
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Vancouverites have been seduced by the fierce, fiery and unforgettable passion of Bizet's masterpiece,

CARMEN

The fastest-selling production in Vancouver Opera history!

Vancouver, BC ~ Box office records have been shattered! Vancouver Opera is pleased to announce that ***Carmen*** is officially the fastest-selling production in its history compared to all other shows at this point in the schedule: two and a half weeks before opening night. Vancouverites have been seduced by the fiery gypsy and are snapping up tickets in record numbers.

Great seats are still available for this evocative traditional production of *Carmen*, on stage for six passionate performances only, January 24 to February 5, 2009 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

Opening night is **Saturday, January 24, 2009**, with subsequent performances **Tuesday, January 27, Thursday, January 29, Saturday, January 31, Tuesday, February 3, and Thursday, February 5, 2009**. All performances take place at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. and begin at 7:30pm. Tickets are available exclusively at the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by telephone (**604-683-0222**). See complete ticket information below.

With a stellar international cast – including sizzling-hot mezzo-soprano **Rinat Shaham** in the title role – and gorgeous sets and costumes, *Carmen* will appeal both to new opera audiences and to opera goers who return again and again to the excitement and beauty of Bizet's unforgettable love-story-gone-wrong. Sensuous, astonishing and irresistible, it's easy to see why *Carmen* is among the most popular operas in the world.

Antony Walker, the Australian-born music director of Pittsburgh Opera, conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and the Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Chorus Director). The stage director is **David Gately**, who has helmed many VO productions including 2004's memorable *Der Rosenkavalier*. This is Mr. Gately's twelfth VO production.

The Singers

Israeli born mezzo-soprano **Rinat Shaham** (*Carmen*) has received accolades for her operatic and concert performances throughout the world, particularly for her portrayal of *Carmen*. *The*

Independent calls her a sensation, “[using] the music like promises and threats”. Her most recent VO appearance was as Cherubino in 1996’s *Le nozze di Figaro*. Her upcoming engagements include a solo in the New York Festival of Song and *Carmen* with New Orleans Opera, The Israeli Opera and Opera Köln.

Rising Canadian tenor **David Pomeroy** (Don José) has caught the attention of artistic directors all over the world. The Newfoundland native recently made his Metropolitan Opera début as Faust at the “Met in the Parks” concerts and last appeared with Vancouver Opera as Joe in 2003’s *La fanciulla del West*. Next season, he will appear as Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with The Canadian Opera Company and Cavaradossi in *Tosca* with L’Opéra de Montréal.

Soprano **Mariateresa Magisano** (Micaëla) is a native of Montreal. Her most recent VO appearance was as Susanna in 2001’s *Le nozze di Figaro*. She has performed with the Chor Leoni and the Vancouver Chamber Choir. Mariateresa began her career as a young artist with Vancouver Opera and completed her training and studies at the Juilliard Opera Center and McGill University. She is a winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions as well as a recipient of the Metropolitan Opera Educational Fund Award.

Vancouver-based baritone **Daniel Okulitch** (Escamillo) recently starred in the world première Théâtre du Châtelet / Los Angeles Opera production of Howard Shore’s opera *The Fly*, directed by David Cronenberg and conducted by Plácido Domingo. He has appeared on Broadway and in Los Angeles as Schaunard in Baz Luhrmann’s production of *La bohème*. Daniel is lauded as much for his powerful stage presence and dramatic abilities as for his “focused, resonant bass-baritone that he wields with power and sensitivity” (New Jersey Star-Ledger). His most recent VO appearance was as Colline in 2008’s *La bohème*.

French-Canadian **Alain Coulombe**’s (Zuniga) “massively deep bass voice probes the theatre like the growl of a lion”, raves the *Victoria Times-Colonist*. His most recent appearance with VO was as Don Fernando in 2008’s *Fidelio*. Future roles include Zuniga in the Canadian Opera Company’s *Carmen* and Comte Des Grieux in Massenet’s *Manon* with Ottawa Opera Lyra. Next season, he returns to VO to sing Oroveso in Bellini’s *Norma*.

Québécoise mezzo-soprano **Majorie Poirier** (Mercedes) made her Vancouver Opera début in the role of Dryad in 2007’s *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Ms. Poirier is a native of Quebec City.

Canadian soprano **Karen Ydenberg**’s (Frasquita) voice has been called “clear and strong and sweet” by *The Globe and Mail*. She has performed with Vancouver Opera, Edmonton Opera Calgary Opera and The Canadian Opera Company and is a winner of the Western District level of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Hamilton-based baritone **Michael Nyby** makes his Vancouver Opera mainstage début as Moralès. He has appeared as Don Giovanni with Bard on the Beach and as Figaro in the Vancouver Opera In Schools production of *The Barber of Seville*. Michael’s upcoming engagements include Ford in *Falstaff* with UBC Opera and Schaunard in *La bohème* with Minnesota Opera.

Baritone **Peter Barrett** (Daincaire), in his VO début, is the recipient of the Ian Rosenblatt Bursary at the Wexford Festival in Ireland and a top prize winner in the Montreal International Music

Competition. Later this season, he will sing Marcello in *La bohème* with the Canadian Opera Company.

Le Rememorado is Toronto-based tenor **Ricardo Gimena**'s Vancouver Opera début. He has appeared as Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* and Rodolfo in *La bohème* (both with UBC Opera) and as Camille de Rosillon in *The Merry Widow* with Vancouver Symphony.

Vancouver-based **Fabrice Grover** makes his VO début in the speaking role of Lillas Pastia. He has appeared with Blackbird Theatre, Chemainus Theatre Festival and in many television and feature film productions.

The Story, in brief

Carmen is a fiery factory worker arrested for assault. Don José is her dutiful guard. But when Carmen ignites Don José's passion with her gypsy spell, his tragic descent begins. He deserts the army, abandons his family for a life of crime, and when Carmen discards him for a bullfighter, erupts with jealous rage to commit a shocking act of revenge.

Read a full synopsis at www.vancouveropera.ca.

Background

Based on the novella of the same name by Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* premiered at the Opéra-Comique in Paris in 1875. In it, Georges Bizet sought to create a new style of opera, one based on realistic depictions of everyday life, especially that of the lower classes. Some 15 years later, this innovative style (known in Italian opera as *verismo*) would come to be celebrated, but at the time, presenting these sensual, violent characters on the family-friendly Opéra-Comique stage was risky. To make matters even more difficult, Bizet's orchestra complained the score was too demanding, and his chorus, when asked to smoke and quarrel onstage, threatened to strike.

The show garnered some critical praise, but it was not enough to boost ticket sales for a show that viewers did not appreciate or understand. *Carmen* opened to condemnation from the press and a cool reception from audiences.

Bizet's quest to renovate the genre ultimately succeeded. The day before he died, in June 1875, he signed a contract with the Viennese Imperial Opera. *Carmen* was produced in Vienna later that year to an audience not bound by the expectations of the Opéra-Comique: they were able to appreciate *Carmen* on its own terms. Backed by praise from Wagner, Brahms and Tchaikovsky, the exotic show was a resounding success. After a well-received run in Vienna, *Carmen* toured Europe and by 1878 was being performed in opera houses as far away as New York and Philadelphia.

Eventually, *Carmen* made it back to Paris, where it was received with much more warmth than in 1875. Its 500th performance was celebrated in October 1891 and its 1000th in December 1904. *Carmen* remains perhaps the most popular opera in the world, with timeless themes, juicy story and larger-than-life – yet realistic – characters. Bizet's most famous work continues to thrill modern audiences, from opera newcomers to the most seasoned aficionados.

"I do not know of any other instance where tragic humour, which constitutes the essence of love, is expressed ... in a more shattering phrase than in Don Jose's last words ...[You can arrest me. I killed her. Ah! Carmen! My adored Carmen!]"

– Nietzsche

Full Ticket Information

Single tickets are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at www.vancouveropera.ca, or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted.

Groups: For special pricing for groups of ten or more, call 604-683-0222.

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This production is generously sponsored by PI Financial.