

Chodorkowski | Periklis Liakakis :: TicketServices.gr

A co-production with



***Khodorkovsky*, the modern opera of distinguished composer and professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna Periklis Liakakis, which won the 2017 Best Independent Opera Production Award at the Austrian Music Theatre Awards, will be given its Greek premiere on the Greek National Opera Alternative Stage at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center.**

The work is a co-production between the GNO Alternative Stage and the music theatre organization Sirene Operntheater in Austria and it will run for three unique performances on 27, 28 and 29 February 2020.

A relentless battle between profit and politics, *Khodorkovsky* the opera refers to the rise and fall of Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who opposed Vladimir Putin in the 90s. The libretto and direction bear the stamp of Kristine Tornquist, and the thirteen-member musical ensemble is conducted by Jury Everhartz.

The performance is realized thanks to the support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation's (SNF) grant to the Alternative Stage.

The modern opera *Khodorkovsky* first premiered at the Atelier of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts in 2015, and two years later, in 2017, it won the Best Independent Opera Production Award at the Austrian Music Theatre Awards. The opera is based on Mikhail Khodorkovsky's biography: his rise as a young bank owner in the years of perestroika at first, the time he reached the zenith of his fame as owner of the huge oil company Yukos, and his final fall after being targeted by Vladimir Putin as a dissident, Yukos' collapse and his imprisonment.

It is a political opera whose protagonists are real persons and which «doesn't attempt to take anyone's side», as composer Periklis Liakakis characteristically notes. *«The opera is not trying to pick anyone's side. I believe that in modern opera there should not be good or bad people, just facts and reactions to these facts. Sanctifying or demonizing people has been avoided, to the extent that that was dramaturgically possible, and my main concern was that this opera could speak to a Russian, same as to an Austrian or a Greek».*

The libretto by Kristine Tornquist, the bulk of which was written before Khodorkovsky's unexpected release from prison in December 2013, deals not only with the Königsdrama between Khodorkovsky and Putin, but situates it in a complex historical context stretching from 1989 to 2013.

The changing relationship between business and government alters the relationship between the protagonists, who initially aren't too dissimilar to one other, both of them young, ambitious men with grand plans, and nothing to lose.

At a watershed moment in history, financial blunders and political intrigues allow fast-climbers to thrive. But as soon as the two rivals reach their respective zeniths, the differences in their natures become all too apparent. While one stands sentinel over his territory, the other thinks ahead of the game and risks everything.

Composer Periklis Liakakis states: *«The opera Khodorkovsky is based on the life of the Russian oligarch who opposed President Vladimir Putin at the end of the 90s. It is a political opera, in which any similarities to the Greek financial crisis are anything but coincidental. The opera's characters, the various situations we shall see, and the libretto are dramatized; they have, namely, been constructed in such a way, so that they are both dramatically and theatrically interesting. An important component of the opera is the couple of the two common, anonymous people (Natasha/Ivan) whose life is marked by the consequences of the people in power. In the opera Khodorkovsky no attempt is made to find who is right and who is wrong, there is no attempt at an historical or «objective» narrative of the relevant facts. However, an attempt is made to bring on stage the thoughts that come to us while observing the History (with a capital «H») and the fate of all those who have never been asked about the decision-making that has a direct impact on their lives».*

A Russian proverb summarizes it into a simple picture: you cannot draw clean water from a well that you yourself have been spitting into for years. In the last few years of the Soviet Union, the shadow economy called *«na levo»* was a necessary survival practice in a collapsing system. But in the post-Soviet chaos the freedom to spit everywhere was almost unlimited. During this time, when not law but Fortuna was governing, two young, ambitious men worked their way up. When the leader of the oligarch pack, Khodorkovsky, and Putin, the newly elected president, met at the top, not only two powerful men were standing in each others way, but also the two principles of power they represented - the power of money and the power of politics. I wrote the libretto in 2013. Khodorkovsky had bought politics often enough and corrupted it, but after all Putin had defeated him and the money with the help of the corrupt judiciary.

Mikhail Borisovich had been in prison for ten years and there was no telling if he would ever leave it alive. But he was not absent. I followed his public correspondence with Lyudmila Ulitzkaja and his other writings from custody. I was impressed by the polite and careful tone of the letters - the letters show a man who realizes his own mistakes. 20 years of uncontrolled capitalism and liberalism had destroyed civil society and poisoned the wells. He changed his mind, he thinks ahead. A strong and open civil society (with clean wells) is a country's greatest wealth and strength and the only way to guarantee security.

Democracy never follows a revolution. Revolutionary forces are too rough for something so fragile. It is a long and effortful process to balance democracy - an exhausting and endless process of mistakes, of rethinking and giving in. Not only in Russia there is a need to think about history and learn from it but everywhere.

Kristine Tornquist