

PITTSBURGH OPERA

For Immediate Release

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Pittsburgh Opera presents *Dialogues of the Carmelites*

Moving, powerful work speaks to the human spirit

- What:** Francis Poulenc's opera [Dialogues of the Carmelites](#)
- Where:** Benedum Center for the Performing Arts
7th Street and Penn Avenue, Downtown Pittsburgh
- When:** Saturday, April 30, 8:00 PM Tuesday, May 3, 7:00 PM
Friday, May 6, 8:00 PM Sunday, May 8, 2:00 PM
- Run Time:** 3 hours, including 1 intermission
- Language:** Sung in French with English titles projected above the stage
- Tickets:** Start at \$10 for all performances.
Call 412-456-6666 for more information or visit
www.pittsburghopera.org

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Pittsburgh, PA...Pittsburgh Opera brings the intimate, powerful *Dialogues of the Carmelites* to the Benedum Center beginning April 30. Poulenc's opera, inspired by the true story of 16 Carmelite nuns of Compiègne martyred during the Reign of Terror in France, is also reputedly a product of his own crisis of faith. Poulenc's exceptionally fine vocal and choral composition is displayed in a work that invites spiritual introspection for people of all faiths. Jean-Luc Tingaud makes his Pittsburgh Opera conducting debut; Eric Einhorn (*Carmen*, 2010; *Don Pasquale*, 2009) returns to direct.

The nuns' martyrdom is preceded by two spiritual crises in the convent, those of Mme. de Croissy, the dying Prioress, and the troubled Blanche de la Force, a young novice trying to escape the vagaries of the outside world, who is placed in the care of Mother Marie. Amanda Majeski debuts with Pittsburgh Opera as Blanche; Sheila Nadler sings Mme. de Croissy and Elizabeth Bishop (*The Grapes of Wrath*, 2008) portrays Mother Marie. The large cast also includes Sean Panikkar (*The Grapes of Wrath*, 2008) as Blanche's brother, the Chevalier; James Maddalena (*Così fan tutte*, 2006) is the Marquis. Julianna Di Giacomo debuts as Mme. Lidoine; Resident Artists Shannon Kessler Dooley and Stephanie Lauricella are Sister Constance and Sister Mathilde; former Resident Artist Daphne Alderson is Sister Jeanne.

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Dialogues features simple period costumes and a minimalistic set that uses light and space to lay bare the spiritual, psychological, and historic conditions of the characters in a non-literal way. The set is from Calgary Opera; costumes are from Seattle Opera.

Tickets to *Dialogues of the Carmelites* start at \$10, with all performances at the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts, 7th Street and Penn Avenue, Downtown Pittsburgh. For additional information or to purchase tickets call 412-456-6666 or visit www.pittsburghopera.org.

Facts about the opera

- *Dialogues of the Carmelites* was first performed in Italian in its premiere at La Scala Milan in January 1957. The original French version premiered in June of that same year at Opéra National de Paris. Poulenc expressed a wish that the opera be performed in the vernacular in any country in which it was produced.
- A significant source for the opera's libretto was a 1931 novel about the Martyrs of Compiègne, *The Last to the Scaffold* by Gertrud von le Fort. The heroine of the book and the opera, Blanche de la Force, is entirely fictional.
- Poulenc wrote only three operas, *Les mammelles de Tirésias*, *La voix humaine*, and *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. *Dialogues* is widely considered to be his most substantial opera. He dedicated the work to the composers Debussy, Verdi, Mussorgsky, and Monteverdi.
- For the final execution scene, Poulenc specified the sound of the falling guillotine into the score. At the moments in which the nuns are beheaded one at a time, the guillotine sounds and the singers' voices stop abruptly.

The story, in brief

In 1789 Paris, Blanche de la Force, a daughter of privilege but nervous and fearful of the chaos of revolution, joins the Carmelites, despite the Prioress's reservations. She begins an uneasy friendship with the childlike Sister Constance, who says she is sure she and Blanche will die together. Blanche also witnesses the Prioress's crisis of faith as she dies in great pain. Blanche tries to leave the convent. Her young friend Constance asserts that the Prioress's hard death did not suit her and must have been meant for someone else, who one day will find death surprisingly simple.

After the Chaplain celebrates his last Mass amid the chaos of revolution, the sisters discuss their possible martyrdom, but Madame Lidoine, the new Prioress, reminds them

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that one cannot choose to be a martyr. As the nuns prepare to leave their devastated convent, Mother Marie proposes they all take the vow of martyrdom, which must be unanimous. A secret vote reveals one dissenter: Constance claims untruthfully that it was hers, and asks to change it. Blanche takes the vow with the rest, but flees.

Mother Marie finds Blanche, who has been pressed into service to revolutionaries who have taken over her home and guillotined her father. Blanche confesses she is still dogged by fear, and Mother Marie gives her an address where she can take refuge. Later, Blanche learns that the nuns have been arrested. In a jail cell, Madame Lidoine tells the Carmelites she will join in their vow of martyrdom, made during her absence; Constance says she has dreamed of Blanche's return.

The Chaplain tells Mother Marie that the nuns have been condemned. Though she desperately wants to join them, the Chaplain reminds her she cannot make a martyr of herself. In the Place de la Révolution, the Carmelites march to the guillotine, chanting the *Salve Regina*, a hymn of supplication. Each is led up to death, as their voices are cut off one at a time. Finally, only Constance remains. She is overjoyed to see Blanche step from the crowd and take up the chant. Blanche changes the song to a hymn of praise to God as she steps to the scaffold. The astonished crowd disperses.

Dialogues of the Carmelites opens Saturday, April 30 and continues May 3, 6, and 8, 2011. Tickets start at \$10. Call 412-456-6666 or visit www.pittsburghopera.org.

The Pittsburgh Opera 2010-2011 season is generously sponsored by [PNC Foundation](#). This project is supported in part by an award from the [National Endowment for the Arts](#). Media sponsor is [WORD-FM](#).

Cast and Artistic Team *(cast is listed in order of vocal appearance)*

Chevalier de la Force	Sean Panikkar **	tenor
Marquis de la Force	James Maddalena	baritone
Blanche de la Force	Amanda Majeski +	soprano
Mme de Croissy, the Prioress	Sheila Nadler	mezzo-soprano
Sister Constance	Shannon Kessler Dooley *	soprano
Mother Marie	Elizabeth Bishop	mezzo-soprano
Mme Lidoine, the new Prioress	Julianna Di Giacomo +	soprano
L'Aumonier	James Flora *	tenor
Sister Mathilde	Stephanie Lauricella *	mezzo-soprano
Mother Jeanne	Daphne Alderson **	mezzo-soprano
Conductor	Jean-Luc Tingaud +	
Stage Director	Eric Einhorn	

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Production	Set from Calgary Opera; costumes from Seattle Opera
Set Designer	Harry Frehner and Scott Reid
Costume Designer	Robert Dahlstrom
Lighting Designer	Shawn Kaufman
Hair & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Stage Manager	Tara E. Kovach

+ Pittsburgh Opera Debut

* [Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artist](#)

** Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artist alumni

Tickets and Group Discounts

Tickets for all performances of *Dialogues of the Carmelites* start at \$10. Group discounts are available. For tickets, call (412) 456-6666 or visit www.pittsburghopera.org. For discounted group tickets (6 or more), contact Randy Adams at 412-281-0912, x 213.

Related Events

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Brown Bag Concert

Saturday, April 9, 2011 – 12:00 PM

The George Rowland White Opera Studio at Pittsburgh Opera Headquarters
([2425 Liberty Avenue](#))

This one-hour concert begins at 12:00 PM and features the Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artists performing a selection of works in French, including music of *Dialogues* composer Poulenc. The Brown Bag concerts provide an informal introduction to opera, and guests can meet the performers after the concert. Pittsburgh Opera proudly serves [21st Street Coffee](#) at Brown Bag concerts. Guests are encouraged to bring a lunch. **Pittsburgh Opera is grateful to Eden Hall Foundation for sponsoring Brown Bag Concerts.**

Opera Up Close: *Dialogues of the Carmelites*

Sunday, April 17 – 2:00 PM

Pittsburgh Opera Headquarters ([2425 Liberty Avenue](#))

Opera Up Close: Dialogues is an entertaining and insightful program held on Sunday, April 17, at the George Rowland White Opera Studio in Pittsburgh Opera's headquarters ([2425 Liberty Avenue](#)) in the Strip. *Opera Up Close* includes an in-depth musical analysis of the opera *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and a panel discussion. Free and open to the public; no RSVP required. Pittsburgh Opera proudly serves [21st Street Coffee](#) at *Opera Up Close*. For more information, call (412) 281-0912 or visit www.pittsburghopera.org.

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Dialogues Previews on WQED-FM 89.3

Saturday, April 23 – 12:30 PM; Friday, April 29 – 7:00 PM

Hosted by WQED's Stephen Baum, the *Dialogues* preview gives listeners an in-depth introduction to the singers, music and production of the opera. For more information, call (412) 281-0912 or visit www.pittsburghopera.org.

Pre-Opera Talks

Benedum Center Main Floor

Ticketholders are invited to attend a [Pre-Opera Talk](#) on *Dialogues of the Carmelites* one hour before each performance's curtain in the Orchestra Section (Main Floor) of the Benedum Center. Learn about the composer and the story of the opera. These talks are free to all ticketholders.

Meet the Artists

Tuesday, May 3

Immediately following the opera in the Benedum Lower Lobby

Ticketholders for the Tuesday, May 3 performance of [Dialogues of the Carmelites](#) are invited to gather in the Benedum Lower Lobby immediately following the performance for light refreshments and interviews with [General Director Christopher Hahn](#) and the stars of the opera. This event is free to all Tuesday performance ticketholders.

Maecenas XXVII Gala, honoring Cardinal Donald Wuerl and Jim and Kathe Patrinis

Saturday, May 14, 2011, 6:00 PM

Pittsburgh Opera Headquarters

This annual gala closes each Pittsburgh Opera season with panache and spectacle. Cardinal Donald Wuerl will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award; Jim and Kathe Patrinis will receive the Maecenas Award. Detailed information will be released at a later date.

Pittsburgh Opera's 2010-2011 season continues a 72-year tradition of excellence in opera. As part of the Company's continued efforts to make opera accessible to all members of the community, single tickets for the 2010-2011 season again start at just \$10, with subscriptions starting at just \$21 for the two remaining mainstage operas. Subscriptions and single tickets are on sale now.

2010-2011 Season

[The Barber of Seville](#) October 9, 12, 15, 17, 2010

[Lucia di Lammermoor](#) November 13, 16, 19, 21, 2010

[Rinaldo](#) January 27, 29; February 1, 4, 6, 2011

[Dialogues of the Carmelites](#) March 26, 29; April 1, 3, 2011

[Dialogues of the Carmelites](#) April 30; May 3, 6, 8, 2011

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