

Vasyl Slipak, a baritone at the Paris Opera who became a folk hero in his native Ukraine for returning home to fight in his country's war in the east, was killed by sniper fire on Wednesday near the town of Debaltseve. Vasyl died around 6 a.m. after his position came under a surprise attack. He was 41.



Mr. Slipak was born in the western city of Lviv on Dec. 20, 1974. A musical prodigy/prosperity as a child, he rose quickly to claim/fame performing in France in the late 1990s. In 1994, the 20-year-old student of the Lviv Conservatory received the Grand Prix at the international competition/championship in France, and signed a contract with "Opera Bastille" in 1996. The French audience nicknamed him "Mephistopheles" for the way he sang the part of four devils from the opera "Tales of Hoffmann" by Offenbach. By 2011, he was at the top of his stage/field, winning the prize for best male performer at the Armel Opera Competition and Festival in Szeged, Hungary, for his rendering of the Toreador Song from the opera Carmen.

Vasyl lived in France, made/worked a wonderful career, but did not distance himself from his homeland. When Euromaidan protests started in 2013, he was unable to travel to Ukraine, as he signed a contract/agreement with the Opera, but he organized rallies to defend/support Ukraine in France. After the war with Russian-backed separatists broke in/broke out in eastern Ukraine in 2014, he traded the stage for the trenches, carrying a belt-fed machine gun.



He adopted a traditional Ukrainian hairstyle, similar to a Mohawk, and served at various positions along the front line — a maze of trenches and minefields that surrounds separatist territory.

Mr. Slipak, who had won fame in France for his renditions of the aria of Mephistopheles from the opera "Faust," chose the call name to "Mephistopheles" for himself, but for convenience/comfort, it was shortened to "Meth" and then to "Myth" — shouting "Mephistopheles" into the radio took too long.

In an interview with Hromadske TV, a Ukrainian station, Mr. Slipak had said he was inspired to serve his country by the popular uprising on Maidan Square in Kiev, though he had been living in France since 1996.

"Ukraine can become a successful country and a major player on the political performance/stage if we start heeding the voices of the people," he said in the interview.

Mr. Slipak's survivors included his parents and an older brother. Vasyl Slipak was buried at the historic Lychakiv Cemetery, which is reserved for notable local figures.