



FESTIVAL
OPERA

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**FESTIVAL OPERA ANNOUNCES CAST FOR THE 2007 SEASON
WHICH INCLUDES WEST COAST PREMIERE OF *OUR TOWN***

Walnut Creek, CA - February 15, 2007 -- Festival Opera today announced the cast for its 2007 Season, which will feature the West Coast Premiere of *Our Town* by noted American composer Ned Rorem, and opera favorite, *Carmen*, by Georges Bizet. Five principal artists will make their company debuts this season, including three participants in San Francisco Opera's prestigious Adler Program. Opening July 7, *Carmen* will feature mezzo-soprano **Kendall Gladen**, a current Adler Fellow at the San Francisco Opera Center, making her debut in the title role of Carmen. Joining her will be tenor **Ryan MacPherson** as Don José, and recent Adler, baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu**, as the toreador Escamillo. The premiere of *Our Town*, which opens August 11, will feature tenor **Richard Byrne** in the role of Stage Manager, along with former Adler, tenor **Thomas Glenn** as George Gibbs, and soprano **Marnie Breckenridge**, who returns to Festival Opera as Emily Webb.

Carmen

Festival Opera's season opens with Bizet's *Carmen* on July 7, 2007. Written in 1875 and filled with familiar melodies, the opera follows the tumultuous story of the alluring Spanish gypsy, Carmen, as she first inspires the passion of the young soldier, Don José, then provokes his jealous rage by transferring her favors to the brash toreador, Escamillo. Carmen will be sung in French with English supertitles.

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Soprano **Kendall Gladen**, singing her first full-staged *Carmen*, comes to Festival Opera following more than a year with the San Francisco Opera Center as an Adler Fellow, where she has sung in a variety of roles including the role of *Carmen's* friend, *Mercédès*, on the SFO mainstage in 2006. A graduate of the Artist-in-Training program of Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Gladen has also sung with Washington National Opera and Sarasota Opera. Tenor **Ryan MacPherson**, making his company debut as Don José, is fast building an international career with his debut at the Opéra National de Paris scheduled for this year. He has sung a variety of roles at New York City Opera since his 2002 debut as the Third Jew in *Salome*, and received the Richard F. Gold Career Award honoring his contributions as a young artist to NYCO. Appearing as Escamillo will be baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu**, who made his 2005 debut with San Francisco Opera in *La Forza del Destino*, following his first year in the Adler Program. He has since returned to SFO in several other productions. Brancoveanu originated the role of Marcello in Baz Luhrmann's Broadway production of *La Bohème*, for which he received an honorary Tony Award for excellence in theater. Soprano **Rebecca Garcia** will sing the role of Micaëla, following her prior appearances with Festival Opera in the title role of *Roméo et Juliette* (2004) and as Paquette in *Candide* (2005).

Director **Heather Carolo** returns to Festival Opera after serving as assistant director for *Don Giovanni* last summer. A full-time faculty member of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's opera and musical theater program, Carolo has staged dozens of productions for San Francisco Lyric Opera and others throughout the Bay Area. **Bryan Nies** also returns to Festival Opera after serving as assistant conductor in 2006, a post he has held several times since his debut in 2001. Nies is the resident conductor of the Oakland Youth Orchestra and holds the Bruno Walter Assistant Conductor Chair with the Oakland East Bay Symphony. Set designs for *Carmen*, in co-production with Tacoma Opera, are by **Peter Crompton** in his fifth assignment for Festival Opera.

Our Town

The West Coast premiere of Rorem's *Our Town* opens August 11, 2007. Festival Opera was one of six co-commissioning companies for this work, which made its debut in February 2006 at Indiana University Opera Theater. Based on the quintessential American drama by Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* provides a snapshot of turn-of-the-century, small-town life. When the love between a boy and his girl-next-door takes a tragic turn, the story speaks to the value of treasuring the time we are given with those we love. The play's remarkable ability to emotionally connect the audience to each character has been preserved in an intimate, accessible chamber opera. *Our Town* will be sung in English.

Making his debut with Festival Opera, tenor **Richard Byrne** brings a wealth of opera experience to the central role of Stage Manager for *Our Town*. He has performed extensively for major companies, including the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Santa Fe Opera and others worldwide, and can be heard as Ulrich Eisslinger in *Die Meistersinger Von Nuremberg* conducted by Sir Georg Solti on London/Decca Records. Tenor **Thomas Glenn** will sing the role of the young man, George Gibbs. A 2005 participant in the Adler program at San Francisco Opera, Glenn went on to sing several mainstage roles there, including the role of physicist Robert Wilson in the world premiere of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic*. He has been engaged for its subsequent productions at Amsterdam Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Soprano **Marnie Breckenridge** returns to Festival Opera to sing the role of Emily Webb. After making her debut in 2004 as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, she appeared as Cunegonde in the company's 2005 production of *Candide*, a role she recently recreated at Prague State Opera. In 2006 she sang the role of Nelle in Berkeley Opera's world premiere of *Chrysalis* by Clark Suprynawicz.

Composer **Ned Rorem** is particularly wellknown for his vocal works and has been called "the world's best composer of art songs" by *Time Magazine*. His works for the voice are only a portion of his extensive compositions, which include the 1976 Pulitzer Prize-winning orchestral suite, *Air Music*. Librettist **J.D. McClatchy** is a distinguished

American poet and long-time Thornton Wilder scholar. Author of five poetry collections and numerous literary essays, he is gaining prominence as a librettist for American opera and recently abridged Mozart's *Magic Flute* for the highly-acclaimed Julie Taymor production at the Metropolitan Opera.

Director **Beth Greenberg** returns to Festival Opera after stepping in as stage director during the last week of rehearsals for *Tosca* last season. She is particularly well qualified to stage *Our Town*, given her extensive experience with New York City Opera and her work in the development of new operas, including *Before the Night Falls* by Jorge Martin and *The Rat Land* by Gordon Beeferman. Production design will be by **Matthew Antaky** in his third full production for Festival Opera, following *Candide* and *Don Giovanni*.

Festival Opera's artistic and music director **Michael Morgan** will conduct the West Coast premiere of *Our Town*, following his acclaimed opera staging debut in last season's *Don Giovanni*. After serving as assistant conductor of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin, Morgan made his operatic debut in 1982 at the Vienna State Opera and became assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1986. Now in his seventeenth year as music director of the Oakland East Bay Symphony, Morgan has been with Festival Opera since 1996. He also serves as music director of the Sacramento Philharmonic, is a member of the board of the American Symphony Orchestra League, and is sought after as a guest conductor worldwide. He is very involved in schools across the country, and is widely regarded as an expert on the importance of arts education and minority access to the arts.

Festival Opera is the third largest opera company in the San Francisco Bay Area. Founded in 1991, it is considered a showcase for emerging American artists, directors and conductors. For more information about the company and its productions, visit the Festival Opera website at www.festivalopera.com.

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