Beyond sexy music, *Carmen* sparks dialogue on depicting ‘the other’

**Seattle Opera presents Bizet’s masterpiece this spring**

May 4-19, 2019
McCaw Hall

SEATTLE—Bizet’s *Carmen* is often labeled as a “sexy” opera. The leading lady is a woman who sings unabashedly of her appetite for *l’amour*, cigarette smoke billowing from her lips. And the music—some of the most iconic in the art form—can’t help but get under one’s skin; it’s *that* tuneful and seductive. This May, Seattleites will be able to experience this titillating opera for themselves through a new production of *Carmen* under the baton of Maestro Giacomo Sagripanti, who returns following *The Barber of Seville* (‘17). Renowned British director Paul Curran and production designer Gary McCann will treat audiences to lavish sets and a multitude of stylish factory girls, townsfolk, smugglers, soldiers, and toreadors.

Singing the title role are two of the United States’ most in-demand Carmens: Ginger Costa-Jackson, who returns after singing Dorabella in *Cosi fan tutte* (’18), and Latvian soprano Zanda Švēde, in her company debut. Don José will be sung by Scott Quinn (Boris in *Katya Kabanova*, ’17) and British tenor Adam Smith in his house, role, and U.S. debuts.
Not all aspects of this Carmen will rely on tradition. Through lobby displays, a panel discussion, program articles, and more, Seattle Opera hopes to create a conversation surrounding this work, which, in addition to sultry tunes, is known for its famous ending: Carmen is violently stabbed to death by her jealous ex-lover.

“Carmen is a woman and an ethnic minority. She embraces her sexuality and uses it how and when she sees fit,” said Alejandra Valarino Boyer, Director of Programs and Partnerships. “We want people to come away reevaluating what they know, or think they know, about this woman. What does it mean for someone like Carmen to transgress the status quo even today?”

Because of the character’s sex positivity, some read Carmen as a feminist hero. Others interpret her as a harmful trope. But where did Carmen come from? She’s a product of “orientalism,” the 19th century trend of white Europeans creating art inspired by fantasies about Asia (as well as Africa and the Middle East). Because Bizet chose to set his opera in Spain, Carmen may not seem like an orientalist opera at first glance. But this story depicting Romani people (once referred to by the derogatory term “gypsies”) is similar to Bizet’s other works The Pearl Fishers (1863) and Djamileh (1872) in the way it depicts the “exotic other.” Carmen shows friction between the dominant culture and the trope of an untamable minority.

In this story, Bizet’s heroine declares that any man she loves should beware. After Carmen decides to seduce the army corporal Don José, he abandons his sweetheart Micaëla (sung by Vanessa Goikoetxea and Emily Dorn) and his army job for the leading lady. But soon, Carmen wearies of her new boyfriend’s possessiveness. And when she turns her attentions to a toreador named Escamillo (baritone Rodion Pogossov), Don José’s jealousy erupts in violence.

Seattle Opera will unpack themes of toxic masculinity and oppression of women characters on April 26 at the Opera Center, prior to May performances of Carmen. A panel discussion called “Decolonizing Allure: Women of Color Artists Redefine Their Narrative” will explore the limitations of stories created by white men, and center
Women of Color creating music, theater, and more for themselves and their own communities. Panelists include **Sara Porkalob**, an award-winning arts activist based in Seattle and creator of *The Dragon Cycle*, a trilogy of plays about her Filipinx family. Two university professors will also speak: **Dr. Naomi André** from the University of Michigan and author of *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*; as well as **Dr. Michelle Habell-Pallán** from the University of Washington, author of *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture*.

“There’s a perception that opera is only about preserving what was,” said Seattle Opera General Director Aidan Lang. “In reality, we carry on our rich traditions, because this art is alive—just as it was centuries ago. Opera is a space for discourse; a space for everyone to have transcendent experiences, and yes, a space for liberation, too.”

*Carmen* opens Saturday, May 4 and runs through Sunday, May 19, 2019. Tickets are available online at seattleopera.org, by calling 206.389.7676, or in person at the ticket office located at the Opera Center, 363 Mercer Street. Box office hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday-Friday. Groups save at least 20 percent: 206.676.5588 or groups@seattleopera.org

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**Carmen**  
Music by Georges Bizet  
 Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy  
 In French with English captions  
 Marion Oliver McCaw Hall  
 Performances: May 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, and 19 2019

Approximate Running Time: 3 hours and 30 minutes with two intermissions  
Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m., Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m.  
Premiere: Opera-Comique (Salle Favart); March 3, 1875

**Cast:**  
Carmen: Ginger Costa-Jackson (May 4, 8, 12, 17, & 19)  
Zanda Švēde* (May 5, 11, 15, & 18)  
Don José: Scott Quinn (May 4, 8, 12, 17, & 19)  
Adam Smith* (May 5, 11, 15, & 18)  
Escamillo: Rodion Pogossov
**Micaela**
Vanessa Goikoetxea* (May 4, 8, 12, 17, & 19)
Emily Dorn* (May 5, 11, 15, & 18)

**Moralès**
Ryan Bede

**Zuniga**
Daniel Sumegi

**Frasquita**
Madison Leonard

**Le Remendado**
John Marzano

**Mercédès**
Sarah Coit*

**Dancairo**
Mark Diamond*

**Conductor**
Giacomo Sagripanti

**Director**
Paul Curran*

**Associate Director**
And Choreographer
Seth Hoff*

**Production Designer**
Gary McCann*

**Lighting Design**
Paul Hackenmueller*

**Fight Director**
Geoffrey Alm

**Chorusmaster**
John Keene

* Company Debut

Co-production with Opera Philadelphia

**Production Sponsors: Barbara Stephanus, Office of Arts & Culture | Seattle, Jay S. Wakefield and Susanne M. Wakefield, Ph. D.**

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