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Contact: Gabrielle Kazuko Nomura Gainor, 206.676.5559, gabrielle.gainor@seattleopera.org

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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 treading.

Singing the title role are two of the United States’ most in-demand Carmens: **Ginger Costa-Jackson**, who returns after singing Dorabella in *Così 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

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 Pogossoff

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,
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About Seattle Opera

Established in 1963, Seattle Opera is committed to serving the people of the Pacific Northwest with performances of the highest caliber and through innovative educational and engagement programs for all. Each year, more than 95,000 people attend Seattle Opera performances, and more than 400,000 people of all ages are served through school performances, radio broadcasts, and more. By drawing our communities together, and by offering opera's unique fusion of music and drama, we create life-enhancing experiences that speak deeply to people's hearts and minds. Connect with Seattle Opera on Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud, and on Classical King FM. 98.1.

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