

7 Deaths of Maria Callas

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Nationaltheater München Live

New production World première – Duration about 1 hrs 35 min, no interval

Video on demand until 8 October 2020

Creative team and Cast

Director and sets	Marina Abramović
Co-Director	Lynsey Peisinger
Conductor	Yoel Gamzou
Music	Marko Nikodijević
Written by	Petter Skavlan, Marina Abramović
Film Director	Nabil Elderkin
Visual Intermezzos	Marco Brambilla
Sound-Design	Luka Kozlovacki
Costumes	Riccardo Tisci for Burberry
Conception of the Stage Design	Anna Schöttl
Lighting	Urs Schönebaum
Dramaturgy	Benedikt Stampfli
Choruses	Stellario Fagone
Violetta Valéry	Hera Hyesang Park
Floria Tosca	Selene Zanetti
Desdemona	Leah Hawkins
Cio-Cio-San	Nadezhda Karyazina
Lucia Ashton	Adela Zaharia
Norma	Lauren Fagan
Film Actor and Performance	Marina Abramović
Film Actor	Willem Dafoe

About the operas and arias

Both Maria Callas and Marina Abramović consider their art their life. For them private person and artist are one and the same: “Could art, should art, be isolated from life? I began to feel more and more strongly that art must be life,” says the artist in her book.

Seven different arias in which Maria Callas shone in her interpretations her entire life long, are performed in concertante by seven singers: “Addio del passato” from *La traviata*, “Vissi d’arte” from *Tosca*, “Ave Maria” from *Otello*, “Un bel dì vedremo” from *Madama Butterfly*, “Habanera” from *Carmen*, “Il dolce suono” from *Lucia di Lammermoor* and the most important aria of all in the soprano’s life: “Casta Diva” from *Norma*. “In this performance we are taking a very conceptual approach to opera. We are stripping the usual elements of opera down to the minimum, and are bridging the elements of video and performance, narrative storytelling and music with conceptual simplicity.”, Abramović explains. The audience hears her voice commenting on aspects from the opera from her own perspective, at which point the work’s central scene is then sung. At the same time, we see in a film how Marina Abramović plays the death of the opera heroine: “I want to reenact the death scenes from seven operas – seven deaths that Maria Callas has died before me”, she reveals. In many scenes the operatic figure does not die alone, but rather is killed by a man. “For Maria Callas the man who kills her on the opera stage was always Aristoteles Onassis,” writes Abramović in her autobiography. As the murderer at her side the artist chose the multiple Oscar-nominated actor Willem Dafoe (*Platoon*, *The Florida Project*, *At Eternity’s Gate*).

The scenes are linked by new music from Serbian composer Marko Nikodijević. As the highlight of the evening the queen of performance art herself comes to the stage and appears as Maria Callas accompanied by Nikodijević’s 20-minute new composition: “This project is very close to my heart. It is about dying of a broken heart, dying for love. I hope the public can find a part of themselves in these timeless subjects.”

SYNOPSIS

1. Violetta dies of tuberculosis.

I am a flickering flame on a lone candle. Exposed to the elements: To wind and rain, to love and hate — to sickness and health. The flame can warm me or burn me. It can light my way or be my guide. But when it goes out, it cannot be relit. It goes out forever.

Violetta' aria from La traviata, Act III: "Addio, del passato"

2. Tosca plunges into the depths.

It is not dangerous to jump. It is not dangerous to fall. The rush of air, of blood through the lungs. Suspended, yet falling. Space. You have time to feel, time to love. Forever. No, it is not dangerous to fall. It is when you land it gets dangerous.

Tosca' aria from Tosca, Act II: "Vissi d'arte"

3. Desdemona is strangled by Otello.

There is an intuition, a premonition, a sense, a suspicion, a dread and a forewarning. Desdemona knew. She dressed in her marriage gown and prayed. When Othello came, she was ready.

Desdemona' aria from Otello, Act IV: "Ave Maria"

4. Cio-Cio-San commits suicide.

In science, butterfly was the name given to an effect, in which small causes lead to unpredictable consequences. In superstition, the butterfly is your beloved coming to see you. In mythology, the butterfly is a human soul; whether it be living, dying, or already dead ...

Cio-Cio-San' aria from Madama Butterfly, Act II: "Un bel dì, vedremo"

5. Carmen is stabbed by Don José.

Her fearlessness fascinates me. Her love of freedom mirrors mine. Her smouldering sexuality empowers her. She knows what she wants and takes it. Love guides her heart. Her beauty and her body are hers and hers alone. She will not be owned. She is her own.

Carmen' aria (habanera) from Carmen, Act I: "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle"

6. Lucia dies of madness.

When the universe conspires against you; trampling on your heart, crushing your soul and invading your brain, you go mad. And when you go mad, you are no longer responsible. Not for yourself. Not for those around you. Love becomes hate, hate becomes love, and death becomes the ultimate release.

Lucia' aria from Lucia di Lammermoor, Act III: "Il dolce suono"

7. Norma goes into the fire.

You walk towards the pyre. The first steps are warm, then they become hot, only to become scorching. Your skin crawls, your eyes water, your hair is singed. Walk. Your skin goes red before it blisters. But you keep on walking. The smell of burning flesh. Your skin turns black. Blindness. Hair on fire. Singed lungs. Yet you walk on — each step requiring otherworldly effort. Just before the fire engulfs you — you realize you are not alone! Then that last step into the furnace. United in flames.

Norma' aria from Norma, Act I: "Casta Diva"

8. Maria Callas dies from a broken heart.

Marina Abramović enters Maria Callas's bedroom in Avenue Georges-Mandel No. 36 in Paris, in which the singer died on September 16th, 1977, at the age of 53. But is Maria Callas really dead, or does she still exist, oscillating between life and death? Marina Abramović slips into Maria Callas's bygone life, to which she exposes herself unconditionally. She sits in her bed and looks at photographs, watches herself in the mirror, opens the window and inhales the air of Paris, until one last time the voice of Maria Callas resounds.