

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE :
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FESTIVAL
OPERA



Festival Opera to present one of the world's most popular operas, Bizet's Carmen

Opening July 7 for four
performances only

Festival Opera will present one of the world's most popular operas, Georges Bizet's masterpiece, *Carmen*. One of the most challenging productions ever mounted by the Walnut Creek-based company, *Carmen* will feature a distinguished cast of principals – including one of New York City Opera's regular guest tenors and two of San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellows.

Filled with familiar melodies, Bizet's classic 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. From the seductive habanera that Carmen uses to bewitch the naive Don José, to the toreador's brash description of his triumphs in the ring, Bizet's memorable music has enchanted audiences for more than a century.

The title role of the tempestuous gypsy, Carmen, will be performed by mezzo-soprano **Kendall Gladen**, who is considered to be one of the rising stars of opera in the Bay Area today. Currently in her second year as an Adler Fellow, Gladen was a participant in San Francisco Opera's 2005 Merola Opera Program, made her SFO debut as Giovanna in *Rigoletto*, and has appeared in such other roles as Mercédès in *Carmen*. A high school choral teacher discovered Gladen singing in a St. Louis church choir, and arranged for her audition with the Artists-in-Training program at Opera Theater of St. Louis. Gladen subsequently received the highest scholarship awarded, allowing her to obtain a degree from Washington University. After moving to New York, she received her first professional break in a role with the Washington National Opera. This will be the first time she has performed in the East Bay.

Carmen's lover, Don José, will be played by tenor **Ryan MacPherson**, a participant in the 2000 Merola Opera Program who performs frequently with the New York City Opera and throughout the U.S. He made his international debut with Opera de Nice earlier this year and returns to France in 2008 to perform at the Opera National de Paris.

In the role of the toreador, Escamillo, who steals Carmen's affections, **Eugene Brancoveanu**, a Romanian-born baritone who was a Merola Opera Program participant and Adler Fellow for two seasons, has thrilled audiences in both North America and Europe. This coming season, he will debut with the New York City Opera and reprise his role in *The Tomashevskys: Music and Memories of a Life in the Yiddish Theatre* for the San Francisco Symphony (which he premiered in 2005-06 for Michael Tilson-Thomas).

In the role of Micaëla, Don José's spurned sweetheart, Alameda County native **Rebecca Garcia** makes her third appearance with Festival Opera. In 2004, Garcia won rave reviews as Juliette in the Festival Opera production of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*. Joshua Kosman of the *San Francisco Chronicle* called her performance "the evening's standout," noting that her "Juliet grew before the audience's eyes and ears from naïve young girl into a real tragic heroine. Garcia's voice is bright and tightly focused, with a silvery sheen that doesn't keep it from expanding into a powerhouse vehicle when the occasion demands it." And Georgia Rowe of the *Contra Costa Times* wrote that her finale "was nothing short of triumphant." Garcia has been a regional winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the Blanche Thebom Award.

This special event is scheduled for four performances only – July 7, 10, 13 at 8:00 pm and July 15 at 2:00 pm – at the Leshner Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. Tickets are \$36 - \$100 for adults; \$26 - \$90 for ages 18 and under. To reserve seats, order tickets early through www.FestivalOpera.com or by calling (925) 943-SHOW. For more information, go to www.FestivalOpera.com. *Carmen* will be sung in French with English supertitles.

Created for the Opéra-Comique in Paris in 1875, *Carmen* continues to thrill mainstream audiences because of its powerful passions, realistic depiction of events, and the exciting rhythms and orchestral colors of Bizet's music. Yet the work was considered scandalous when it originally debuted. The morning of its opening, several newspapers published letters attacking *Carmen* for its "most unsavory characters." The audience was also offended, leading to the cancellation of the production after only 16 performances. Within months, however, the new opera was a box office success in Vienna and Brussels, followed by enthusiastic receptions in St. Petersburg, London, New York and Naples. Sadly, Bizet did not live to enjoy the level of popularity that *Carmen* would achieve. Depressed, he fell ill and died three months after the premiere. Today, *Carmen* can be found in the repertoire of almost every major opera company in the world.

The Festival Opera production will be **directed by Heather Carolo**, who previously staged *Carmen* for the San Francisco Lyric Opera in late 2005. Her work as assistant director last season was instrumental in bringing artistic director Michael Morgan's vision of *Don Giovanni* to life. The production will be **conducted by Bryan Nies**, who made his debut with Festival Opera in 2001 as assistant conductor. Nies was the recipient of a 2002 Leonard Bernstein Fellowship to conduct at the Tanglewood Music Center and has worked closely with music director Michael Morgan at the Oakland East Bay Symphony since 2002. The set designs for *Carmen*, in co-production with Tacoma Opera, are by **Peter Crompton** in his fifth assignment for Festival Opera.

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.

EVENT DETAILS

WHAT: Festival Opera presents one of the world's most popular operas, Georges Bizet's *CARMEN*, directed by Heather Carolo and conducted by Bryan Nies.

DATES: Evening performances: **8 pm on July 7, 10, 13.** Matinee: **2 pm on July 15**

WHERE: **Leshner Center for the Arts**, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596

FEATURED PERFORMERS: Mezzo-soprano **Kendall Gladen** as Carmen, tenor **Ryan MacPherson** as Don José, baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu** as Escamillo and soprano **Rebecca Garcia** as Micaëla

TICKET PRICES: **\$36 - \$100 (\$10 discount for ages 18 and under)**

HOW TO PURCHASE: Order online at www.FestivalOpera.com. Call (925) 943-SHOW. Or visit the Leshner Center Ticket Office.

MORE INFORMATION: Go to www.FestivalOpera.com. Ticketholders can also learn more about this exciting opera by attending a free lecture presented by Professor Lynne Morrow in the balcony of the auditorium one hour before each performance.

Photo Caption: Mezzo-soprano **Kendall Gladen** will perform the title role in Festival Opera's production of Bizet's *Carmen*, opening July 7 at the Leshner Center for the Arts. Now in her second year in San Francisco Opera's prestigious Adler Program, Gladen is shown here as Mercédès in its 2006 production of *Carmen*. *Photo: Terrence McCarthy for San Francisco Opera*

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