

April 2006

To the Editor of The Ukrainian Observer

Two nights at the Opera

More than once in your recent pages you have deplored the neglect of PR here in Kyiv. Once you pointed out the charming summer concerts in the city's parks, free because somebody sponsors them, but nobody knows who because somebody forgets to tell the audience.

One weekend this winter, I made two visits to the Opera: Aida in the National on Friday, and Carmen in the Conservatoire on Saturday. The Aida was, as you'd expect, professionally performed and cheap by western standards. But I enjoyed the Carmen more. O.K., the seating was less plush and the chorus a little past their prime, but the principles – although presumably still students – were wonderful. Sadly, the performers and musicians outnumbered the audience, which seemed to be largely made up of Mums, Dads and friends. And the price? Well, I can't remember exactly, but I know I didn't have to dig any further than the pocket where I keep coins and dirty bills for the marsuka.\*

Incredible to reflect that this was in a building that millions would have seen on TV during the Orange Revolution. And sad to come out of that building into that Disneyland mediocrity known as the Maidan. But I've been back since to hear two more Carmens singing their hearts out for funny old souls like me, each interpretation falling differently along the scale of slut to sweetheart. And, for what it matters, the last two occasions were free, the babushkas who seem to exercise uncontested power being too occupied either with their cigarettes or the consequential coughing to open up their kassa.

Now I can imagine that a management that tolerates such behavior is not going to be lectured to by any PR firm, yours or any other. But why aren't you and your fellow English-language journalists being more pro-active? At the very least, if members of your staff were to turn up and present bouquets with your company card discreetly attached, wouldn't that reach out to some very deserving hearts and potentially loyal minds?

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