janvier 1954, il écrit à Bernac: "Sans déranger la musique j'ai réécrit le rôle de Constance qui était trop grave; maintenant cela tourne en moyenne entre fa [clef de sol, espace inférieur] et la [au-dessus de la portée]." Un critique avait remarqué à propos de la pièce originale que l'apparent défaut théâtral de l'ouvrage, c'est-à-dire sa succession de scènes sans progression psychologique, devient une vertu, car la pièce obtient la souplesse de la vie même avec sa profonde réalité derrière chaque épisode, sans imposer aucun artifice. De la même manière, Poulenc n'impose rien. Il y a certes des moments discordants, mais tous proviennent du texte; Bernanos l'avait considérablement écourté dans le scénario qu'on lui présenta, et Poulenc l'écourta encore davantage. Beaucoup ont noté que Poulenc n'a pas suivi la manière de mettre les paroles en musique de Debussy (plus récemment, Henri Dutilleul a déclaré que ce style, quoique magistral en lui-même, s'est révélé être une impasse pour les compositeurs d'opéras); au lieu de cela, il revint au style de Massenet, sans aucun doute avec la voix élégante d'Edmond Clément dans l'oreille, et à ce que l'on a appelé la

"mélodisation" de la langue française de Massenet. Quant aux accompagnements de l'orchestre (et ce sont en effet la plupart du temps des accompagnements), la régulière pulsation des accords retrouve l'esprit du lied allemand, et peut-être par-dessus tout celui de Schumann, un compositeur que la mère de Poulenc aimait jouer et que le jeune Francis écoutait assis sous le piano.

Le second de ces facteurs positifs conduisant au succès de l'ouvrage était tout simplement le moment de sa création. L'histoire d'une confrontation avec la peur, la mort, et la destruction d'un mode de vie traditionnel par des forces révolutionnaires ne pouvait que frapper les publics européens pour qui la Seconde Guerre mondiale était encore un souvenir brûlant. Et tout particulièrement pour les Français, dont l'expérience pendant l'Occupation avait démontré, peut-être de la manière la plus effrayante qui soit, jusqu'à quel point certains de leurs compatriotes pouvaient s'abaisser devant la menace de la torture et de l'exécution – un traumatisme dont cette nation n'est peut-être pas encore complètement guérie soixante ans plus tard. La bonne mort de Blanche, qu'elle ait été ou non possible grâce à la mauvaise mort de la Prieure, présente une image de la France telle qu'elle aimait se voir.

L'écrivain Henry de Montherlant admirait la pièce de Bernanos en raison de son mélange de simplicité et d'extraordinaire. L'opéra de Poulenc est, lui aussi, simple et extraordinaire – extraordinairement simple, et simplement extraordinaire.

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Synopsis

Argument

L'action se situe principalement au couvent des Carmélites à Compiègne, et plus tard à Paris pendant la Révolution française et la Terreur, 1789–1794.

COMPACT DISC ONE

Acte I

Scène 1 *La bibliothèque du Marquis de la Force*

[1] Le Chevalier de la Force fait irruption dans la bibliothèque de son père, inquiet de savoir où se trouve sa sœur Blanche. La rue est envahie par la foule et le carrosse de Blanche aurait été encerclé. [2] Blanche entre. Elle est saine et sauve mais bouleversée par son expérience. [3] En allant se coucher, elle est prise de frayeur à la vue d'une ombre sur le mur, et revient auprès de son père et de son

frère, [4] annonçant son intention de devenir religieuse.

Scène 2 *Le parloir du couvent des Carmélites*

[5] Prélude. [6] – [7] Quelques semaines plus tard, la vieille Prieure, Mme de Croissy, interroge Blanche sur les raisons de sa vocation. [8] Elle la prévient que le couvent ne peut pas la protéger du monde extérieur; c'est une maison de prière. Cependant, Blanche demeure inébranlable et annonce le nom de Carmélite qu'elle a choisi: Sœur Blanche de l'Agonie du Christ.

Scène 3 *Dans le couvent*

[9] Prélude. [10] Blanche est entrée au couvent comme novice. Elle rentre des provisions avec Sœur Constance de Saint-Denis, une autre jeune novice. Constance lui parle de ses heureuses années d'enfance dans son village de Bretagne. Blanche lui reproche une telle bonne humeur alors que la Prieure est en train de mourir. Constance l'invite à prier, et à offrir leurs vies en échange de celle de la Prieure. Blanche est horrifiée, mais Constance affirme qu'elle a eu depuis toujours le pressentiment qu'elle mourra jeune, et que lorsqu'elle a rencontré Blanche pour la



première fois, elle a eu la prémonition qu'elles mourront ensemble le même jour.

Scène 4 *L'infirmier*

[11] Prélude. [12] La Prieure est sur son lit de mort, avec Mère Marie auprès d'elle. Pour la Prieure, Dieu est devenu une ombre, et toutes ses méditations antérieures sur la mort ne lui sont d'aucun secours maintenant. Elle est très inquiète pour Blanche, et demande à Mère Marie de prendre soin d'elle. [13] Blanche entre. La Prieure fait des adieux pleins de tendresse à la plus jeune de ses filles qui est de ce fait sa préférée. Mère Marie revient avec le médecin qui refuse de donner d'autres calmants à la Prieure. [14] – [15] Tandis que son agonie s'aggrave, la Prieure commence à délirer. Elle se met à protester contre Dieu, et voit en vision la chapelle du couvent profanée. Blanche revient dans la pièce et voit la Prieure mourir dans la terreur.

Acte II

Scène 1 *La chapelle du couvent, la nuit*

[16] Blanche et Constance veillent le corps de la Prieure. Leur veillée se termine et Constance va chercher les religieuses qui doivent les remplacer. Restée seule, Blanche est terrifiée et veut partir. [17] Mère Marie l'intercepte et la conduit à sa cellule.

Interlude *Le jardin du couvent*

[18] Blanche et Constance ont arrangé une croix avec des fleurs pour la tombe de la prieure. Constance suggère que l'on ne meurt pas pour soi-même, mais pour les autres, et que la Prieure est peut-être morte dans la détresse et la peur afin que quelqu'un d'autre puisse mourir plus facilement.

Scène 2 *La salle du chapitre*

[19] La nouvelle Prieure, Mme Lidoine, arrive et s'adresse aux Carmélites. Elle les avertit que la sécurité tranquille de leurs jours est maintenant terminée et que le futur s'annonce plein d'épreuves. Elle leur rappelle que leur devoir le plus important est de prier et qu'elles ne doivent pas aspirer au martyre. [20] Mère Marie entonne avec elles l'*Ave Maria*.

Interlude *Une salle dans le couvent*

[21] La Prieure, Mère Marie et Constance entrent précipitamment quand la cloche de la porte d'entrée retentit. La Révolution gagnant du terrain, le Chevalier de La Force a décidé de quitter la France et désire voir Blanche. La Prieure autorise une entrevue entre le frère et la sœur en présence de Mère Marie.

COMPACT DISC TWO

Scène 3 *Le parloir*

[1] Prélude. [2] Le Chevalier tente de persuader Blanche de quitter le couvent. Leur père estime que ce n'est plus un lieu sûr pour elle; en sa qualité d'aristocrate et de religieuse, elle est doublement en danger à l'approche de la Terreur. Le Chevalier croit que c'est la peur – ou la peur de la peur – qui la retient au couvent. Blanche déclare qu'elle est dépendante de la volonté de Dieu, et renouvelle son intention de rester. Une fois le Chevalier parti, Blanche est sur le point de défaillir. [3] Mère Marie la presse de prendre courage.

Scène 4 *La sacristie*

[4] Le Père confesseur conduit la prière des religieuses. [5] Il fait ses adieux car il est forcé de partir de cacher. Mère Marie déclare que pour préserver l'Église, les Carmélites doivent s'offrir en sacrifice. Mais la Prieure la corrige: ce n'est pas aux religieuses de décider si elles doivent devenir martyres ou non.

[6] Le Père confesseur revient précipitamment, cherchant refuge contre la foule et les soldats qui se pressent à l'extérieur du couvent. [7] Les Commissaires entrent et annoncent que les

religieuses vont être expulsées du couvent.

[8] La Prieure part pour Paris. Voyant la terreur de Blanche, Mère Jeanne lui donne une petite statue de l'enfant Jésus, mais les cris de la foule font sursauter Blanche, et elle laisse tomber la figurine qui se brise sur le sol.

Acte III

Scène 1 *La chapelle du couvent*

[9] La chapelle a été profanée. En l'absence de la Prieure, Mère Marie est responsable des Carmélites, et elle propose qu'elles fassent ensemble vœu de martyre. [10] Le vote est secret, mais il y a une dissidente: bien que Blanche soit soupçonnée, Constance prétend que c'est elle qui a voté contre et demande de pouvoir changer d'avis. Les religieuses prononcent le vœu. Le courage abandonne Blanche, et elle s'enfuit.

Interlude *Une rue à l'extérieur du couvent*

[11] La Prieure est revenue de Paris. Un Officier s'adresse aux Carmélites: leur communauté a été proscrite, et il les accueille comme de nouvelles citoyennes de la République. [12] La Prieure veut prévenir le Père confesseur qu'il est trop dangereux de venir célébrer la messe, mais Mère Marie demande comment il est possible de concilier une telle précaution avec leur vœu de martyre.



Scène 2 *La bibliothèque du Marquis de La Force*

^[13] Prélude. ^[14] Le père de Blanche a été guillotiné et elle est revenue dans sa maison comme bonne. Mère Marie vient pour la reconduire au couvent, mais Blanche est trop effrayée pour la suivre. Mère Marie lui communique une adresse où elle sera en sécurité.

Scène 3 *La prison de la Conciergerie*

^[15] Les Carmélites ont été arrêtées et sont emprisonnées à la Conciergerie. La Prieure fait vœu de martyr. ^[16] Constance a rêvé que Blanche reviendra parmi ses sœurs.

^[17] – ^[18] Le geôlier annonce le jugement du Tribunal révolutionnaire: les Carmélites sont condamnées à mort.

Interlude *Une rue proche de la Bastille*

^[19] Mère Marie, apprenant du Père confesseur la sentence de mort qui frappe les Carmélites, décide de rejoindre ses sœurs. Mais le prêtre lui répond que Dieu a peut-être pour elle un dessein différent.

Scène 4 *La Place de la Révolution, le 17 juillet 1794*

^[20] Prélude. ^[21] Observées par une large foule, les Carmélites sont menées sur le lieu de

l'exécution. Conduites par la Prieure, elles montent l'une après l'autre à l'échafaud en chantant le *Salve Regina*. Constance est la dernière à monter. Au même instant, Blanche sort de la foule pour se joindre à son amie et chante seule jusqu'au moment où, à son tour, elle meurt sous la guillotine.

Traduction: Francis Marchal

Ashley Holland (Marquis de la Force) a fait ses études à l'Université de Warwick puis au Royal Northern College of Music de Manchester grâce à une bourse de la Peter Moores Foundation. Il s'impose de plus en plus des deux côtés de l'Atlantique comme l'un des jeunes barytons les plus recherchés pour les rôles du répertoire italien du dix-neuvième siècle. Après ses débuts très acclamés dans le rôle de Don Pedro dans *Maria Padilla* de Donizetti à l'Opéra de Minnesota, il a été immédiatement réinvité à se produire dans le rôle d'Orazio dans la nouvelle production de *Orazi e Curiazi* de Mercadante.

Ashley Holland a été pendant plusieurs saisons baryton principal à l'English National Opera où il a chanté les rôles de Zurga (*Les Pêcheurs de perles*), Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Cecil

(*Maria Stuarda*), Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*), Lescaut (*Manon*), Ottakar (*Der Freischütz*), Marcello (*La Bohème*), Escamillo (*Carmen*), Ford (*Falstaff*), et Don Carlo (*Ernani*). Il a également interprété le rôle de baryton dans la co-production de l'English National Opera et du Mark Morris Dance Group de *L'Allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato* de Haendel.

Ashley Holland s'est également produit à l'Opera North, au Royal Opera de Covent Garden, au Chicago Lyric Opera, à l'Opéra de Paris-Bastille, à l'Opéra de Cincinnati, à l'Opéra de Calgary et à Dresde. Parmi ses enregistrements figurent Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*) et Ford (*Falstaff*) sous la direction de Paul Daniels, tous deux dans la série "Opera in English" de Chandos.

Native du Pays de Galles, la soprano **Catrin Wyn-Davies** (Blanche de la Force) a obtenu un diplôme (Drame et Études théâtrales) au Royal Holloway College avant d'entreprendre ses études vocales à la Guildhall School of Music de Londres en 1990. Pendant cette période, elle remporta de nombreux prix parmi lesquels le Richard Tauber Prize 1993 et le *Decca Prize* lors des Kathleen Ferrier Awards en 1994.

En 1994 elle est entrée comme soprano principale au Welsh National Opera où elle

a chanté les rôles de Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*), Hero (*Béatrice et Bénédicte*), Ilia (*Idomeneo*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Zerlina et Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Blanche (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) et le rôle titre dans *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

D'autres prestations importantes incluent le rôle de Zerlina au Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; Ilia, Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) et Poppea au Bayerische Staatsoper de Munich; Donna Elvira, Poppea et Alice Ford (*Falstaff*) au Deutsche Oper am Rhein; et Mélisande dans la production de l'Opéra du Rhin de *Pelléas et Mélisande* à Strasbourg. Aux États-Unis, elle a chanté le rôle de Susanna à l'Opéra de Santa Fe et celui de Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*) à l'Opéra de San Francisco.

En Grande-Bretagne, Catrin Wyn-Davies a incarné les rôles de Blanche, Ginevra (*Ariodante*) et Tatiana (*Eugène Onéguine*) à l'English National Opera; Valencienne (*Die lustige Witwe*) et la Première Fille-Fleur (*Parsifal*) au Royal Opera de Covent Garden. Elle a chanté le rôle de Miss Jessel dans le film réalisé par la BBC de l'opéra de Britten *The Turn of the Screw* mis en scène par Katie Mitchell et dirigé par Richard Hickox. Elle s'est produite en concert à travers toute l'Europe sous la direction de chefs tels que



Christoph von Dohnányi, Richard Hickox, Paul McCreech, René Jacobs, Trevor Pinnock et Pierre Boulez.

Catrin Wyn-Davies a enregistré des œuvres religieuses de Vivaldi avec le King's Consort sous la direction de Robert King, *Der Silbersee* de Kurt Weill sous la direction de Markus Stenz, et un album de chansons populaires de Beethoven avec Malcolm Martineau.

Peter Wedd (Chevalier de la Force) a étudié à la Guildhall School of Music and Drama de Londres avec William McAlpine puis au National Opera Studio grâce au soutien de la Peter Moores Foundation. Il fut ténor principal au Royal Opera de Covent Garden de 1999 à 2001. Il est régulièrement invité par le Welsh National Opera où il a chanté les rôles de Don José (*Carmen*), Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), Alfredo (*La traviata*) et Laça (*Jenůfa*).

Parmi ses autres prestations en Grande-Bretagne et en Irlande, on citera les rôles de Federico (*L'Arlesiana*) et Pluto (*Orphée aux enfers*) avec l'Opera Holland Park, au Festival de Wexford, Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) au Royal Albert Hall de Londres, Tamino avec Glyndebourne On Tour, Lensky (*Eugène Onéguine*) avec l'Opera Holland Park et le

Chevalier de la Force (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) à l'English National Opera. Peter Wedd a également chanté avec l'Opéra de chambre d'Europe et au Théâtre Lyrique de Singapour.

Felicity Palmer (Madame de Croissy) est l'une des chanteuses aux talents les plus remarquables de notre temps, montrant la même aisance dans des musiques aussi diverses que celles de Haendel, Wagner et Luciano Berio.

Au Metropolitan Opera de New York, elle a incarné Fricka et Waltraute dans des cycles du *Ring*, la Comtesse (*La Dame de Pique*), Geneviève (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) et Mme de Croissy (*Dialogues des Carmélites*). À La Scala de Milan, elle a interprété Mme de Croissy et Klytemnestra (*Elektra*); à Chicago la Comtesse, Kabanicha (*Katya Kabanova*) et Madame Begbick (*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*); à San Francisco *Giulio Cesare*; à Munich, Eduige (*Rodelinda*) et Klytemnestra; à Berlin, La Zia Principessa (*Suor Angelica*) et Klytemnestra; à Glyndebourne, Zita (*Gianni Schicchi*) et Mistress Quickly (*Falstaff*); au Royal Opera de Covent Garden, elle a chanté Mrs Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*), Juno (*Semele*) et Klytemnestra, et à Paris Klytemnestra, la Comtesse, Mme de Croissy, Zita, Madame

Begbick et Maria Dmitrievna Ahkrosimova (*Guerre et Paix*). Elle est récemment revenue à l'English National Opera pour y interpréter Mme de Croissy et Katisha (*The Mikado*).

Felicity Palmer mène depuis longtemps une brillante carrière en concert, notamment avec le BBC Symphony Orchestra et le New York Philharmonic sous la direction de Pierre Boulez, Sir Colin Davis et Gennady Rozhdestvensky; l'English Chamber Orchestra sous la direction de Sir Charles Mackerras; le London Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Michael Tilson Thomas; le Philharmonia Orchestra et le Royal Philharmonic Orchestra sous la direction de Giuseppe Sinopoli; le Concentus Musicus de Vienne sous la direction de Nicolaus Harnoncourt; l'Orchestre du Concertgebouw sous la direction d'Edo De Waart; le Boston Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos et le Los Angeles Philharmonic sous la direction de Sir Simon Rattle.

Felicity Palmer a réalisé de nombreux enregistrements parmi lesquels *Le Rossignol* de Stravinski et les *Poèmes pour Mi* de Messiaen sous la direction de Pierre Boulez, des pièces vocales de Benjamin Britten et deux disques consacrés à des mélodies de l'époque victorienne et édouardienne avec le pianiste

John Constable. Felicity Palmer a été nommée Commandeur de l'empire britannique (CBE) en novembre 1993.

Josephine Barstow (Mère Marie) débuta sa carrière en faisant des tournées avec Opera for All après quoi elle obtint une bourse pour étudier pendant un an au London Opera Centre. Elle chanta Euridice et Violetta au Sadler's Wells Opera puis signa un contrat de trois ans avec la Welsh National Company où elle interpréta les rôles de la Comtesse (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Fiordiligi, Violetta, Mimì, Amelia (*Simon Boccanegra*) et Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*). Après avoir chanté Violetta (*La traviata*) à l'English National Opera, elle commença une longue et très heureuse collaboration avec cette compagnie. Parmi ses meilleurs rôles, on citera Natacha (*Guerre et Paix*), Salome, Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*), Leonora (*La forza del destino*), Leonore (*Fidelio*), Jeanne (*Les Diables de Loudon*), Katarina (*La Lady Macbeth de Mtsensk*), Tosca, Sieglinde, Senta, Emilia Marty (*L'Affaire Makropoulos*), la Maréchale et Arabella. Elle s'est régulièrement produite au Royal Opera de Covent Garden dans des rôles tels que la jeune femme dans *We come to the River* de Henze, Salome, Ellen Orford, Helena



(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Santuzza, Leonore, Alice, Lady Macbeth et la Comtesse (*La Dame de Pique*).

Josephine Barstow a voyagé dans le monde entier, chantant un répertoire varié incluant Verdi, Richard Strauss, Puccini et Janáč'ek, et se produisant sur les scènes lyriques de Paris, Munich, Vienne, Bayreuth, Berlin, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, en Afrique du Sud, au Japon et en Australie.

Josephine Barstow a connu une collaboration fructueuse avec l'Opera North où elle a chanté les rôles de Tosca, Marie (*Wozzeck*), Aida, Medea, Lady Billows, et peut-être plus notablement Gloriana, qui fut également filmé. Ses récents engagements incluent Kabanicha (*Katya Kabanova*) à San Diego, Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) à Anvers et Oviedo, et Mère Marie (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) à l'English National Opera. Sa discographie inclut les rôles de Marie (*Wozzeck*) et Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) dans la série "Opera in English" de Chandos, ainsi que *Un ballo in maschera*, *Gloriana*, *Albert Herring*, *Kiss me Kate*, *Oliver* et *Street Scene*.

Née en Irlande, **Orla Boylan** (Madame Lidoine) est diplômée du D.I.T. College of

Music de Dublin où elle a étudié le chant avec Mary Brennan. Elle a reçu de nombreux prix parmi lesquels la Veronica Dunne Bursary, le Ibla Grand Prize et celui de la National Mozart Competition.

Ses récentes prestations incluent les rôles de Madame Lidoine (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) à l'English National Opera; Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) au New York City Opera; la Deuxième Symphonie de Mahler avec l'Orchestre national symphonique d'Estonie sous la direction de Paavo Järvi et un récital à Harewood House à Leeds.

Sur scène, Orla Boylan a incarné le rôle de Jenůfa au Festival de Glyndebourne et à l'Opéra de Lyon; elle a fait ses débuts dans le rôle d'Arabella au Garsington Opera; elle a chanté dans le Chœur de Femmes (*The Rape of Lucretia*) et Sieglinde à l'English National Opera; la Gouvernante (*The Turn of the Screw*) à Angers Nantes Opéra; la Comtesse (*Le nozze di Figaro*) au New York City Opera; le rôle titre dans *Katya Kabanova* pour ses débuts au Festival de Glyndebourne; Mar'enka (*La Fiancée vendue*) avec le Glyndebourne Touring Opera; le rôle titre dans la première production scénique en Angleterre de *Die Liebe der Danae* de Strauss au Garsington Opera; et Tatiana (*Eugène*

Onéguine) avec l'European Union Opera, également enregistré sur DVD.

En concert, Orla Boylan s'est produite dans *Das Klagende Lied* de Mahler avec le RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Laurent Wagner; le *Requiem* de Verdi à la cathédrale Saint-Paul de Londres avec le Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; l'Acte III de *Die Walküre* avec l'English National Opera lors du Festival de Glastonbury en 2004; la création de *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* de Gerald Barry avec le RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, et ses débuts aux BBC Proms de Londres dans le rôle d'Anna dans *Street Scenes* de Kurt Weill sous la direction de Barry Wordsworth.

Née à Londres, **Sarah Tynan** (Sœur Constance) a étudié au Royal Northern College of Music de Manchester et avec Penelope Mackay à la Royal Academy of Music de Londres où elle a obtenu le Queen's Commendation for Excellence.

Depuis son entrée à l'English National Opera, elle a interprété les rôles de Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Papagena (*Die Zauberflöte*), Iphis (*Jephtha*), Atalanta (*Xerxes*), Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*) et Sœur Constance (*Dialogues des Carmélites*). Elle s'est

également produite dans les rôles de Tytania au Théâtre de La Monnaie de Bruxelles; Bella (*The Midsummer Marriage*) sous la direction de Richard Hickox au St Endellion Festival; Pretty Polly dans *Punch and Judy* de Birtwistle au Teatro Nacional San João d'Oporto; la Gouvernante dans *The Turn of the Screw* de Britten lors de la tournée en Russie du British Council; Elsie Maynard (*The Yeomen of the Guard*) et Gianetta (*The Gondoliers*) avec le Phoenix Opera; et Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*) avec l'Opera Holland Park. Elle a chanté à la Royal Academy of Music de Londres le rôle titre dans *Le Petit Renard rusé* sous la direction de Sir Charles Mackerras, Zerlina dans *Don Giovanni* sous la direction de Sir Colin Davis, Drusilla dans *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, et le Feu et le Rossignol dans *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*.

En concert, Sarah Tynan a interprété le rôle d'Eleanora dans *Prima la musica* de Salieri et celui de Mlle Silberklang dans *Der Schauspieldirektor* de Mozart avec le City of London Sinfonia sous la direction de Richard Hickox, le *Requiem* de Mozart sous la direction de Sir Roger Norrington au Spitalfields Festival, la Deuxième Symphonie de Mahler avec l'Orchestre symphonique des Pays-Bas sous la direction de Jaap van



Zweden, le *Messie* de Haendel avec le Halle Orchestra et en tournée en Chine avec le London Philharmonic Orchestra. Elle a également chanté le rôle de Barbarina dans l'enregistrement de *Le nozze di Figaro* pour la série "Opera in English" de Chandos.

Jane Powell (Sœur Jeanne) a étudié à la Royal Academy of Music de Londres, et poursuit actuellement sa formation avec Lyn Cook. Elle a chanté les rôles de Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*), la Deuxième Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*), et la Princesse Linette dans la production de la BBC Television de *L'Amour des trois oranges*. Au Royal Opera de Covent Garden elle a tenu des rôles dans *Salome*, *Der Freischütz*, *Werther* et *Simon Boccanegra*. Jane Powell a fait partie de la production originale de la comédie musicale *Chess* donnée dans le West End à Londres, et a participé à de nombreux enregistrements d'opéras et de comédies musicales. Depuis son entrée à l'English National Opera, elle a chanté plusieurs rôles.

Anne Marie Gibbons (Sœur Mathilde) a étudié au Royal Northern College of Music de Manchester grâce au soutien de la Peter Moores Foundation. Elle a récemment chanté les rôles de Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*),

Anna (*The Trojans at Carthage*), Ascagne (*Les Troyens*), Ino (*Semele*), et Pitti-Sing dans *The Mikado* (à l'English National Opera où elle est membre du Young Singers Programme), Pippo (*La Pie voleuse* à l'Opera North), les rôles titres dans *Ariodante* et *La Cenerentola* (Opera Theatre Company). Sa discographie inclut les rôles de Zulma (*Elvida*) et Abra (*Il diluvio universale*) pour Opera Rara.

Né dans le Sud du Pays de Galles, **Ryland Davies** (le Père confesseur) a étudié au Royal Manchester College of Music dont il devint "Fellow" en 1971. Après ses débuts à l'opéra en 1964 dans les rôles du Comte Almaviva (*Il barbiere di Siviglia* au Welsh National Opera), il fit ses débuts au Festival de Glyndebourne en 1965 dans le rôle du Majordome (*Der Rosenkavalier*), et fut par la suite réinvité à se produire dans de nombreux rôles. À Covent Garden, il a incarné entre autres Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni, Ferrando, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*), Fenton (*Falstaff*) et Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

Plus récemment, Ryland Davies a chanté dans *Turandot* à l'Opéra de Genève; Arbaçe (*Idomeneo*) et Monostatos (*Die Zauberflöte*) au Metropolitan Opera de New York, à l'Opera North et au Garsington Opera; le

Duc (*Chérubin*) à Covent Garden et Montecarlo; Monostatos à Santa Fe; Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) à l'Opéra de Nice, au New Israeli Opera, à l'Opéra des Pays-Bas et à Glyndebourne; Dr Caius (*Falstaff*) en Israël; Gaudenzio dans *La Bohème* de Leoncavallo à l'English National Opera; Monostatos à Covent Garden; Hauk-Sendorf (*L'Affaire Makropoulos*) au Houston Grand Opera; et Basilio au Chicago Lyric Opera.

Né dans l'Essex, **James Edwards** (Premier Commissaire) a d'abord été choriste à la cathédrale Saint-Paul de Londres, puis a continué sa formation vocale au Royal Northern College of Music de Manchester et à la Royal Academy of Music de Londres. Il est membre du "Royal Opera's Young Artists Programme" depuis septembre 2003, et a chanté des rôles tels que Nicolios (*The Greek Passion*), Pong (*Turandot*), Gastone (*La traviata*), et Albazar (*Il turco in Italia*).

Parmi les autres rôles de James Edwards figurent Alfredo (*La traviata*) et Dancaïro (*Carmen*) avec l'Opéra de chambre d'Europe; Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*), Ralph Rackstraw (*HMS Pinafore*) et Prosper (*Not in front of the Waiter*) avec le Kentish Opera; Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) avec le Surrey Opera et Ferrando (*Così*

fan tutte) avec Opéra à la carte. Il a fait ses débuts à l'English National Opera dans le rôle du Novice dans *Billy Budd* de Britten.

Né dans le Berkshire, **Roland Wood** (Deuxième Commissaire) a étudié au Royal Northern College of Music de Manchester puis au National Opera Studio (grâce au soutien de la Peter Moores Foundation) et à l'English National Opera. Parmi ses engagements figurent les rôles du Comte Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) avec l'Opera Holland Park, Nick Shadow (*The Rake's Progress*) à Glyndebourne, et le Baron Douphol (*La traviata*) à l'English National Opera.

De 2002 à 2004 Roland Wood a été baryton principal au Scottish Opera où il a incarné les rôles de Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), Marullo (*Rigoletto*), Schaunard (*La Bohème*) et Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*). Il a participé à plusieurs enregistrements réalisés par Chandos et Opera Rara.

Toby Stafford-Allen (Premier Officier) a étudié au Royal Northern College Music de Manchester, et a fait ses débuts internationaux dans le rôle de Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) au Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Après avoir été



engagé dans le Young Singers Programme de l'English National Opera, il est aujourd'hui baryton principal dans cette compagnie où il a chanté des rôles importants tels que Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Schaunard (*La Bohème*), et Henry (*The Fairy Queen*).

Parmi ses autres engagements en Grande-Bretagne figurent le rôle de Papageno avec le Glyndebourne Touring Opera, Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*) et Schaunard avec l'Opera Holland Park. À l'étranger, il a chanté Henry (*The Fairy Queen*) au Teatro del Liceu de Barcelone, Mars et Euro dans *Il Pomo d'oro* de Cesti au Festival de Batignano, et Schaunard au Bregenzer Festspiele. Il a enregistré le rôle de Morales (*Carmen*) pour la série "Opera in English" de Chandos.

Né à Aberdeen, **David Stephenson** (Geôlier) a fait des études d'ingénieur électricien avant d'entrer au Royal College of Music de Londres.

Il a chanté les rôles d'Angelotti (*Tosca*) à l'Opéra d'Irlande, Malatesta (*Don Pasquale*) et Johann (*Werther*) au Festival de Wexford, Morales (*Carmen*) au Royal Albert Hall de Londres, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) et Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) au Scottish Opera, Silvio (*Pagliacci*) et Papageno au

Welsh National Opera, Marullo (*Rigoletto*) à l'English National Opera, et d'autres rôles au Festival de Buxton et à l'Opera Zuid. Parmi ses enregistrements on citera un album d'extraits du *Messie* de Haendel avec le London Symphony Orchestra.

Gary Coward (Thierry) est diplômé du Royal College of Music de Londres. Il a également étudié à la Guildhall School of Music and Drama et à la Britten-Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies.

Il s'est produit avec des compagnies lyriques telles que Opera Brava, Kentish Opera, Pavilion Opera, London Opera Players, l'English Touring Opera et le Scottish Opera, dans des rôles importants de Mozart, Donizetti et Rossini; il a chanté dans des opérettes de Strauss et Lehár, et plus fréquemment dans des ouvrages de Puccini (Marcello, Sharpless et Scarpia) et Verdi (Renato, Don Carlo, Ford, Iago, Di Luna, Germont Père, Amonastro et Rigoletto). Gary Coward est membre de l'English National Opera.

William Berger (M. Javelinot) a étudié à la Royal Academy of Music de Londres. Il a fait ses débuts professionnels à l'opéra dans le rôle d'Ormonte dans *Partenope* de Haendel

au Festival Haendel de Göttingen où il a été réinvité pour y chanter Mercurio (*Atalanta*). Parmi ses autres rôles figurent Don Giovanni (Opera East), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte* avec le British Youth Opera) et Oberon (*A Summer Night's Dream* – projet Mozart/Shakespeare, Aix-en-Provence). Il est membre du Young Singers Programme de l'English National Opera.

Le **Chœur de l'English National Opera** est l'un des plus beaux atouts de cette compagnie lyrique. Remarquable autant pour la puissance de son chant que l'intensité de son jeu, cet ensemble a enthousiasmé le public dans d'innombrables productions de l'English National Opera. Ces choristes, riches d'une vaste expérience et d'une multitude de talents, marquent de leur sceau toutes les représentations auxquelles ils participent. Le Chœur a triomphé entre autres dans *Guerre et paix* de Prokofiev, *Lady Macbeth de Mtsensk* de Chostakovitch, *Billy Budd* et *Peter Grimes* de Britten, *Boris Godounov* de Moussorgsky, *Carmen* de Bizet et *Otello* de Verdi. Leur enregistrement de ce dernier opéra, dans une mise en scène de Jonathan Miller et sous la direction de Mark Elder, est sorti chez Chandos grâce au financement de

la Peter Moores Foundation, tout comme leur enregistrement combien célèbre du cycle du *Ring* dirigé par Sir Reginald Goodall. Il sont aussi enregistré pour Chandos, en collaboration avec la Peter Moores Foundation, *Falstaff*, *Maria Stuarda*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Rigoletto* (dans la mise en scène de Jonathan Miller) et *La traviata*.

dAcclamé par la critique comme par le public, l'**Orchestre de l'English National Opera** a reçu plusieurs prix prestigieux au cours de ces dernières années, notamment le Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award et un Olivier Award pour sa contribution remarquable dans le domaine de l'opéra. Cet orchestre est au cœur de la vie artistique de l'English National Opera et, outre des représentations lyriques au Coliseum de Londres, il s'est produit en concert, au Festival d'Aldeburgh (*Peter Grimes* et *Le Viol de Lucrèce*) et à Glastonbury en 2004 (Acte III de *La Walkyrie* de Wagner). Un grand nombre d'instrumentistes participent au travail de l'ENO Baylis, département de pédagogie et d'assistance de la troupe. L'Orchestre de l'ENO apparaît dans beaucoup d'enregistrements réalisés dans le cadre de la série de Chandos "Opera in English": *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Otello*,

Ernani, Mary Stuart, Jules César, Le Barbier de Séville, Rigoletto, La traviata, Werther et un cycle complet de la *Tétralogie* sous la direction de Sir Reginald Goodall.

Paul Daniel a été directeur musical de l'English National Opera entre 1997 et 2005; il y a dirigé un large répertoire comprenant notamment des productions remarquables de la *Tétralogie*, *Lulu*, *Les Troyens*, *Guerre et Paix* et la création mondiale de *The Silver Tassie* de Turnage.

Il a été directeur musical d'Opera Factory entre 1987 et 1990 et d'Opera North entre 1990 et 1997, où il a été salué par la critique pour son répertoire diversifié et d'un abord difficile comprenant plusieurs créations mondiales, ainsi que des productions fameuses de *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Don Carlos* et *Boris Godounov*.

Parmi ses autres engagements lyriques, on peut citer le Royal Opera House de Covent Garden, la Monnaie de Bruxelles, l'Opéra d'État bavarois de Munich, le Teatro Real de Madrid et le Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Dans le domaine symphonique, il a dirigé le Philharmonia, l'Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, l'Orchestre philharmonique

de Londres, le Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, l'Orchestre symphonique de Bournemouth, le Royal Scottish National Orchestra, l'Orchestre philharmonique de la Radio néerlandaise, l'Orchestre de Paris, l'Orchestre National de France, l'Orchestre National de Lyon, l'Orchestre de la Tonhalle de Zürich, l'Orchestre symphonique de Göteborg, l'Orchestre de la Suisse romande, la Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, l'Orchestre philharmonique de Los Angeles, l'Orchestre de Cleveland et l'Orchestre philharmonique de New York. En 2005, il a dirigé le BBC Symphony Orchestra lors de la Dernière Soirée des Proms à Londres, concert télévisé dans le monde entier.

Parmi ses enregistrements figurent la Symphonie no 3 d'Elgar/Payne avec l'Orchestre symphonique de Bournemouth, une série de CD de musique anglaise avec l'Orchestre d'Opera North et *Elias* avec l'Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Pour Chandos, il a enregistré *Baa Baa Black Sheep* de Michael Berkeley et, dans le cadre de la série de Chandos "Opera in English", *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Wozzeck*, et des extraits de *Boris Godounov*.

Paul Daniel a été fait Commandeur de l'Ordre de l'Empire britannique en l'an 2000.



Josephine Barstow as Mother Marie in English National Opera's production of *The Carmelites*

© Stephen Vaughan



Poulenc: Le Carmelitane

La prima rappresentazione dell'unica opera seria di Poulenc fu allestita alla Scala di Milano il 26 gennaio 1957 (in italiano); la prima francese si svolse all'Opéra di Parigi, il 21 giugno dello stesso anno. Ma dietro le semplici date, come spesso accade per l'opera, si nascondono tutte le speranze, i problemi, i desideri e i disastri che produssero infine quello che a quasi cinquant'anni di distanza può a buon diritto definirsi un trionfo.

Nato a Parigi nel 1899, Francis Poulenc si formò durante il difficile periodo che vide Debussy e Ravel sfidare la supremazia musicale della Germania. Il compositore era di famiglia agiata e sua madre era una pianista di talento; un visitatore regolare della sua casa fu il grande tenore lirico francese Edmond Clément, rinomato per l'interpretazione del Don José nella *Carmen* e in particolar modo per quella di Des Grieux nella *Manon* di Massenet. Poulenc padre impose al figlio un'educazione tradizionale, e così il giovane uscì alla fine della prima Guerra mondiale senza veri studi musicali, ma deciso a fare il compositore. Studiò privatamente con Charles Koechlin e imparò molto in fretta, ma gli fu necessario

molto tempo per scrollarsi di dosso l'etichetta di dilettante tra i professionisti. Si può addirittura ipotizzare che fu proprio la forza interiore derivata dagli sforzi per combattere quest'accusa e rimanere indipendente a consentirgli di ideare e realizzare questo improbabile soggetto operistico.

Per quanto la prima mondiale scaligera delle *Carmelitane* garantisse altre rappresentazioni a Napoli, Buenos Aires, Londra e Berlino, nel mirino del compositore parigino di un'opera francese seria rimanevano naturalmente Parigi e, in particolare, l'Opéra. Ma qui stava la prima difficoltà. Quando aveva costruito l'Opéra, nei decenni del 1860 e del 70, Charles Garnier aveva dichiarato che gli spettacoli avrebbero dovuto colpire gli spettatori per la loro forza morale: "la sensazione istintiva è che sia necessaria una certa dignità e sarebbe inappropriato lasciarsi andare a un'eccessiva mancanza di formalità". Questo era probabilmente ideale per il periodo di fine Ottocento, ma nei più brillanti anni Venti, l'Opéra sembrava del tutto irraggiungibile per l'allegro Gruppo dei Sei, di cui il giovane Poulenc fu uno dei principali componenti.

L'elenco di opere dei compositori francesi viventi la cui prima era stata allestita nel teatro e ancora in repertorio nel ventunesimo secolo è deludente. Prima delle *Carmelitane* bisogna risalire alla *Thaïs* di Massenet... nel 1894! Così nel 1957, per quanto Poulenc potesse accettare l'ideale di Garnier Poulenc, il rischio di un fiasco era elevato.

Una seconda difficoltà stava nella persona dello stesso Poulenc, che si era messo in luce inizialmente a diciannove anni, nel 1918, con i suoi brevi componimenti per pianoforte dal titolo *Trois mouvements perpétuels*; altre opere divertenti negli anni Venti gli avevano dato una reputazione di *farceur*. I critici inglesi lo avevano soprannominato "le leg-Poulenc" [*Poulenc il burlone, n.d.t.*], una reputazione cementata dalla splendida opera comica *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, la cui prima ebbe luogo presso l'Opéra-Comique di Parigi nel 1947. L'idea di un profondo coinvolgimento del compositore in una grande opera seria, che parlava di suore ed esecuzioni, fu sicuramente una sorpresa per molti. Inoltre esisteva anche la questione puramente tecnica della capacità di Poulenc di affrontare l'ampio respiro che richiedeva il tradizionale materiale dell'opera lirica. Anche in una delle sue ultime (e serie) composizioni come lo *Stabat mater* del 1953,

alla sua tendenza a raggiungere il culmine non seguiva una graduale conclusione, ma una semplice fermata, prima di ripartire.

Un terzo problema era la natura religiosa della storia. Il tardo Ottocento era stato testimone di una vigorosa campagna a favore del laicismo in Francia, culminata nel 1905 con la separazione ufficiale tra Chiesa e Stato. Nella rappresentazione dei temi religiosi nel teatro pubblico, questa separazione non favoriva nessuno: i fautori del laicismo sostenevano che l'Opéra dovesse essere un luogo in cui potersi allontanare dalla religione – un luogo per opulenti spettacoli imperniati su storie d'amore e gesta audaci – e i credenti si lamentavano che i soggetti religiosi venissero inevitabilmente rovinati in un ambiente del genere (come accadde in molti teatri a proposito del *Parsifal*; e dal momento che si è parlato della *Thaïs*, in base ad alcuni elementi si potrebbe sostenere che in quel dramma l'aspetto religioso serve solo ad acuirne i risvolti sessuali). In un modo o nell'altro l'opera di Poulenc quindi rischiava di alienarsi una buona sezione del pubblico della tradizionale classe media.

Rispetto a questi problemi, esistevano almeno due fattori altamente positivi da tenere in considerazione, a parte il genio di Poulenc



e il fatto che, oltre ai *jeux d'esprit*, avesse al suo attivo anche composizioni di profondo sentimento religioso, come le *Litanies à la Vierge noire*, lo *Stabat mater* e diversi mottetti. Il primo di questi fattori fu la convinzione con cui affrontò la storia, cosa che forse sorprese persino lo stesso compositore, come testimoniano alcune lettere e scritti.

La sceneggiatura era firmata da George Bernanos, ispirata a un romanzo di Gertrude von Le Fort e destinata a un film mai realizzato. Dopo la morte dello scrittore, l'esecutore testamentario la trovò tra le sue carte e l'allestì a Zurigo nel 1951. Ci furono 300 rappresentazioni consecutive a Parigi nel 1952, e presumibilmente fu allora che Poulenc ne seguì due e lesse il testo del dramma. Quello stesso anno, il direttore della casa editrice Ricordi, Guido Valcarengi, si era rivolto a Poulenc per chiedergli un balletto per la Scala; inizialmente il compositore era rimasto entusiasta dell'idea e aveva iniziato a pensare a un santo la cui vita potesse essere utilizzata come soggetto. Ma nel marzo 1953, durante una tournée con il violoncellista Pierre Fournier, cambiò idea e invece propose un'opera di argomento mistico. Fu Valcarengi a suggerire il dramma di Bernanos. Ecco come Poulenc narra la storia:

“Avevo deciso di pensare all'idea in seguito, al mio ritorno a Parigi, ma il giorno dopo, nel bel mezzo della vetrina di una libreria di Roma, vidi i *Dialoghi* che sembravano lì ad aspettarmi. Comprai il libro e decisi di rileggerlo. Così mi misi a sedere fuori, a un tavolino del caffè *Tre scalini* di Piazza Navona. Erano le dieci di mattina. A mezzogiorno ero ancora lì. Alle due inviai un telegramma al signor Valcarengi, il vero creatore del progetto, per dirgli che avrei composto i *Dialoghi*”. Qualche giorno dopo scrisse a un amico: “Credo che il soggetto sia fatto per me. Purché non ne faccia un pasticcio... Ho pregato l'altro ieri il mio patrono, San Francesco d'Assisi”.

Alla fine di agosto Poulenc, di ritorno nella sua casa di campagna nella Touraine, era già al lavoro. Scrisse al cantante Pierre Bernac, suo amico: “Ho iniziato le Carmelitane e non dormo più (letteralmente). Ho trovato il tono della grande scena tra la priora e Blanche [Atto I, scena 2], che ha un'ottima forma: calmo all'inizio, ardente nel mezzo (regole dell'Ordine), poi nuovamente calmo alla fine. È solo l'identificazione assoluta della musica con lo *spirito* di Bernanos che può decretare il successo di questo mio lavoro. Un'orchestrazione molto leggera per dare risalto alle parole”.

La preoccupazione di non farne “un pasticcio”, di cogliere “lo spirito di Bernanos”, per non parlare dell'insonnia, dimostrano che Poulenc era ben cosciente della difficoltà del compito che si era prefisso. Soprattutto era consapevole di condividere in altri modi le sofferenze delle suore di Compiègne. Il suo amante Lucien Roubert era ammalato di cuore e morì nell'ottobre 1955, proprio mentre Poulenc stava terminando la bella copia della partitura vocale. In agosto Poulenc aveva scritto a Bernac: “L'ho affidato alle 16 Carmelitane benedette, che assistano la sua morte, dal momento che lui è rimasto così strettamente legato alla loro storia. Ho iniziato a lavorare felice, accanto a lui, a Lione nell'agosto 1853. Dopo il terribile tormento di cui sapete, l'ho appena completata vicino a lui, negli ultimi giorni della sua vita terrena”. E qui cita delle frasi fondamentali dal testo di Bernanos: “Non moriamo solo per noi stessi, ma gli uni per gli altri, o probabilmente addirittura gli uni al posto degli altri. Chissà?”.

È in queste battute, cantate da suor Constance alla fine del primo interludio dell'Atto II, dopo la conversazione con suor Blanche sulla terribile morte della prima Priora, che Bernanos introduce il concetto

spirituale del trasferimento della grazia: in particolare, qui, la terribile morte della Priora potrebbe servire a facilitare quella di un'altra persona. Questo per Bernanos è un prolungamento della dottrina cattolica secondo cui i santi costituiscono una comunità spirituale all'interno della quale ciascuno può intercedere per gli altri, e persino per i peccatori. Le preghiere per i morti appartengono a un sistema di fede parallelo, come il valore di chi dedica la propria vita alla preghiera e alla contemplazione religiosa. Nel testo dell'opera non viene fornita alcuna allusione sull'identità della persona la cui morte sarebbe facilitata da quella della Priora; ma alle parole di Constance, “Direi che potrebbe esserci una persona quando sta per morire...” Poulenc accenna al tema dell'accordo di Blanche (preso in prestito dal primo e ultimo dei suoi *Notturmi* per pianoforte). Nel caso di Poulenc, il trasferimento non si verificò. La morte di Roubert per problemi cardiaci non impedì quella di Poulenc, avvenuta qualche anno dopo per la stessa causa.

Il compositore affrontò il pericolo della monotonia rappresentato dal predominio delle voci femminili curando molto le gamme vocali, come testimoniano le sue lettere.



Nel gennaio 1954 disse a Bernac: “Senza sconvolgere la musica, ho riscritto il ruolo di Constance, che era troppo basso: adesso per lo più si colloca tra il fa [sopra il do centrale] e il la [sopra il rigo della chiave di violino]”. Del dramma originale, un critico sottolineò che “l’apparente difetto teatrale dell’opera – una successione di scene senza alcun progresso psicologico – fu trasformato in virtù, e così il dramma acquistò l’elasticità della vita stessa, dove la suprema realtà è visibile dietro ciascun episodio, mai imposta artificialmente”. Analogamente, Poulenc non impone nulla. Ci sono momenti di dissonanza, certo, ma scaturiscono tutti dal testo, drasticamente tagliato da Bernanos nella sceneggiatura cinematografica che gli era stata presentata e che Poulenc ridusse ulteriormente. È stato giustamente osservato che non seguì lo stile di Debussy nel musicare le parole (di recente Henri Dutilleux ha sostenuto che questo stile, pur magistrale in sé, si è rivelato una via senza uscita per i compositori lirici); invece tornò indietro a Massenet, indubbiamente con l’elegante voce di Edmond Clément nelle orecchie, e a quella che è stata definita la “melodizzazione” della lingua francese. Per quanto riguarda l’accompagnamento orchestrale (e si tratta

per lo più di accompagnamenti), gli accordi regolari richiamano i *lieder* tedeschi e forse soprattutto Schumann, molto amato dalla madre di Poulenc che ne eseguiva spesso i brani, mentre il giovanissimo compositore ascoltava da sotto il pianoforte.

Il secondo dei fattori positivi che condussero al successo dell’opera fu semplicemente la scelta del momento. Il modo di affrontare la paura e la morte e la storia della distruzione di un modo di vivere provocata dalle forze rivoluzionarie fece inevitabilmente colpo sul pubblico europeo in un periodo in cui quello della seconda Guerra mondiale era un ricordo anche troppo vivo. E soprattutto per i francesi, le cui esperienze durante l’occupazione avevano dimostrato, forse nella maniera più tragica, l’abisso in cui alcune comunità potevano cadere di fronte alla prospettiva della tortura e dell’esecuzione – un trauma da cui la nazione forse non si è completamente ripresa a distanza di sessant’anni. La “buona” morte di Blanche, facilitata o meno da quella “cattiva” della Priora, presenta un’immagine della Francia per come alla nazione piace vedersi.

Lo scrittore Henri de Montherlant ammirò il dramma di Bernanos per la sua “combinazione” di “semplice e straordinario”.

Anche l’opera di Poulenc è semplice e straordinaria – straordinariamente semplice, e semplicemente straordinaria.

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Sinossi

Trama

La vicenda si svolge principalmente nel convento delle Carmelitane di Compiègne e più tardi a Parigi durante la rivoluzione francese e i successivi anni del Terrore, 1789–94.

COMPACT DISC ONE

Atto I

Scena 1 *Biblioteca del marchese de la Force*

[1] Il cavaliere de la Force irrompe nella biblioteca di suo padre: è in ansia per sua sorella, Blanche. All’esterno la folla minacciosa è in rivolta e si è saputo che la carrozza di Blanche è stata circondata. [2] Arriva Blanche illesa, ma sconvolta dalla sua esperienza. [3] Mentre va a letto, un’ombra sul muro la riempie di terrore; ritorna così dal padre e dal fratello [4] per dichiarare la propria intenzione di farsi suora.

Scena 2 *Il parlatorio del convento delle Carmelitane*

[5] Preludio. [6] – [7] Alcune settimane dopo l’anziana priora, Madame de Croissy, fa domande a Blanche sulla sua vocazione [8] e l’ammonisce che il convento non può proteggerla dal mondo esterno; è una casa di preghiera. La decisione di Blanche rimane salda dopo il colloquio e la donna dichiara il nome di carmelitana che ha scelto: suor Blanche dell’agonia di Cristo.

Scena 3 *Interno del convento*

[9] Preludio. [10] Blanche è entrata in convento come novizia e aiuta un’altra giovane suora, Constance di Saint Denis, a portare del cibo nel convento. Constance parla della sua felicità della sua vita precedente nel villaggio della Bretagna da cui viene. Blanche le rimprovera la sua eccessiva allegria mentre la Priora sta per morire. Constance suggerisce di pregare e di offrire le loro vite in cambio di quella della Priora. Blanche è sconvolta, ma Constance rivela di aver sempre pensato che sarebbe morta giovane; dopo aver conosciuto Blanche ha avuto la premonizione che moriranno insieme, lo stesso giorno.



Scena 4 *L'infermeria*

[11] Preludio. [12] La Priora giace sul letto di morte, assistita da Madre Marie. Per la Priora, Dio è divenuto un'ombra; tutta la precedente contemplazione della morte è vana per lei. Si preoccupa molto per Blanche e la affida alle cure di Madre Marie. [13] Blanche entra nella camera dell'ammalata e la Priora dice teneramente addio alla sua più giovane e più amata figlia. Madre Marie ritorna con il medico, che rifiuta di somministrare altri sedativi. [14] – [15] La Priora entra in agonia e delira, lanciando invettive contro Dio e profetizzando la profanazione della cappella del convento. Blanche ritorna nella sala e vede la Priora morire nel terrore.

Atto II

Scena 1 *La cappella, di notte*

[16] Blanche e Costance vegliano il corpo della Priora. Al termine del loro turno, Costance va a chiamare le suore che dovranno sostituirle. Rimasta sola, Blanche è terrorizzata e vorrebbe fuggire, [17] ma Madre Marie la ferma e la riaccompagna nella sua cella.

Interludio *Il giardino*

[18] Blanche e Constance hanno intrecciato dei fiori a forma di croce per la tomba della Priora.

Constance suggerisce che non si muore per se stessi, ma per gli altri, che forse la Priora è morta infelice e impaurita perché qualcun altro possa affrontare la morte con più facilità.

Scena 2 *La sala di riunione*

[19] Arriva la nuova Priora, Madame Lidoine, e parla alle Carmelitane. Le avverte che i giorni di tranquilla sicurezza sono finiti e che il futuro sarà pieno di difficoltà. Ricorda che il loro dovere più importante è la preghiera, ma che non devono aspirare al martirio. [20] Madre Marie intona l'Ave Maria.

Interludio *Una stanza nel convento*

[21] La Priora, Madre Marie e Constance si precipitano ad aprire al suono del campanello. Per sfuggire alla Rivoluzione, il cavaliere de la Force ha deciso di lasciare la Francia e desidera vedere Blanche. La Priora acconsente a fare incontrare fratello e sorella, in presenza di Madre Marie.

COMPACT DISC TWO

Scena 3 *Il parlatorio*

[1] Preludio. [2] Il Cavaliere cerca di convincere Blanche a lasciare il convento. Secondo il padre questo non è più un luogo sicuro per lei; come

aristocratica e suora è doppiamente in pericolo davanti al Terrore che incalza. Il cavaliere crede che sia la paura – o la paura della paura – a tenerla in convento. Blanche dichiara di dipendere dalla volontà di Dio e ripete la propria intenzione di rimanere. Dopo la partenza del fratello, la donna si sente mancare. [3] Madre Marie la sollecita ad avere coraggio.

Scena 4 *La sagrestia*

[4] Il Padre Confessore del convento guida le suore in preghiera [5] e dice loro addio, essendo stato obbligato a nascondersi. Madre Marie dichiara che le Carmelitane hanno solo la propria vita da offrire per la Chiesa. Ma la Priora la corregge: non sta alle suore decidere se scegliere il martirio.

[6] Il Padre Confessore ritorna di corsa, inseguito dalla folla e dai soldati davanti al convento. [7] I commissari entrano e annunciano l'espulsione delle suore dal convento. [8] La Priora parte per Parigi. Vedendo il terrore di Blanche, Madre Jeanne le regala una statuetta del Bambino Gesù ma, allarmata dalle grida della folla, se la lascia sfuggire e la rompe.

Atto III

Scena 1 *La cappella*

[9] La cappella è stata sconsacrata. In assenza della Priora, Madre Marie è responsabile della comunità e propone il voto del martirio. [10] La votazione è segreta e c'è solo una persona contraria: viene sospettata Blanche, ma Constance dichiara di essere stata lei a votare contro e chiede di cambiare idea. Le sorelle scelgono il voto del martirio. A Blanche viene meno il coraggio e fugge.

Interludio *Una via davanti al convento*

[11] La Priora è ritornata da Parigi. Un ufficiale parla alle Carmelitane: la loro comunità è messa al bando e lui le accoglie come nuove cittadine della Repubblica. [12] La Priora invia un avvertimento al sacerdote: sarà troppo pericoloso celebrare la messa. Madre Marie chiede se è possibile riconciliare questa prudenza con il voto del martirio.

Scena 2 *La biblioteca del marchese de la Force*

[13] Preludio. [14] Il padre di Blanche è stato ghigliottinato e la donna è ritornata nella sua casa come domestica. Arriva Madre Marie per riportarla al convento, ma Blanche ha troppa paura di andarsene. Madre Marie le consegna l'indirizzo di un luogo dove potrà essere al riparo.



Scena 3 *La Conciergerie*

^[16] Le Carmelitane sono state arrestate e imprigionate nella Conciergerie. La Priora accetta il voto del martirio. ^[16] Constance ha sognato il ritorno di Blanche tra le consorelle. ^[17] – ^[18] Il carceriere consegna la sentenza del tribunale rivoluzionario: le Carmelitane sono condannate a morte.

Interludio *Una via nei pressi della Bastiglia*

^[19] Informata della condanna a morte delle Carmelitane dal Padre confessore, Madre Marie decide di tornare dalle sorelle. Il sacerdote sottolinea che Dio potrebbe riservarle un altro destino.

Scena 4 *Place de la Révolution, 17 luglio 1794*

^[20] Preludio. ^[21] Le Carmelitane sono condotte al luogo dell'esecuzione, sotto gli occhi di una gran folla. Guidate dalla Priora, salgono sul patibolo una per una, cantando il *Salve Regina*. Constance è l'ultima a salire. Mentre si avvia, Blanche esce dalla folla per unirsi all'amica, cantando da sola finché anche lei viene ghigliottinata.

Traduzione: Emanuela Guastella

Ashley Holland (marchese de la Force) ha studiato presso l'università di Warwick e si è perfezionato al Royal Northern College of Music, dove ha conseguito una borsa di studio della Peter Moores Foundation e oggi è uno dei più richiesti giovani baritoni nel repertorio italiano del XIX secolo su entrambe le sponde dell'Atlantico. Dopo il grande successo riscosso con il debutto nelle vesti di Don Pedro in *Maria Padilla* di Donizetti, la Minnesota Opera lo ha subito invitato a cantare il ruolo di Orazio nel nuovo allestimento degli *Orazi e Curiazi* di Mercadante.

Per diverse stagioni è stato baritono solista presso la English National Opera, dove ha interpretato, tra l'altro, Zurga (*I pescatori di perle*), Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Cecil (*Maria Stuarda*), Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*), Lescaut (*Manon*), Ottakar (*Der Freischütz*), Marcello (*La bohème*), Escamillo (*Carmen*), Ford (*Falstaff*), e Don Carlo (*Ernani*). Ha inoltre interpretato il ruolo del baritono ne *L'Allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato* di Handel nella coproduzione English National Opera–Mark Morris Dance Group.

Altri impegni comprendono interpretazioni per Opera North, The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Lyric Opera di Chicago, Opéra de

Paris-Bastille, Cincinnati Opera, Calgary Opera e a Dresda. La discografia comprende Belcore (*The Elixir of Love*) e Ford (*Falstaff*) con Paul Daniels, entrambi per la serie Opera in English di Chandos.

Il soprano gallese **Catrin Wyn-Davies** (Blanche de la Force) ha conseguito la laurea in Drama and Theatre Studies presso il Royal Holloway College prima di iniziare a studiare canto presso la Guildhall School of Music nel 1990. Nel corso degli studi universitari ha vinto numerosi riconoscimenti, tra cui il premio Richard Tauber nel 1993 e il premio Decca nel 1994 in occasione dei Kathleen Ferrier Awards.

Nel 1994 è entrata come solista alla Welsh National Opera, per cui ha interpretato Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Anne Trulove (*The Rakè's Progress*), Hero (*Béatrice et Bénédict*), Ilia (*Idomeneo*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Zerlina e Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Blanche (*Dialogues des Carmélites*) e il ruolo di protagonista femminile ne *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

Altre apparizioni significative comprendono Zerlina al festival di Aix-en-Provence; Ilia, Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) e Poppea per la Bayerische Staatsoper di Monaco; Donna Elvira, Poppea e Alice Ford (*Falstaff*) per

la Deutsche Oper am Rhein; Mélisande nell'allestimento di *Pelléas et Mélisande* dell'Opéra du Rhin a Strasburgo. Negli USA si è esibita con l'Opera di Santa Fe nelle vesti di Susanna e con l'Opera di San Francisco nel ruolo di Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*).

Nel Regno Unito Catrin Wyn-Davies ha cantato Blanche, Ginevra (*Ariodante*) e Tatiana (*Eugene Onegin*) alla English National Opera; Valencienne (*La vedova allegra*) e la prima Fanciulla-fiore (*Parsifal*) alla Royal Opera House. Ha interpretato il ruolo di Miss Jessel nella versione televisiva BBC di *The Turn of the Screw* di Britten con la regia di Katie Mitchell e la direzione di Richard Hickox. La cantante è apparsa nelle sale da concerto di tutta Europa con direttori tra cui Christoph von Dohnányi, Richard Hickox, Paul McCreesh, René Jacobs, Trevor Pinnock e Pierre Boulez.

Catrin Wyn-Davies ha registrato musica sacra di Vivaldi con il King's Consort diretto da Robert King; altre registrazioni comprendono *Der Silbersee* di Weill con Markus Stenz e una raccolta di Canti popolari musicati da Beethoven con Malcolm Martineau.

Peter Wedd (cavaliere de la Force) ha studiato presso la Guildhall School of Music and Drama con William McAlpine e successivamente



presso il National Opera Studio con l'appoggio della Peter Moores Foundation. È stato solista alla Royal Opera, Covent Garden dal 1999 al 2001 e collabora regolarmente con la Welsh National Opera, dove ha interpretato, tra l'altro, Don José (*Carmen*), Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) Alfredo (*La traviata*) e Laça (*Jenůfa*).

Tra le altre apparizioni nel Regno Unito e in Irlanda si ricordano Federico (*L'Arlesiana*) e Plutone (*Orphée aux enfers*) per Opera Holland Park e Wexford Festival, Rodolfo (*La bohème*) alla Royal Albert Hall di Londra, Tamino per Glyndebourne On Tour, Lenskij (*Eugenio Onieghin*) per Opera Holland Park e il cavaliere de la Force (*The Carmélites*) con English National Opera. Peter Wedd ha cantato per la European Chamber Opera e il Lyric Theatre di Singapore.

Felicity Palmer (Madame de Croissy) è una delle più versatili cantanti–attrici di oggi, sempre a proprio agio con la musica più diversa, da Handel a Wagner, fino ai contemporanei come Berio.

Alla Metropolitan Opera di New York ha cantato Fricka e Waltraute nel ciclo del *Ring*, la Contessa (*La dama di picche*), Geneviève (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) e Mme

de Croissy (*Dialogues des Carmélites*). Alla Scala di Milano ha cantato Mme de Croissy e Klytämnestra (*Elektra*); a Chicago ha cantato la Contessa, Kabanicha (*Katá Kabanova*) e Madam Begbick (*The Rise and Fall of Mahagonny*); a San Francisco *Giulio Cesare*; a Monaco, Eduige (*Rodelinda*) e Klytämnestra; a Berlino, la zia principessa (*Suor Angelica*) e Klytämnestra; per Glyndebourne, Zita (*Gianni Schicchi*) e Mistress Quickly (*Falstaff*); alla Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, i suoi ruoli hanno compreso Mrs Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*), Juno (*Semele*) e Klytämnestra, e a Parigi ha cantato Klytämnestra, la Contessa, Mme de Croissy, Zita, Madam Begbick e Maria Dmitrievna Ahkrossimove (*Guerra e Pace*). Di recente ha fatto ritorno alla English National Opera nei ruoli di Mme de Croissy e Katisha (*The Mikado*).

Durante la sua lunga e illustre carriera concertistica ha collaborato con la BBC Symphony Orchestra e la New York Philharmonic Orchestra dirette da Pierre Boulez, sir Colin Davis e Gennady Rozhdestvensky; la English Chamber Orchestra e sir Charles Mackerras; la London Symphony Orchestra e Michael Tilson Thomas; la Philharmonia e la Royal

Philharmonic Orchestra con Giuseppe Sinopoli; il Concentus Musicus Wien con Nicolaus Harnoncourt; l'Orchestra del Concertgebouw con Edo De Waart; la Boston Symphony Orchestra con Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos e la Los Angeles Philharmonic con sir Simon Rattle.

La sua ricca discografia include *Le Rossignol* di Stravinskij e *Poèmes pour Mi* di Messiaen con Pierre Boulez, brani per voce di Benjamin Britten e due registrazioni di brani di epoca vittoriana ed edoardiana con il pianista John Constable. Felicity Palmer è stata insignita del titolo di CBE nel novembre 1993.

Josephine Barstow (madre Marie) ha iniziato la carriera nelle tournée di Opera for All e poi ha vinto una borsa di studio per un anno presso il London Opera Centre. Ha cantato Euridice e Violetta per la Sadler's Wells Opera Company e poi ha iniziato un contratto triennale con la Welsh National Company, dove i suoi ruoli hanno compreso la Contessa (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Fiordiligi, Violetta, Mimì, Amelia (*Simon Boccanegra*) ed Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*). Dopo aver cantato Violetta (*La traviata*) con English National Opera, ha iniziato una lunga e molto proficua collaborazione con

questa compagnia, per cui ha interpretato in particolare Natasha (*War and Peace*), Salome, Elisabetta (*Don Carlos*), Leonora (*The Force of Destiny*), Leonora (*Fidelio*), Jeanne (*The Devils of Loudon*), Katarina (*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*), Tosca, Sieglinde, Senta, Emilia Marty (*The Makropulos Case*), la Marschallin e Arabella. Ha cantato regolarmente alla Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in ruoli come quello della giovane in *We come to the River* di Henze, Salome, Ellen Orford, Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Santuzza, Leonora, Alice, Lady Macbeth e la Contessa (*La dama di picche*).

Ha viaggiato in tutto il mondo interpretando un repertorio vario che comprende Verdi, Richard Strauss, Puccini e Janáček e comparando nei teatri di Parigi, Monaco, Vienna, Bayreuth, Berlino, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Sud Africa, Giappone e Australia.

Josephine Barstow ha al suo attivo una stretta collaborazione con Opera North per cui ha interpretato i ruoli di Tosca, Marie (*Wozzeck*), Aida, Medea, Lady Billows, e forse, soprattutto, Gloriana, un ruolo di cui esiste anche una videoregistrazione. Tra i suoi recenti impegni si ricordano Kabanicha



(*Katya Kabanova*) a San Diego, Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) ad Anversa e Oviedo, e Madre Marie (*The Carmelites*) presso English National Opera. La discografia comprende Marie (*Wozzeck*) e Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*) nell'ambito della serie Opera in English di Chandos, oltre a *Un ballo in maschera*, *Gloriana*, *Albert Herring*, *Kiss me Kate*, *Oliver* e *Street Scene*.

Nata in Irlanda, **Orla Boylan** (Madame Lidoine) ha conseguito il diploma del D.I.T. College of Music di Dublino, dove ha studiato canto con Mary Brennan. Al suo attivo ha numerosi riconoscimenti, tra cui: Veronica Dunne Bursary, Ibla Grand Prize e National Mozart Competition.

Tra i suoi ultimi impegni vanno ricordati Madame Lidoine (*The Carmelites*) con English National Opera; Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) con la New York City Opera; la seconda Sinfonia di Mahler con l'Orchestra sinfonica nazionale dell'Estonia diretta da Paavo Järvi e un recital presso Harewood House a Leeds.

Orla Boylan ha interpretato in teatro i ruoli di Jenůfa per la Glyndebourne Festival Opera e l'Opéra de Lyon; ha esordito nel ruolo di Arabella per la Garsington Opera; è stata il coro femminile (*The Rape of Lucretia*) e Sieglinde con la English National Opera;

la Governante (*The Turn of the Screw*) con l'Opera di Angers Nantes; la Contessa (*Le nozze di Figaro*) alla New York City Opera; protagonista nella *Katá Kabanova* nel suo esordio per la Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Mar'enka (*La sposa venduta*) per la Glyndebourne Touring Opera; protagonista nel primo allestimento britannico di *Die Liebe der Danae* di Strauss per la Garsington Opera e Tatiana (*Eugenio Onieghim*) per l'Opera dell'Unione Europea, registrata su DVD.

Gli impegni concertistici comprendono *Das klagende Lied* di Mahler con l'Orchestra sinfonica nazionale RTÈ diretta da Laurent Wagner; la Messa da Requiem di Verdi alla Cattedrale di St Paul con la Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, un'interpretazione del Terzo atto della *Valchiria* con la English National Opera al Festival di Glastonbury nel 2004, la prima di *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* di Gerald Barry con l'Orchestra sinfonica nazionale RTÈ e l'esordio ai Prom BBC nelle vesti di Anna in *Street Scene* di Weill diretto da Barry Wordsworth.

Sarah Tynan (suor Constance) è nata a Londra e ha studiato presso il Royal Northern College of Music e la Royal Academy of Music (con Penelope Mackay). Alla Royal Academy

ha ricevuto la Queen's Commendation for Excellence.

Dopo essere entrata alla English National Opera i suoi ruoli hanno compreso Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Papagena (*The Magic Flute*), Iphis (*Jephtah*), Atalanta (*Xerxes*), Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*) e Sister Constance (*The Carmelites*). Altri impegni operistici comprendono Tytania per La Monnaie di Bruxelles; Bella (*The Midsummer Marriage*) per il Festival di St Endellion con Richard Hickox; Pretty Polly in *Punch and Judy* di Birtwistle al Teatro Nacional San João di Porto; la Governante in *The Turn of the Screw* di Britten per una tournée del British Council in Russia; Elsie Maynard (*The Yeomen of the Guard*) e Gianetta (*The Gondoliers*) per la Phoenix Opera; Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*) per Opera Holland Park. Le apparizioni teatrali alla Royal Academy of Music comprendono il ruolo di protagonista in *The Cunning Little Vixen* diretta da sir Charles Mackerras, Zerlina nel *Don Giovanni* diretto da sir Colin Davis, Drusilla ne *L'incoronazione di Poppea* e Feul Rossignol ne *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*.

Gli impegni concertistici di Sarah Tynan comprendono Eleanora in *Prima la musica* di Salieri e Mlle Silberklang in *Der Schauspieldirektor* di Mozart con la City of

London Sinfonia diretta da Richard Hickox, il *Requiem* di Mozart diretto da sir Roger Norrington allo Spitalfields Festival, la Sinfonia n. 2 di Mahler con la Netherlands Symphony Orchestra diretta da Jaap van Zweden, il *Messiah* con la Halle Orchestra e in tournée in Cina con la London Philharmonic Orchestra. Ha inoltre interpretato il ruolo di Barbarina nella registrazione di *The Marriage of Figaro* per la serie Opera in English di Chandos.

Jane Powell (suor Jeanne) ha studiato presso la Royal Academy of Music e oggi prosegue con Lyn Cook. I ruoli operistici comprendono Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Seconda damigella (*Die Zauberflöte*) e la principessa Linette nella versione televisiva BBC de *L'amore delle tre melarance*. Alla Royal Opera House, Covent Garden è stata interprete di vari ruoli in *Salome*, *Der Freischütz*, *Werther* e *Simon Boccanegra*. Ha fatto parte del cast originale del musical *Chess* nel West End di Londra ed è stata impegnata in numerose registrazioni di opere e musical. Da quando è entrata alla English National Opera ha interpretato numerosi ruoli.

Anne Marie Gibbons (suor Mathilde) ha studiato presso il Royal Northern College



of Music, con l'appoggio della Peter Moores Foundation. I suoi ultimi impegni comprendono Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), Anna (*The Trojans at Carthage*), Ascanius (*The Trojans*), Ino (*Semele*), e Pitti-Sing in *The Mikado* (per English National Opera nell'ambito del Young Singers Programme), Pippo (*The Thieving Magpie* per Opera North), i ruoli di protagonista in *Ariodante* e *La Cenerentola* (Opera Theatre Company). La discografia comprende Zulma (*Elvida*) e Abra (*Il Diluvio Universale*) per Opera Rara.

Nato nel Galles meridionale, **Ryland Davies** (cappellano) ha studiato presso il Royal Manchester College of Music di cui è stato nominato Fellow nel 1971. Ha esordito in teatro nel 1964 nelle vesti del conte Almaviva (*Il barbiere di Siviglia* con la Welsh National Opera), e ha debuttato nel 1965 nelle vesti del Maggiordomo (*Der Rosenkavalier*) con la Glyndebourne Festival Opera, per cui ha interpretato poi numerosi ruoli. Per la Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, ha cantato, tra l'altro, Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni, Ferrando, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*), Fenton (*Falstaff*) e Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

I suoi impegni più recenti comprendono *Turandot* all'Opera di Ginevra; Arbace

(*Idomeneo*) e Monostatos (*Die Zauberflöte*) per la Metropolitan Opera, Opera North e Garsington; Le Duc (*Chérubin*) al Covent Garden e a Monte Carlo; Monostatos a Santa Fe; Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) all'Opéra di Nizza, New Israeli Opera, Netherlands Opera e Glyndebourne; Dr Caius (*Falstaff*) in Israele; Gaudenzio nella *Bohème* di Leoncavallo alla English National Opera; Monostatos al Covent Garden; Hauk-Sendorf (*L'affare Makropulos*) con la Houston Grand Opera; Basilio alla Lyric Opera di Chicago.

James Edwards (primo commissario) è nato nella contea inglese dell'Essex e ha iniziato a cantare nel coro della Cattedrale di St Paul. Ha proseguito gli studi presso il Royal Northern College of Music e la Royal Academy of Music. Nel settembre 2003 ha partecipato allo Young Artists Programme della Royal Opera, e ha interpretato diversi ruoli tra cui Nicolios (*The Greek Passion*), Pong (*Turandot*), Gastone (*La traviata*) e Albazar (*Il turco in Italia*).

Altri ruoli operistici hanno compreso Alfredo (*La traviata*) e Dancaïro (*Carmen*) per la European Chamber Opera; Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*), Ralph Rackstraw (*HMS Pinafore*) e Prosper (*Not in front of the Waiter*)

per la Kentish Opera; Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) per la Surrey Opera e Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*) per Opera à la carte. Ha esordito con la English National Opera nel ruolo del novizio in *Billy Budd*.

Roland Wood (secondo commissario) è nato nella regione inglese del Berkshire e ha studiato presso il Royal Northern College of Music (già National Opera Studio), dove ha ottenuto l'appoggio della Peter Moores Foundation e della English National Opera. I suoi ruoli hanno compreso il conte Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) per Opera Holland Park, Nick Shadow (*The Rake's Progress*) a Glyndebourne, e il barone Douphol (*La traviata*) per English National Opera.

Dal 2002 al 2004 è stato solista della Scottish Opera per cui ha interpretato, tra l'altro, Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), Marullo (*Rigoletto*), Schaunard (*La bohème*) e Papageno (*The Magic Flute*). Ha partecipato a numerose registrazioni con Chandos e Opera Rara.

Toby Stafford-Allen (primo ufficiale) ha studiato presso il Royal Northern College of Music e ha fatto il suo debutto internazionale nelle vesti di Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) al

festival di Aix-en-Provence. Ha partecipato allo Jerwood Young Singers Programme della English National Opera prima di diventare solista della compagnia, per cui ha interpretato, tra l'altro, Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Papageno (*The Magic Flute*), Schaunard (*La bohème*) e Henry (*The Fairy Queen*).

Altri impegni nel Regno Unito comprendono Papageno con la Glyndebourne Touring Opera, Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*) e Schaunard con Opera Holland Park. A livello internazionale è comparso, tra l'altro, nelle vesti di Henry (*The Fairy Queen*) al Teatro del Liceu di Barcellona, Marte ed Euro in *Il Pomo d'oro* di Cesti al Festival di Batignano e Schaunard ai Festspiele di Bregenz. Ha registrato il ruolo di Morales (*Carmen*) per la serie Opera in English di Chandos.

David Stephenson (carceriere) è nato ad Aberdeen e ha lavorato come ingegnere elettrico, prima di frequentare il Royal College of Music.

Le sue apparizioni teatrali comprendono Angelotti (*Tosca*) per Opera Ireland, Malatesta (*Don Pasquale*) e Johann (*Werther*) per la Wexford Festival Opera, Morales (*Carmen*) alla Royal Albert Hall, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) e Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) per



Scottish Opera, Silvio (*Pagliacci*) e Papageno per la Welsh National Opera, Marullo (*Rigoletto*) per English National Opera, e altri ruoli per la Buxton Festival Opera e Opera Zuid. La discografia comprende momenti salienti del *Messiah* con la London Symphony Orchestra.

Gary Coward (Thierry) si è diplomato presso il Royal College of Music, perfezionandosi poi alla Guildhall School of Music and Drama e alla Britten-Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies.

Nel campo teatrale ha collaborato con Opera Brava, Kentish Opera, Pavilion Opera, London Opera Players, English Touring Opera e Scottish Opera, interpretando importanti ruoli nelle opere di Mozart, Donizetti e Rossini, nelle operette di Strauss e Lehár, ma più spesso nelle opere di Puccini – Marcello, Sharpless e Scarpia – e Verdi – Renato, Don Carlo, Ford, Iago, Di Luna, Germont padre, Amonastro e Rigoletto. È membro della English National Opera.

William Berger (M Javelinot) ha studiato presso la Royal Academy of Music. Ha esordito da professionista in teatro nel ruolo di Ormonte (*Partenope* di Handel

all'Handel Festival di Göttingen) e poi in quello di Mercurio nell'*Atalanta*. Altri ruoli comprendono Don Giovanni (Opera East), Papageno (*The Magic Flute* con la British Youth Opera) e Oberon (*A Summer Night's Dream* – progetto Mozart/ Shakespeare, Aix-en-Provence). Partecipa allo Young Singers Programme della English National Opera.

Il **Coro di English National Opera** è una delle migliori risorse dell'Opera. In innumerevoli produzioni della English National Opera ha entusiasmato le platee con il potere del canto e l'intensità della recitazione. L'ampia gamma di capacità ed esperienza che portano i coristi nelle esibizioni costituiscono il tratto distintivo di ogni produzione in cui appaiono. Particolari trionfi per il Coro sono stati *Guerra e pace* di Prokofiev, *Lady Macbeth dei macelli* di Shostakovich, *Billy Budd* e *Peter Grimes* di Britten, *Boris Godunov* di Mussorgsky, la *Carmen* di Bizet e l'*Otello* di Verdi. La loro ultima registrazione, nella produzione di Jonathan Miller diretta da Mark Elder, è uscito per Chandos con il patrocinio della Peter Moores Foundation, come la loro registrazione del amoso "Ciclo del *Ring*" diretti da Sir Reginald Goodall. Altre registrazioni Chandos/ Peter Moores Foundation sono *Falstaff*, *Maria*

Stuarda, *Giulio Cesare*, *Rigoletto* (produzione di Jonathan Miller) e *La traviata*.

Apprezzata dalla critica e dal pubblico, l'**Orchestra della English National Opera** ha ricevuto numerosi riconoscimenti prestigiosi, tra cui il Music Award della Royal Philharmonic Society e un premio Olivier per il suo contributo all'opera. L'Orchestra è il fulcro della vita artistica della English National Opera e, oltre al lavoro in teatro presso il London Coliseum, si esibisce anche in concerto; è stata presente al festival di Aldeburgh (*Peter Grimes* e *The Rape of Lucretia*) e a Glastonbury nel 2004 (Atto III della *Valchiria* di Wagner). Molti dei suoi componenti collaborano con il dipartimento di istruzione esterno della compagnia, ENO Baylis. L'Orchestra della ENO compare in numerose registrazioni per la serie Opera in English di Chandos: *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Otello*, *Ernani*, *Mary Stuart*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Werther*, e nella registrazione completa del *Ring Cycle* diretta da sir Reginald Goodall.

Paul Daniel è stato Direttore musicale della English National Opera dal 1997 al 2005, e ha al suo attivo un vasto repertorio comprendente

importanti allestimenti del *Ring*, oltre a *Lulu*, *The Trojans*, *War and Peace*, e alla prima mondiale dell'opera di Mark Anthony Turnage *The Silver Tassie*.

È stato Direttore musicale di Opera Factory nel periodo 1987–1990, e di Opera North nel 1990–1997; quest'ultima collaborazione ha riscosso i consensi della critica per il repertorio diverso e interessante comprendente alcune prime mondiali e apprezzate produzioni di *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Don Carlos* e *Boris Godunov*.

Altre collaborazioni teatrali lo hanno visto impegnato con la Royal Opera House Covent Garden, La Monnaie di Bruxelles, l'Opera nazionale della Baviera di Monaco, il Teatro Real di Madrid e l'Opera di Ginevra.

Gli impegni sinfonici hanno compreso la Philharmonia, l'Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, la London Philharmonic Orchestra, la Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, la Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, la Royal Scottish National Orchestra, la Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, l'Orchestre de Paris, l'Orchestre National de France, l'Orchestre National de Lyon, la Tonhalle-Orchester di Zurigo, l'Orchestra Sinfonica di Göteborg, l'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, la Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, la Los Angeles



Philharmonic, l'Orchestra di Cleveland e la New York Philharmonic. Nel 2005 ha diretto l'ultima serata dei Prom a Londra con la BBC Symphony Orchestra, teletrasmessa a livello internazionale.

La discografia comprende la Sinfonia N. 3 di Elgar/Payne con la Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, una serie di CD di musica inglese con l'Orchestra di Opera

North, *Elijah* con la Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Per Chandos ha registrato *Baa Baa Black Sheep* di Michael Berkeley e, per la serie Opera in English, *Lulu*, *Falstaff*, *Wozzeck*, e momenti salienti del *Boris Godunov*.

Paul Daniel è stato insignito del titolo di Commander of the Order of the British Empire nel 2000.

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Felicity Palmer as Madame de Croissy and Catrin Wyn-Davies as Blanche de la Force in English National Opera's production of *The Carmelites*



© Stephen Vaughan

Ashley Holland as the Marquis de la Force and Peter Wedd as the Chevalier de la Force in English National Opera's production of *The Carmelites*

COMPACT DISC ONE

Act I

Scene 1

The library of the Marquis de la Force, April 1789.

The Marquis is dozing in a large easy chair. The Chevalier enters brusquely through the main door, which he leaves open behind him.

Chevalier de la Force

1 Where is Blanche?

Marquis de la Force

Good God, you gave me a fright. Why the devil don't you go and ask the groom or the maids, instead of bursting in without a warning, like a fool?

Chevalier

I beg your pardon, dear father.

Marquis

There's no harm at your age in being so full of life, just as at mine it's far more natural to take things a little easier. Your dear uncle came today to see me, deprived me of my midday nap, so I was trying to rest a little while, maybe I was dozing... Why do you want to see your sister?

Chevalier

My friend Damas left here this morning. Straight away he saw that he must turn back or he would have found himself caught in the midst of a furious mob. I have heard that they will burn an effigy of Réveillon in front of the palace.

Marquis

Indeed, let them burn it. Remember, spring is in the air; wine is very cheap. There'll always be trouble. The same thing every year. Never fear... it will pass.

Chevalier

With respect, I would venture to contradict. It's not as trivial as you think. And when I tell you what happened to my sister on the way to church, you will see that your prediction is quite wrong. Damas saw her carriage stopped by the mob, on the road to Bucy.

Marquis

The carriage... the mob... Forgive me... visions like these torment my sleep, haunt me night after night. I hear a lot of talk of rebellion, sometimes even revolution. Those who've never seen hysteria in a crowd will never understand. Those frightened faces with their features contorted, thousands and thousands of eyes... That night it was the wedding of the young Dauphin. Everyone is watching the fireworks. A case of rockets catches fire, exploding. Panic overtakes

the crowd, driving them to frenzy. Your mother quickly locks the door of our carriage. Our driver whips the horses on, faster, faster. Now the mob surrounds the carriage and next a window is smashed.

(The Marquis buries his face in his hands.)

The soldiers arrived just in time, clearing a path for our carriage. It was later that night, in the stillness of this house, that your dear mother died after giving birth to Blanche.

Chevalier

Monsieur, please forgive me, I should have known better... Once again I've behaved like an utter fool.

Marquis

Bah! I should know better at my age, than to get so excited...

(The Marquis remains pensive.)

But my carriage is sturdy, my good old horses are never afraid, Antoine has been with us twenty years. I can assure you that your sister will come to no harm.

Chevalier

Oh, it is not just her safety that concerns me. You know quite well, it's her morbid imagination.

Marquis

Blanche is simply an over-sensitive child. A happy marriage will soon take care of that, you'll see!

You'll see! Any pretty girl has the right to be just a wee bit nervous. Be patient! You will soon have lots of nephews tearing all around you.

Chevalier

Father, please! What has put my sister's health at risk, perhaps even her life, is not her nervousness alone. An icy hand has gripped her heart...

Marquis

My! you sound like a superstitious fool. Blanche, I am sure, is a normal young girl. Sometimes she's even quite playful.

Chevalier

Yes, I know. There are times, I must admit, when I too am deceived. I would swear she had cheated her fate if I didn't see the signs of this curse deep within her eyes.

Marquis

Soon enough, when Blanche and her maid come running through the door, you will laugh at your misgivings and she'll forget her own.

Chevalier

Are you suggesting there isn't a problem, she only had a scare? Just a little fear? Just a little fear? When I think of my sister, simple fear is not what comes to mind. She's a girl who's noble and proud! Yet something's eating away inside her, like a worm inside a fruit!

**Marquis**

What childish nonsense!

(Blanche appears through the open door, so suddenly that it is not clear whether or not she has heard these last words.)

- 2 Blanche, your poor brother was so very impatient for your return.

Blanche de la Force

Monsieur le Chevalier is too kind to his baby lamb...

Chevalier

Blanche, I've told you before, let's keep our little jokes to ourselves.

Blanche *(making an effort to appear cheerful)*

Little lambs do not often find themselves straying so far from the fold. It is true that in my own carriage I should feel safe. Yet just a fragile window between my frightened self and all the howling mob seemed to be, at the time, I can assure you, hardly very adequate protection. I must have looked quite ridiculous.

Chevalier

Monsieur de Damas, who saw you there at the crossroads near Bucy, told me quite clearly how you sat by your window looking perfectly calm and courageous...

Blanche

Oh! Monsieur de Damas without any doubt saw only what he wished... Do you really think that I was calm and courageous? Good Lord, confronting danger is like plunging into cold water. First it knocks the breath from your body, then it becomes almost natural, once you're in up to your neck...

(On the verge of fainting, she leans on a chair.)

At the Convent this morning the service was extremely long. I'm afraid it left me completely exhausted. That is the reason, no doubt, for all of my nonsense. With your permission, father, I will go upstairs to my room and rest before supper. Ah! Isn't it darker than usual tonight!

Marquis

I would say there's a storm coming nearer and nearer.

(Blanche goes towards the door.)

Chevalier

Since you're going upstairs to your room, ask the chambermaid for some candles. Don't stay there alone in the dark. I know how the shadows of twilight make you sad and uneasy. You used to tell me, when you were very little: 'I die every night, but each morning I'm reborn!'

Blanche

You know there's only been one Resurrection, Monsieur le Chevalier, that of our Lord. But

every night of one's life is like the night of the Agony of Christ...

(Blanche goes out without closing the door behind her, leaving the Marquis and the Chevalier baffled.)

Marquis *(trying to reassure himself)*

- 3 Her poor imagination always flies from one extreme to another. What did she mean, I'd like to know.

(He sits down again in his armchair.)

Chevalier

I've no idea. Don't ask me. It is her look and her voice that pierce my soul... *(suddenly deciding to break the heavy atmosphere)* It is time for the horses to be fed. I must go and have a word with old Antoine.

(He goes out. The Marquis resumes his nap.)

Blanche *(in another room)*

Ah!

Marquis *(starting up)*

Are you there, Thierry? What is going on, my boy?

(Thierry enters. He is a tall, simple-minded footman.)

Thierry *(terrified)*

Hardly were the candles lit, when Mademoiselle Blanche came upstairs into her bedroom... I think she was frightened when she saw my shadow on the wall. I had just drawn all the blinds.

(Blanche, ashen, appears on the threshold. Her voice, her manner and her features display a kind of resolution and desperate resignation.)

Marquis

My dear, it was nothing at all, nothing serious.

Blanche

Oh Monsieur, you've been indulgent all my life. Such a kind and loving father...

Marquis

Let's not speak of this incident any more.

Blanche

- 4 Dear father, there is no incident so small or unimportant that is not written by the hand of God, just as all the vastness of the Heavens is in one small drop of water. If you will give me your permission, I wish to take the vows of a nun.

Marquis

A nun!

Blanche

I think the desire surprises you far less than you would care to admit.

Marquis

Alas! One should always fear, when it concerns a young girl who's quite as virtuous as my daughter, any step taken in a moment of fervour. If you weren't so proud, you would not be so disturbed by a cry. One should not renounce the world because of spite.

Blanche

I bear the world no special hatred. For me, the world is very strange, like an alien place in which I cannot live. Yes, dear father, I am quite unable to bear the noise, the breathless pace, the fearful strain. If my nerves were only spared the ordeal, then you would see how much I could accomplish.

Marquis

My beloved child, if this is so, only your conscience can decide whether this ordeal is more than your strength can endure...

(Blanche throws herself at the feet of her father, who is still seated in the chair.)

Blanche

Dearest father, let's end this game, for pity's sake. Oh for pity's sake, let me believe that I'll

find a way of overcoming this weakness, this weakness that darkens my life! If I could not believe that my fate was safe in the hands of God, I would rather die in shame at your feet. It may well be that you are right when you tell me that I've never given life a chance. But God will understand. I give my life to Him. I abandon all, I renounce the world. May He restore me to grace.

(The Marquis, lost in thought, gently strokes his daughter's head, which rests on his knees.)

Scene 2 The parlour at the Carmelite convent at Compiègne

Several weeks later. The Prioress and Blanche are conversing, seated on either side of the double grille. Madame de Croissy, the Prioress, is an old woman who is visibly ill.

5 Prelude

Madame de Croissy, Prioress *(attempting clumsily to bring her armchair closer to the grille)*

- 6** Do not believe this comfortable chair is a privilege of my position, like the footstool of a Duchess. Alas! It is the wish of my dear daughters who are so thoughtful and kind, I wish I could feel more at ease here. But it is not so easy to return to an old way of life, a life one has long discarded. Now I find something that's meant to give me some comfort has sadly become a humiliating necessity.



Blanche

Oh how sweet it must be, my Mother, to have travelled so far on the road of detachment that one never feels one can ever turn back.

Prioress

Oh my poor child, in time we can become detached from the world, but what does it serve for any one of us to become detached from the world if she's not also detached from herself; that is to say, from detachment itself?... I see the severities of our Order cause you no fear.

Blanche

They attract me!

Prioress

Yes, yes, your soul is generous and noble...

- 7** What has driven you here?

Blanche

Does Your Reverence command that I should answer with absolute frankness?

Prioress

Yes.

Blanche

It's this: the call of a life that's heroic.

Prioress

The call of a life that's heroic? Or that of a certain

manner of living which you seem to think, quite wrongly, would make heroism easier to achieve – would put it, one might say, in the palm of your hand?

Blanche

My most Reverend Mother, I ask your pardon. that was never my ambition.

Prioress

The most dangerous of our ambitions are those that we describe as illusions.

Blanche

It may well be I have illusions. If that is so, I should be stripped of them for ever.

Prioress

Stripped of them you shall be! You alone must be responsible for this, my daughter. Each of us here is far too concerned with her own illusions.

- 8** My daughter, the outside world often questions the purpose of our Order. After all they are quite justified in asking us this of us. No, my daughter, it never was the purpose of our Order to mortify the soul, nor are we a conservatoire of virtue. We're nothing but a house of prayer! Prayer alone justifies our whole existence. Those who do not believe in prayer can only think of us as parasites, or impostors. If belief in Almighty God is universal, should not the same be true as well for belief in prayer? And so every prayer – even the



prayer of a little shepherd who's tending his sheep – is truly the prayer of all mankind. Whereas the little shepherd just prays from time to time whenever he feels moved to do so, we have to pray day and night. Oh, my child, it is not in the spirit of Carmel to involve ourselves with others. But I am old and ill. I am very near to the end. I can allow myself to care for you. The ordeals that await you are great, my daughter.

Blanche

Why worry if God will give me the strength?

Prioress

What God desires to test in you is certainly not your strength but your weakness... You are crying?

Blanche

I'm weeping not for sorrow but for joy. Your words may be harsh, but I feel that, even if they were harsher, they could never break the power that draws me to you. I have no other refuge but this.

Prioress

But our Order is not a refuge. It is not the Order which protects us, my daughter. It is we who protect the Order. Do please tell me whether you by any chance have already chosen your name as a Carmelite, in case we admit you as a novice

to our Order? But, no doubt you have already considered this.

Blanche

I have, Mother! I should like to be called Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ!

Prioress

Go in peace, my child.

(Blanche genuflects and goes out.)

Orchestral interlude

Scene 3 Inside the convent

Blanche and a very young nun, Constance de Saint-Denis, take the provisions and packages which the nun at the door hands them.

9 Prelude

Constance

10 Oh no, not more beans!

Blanche

They say that the merchants are hoarding all the grain, and in Paris there is no bread...

Constance

Look! Why here's the iron we had thought was lost. We looked everywhere, but without success! Look here how the handle has been covered

up with flannel. No more shall we hear our Sister Jeanne of the Holy Child swearing as she blows on her fingers. How is it possible to press the sheets with such a useless iron? Just how? How I used to bite my tongue in order not to laugh, yet how I love to hear her. She transports me back to the country and our good village folk in Bretagne. Oh dear Blanche, just a few weeks before I entered this life, how we enjoyed ourselves at my older brother's wedding. All of our village were gathered together. Twenty young maidens to present a bouquet, while violins were playing. Then we went to Mass, dined at the chateau, we danced the whole day long. How I danced, faster and faster, I know I've never been so happy. All of those people adored me to distraction, loved my gaiety. How I loved them in return.

Blanche

Aren't you ashamed to chatter on like this, when you know that our Reverend Mother...

Constance

Oh! dear Blanche, if I only thought that I could save her, then I would willingly give up my poor little life, such as it is. Yes, cross my heart, I'd lay down my life... But, when someone's fifty-nine or more, it's surely time for them to die?

Blanche

You've never been afraid of death?

Constance

I do not know... Well, a little... but very long ago, when I didn't really know just what it was.

Blanche

And then?

Constance

And then... dear Blanche, one day I realized that life was so delightful, I decided that death had to be the same...

Blanche

Do you think so now?

Constance

Oh, as for now, I no longer know just what I think of death. But it seems to me still that life is very delightful. I try to do as best I can whatever I am told, but I find it completely delightful... After all, who can really blame me if the service of our good Lord delights me?

Blanche

Are you not afraid that God will grow rather tired of your good humour?

(Constance looks at her, dumbfounded, her child-like face contracted in a sorrowful grimace.)

Constance

Sister, if you'll excuse me... though I know we

are friends, I can't help feeling that wasn't a nice thing to say.

Blanche

Indeed, you are absolutely right. Yes, I have envied you...

Constance

Envied me? I can't believe it! This is absolutely the strangest thing that I have ever heard! Envied me, when it is clear that I deserved to be punished for having spoken so thoughtlessly of the death of our beloved Reverend Mother! Oh dear Blanche, since I spoke the way I did before and regret it, will you be so kind as to help me atone for my behaviour. Let us kneel down and pray. We will offer both of our poor little lives for that of our Reverend Mother.

Blanche

That is terribly childish!

Constance

Oh! not at all, dear sister. Really, I think it's such an uplifting inspiration.

Blanche

You're making fun of me!

Constance

It came to me all of a sudden. I didn't think that it would do any harm. I've always wanted to die very young.

Blanche

What's my part in this comedy of yours?

Constance

Ah, well! The very first time I looked at your face I just knew that my wish had been granted.

Blanche

And granted with what?

Constance

With...

Blanche

Put down that ridiculous iron. Answer me at once, do you hear.

(Constance quietly sets the iron down on the table.)

Constance

I will... I have always known that God would be kinder than to let me grow old and that we would die together, the same day... Where or how, I assure you, I have never known, and at this moment I still do not know...

Blanche

What a ridiculous notion! Are you not ashamed of believing that your life could possibly redeem the life of somebody else? You're arrogant and proud like the Devil himself. You... you... stop it now!

Constance

I never dreamt I would cause you such offence.

Orchestral interlude

Scene 4 The infirmary

11 Prelude

Marie of the Incarnation is at the bedside of the Prioress.

Prioress

12 Would you be so kind as to raise my pillow? Do you not suppose that Monsieur Javelinot will allow me to be moved into the chair? I find it painful, painful indeed to be seen by my daughters while lying so helpless, just like someone drowning who's pulled from the water... And this when I'm still capable of thinking so clearly. Oh, it is not that I wish to deceive them! But when one's so miserably lacking in courage, one should at least, I hope, be able to maintain one's composure.

Mother Marie of the Incarnation

I was almost certain, my Mother, that your suffering had somewhat subsided in the night...

Prioress

It was only a heaviness of my soul. God nevertheless be thanked! I no longer saw myself dying. 'To see oneself die' – that's just a phrase

that people like to use. Well, my Mother, it is true I see myself die! Nothing can distract me from the sight! I'm alone, Mother, totally abandoned with no hope of consolation. Will you tell me quite frankly – how much more time Monsieur Javelinot has given me to go on living?

(Mother Marie of the Incarnation kneels at the head of the bed and gently places the crucifix on the lips of the Prioress.)

Mother Marie

He says your constitution is remarkably strong; I think he fears you will have a long and bitter struggle. But God...

Prioress

God has become a shadow... Alas! I have lived as a nun for thirty years, and Mother Superior for twelve. I've contemplated death each hour of my life, and yet now these devotions serve me not at all. It seems that Blanche de la Force is very late. But after yesterday's lengthy discussion, is she still set on the name that she has chosen?

Mother Marie

Yes, she still desires the name, with your permission, of Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ. You seem to be deeply affected by this choice.



Prioress

It was mine too, very long ago. At that time our Prioress was called Madame Arnoult, she was then eighty years old. She said to me: 'Look deep within your soul! Who enters Gethsemane will never leave. Are you convinced you have the courage to remain, to the end, a prisoner of the Agony of Christ?'... It was I who introduced Sister Blanche to this house, Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ. Of all my daughters, there's none who gives me greater cause for worry. I had thought I should recommend this child to your care. But on reflection and if God desires, this will be the last thing I do as Mother Superior. Mother Marie...



Mother Marie

My Reverend Mother?

Prioress

In the name of obedience, I now entrust to you Blanche de la Force. And you will answer for her before God.

Mother Marie

Yes, my Mother.

Prioress

You will have need of great strength and clarity of judgement, discipline and patience. These are precisely what the child is lacking and you possess in such abundance.

Mother Marie

It is very true. You always see things exactly as they are.

(a knock on the door)

Prioress

Ask her to come in. Here she is.
(Mother Marie goes to the door, steps aside in order to let Blanche enter, then goes out. Blanche comes forward and kneels beside the bed.)

¹³ You may get up, my child. I was hoping so much that we could be together just for a while, but the conversation I had just now left me greatly exhausted. You are the last to enter our house, and for that reason the closest to my heart. Yes, of all my daughters, you're the closest, just like a child of one's old age, and the one who's most vulnerable, and the most in danger. Could I prevent that fearful danger I would gladly give my humble life. Oh yes, how eagerly I'd give it... But alas, I've nothing to give but my death, a very humble death...

(Blanche falls to her knees once again and sobs. The Prioress puts her hand on Blanche's head.)
God is glorified in His Saints, in His heroes and His martyrs. Also in the poor, the meek and the humble.

Blanche

I have no fear of being poor.

Prioress

Oh, there are many ways of being poor, down to the very bleakest. That's precisely the one with which you'll have to be content. My dear child, you must have courage. Whatever happens, be simple and unspoiled. Oh! my daughter, you should always remain soft and pliant in the hands of God! You know temptation had its dangers, even for the Saints. They would never have rebelled against their nature. Rebellion is always the work of the devil. Don't forget, you must never despise yourself! God is there to protect your honour, and it is safer in the hands of the Lord than in yours. So now get up, this perhaps for good. Goodbye, I bless you now. Goodbye, my dearest child...

(Blanche goes out. Mother Marie of the Incarnation returns with the doctor and Sister Anne of the Cross.)


Monsieur Javelinot, I beg you to give me more of that medicine, just one more dose.

Monsieur Javelinot

I'm afraid Your Reverence cannot take another dose.

Prioress

¹⁴ Monsieur Javelinot, you must know it's customary in all our Houses that the Mother Superior publically says goodbye to those within her charge. Mother Marie, please try to persuade Monsieur Javelinot. Either this drug or another,



it's all the same. Oh my Mother, can't you see: how can I possibly show this face to my dearest daughters?

Mother Marie

Oh! my Mother, you should not be thinking of us any more. From now on, your concern should be only with God.

Prioress

Who am I, at this moment wretch that I am, to concern myself with Him! Let Him first concern Himself with me!

Mother Marie

Your Reverence is delirious!
(The Prioress's head drops heavily on the pillow. Her death-rattle begins.)

(to Sister Anne of the Cross)

I think you had better shut the window. Clearly our Mother is no longer quite responsible for the things she says. I am sure it is wiser not to scandalize all our sisters...
(Sister Anne looks faint.)

O come! Sister Anne of the Cross, you're surely not going to faint like a silly girl! You should fall to your knees and pray! Put away those salts!

(While Mother Marie speaks, the Prioress almost sits up in bed. She starts before her and as soon as she stops speaking her lower jaw drops.)



Prioress

Mother Marie of the Incarnation! Mother Marie!...

Mother Marie

My Reverend Mother?

Prioress

I have seen our chapel ravaged and profaned, and deserted, the altar split in two. There was straw and blood on the flagstones... Ah, ah! God has forsaken us, God has renounced us!

Mother Marie

Your Reverence, you're not quite yourself. You don't know what you say. But I must beg you to try to say nothing that might be...

Prioress

Say nothing... Say nothing... Does it matter what I say? I am no more in command of my tongue than of my face! Despair clings to my skin like a death-mask... Oh! if I only could tear away this mask with my nails!

(She falls back on the pillow.)

Mother Marie *(to Sister Anne of the Cross)*

¹⁵ Please inform your sisters they will have no chance to see the Reverend Mother today. Will you tell them, at ten o'clock, recreation as usual.

(Sister Anne of the Cross leaves the room. The Prioress, who has heard everything, suddenly sits up.)

Prioress

Mother Marie of the Incarnation, in the name of Holy Obedience, I command you... Ah, ah!

(Exhausted by the effort, she falls back again. Her death rattle resumes. The door opens and Blanche enters as though walking in her sleep. The Prioress catches sight of her and makes an effort to call her. Blanche remains standing as if petrified.)

Mother Marie

Our most Reverend Mother desires you to come near to her bed.

(Blanche, distraught, kneels by the bed. The Prioress puts her hand on Blanche's forehead.)

Prioress

Blanche...

(She tries to say something and suddenly chokes.)

Mother Marie

It really is an outrage... they should not be allowed to see her!

Prioress

Implore your forgiveness... death... fear... fear of death!

(She falls dead.)

Blanche

I think our Reverend Mother is saying... our Reverend Mother was about to say... would have wanted to say...

(She falls on her knees, sobbing, and buries her face in the sheets.)

Act II

Scene 1 The Chapel of the Convent

The Prioress lies in state in an open coffin in the centre of the chapel. It is night. The chapel is lit only by six tall candles that surround the coffin. Blanche and Constance de Saint-Denis stand watch over the deceased.

Constance

¹⁶ Qui Lazarum resuscitasti a monumento foetidum.

Blanche

Tu eis, Domine, dona requiem et locum indulgentiae.

Constance

Qui venturus es judicare vivos et mortuos, et saeculum per ignem.

Blanche

Tu eis, Domine, dona requiem...

Both

...et locum indulgentiae. Amen.

(On hearing the clock strike, Constance gets up and goes to fetch those who are to take their place, leaving Blanche alone. Blanche tries to pray. She stares at the corpse. Overcome by fear, she rises and goes to the door. The door opens and Mother Marie appears)

Mother Marie

¹⁷ What are you doing? It's your turn to be watching.

Blanche

I... I... thought the hour was over, Mother.

Mother Marie

What are you saying? Are your replacements here in the chapel?

Blanche

They did not arrive... so Sister Constance decided to go and find them... and then...



Mother Marie

And then you gave in to fear and...

Blanche

But I really meant no harm in going to the door.

(Blanche makes a move to return to the coffin.)

Mother Marie

No, for goodness sake, my child! There's no point at all in doing that now... A task left undone is a task left undone. Try to forget. There's no need to be so upset! But the night is cool, and I think you are trembling less from fear than from cold. I will walk with you now myself as far as your cell. And now put this trifling incident out of your mind... Go to bed, make the sign of the cross. With my permission you are excused from all other prayers. I'm sure by tomorrow this will fill you with sorrow rather than shame. It is then you will be able to ask forgiveness of God, without fear of offending Him further.

(Mother Marie takes Blanche by the shoulder and leads her towards the door.)

Interlude: the garden of the Convent

Blanche and Constance have made a cross of flowers for the tomb of the Prioress.

Constance

¹⁸ Dear Sister, I'm afraid that our cross is just a bit too big when the tomb of our poor Mother is so tiny!

Blanche

What do you think we should do with the rest of the flowers?

Constance

I know, let's make a bouquet for whoever is to be our new Prioress.

Blanche

I wonder if Mother Marie likes flowers.

Constance

Oh, how I wish!

Blanche

That she likes flowers?

Constance

No, dear Blanche, that she be chosen as our new Prioress.

Blanche

You always believe that God will grant whatever you ask of Him!

Constance

And why not? What goes by the name of chance may perhaps be the will of God. Just think of

the death of our beloved Mother, dear Blanche! Who'd ever imagine that it would be so hard for her to die, that she would ever die so badly? One would think when He gave such a death to her, our good Lord made a great mistake; like in a cloakroom when you're given someone else's coat. Yes, I think her death belonged to another, such a death was too small for her, it was really so small that the sleeves barely reached down to her elbows...

Blanche

The death of another? Tell me what could that possibly mean, dear Constance?

Constance

I would say there might be someone that in the hour of their death, finds their final moments surprisingly easy, and that they feel quite comfortable. We die not for ourselves alone, but we die for each other, or probably even instead of each other. Who knows?

Scene 2 The chapter room

The community is assembled for the ceremony of obedience to the new Prioress. A very large and beautiful crucifix hangs on the centre wall. Underneath it stands the Prioress' armchair. A number of nuns are already seated on the benches along the side walls. The ceremony of obedience is coming to an end.

Madame Lidoine, the New Prioress

¹⁹ My dear daughters, I don't need to remind you of your terrible misfortune in losing your beloved Mother at the very moment when her courage and advice were most needed. We have doubtless left behind us all those calm and happy days. Sometimes it is far too easy to forget that we could ever come to harm, and that we are always in the hand of God. What fate awaits us now, what lies before us, I don't know. And all we can ask from Almighty God in Heaven are those modest blessings, which the mighty of this world look down upon, in their scorn: good will to all mankind, endless patience, a generous and loving heart. Of all virtues there are no greater for humble women such as we. Now, truly there are many kinds of courage, but the courage of kings and princes is not at all that of simple folk. It would not enable them to survive. Many a servant will copy certain traits of his noble master, but they really will suit him no more than the finest of spices suit a common rabbit stew. May I repeat: we are poor and humble servants who have come to God in prayer. Now beware of all that turns our wayward roving hearts away from prayer. Put no trust in the joy of martyrs. Prayer to God is our whole life. Martyrdom is merely recompense. When a great king before his noble court desires a servant girl that she sit beside him on his golden throne, as though she were his loving wife, would it not be wiser if she should first refuse to believe her eyes and



ears, and go on working as usual? I humbly ask your pardon for speaking in a simple manner, it's how I've spoken all my life. Mother Marie of the Incarnation, might I ask you to conclude my poor humble words...

Mother Marie

My sisters, Her Reverence has explained to us all that our most important duty lies in prayer. So let us obey, not only with our tongues but with our hearts, obey the will of our Reverend Mother. *(At a sign from Mother Marie all the Carmelites kneel.)*

20 Ave Maria.

Carmelites

Gratia plena.

Mother Marie, Carmelites

Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus...

Carmelites

...et benedictus fructus ventris tui...

Mother Marie, Carmelites

Jesu.

Prioress

Sancta Maria.

Carmelites

Mater Dei.

Prioress, Carmelites

Ora pro nobis peccatoribus...

Carmelites

...nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.

All

Amen.

(The Carmelites rise and begin to go out slowly.)

Interlude: a room in the convent

The doorbell rings violently. The Prioress and Mother Marie enter rapidly from one direction, Constance from another.

Prioress

21 What is going on?

Constance

There's a man at the gate. He begs to come in. He insists that he must see our Reverend Mother.

Prioress

Tell me what gate?

Constance

The one in the alley.

Prioress

If he's so keen to come unobserved, then he must be one of our friends. Mother, go at once.

(Mother Marie and Constance go out. The Prioress remains, her face impassive, her lips moving slightly. Mother Marie returns in haste.)

Mother Marie

My Mother, he says he's Monsieur de la Force, who asks to see his sister Blanche, before his departure from France.

Prioress

Have someone go and warn Blanche de la Force. The present circumstances warrant our breaking the rules.

(calling back Mother Marie, who had begun to leave)

When they see each other, I would like you to be there.

Mother Marie

If only your Reverence would kindly permit me...

Prioress

Only you, and no other!

(Mother Marie goes out hurriedly.)

COMPACT DISC TWO

Scene 3 The parlour

Blanche has her face uncovered. Concealed from view, Mother Marie of the Incarnation witnesses the interview, her face covered by a heavy veil.

1 **Prelude**

Chevalier

2 Blanche, why do you behave like this? You've hardly even raised your eyes to me. You are barely listening. Can this be the welcome you give to a brother?

Blanche

The good Lord knows that I've no desire to cause you the slightest pain!

Chevalier

Let me come to the point: our father feels it isn't safe for you to stay here any more.

Blanche

There is danger all around, here I feel safe – and that's enough for me.

Chevalier

How can you explain the sudden change in the Blanche that I knew! There is something in your voice and your manner – why on earth are you so tense and withdrawn?

Blanche

If I now appear uneasy, it is only that I feel so very awkward. I have not as yet grown used to this life, this life of happiness and freedom.



Chevalier

Perhaps you could be happy, but you'll never be free! It is not within your power to rise above your own nature.

Blanche

Oh come, you surely do not believe the life of a Carmelite conforms to nature?

Chevalier

At times like these, there are plenty of girls, once envied by all, who now, believe me, would gladly change places with you. Though I'm speaking rather harshly, Blanche, I must because I see before me the image of our dear father left alone with servants.

Blanche

Do you really think that I am kept here by fear?

Chevalier

Or by your fear of fear. After all, this fear is hardly nobler than any other fear. You have to face your fear just as a soldier faces death and cease to be a victim of your fear.

Blanche

From this day on I can only be the humble and willing victim of Almighty God.

Chevalier

Blanche, just now when I entered the room, you looked so frail that I thought you would faint. And then I saw, in the feeble glimmer of this light for a single moment, a glimpse of our childhood. It is just because we felt so awkward we found ourselves speaking such bitter words that seemed to give offence. Could they have changed my baby lamb?

Blanche

Oh, why must you forever fill me with doubt, poisonous doubt, doubt that destroys, and from such poison I almost died. It's true I've changed forever.

Chevalier

You no longer are afraid?

Blanche

Where I am, nothing can harm me.

Chevalier

Ah well, good-bye, my darling.

(He goes towards the door. At this, Blanche nearly collapses and grasps the grille with both hands.)

Blanche

Oh, do not go, we cannot part like this. Ah, no! I have long endured your pity and compassion.

Can you not now find a way to grant me instead that respect and understanding which you would freely grant to any man.

Chevalier

Blanche, now you're the one who is angry and defiant.

Blanche

I feel nothing but respect for you, respect and affection. But I am no more your baby lamb. I now am a daughter of God, who will suffer for you, and whom I ask you most sincerely to respect, from now on, as a companion in battle. For we're going into battle, each in his own way, and mine has its risks and its dangers, the same as yours.

(The Chevalier turns upon Blanche a long indefinable look, and goes out. Blanche holds on to the grille so as not to fall. Mother Marie of the Incarnation comes forward.)

Mother Marie

⁴ Compose yourself, Sister Blanche.

Blanche

Oh my Mother, I have told a lie. Do I not know what I am? Alas! I could not bear to hear him pity me! May God grant me pardon. His kindness suffocates me. Ah, will I never be more to him than a child?

Mother Marie

Come on. It is time to go.

Blanche

I have been too proud, I will be punished for it.

Mother Marie

There is but one way for you to conquer pride, you must rise above it. You must have courage.

(They go out.)

Scene 4 The sacristy of the convent

The Chaplain, surrounded by all the nuns, is taking leave of the Community. He puts the vestments away in a cupboard.

Chaplain

⁴ My faithful daughters, I know that some among you already have heard what I'm now about to say. I have been relieved of all my duties. And the Mass I've just completed here will be my last. The Tabernacle is empty. I partake today of the grief of our early Christian fathers. Today's a very great day for Carmel. Good-bye; I bless you all. Let us sing once more together. *(All the nuns fall to their knees.)*
Ave verum corpus natum
Ex Maria Virgine.



Carmelites

Vere passum immolatum
In cruce pro homine.

Chaplain

Cujus latus perforatum
Unda fluxit et sanguine.

Carmelites

Esto nobis praegustatum
Mortis in examine.

Chaplain

O clemens!

Carmelites

O pie!

Chaplain

O Jesu fili Mariae. Amen.

(The nuns rise. Blanche finds herself immediately beside the Chaplain.)

Blanche

⁵ But what will become of you?

Chaplain

I'll remain just as I am at this moment: an outcast!

Blanche *(terrified)*

But if what they say is true, you will be killed if they ever find you!

Chaplain

They will not recognize me, so do not fear.

Blanche

You're going in disguise?

Chaplain

Yes. These are the orders that we have just received. Dear sister Blanche, your imagination is far too easily excited. Yes, my dear child, you need not fear for I will stay not far from this house.

(On the threshold he raises his hand in blessing.)

I'll return as often as I can.

(He leaves. Mother Marie with great calm pushes home the bolts of the outside door.)

Constance

How can it be that priests are hounded in this fashion – and in a land of Christians? Have the French now become such awful cowards?

Sister Mathilde

They're afraid. Everyone's afraid. They infect one another with their panic, just as they might give each other cholera or smallpox.

Blanche

Perhaps you are right about fear, it's really an illness.

Constance

But are there no men left here in France to come to the defence of our priests?

Prioress

When there are no priests there'll be martyrs in plenty, thus the balance of grace is very soon restored.

Mother Marie *(in a hard voice filled with suppressed passion)*

I am certain the Holy Ghost has spoken through the mouth of our Reverend Mother. To make sure the Church may survive in France, the daughters of Carmel have only to offer their lives.

Prioress

You did not hear me correctly, Mother, or at least you did not understand me. We are not allowed to decide if our humble names shall be inscribed among the martyrs.

(She goes out, followed by Mother Jeanne. The nuns, dumbfounded, look at Mother Marie. The bell at the gate is rung violently.)

Constance

⁶ Someone is ringing the bell!

Sister Mathilde

We'd better go at once and take a look at the door behind the stairs.

(The Chaplain reappears.)

Crowd *(outside in the street)*

Oh!

Chaplain

I was very nearly caught between the crowd and all the soldiers, so I had no choice but to return to you at once.

Constance

You must stay with us, my Father.

Chaplain

I would not wish to put you all in danger. I will have to leave you... When the crowd assembles to watch the procession, they'll be gathered in front of the City Hall, then I shall escape.

Crowd

Ah!

Constance

Listen!

Sister Mathilde

Listen!



Carmelites
They are here!

Chaplain
I have waited far too long. What will happen to you, my daughters, if they should find me here?

(He blesses them and leaves.)

Crowd
You'd better open! You'd better open!

(The nuns huddle in a corner, with the exception of Mother Marie.)

Carmelites
We will not! We will not!

Crowd
You'd better open! You'd better open!

Carmelites
We will not! We will not!

Voice from the crowd
7 Open the door, open the door now!

Mother Marie (to Constance)
Do as they say, my little daughter.

(With a firm step, Constance goes to unbolt the door. Four Commissioners enter. Two remain by the

door. The crowd is held back by guards armed with long pikes.)

First Commissioner
Are these all the nuns?

Mother Marie
You see them over there.

First Commissioner
It is our duty to see that they read the details of the decree of expulsion.

Mother Marie
Perhaps we can hear them from you.

Second Commissioner (reads)
'Whereas it was decided by the Legislative Assembly, in session the seventeenth of August 1792, by the first of October next all houses of retreat at present still occupied by active members of religious societies and orders have to be vacated at once by the aforementioned parties and must be offered for sale with the full approval of the proper authorities.'

First Commissioner
Is there anything in this decree to which you object?

Mother Marie
How can we possibly object, when you have left

us with nothing at all to decide? But it really is essential that we obtain some appropriate clothes, since you insist we may not wear the ones we have.

First Commissioner
Good! *(mockingly)* Are you then so very eager to throw off your ridiculous garments and to be dressed the same as everybody else?

Mother Marie
Surely you understand, it's the man who makes the soldier, not the uniform. No matter what we wear, we always will be nothing else but servants.

First Commissioner
The people have no more need of servants.

Mother Marie
But they have a great need of martyrs, so you see, there's a service we can provide.

First Commissioner
Bah! When there's death on every hand, dying is nothing!

Mother Marie
Living is nothing when life is thoroughly debased, and devoid of value, having no more worth than all your documents.

First Commissioner
These words you've said would cost you very dear if they had been heard by anyone but me. *(aside to Mother Marie)* Can you believe that I am like the rest of them? In our Church at home, I served two year as sacristan; our noble priest... I loved him like a brother. Yet I've no choice but to howl with all the wolves!

Mother Marie
Forgive me, sir, but I must ask you to prove your loyalty and good will.

First Commissioner
I will manage somehow to get rid of the patrol. You will be alone until the workmen come later on tonight. But beware the blacksmith called Blancard. He's an informer.

(The Commissioners withdraw. The crowd leaves. Mother Marie goes to close the large door. The nuns, dumbfounded, do not know what to do. Some are praying. Blanche, like a poor wounded bird, has collapsed on a little stool. Mother Jeanne enters through the little door of the enclosure.)

Mother Jeanne
8 My sisters, our Reverend Mother is coming to say goodbye to you all, for she must go to Paris tonight.



(Mother Jeanne turns a pitying glance upon Blanche, then goes over to a cupboard. She takes out the Little King of Glory and hands it to Blanche like a toy.)

My dear little Sister Blanche, every Christmas Eve, as you well know, we would carry the Infant Jesus into each cell. I trust He will bring you courage and hope.

Blanche *(taking the Little King in her arms)*
Oh! He's so small... and frail!

Mother Marie
No! He's so small, but so strong!

Crowd *(outside in the street)*
Ah! We will win! We will win! We will win!

Blanche
Ah!

(She lets the figure of the Little King slip from her arms. Its head cracks on the flagstones.)

Blanche *(terrified, with the look of someone who is forever branded)*
The Infant King is dead! And nothing left to us but the Lamb of God.

Crowd
Ah! We will win! We will win!

Act III

Scene 1 The chapel

The community is assembled in the chapel, which presents a scene of total devastation. Everything is covered with straw and plaster; the grille of the chancel is partly torn loose. The chapel is lit by a few candles. A nun watches near the door. The very modest civil garb of the Chaplain is spotted with earth, his shoes covered with mud; one sleeve is torn the length of his arm. Mother Marie, firm and calm, is surrounded by nuns. Constance and Blanche are side by side, Sister Mathilde and another nun stand apart from them.

Mother Marie 9 Father, speak to them. I assure you they are fully prepared for the solemn vow they will be taking.

Chaplain
It's hardly a duty of mine. So I think it would be more appropriate, in the unavoidable absence of the Reverend Mother, if you yourself address the community.

Mother Marie
My daughters, I propose that we take upon ourselves the vow of martyrdom, to give our lives for the glory of Carmel and the salvation of our land.
(The Sisters look at each other.)

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I am glad to see you accept my proposal with as much detachment as our dear Lord, Father of all, inspires me to make it. But, if we should finally decide to offer up our lives, we should have no illusion as to what they are actually worth.

Mother Jeanne
To what will we have to bind ourselves by taking this vow? The only trouble with these special vows is the disagreement they can create, and they may even go against our conscience.

Mother Marie
And that is why I have always believed that we should know and recognize the worth of this vow and the great opportunity it brings. If there is even one of you against, it will suffice to stop me at once. I would suggest we come to a decision at once by a secret vote. And then our Father will hear what we have all decided in the presence of Almighty God. Does this serve to clarify the issues that you raised, my Mother?

Mother Jeanne
That seems to set our minds at rest.

Chaplain
It would be best if you would pass in turn before the cross.

Sister Mathilde *(to the nun beside her, indicating Blanche)*
I bet there'll be one vote against.

(One by one the nuns pass behind the altar and reappear almost immediately. When Blanche reappears her face is haggard. Constance watches her. The Chaplain approaches Mother Marie and says a few words to her in a low voice.)

Mother Marie 10 There is only one vote against. That is enough.

Sister Mathilde *(to her neighbour)*
We know who that is...

Constance
Truly it was I.
(General stupefaction. Blanche begins to weep, burying her face in her hands.)
The priest here knows I have told the truth... But... but... now I declare that I am in agreement with you all... and... I would like to... may I ask that I be permitted to take this vow... I beg of you in the name of our Lord.

Chaplain
We have a decision. Now rejoin your companions. Come forward to me two by two.
(The Chaplain puts on his vestments.)
And now, dear Sister, open the Book of the Holy Gospel and prepare to take your vow. Let the youngest be first. Sister Blanche and Sister Constance, if you please.

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(Blanche and Constance kneel side by side and offer their lives to God. The other nuns mill about to take their places. Taking advantage of the confusion, Blanche flees.)

Interlude: a street outside the convent

The Carmelites, with the Prioress at their head, are assembled before a group of officers. They are in civil garb and carry meagre bundles.

Officer

¹¹ Fellow citizens, we congratulate you all on your disciplined behaviour and on your public spirit. But I have to warn you now that we shall henceforth be careful to observe you all. No more living in communities, no more dealings with those who oppose the foes of our Republic, nor with priests who plot against the State – henchmen of the Pope and of tyrants. You will appear before the courts today, one by one, and receive papers that will let you enjoy once again all the benefits of freedom under the eye of the Law.

(He leaves, followed by the other officers. The Prioress, with a gesture, holds back the Carmelites.)

Prioress

¹² Sister Gerald, we have to warn the priest as soon as possible. Last night, when we met, he agreed he would say Holy Mass for us this morning, but now it's very clear it would be far too dangerous

for him and also for us. Do you not agree, Mother Marie?
(Sister Gerald leaves.)

Mother Marie

I must rely upon Your Reverence for all that I should or should not be thinking from now on. But if I was wrong to act the way I did, it's true, all the same, once a thing is done, it is done. And is it in the spirit of our vow to act with so much caution?

(She leaves.)

Prioress *(turning towards the nuns)*

Each of you will answer to God for her vow and herself, but I, I have to answer for all, and I'm certainly old enough to keep my house in order.

Scene 2 The library of the Marquis de la Force

The library has been pillaged and disordered and the once sumptuous furnishings partly destroyed. A low stove has been placed in the large fireplace. On top of it stands a common earthenware pot. A folding bed stands in the middle of the room. Blanche, dressed as a servant, sits staring into the fire. Mother Marie, in civil garb, brusquely opens the main door.

¹³ **Prelude**

Blanche

¹⁴ It's you!

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Mother Marie

Yes. I've come to bring you back. It is time.

Blanche *(distracted)*

Ah, but I'm not free to go with you at this moment... Please... just give me time... till later.

Mother Marie

Later, no my dear child. Now, now at once. If you delay, it may be too late.

Blanche

Too late for what?

Mother Marie

For you to be saved.

Blanche

To be saved... Do you believe that I would be safe if I returned with you?

Mother Marie

With us, you'll be far safer than here, Blanche...

Blanche

I cannot believe you. In times such as these, how can I find anywhere safer than here? They'll never find me. Who'd ever think of looking here, for death strikes only the mighty... But I feel so exhausted, Mother Marie... Oh look, my stew is burning! It's all your fault! My God! My God! Whatever shall I do?



(Blanche falls to her knees before the fire and sobs. She lifts up the cover of the pot. Mother Marie also kneels and hastens to pour the stew into another pot.)

Mother Marie

Do not torment yourself, Blanche. You see the damage is repaired. But why do you cry?

Blanche

Because you are so kind and gentle. But I feel ashamed of my tears. I just want to be left in peace... I want people to leave me alone... *(with sudden violence)*

What have they got against me? Have I done them any harm? I would never sin against God. Fear is not a sin against God! I was born in fear, I've lived in fear, still live in fear. All the world despises a coward – so it is only right that I too should be scorned and despised. I've had this feeling since I was a child. Only one man could stop me from talking like this, that was my father. He is dead. He died on the guillotine only a week ago.

(throwing herself on the bed)

In this house that was his, I – so unworthy of him and of his name – what other role can I assume but that of a miserable servant? This morning I was slapped... Yes, slapped in the face.

Mother Marie

The worst, my daughter, is not to be despised,

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but to despise oneself. Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ!

(Blanche rises and stands upright, her eyes dry.)

Blanche
My Mother?

Mother Marie
I will give you an address. Remember it well. Mademoiselle Rose Ducor, 5 rue Saint-Denis. You'll be completely safe with her. Rose Ducor, 5 rue Saint-Denis. I shall await you there until tomorrow night.

Blanche
I will not go. I cannot possibly go.

Mother Marie
You will go; I know that you will go, my child.

A Woman's Voice *(outside the room)*
Blanche, get a move on!

(Blanche escapes through a side door. Mother Marie, for an instant dumbfounded, slips away through the main door.)

Scene 3 A prison cell at the Conciergerie
The Carmelites are crowded together in the cell. The Little King of Glory has been placed on an old table which is partially covered with a small white cloth; a few wilting flowers stand in a cracked jug. There are some old benches and a broken-down

chair on which the Prioress is sitting. The barred window looks out on a dark courtyard. The door is heavy and unyieldy. It is daybreak.

Prioress

- [15] My daughters, we have almost come to the end of our first night in prison. By far, by far, the hardest. We must accept that we are here to stay. By tomorrow you will feel more at ease in these strange surroundings and quite accustomed to this way of life, this new way of life which we now must bear. After all, it is only a change of scene. No one could take away from us the freedom that we surrendered with our vows so long ago. My daughters, while I was gone, you chose to take the vow of martyrdom. Now whether this was wise or not, God will not allow that such a noble sacrifice should now return to plague your souls. I take this vow myself. Now I am bound with you all. I am and shall be, whatever happens, the sole judge of how this vow is fulfilled. Ah! I take the burden; I leave you the reward, since I did not pronounce the vow myself. Do not worry about it any more, my daughters. I've always answered for you in this world, I've no desire at all as far as it concerns myself, of avoiding whatever may come. You need not fear!

Mother Jeanne
While Your Reverence is with us, we shall never be afraid.

Prioress
In the Garden of Olives, our Lord was no more master. He knew the fear of death.

Constance
[16] And what of Sister Blanche?

Prioress
I really do not know any more than you, my dear little daughter.

Constance
She will return.

Sister Mathilde
Tell us why you're so certain, sister Constance?

Constance
Because... because... because of a dream I have had!

(All the Carmelites, with the exception of the Prioress, burst out laughing. The door is suddenly opened and the Gaoler enters. He unrolls a document.)

- Gaoler** *(reads)*
[17] 'The Tribunal of the Revolution declares that the former sisters of the Order of Carmel, who reside in Compiègne, Department of the Oise—Madeleine Lidoine, Anne Pellerat, Madeleine Touret, Marie-Anne Hanniset, Marie-Anne

Piedcourt, Marie-Anne Brideau, Marie-Cyprienne Brare, Rose Chrétien, Marie Dufour, Angélique Roussel, Marie-Gabrielle Trézelle, Marie-Geneviève Meunier, Catherine Soiron, Thérèse Soiron, Elisabeth Vezolot — gathered in defiance of the Law in secret meetings aimed against the Revolution, also engaged in correspondence with our enemies, spreading rumours most dangerous to freedom. Whereas they constitute a body of rebels, openly seditious, who maintain within their hearts the most criminal desire which is to see the people of France enslaved once more by tyrants, to see their freedom drowned in torrents of blood which their treachery and evil designs have brought about in the name of God. The Tribunal of the Revolution, for the safety of the Republic, has decided that the aforementioned women shall be condemned to death.'

(The Gaoler rolls up the document. The nuns lower their heads. The Gaoler leaves.)

- Prioress**
[18] My daughters, I wanted to save you, save you with all my heart... Ah, how I longed for you to be spared this fearful sacrifice. For, from the very day when I knew you all, I truly loved you, loved you like a mother; and would a mother willingly see, even if a king desired it, the sacrifice of her children? If I've done wrong, God will decide. Such as I am, you're all that I have. I am not



someone who would throw all her wealth out of the window. My daughters, you must solemnly swear the oath of obedience for the very last time, now and forever, with my maternal blessing upon you all.

Interlude: a street near the Bastille

(The Chaplain enters brusquely. Mother Marie, who had been waiting for him, comes out of the shadows.)

Chaplain

¹⁸ It is done. They have been condemned.

Mother Marie

All of them?

Chaplain

All of them!

Mother Marie

God! And...

Chaplain

It will happen late tonight, I'm told, or tomorrow...

(Mother Marie turns aside.)

Whatever are you doing?

Mother Marie

I cannot let them die without me!

Chaplain

What does it matter what you feel at such a moment? God decides who will live and who will die.

Mother Marie

I took the martyr's vow...

Chaplain

It was God who accepted your vow – it is to Him alone that you will answer, and not to your companions. Should He choose to free you from your word, then He is simply taking back that which is His.

Mother Marie

Oh, God! I am dishonoured! At the moment of death they will look for me in vain.

Chaplain

There's another who looks for you. Your duty is solely to Him.
(They leave.)

Scene 4 Place de la Révolution, 17 July 1794

(The last of the Carmelites are descending from tumbrels. Old Mother Jeanne is being helped down. Constance is the last one; she leaps down almost joyfully. Then the Carmelites, with the Prioress at their head, make their way to the scaffold singing. In the first row of the dense and restless crows the Chaplain appears, wearing a cap

of Liberty. He murmurs the absolution, makes a furtive sign of the cross as the first Carmelites ascend the scaffold, then quickly disappears.)

²⁰ Prelude

(The Prioress is the first to mount the scaffold. As each nun in turn disappears, the voices of the chorus become fewer and fewer.)

Prioress, Mother Jeanne, Sister Mathilde, Constance, Carmelites

²¹ Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae,
vita dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.

Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevae;

ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac
lacrimarum valle.

Eia ergo advocata nostra,

illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.

Et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui nobis
post hoc exsilium ostende.

O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria, o dulcis
Virgo Maria.

(Constance, the last of the Carmelites, ascends the scaffold. Blanche, her face free from every vestige of fear, makes her way through the crowd in which she had been lost.)

Constance

O clemens...

(Constance catches sight of her friend and her face becomes radiant with happiness. She stops short for a brief moment, then resumes her journey to the scaffold, with a gentle smile to Blanche.)

O pia, o dulcis Virgo Ma...

(Incredibly calm, Blanche steps forward, amid the stupefaction of the crowd, and mounts the scaffold.)

Blanche

Deo Patri sit gloria

Et Filio qui a mortuis

Surrexit ac Paraclito

In saeculorum saecula,

In saeculorum...

(The crowd begins to disperse.)

English version by Joseph Machlis



On session



Clockwise from top left: Paul Daniel, Josephine Barstow, Sarah Tynan and Felicity Palmer



Brian Couzens, Felicity Palmer, Paul Daniel, Orla Boylan and Anne Marie Gibbons.



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CHANDOS DIGITAL

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Francis Poulenc (1889–1963)

The Carmelites

Opera in three acts

Libretto by the composer after Georges Bernanos' play *Dialogues des Carmélites*,
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 Blanche de la Force, his daughter Catrin Wyn-Davies *soprano*
 Chevalier de la Force, his son Peter Wedd *tenor*
 Thierry, a valet Gary Coward *baritone*

Madame de Croissy, Prioress Felicity Palmer *mezzo-soprano*
 Mother Marie of the Incarnation, assistant Prioress Josephine Barstow *soprano*
 Madame Lidoine, the new Prioress Orla Boylan *soprano*
 Sister Constance of Saint-Denis, a young nun Sarah Tynan *soprano*
 Mother Jeanne of the Child Jesus Jane Powell *mezzo-soprano*
 Sister Mathilde Anne Marie Gibbons *mezzo-soprano*
 Chaplain Ryland Davies *tenor*
 Monsieur Javelinot, a physician William Berger *baritone*

First Commissioner James Edwards *tenor*
 Second Commissioner Roland Wood *baritone*
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 Gaoler David Stephenson *baritone*

English National Opera Chorus
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