



PRESENTS

# *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*

by Francis Poulenc

After the great success of his *Les Feluettes*,  
Serge Denoncourt takes on an all-new production  
of this 20<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece

[Videoclip](#) / [Musical excerpts](#) / [TV ad](#) / [Podcast](#)

Montreal, **December 13, 2016** – For its third production of the season, the Opéra de Montréal presents a 20<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece: *Dialogues des carmélites* by Francis Poulenc, after the play by Georges Bernanos. This heartrending story of Carmelites destined to die during the French Revolution offers French opera some of its most beautiful music. The stage direction for this opera of clarity—with its limpid text and music—has been entrusted to Serge Denoncourt, whose last opera staging (*Les Feluettes*) was a resounding success with audiences and critics alike. A new production by **Productions ODM Inc.**, with performances on **January 28, 31 and February 2 and 4, 2017, at 7:30 pm** in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts.

## A 100% Canadian Cast

A quick return to the Opéra de Montréal for **Marianne Fiset** (she was heard here two seasons ago in *Silent Night*), embodying the doubts, fears, and redemption of young Blanche de la Force. Mezzo **Mia Lennox** lends her rich voice to the torments of prioress Madame de Croissy, appearing alongside soprano **Marie-Josée Lord** (Madame Lidoine), mezzo **Aidan Ferguson** (Mother Marie of the Incarnation), and soprano **Magali Simard-Galdès** (Sister Constance of Saint-Denis). Completing the cast are **Antoine Bélanger** in the role of the Chevalier de la Force, renowned baritone **Gino Quilico**, O.C. (Marquis de la Force), **Caroline Gélinas\*** (Mother Jeanne of the Holy Child Jesus), **Lauren Margison\*** (Sister Mathilde), **Keven Geddes\*** (Chaplain of the Carmel), **Max Van Wyck\*** (Officer), **Geoffroy Salvas\*** (Jailer), **Dominic Lorange** (1<sup>st</sup> Commissioner), and **Philippe Bolduc** (2<sup>nd</sup> Commissioner).

\*Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal

Conductor **Jean-François Rivest** leads the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and **Serge Denoncourt** directs the production, assisted by **Suzanne Crocker**. The sets are by **Guillaume Lord**, costumes by **Dominique Guindon**, and lighting by **Martin Labrecque**. **Claude Webster** is the chorus master. The opera is sung in French with English and French surtitles.

## The Story

The true story of the sixteen Carmelites of Compiègne, who were guillotined on July 17, 1794, marking the end of the Reign of Terror. Transformed into a work of fiction, *Dialogues des carmélites* tells the story of Blanche de la Force, a young aristocrat who enters the convent to overcome her fear of life and her anxiety about death; monastic life transforms her. While she first flees the convent to escape martyrdom, she later joins her sisters and climbs the scaffold, free and at peace.

### A work about grace... with a complex history

Poulenc told Claude Rostand in 1957: *If it is a work about fear, it is equally and above all, in my opinion, a work about grace and the transfer of grace. This is why my Carmelites climb the scaffold with extraordinary calm and confidence. For are not confidence and calm at the base of all mystical experience?*

The first performance—in French—of *Dialogues des carmélites* was given on June 21, 1957 at the Opéra de Paris: it was a success! But the story of its genesis is quite complicated. On June 22, 1794, sixteen Carmelites were arrested, tried before the revolutionary court, and guillotined on July 17. The story was related by the sole survivor, Marie de l'Incarnation, and published after her death in 1836. One hundred years later, German writer Gertrude von Le Fort told the story once again in a novel, this time adding the fictional character of Blanche de la Force. In 1938, Catholic writer Georges Bernanos was made aware of Gertrude von Le Fort's novel and, in 1947, began to adapt it into a script at the request of Father Bruckberger, who wanted to turn it into a film, working with filmmaker Philippe Agostini. The project was abandoned upon his death in 1948 (though it later made it to the screen in 1960). In 1950, however, publisher Albert Béguin transformed Bernanos's writing into a play published under the name *Dialogues des carmélites*, which was staged by Jacques Hébertot in 1952. In 1953, at the request of Guido Valcaranghi, the director of Ricordi publishers, Poulenc set about composing an opera based on the play (which had been adapted into Italian by dramatist Flavio Testi), paring it down and cutting it into scenes "with great respect." Poulenc identified with Blanche de la Force, who fell prey to her worst fears, while he himself was going through a particularly difficult period following the death of his companion Lucien Roubet. The orchestration was completed in 1956. The opera premiered in Italian at La Scala in Milan on January 26, 1957, and then in French, in Paris, in June of the same year.

### Music of grace, far-removed from the experimental approaches of the time

Poulenc composed a spiritual opera that is more in keeping with the spirit of Debussy, Verdi, Mussorgsky, and Monteverdi than with the experimental approaches of his century... His genius was to have the richness and lyricism of the French melodies serve the clarity of the text. The colourful orchestration was used with finesse to establish the atmosphere without obscuring the subject matter. As for the voices, he used all of the possibilities of the human voice—recitative and arioso—always staying close to the emotions and inflections of spoken language. In so doing, he successfully managed to express the protagonists' various states of mind, ranging from the old prioress's anxiety in the face of death to the reassuring tenderness of Madame Lidoine at the Conciergerie, from the violent agitation when the sisters are evicted from their monastery to Sister Constance's impishness. Poulenc succeeded in creating a perfect fusion of the profane melodic style of his melodies and a religious aesthetic by fitting them to the requirements of lyric drama.

**Opera:** *Dialogues des carmélites* by Francis Poulenc

**Structure:** 3 acts

**Language:** French with English and French surtitles

**Libretto:** after the play by Georges Bernanos, adapted from the novel *Die letzte am Schafott* (*The Song at the Scaffold*) by G. von Le Fort (1931)

**Premiere:** La Scala, Milan, January 26, 1957 in Italian, and Opéra de Paris, June 21, 1957 in French

**New production:** Productions ODM Inc.

**Last presented at the Opéra de Montréal:** March 2000

## DECEMBER AND JANUARY AT THE OPÉRA DE MONTRÉAL

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### AM AHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS – ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DES JEUNES DE MONTRÉAL

Menotti's opera/Christmas story, presented by the Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal

Conductor: Louis Lavigueur; Stage Director: Martine Beaulne; Vocal Coaches: Sara Chiesa and Carol-Anne Fraser

**Venue:** Saint-Donat-de-Montcalm Church in Saint-Donat

**Date:** December 17, 4 pm

[Info](#)

### LET'S TALK OPERA – FREE

A new General Director, fresh new ideas... The Opéra de Montréal emerges from its confines to talk to you about opera. Let's Talk Opera! is a new series serving as an introduction to each opera in our season. About a week before the premiere, join musicologist Pierre Vachon (Ph.D.), a pianist, and a singer, and get to the heart of each work in just 90 minutes (including a coffee break): history, music, voices, cultural context, composer, style...

Next event: *Dialogues des carmélites*

**Venue:** Victoria Hall Community Centre, 4626 Sherbrooke West - Westmount (QC) - H3Z 1G1

**Date:** January 22, 10:30 am

[Info](#)

### PLACE À L'ART VOCAL – FREE

Second interview, in collaboration with Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.

Opera and Women: a vast topic. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they were goddesses or kings' wives, often acting as foils, and did not appear on stage much at all due to a papal ban. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, women of character and playwrights appeared, with Mozart giving them true independence. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they became divas. And in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were many... So, who are these women of opera? Their story, the archetypes, the roles... Join Chantal Lambert, Director of the Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal, for an overview. With host Pierre Vachon and singers from the Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal: Lauren Margison, Chelsea Rus, Caroline Gélinas, Katie Miller, and Carol-Ann Fraser.

**Venue:** BAnQ – 475 de Maisonneuve East in Montreal

**Date:** January 25, 7 pm

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### OPÉRA DE MONTRÉAL | 2016-2017 SEASON – 37<sup>TH</sup> SEASON

All operas are performed in their original language with bilingual surtitles projected above the stage.

#### SALLE WILFRID-PELLETIER, PLACE DES ARTS (PDA)

POULENC – *Dialogues des carmélites* | January 28, 31, February 2, 4, 2017 at 7:30 pm

BILODEAU – *Another Brick In The Wall – The Opera* | March 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, and 26, 2017

at 7:30 pm (Official programming: Montreal's 375<sup>th</sup> Anniversary)  
PUCCINI – *La bohème* | May 20, 23, 25, 27, 2017 at 7:30 pm

Graphic design for the Opéra de Montréal's 2016-2017 campaign: Brad

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[Info: operademontreal.com/tickets](http://operademontreal.com/tickets)

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## Opéra de Montréal

Founded in 1980 and based in Montreal, the Opéra de Montréal is the largest francophone opera company in North America. Last year, close to 50,000 spectators made their way through the doors at the Opéra de Montréal, which is under the direction of General Director Patrick Corrigan and Artistic Director Michel Beaulac. Its season is made up of four operas, several activities by the Atelier lyrique, and several outreach activities. The Opéra is a key player in the city's economic, cultural, and social development as, each season, it maintains working relationships with over 360 local businesses, and hires no less than 800 artists and craftspeople. Close to 80% of the artists appearing at the company are Canadian.

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