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THE TRAGEDY OF CARMEN

BY PETER BROOK

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American women entered industry when men went off to war; Spanish women entered the workforce when cigarettes became more popular than cigars. Turns out, women had nimbler hands and asked for lower wages. So young, beautiful women actually did pour out of cigarette factories on break. They created a joyful workplace, where mothers nursed and women could get medical attention at work. Restrictions on women in “proper society” were strict; escorts, church, and purity were key. So Carmen’s freedom - a complete abandonment of that structure for a paying job, dancing, flirting, and owning her sexuality - would have made her a target and an asset to the gitano bandits with whom she eventually stayed. Carmen’s escape to the mountains was also feasible. Shunned women did indeed band together to survive in the Sierra Morena mountains outside Seville. They had no chance of returning home, so crime was the only path to survival available. Similar to the camaraderie in the factories, the abandoned and fallen took care of one another and created a women’s subcommunity.

As spring creeps towards us, we’re thrilled to have Carmen heat up our stage. In this iteration of her story, Carmen submits to nothing but fate as she takes control of everything around her. The original novella that inspired Bizet was more accurate than he realized. In an era that honors gritty truth and accuracy, we appreciate Brook’s reexamination of this story with a more brutal lens. Rather than a flippant flirt, we see Carmen as a woman who has truly stepped out of social norms to carve out a life that pleased her. Yet we never see Carmen regret that radical decision, even when facing her former husband, Micaëla’s frustration, or her own doom.

Brook took Bizet’s romanticized version of a historically accurate story and pared it back to a stark believability. We may miss the chorus and the pageantry, but we get to focus on Carmen herself: a woman who ignores all restraints on her freedom, even though that condemns her to live on the fringes forever. In this season and era of strong heroines and women CEOs, it’s incredible to think how far we’ve come since a theoretical Carmen would have fought so hard to make her own choices. We see many Carmens in the world today, forging paths from rock star to engineer. That diversity in thought and lifestyle enriches our lives, and does truly open up that sought-after freedom the ‘mountain women’ so precariously wished for themselves. As we drink our lattes and clear our own path towards destiny, I hope every woman who enters this theater leaves with a bit of Carmen’s wildness inspiring her to challenge the restraints of today.
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Dear Florentine Friends and Family,

I am particularly pleased to welcome you to this brand new Florentine Opera production of *The Tragedy of Carmen* by Peter Brook. This exciting take on Bizet’s well-known classic allows us to continue our tradition of showcasing favorite works in stimulating new ways. *La tragédie de Carmen* premiered in Paris in 1983, and channels the romanticism of the original to its emotional core, igniting passion and tragedy while maintaining the original score. In Brook’s hands, powerful and emotional theater is the element that takes center stage. Be the judge yourself.

We are fortunate to have an incredibly talented, international cast and creative team to put us right into the middle of this emotional whirlwind and story. Donor support elevates the quality of everything we are able to do, and I especially want to thank Robert Sobczak for being our Presenting Title Sponsor. Robert has been a generous supporter for many seasons, and this is his first title sponsorship. John Shannon and Jan Serr do so much to help bring art to Milwaukee, and we thank them for being our Stage Director Sponsors of Eugenia Arsenis, who is an internationally known dramaturg. I’m equally thankful to Cynthia and Gary Vasques, Performance Sponsors. Sandy and Bill Haack are our Matinee Sponsors in memory of Lloyd and Mary Ann Gerlach, long-term supporters of new opera in our community. Nita Soref, a longtime supporter and friend helps us bring new talent to Milwaukee, and is our Title Artist Sponsor for Laurel Semerdjian in her Florentine debut. Of course, none of our work is possible without UPAF, our largest donor—and, you, our loyal and courageous audience.

Join us again in May for Verdi’s *Macbeth*—and for our exciting 2020-21 Season ahead. There are so many ways you can be involved, and we look forward to partnering and sharing more exciting opera with you. Come to the opera, bring a friend, and share with us all that we do.

Sincerely

Peter Drescher, President

Board of Directors
Spotlight on Robert Sobczak

Robert Sobczak is a dyed-in-the-wool college sports fan and an opera enthusiast. As a proud Marquette alumnus, there isn’t a home basketball game that he’d miss. He loves the unifying human roar, bantering with fans, and celebrating friendships. That’s something he shared in common with his wife Nancy before she passed away. Both Marquette engineering graduates—Nancy was one of a handful of female engineers among a thousand students. She was a warrior. They cheered on their college team, raced airplanes, and enjoyed attending the opera with Nancy’s sister Irene, who was a life-long Florentine supporter. Robert is particularly drawn to this season of strong heroines and the stories they tell. “Everyone’s story has much more to it, hidden under layers.” Like the drama of a great basketball game, *The Tragedy of Carmen* tells a story that’s particularly worth cheering. The fact that it has roles for our young professional Baumgartner Studio Artists is icing on the cake. Robert is after-all, most loyal to the home-team.
IN MEMORIUM

Edwin P. Wiley, 1929-2019
Along with his late wife Barbara, Ted was a tireless supporter of Milwaukee. As president of the Florentine Opera Board from 1983-1986, he initiated the company’s first major capital campaign, and then never retired from duty. He remained a committed Life Director for the next four decades. As a partner at Foley and Lardner during his professional career, Ted was an innovator, founding the Intellectual Property Department in addition to many other professional accomplishments and awards. In the arts, he served the symphony, the ballet, the Pabst Theater, and many others, and received UPAF’s Olive Stiemke Award, and, with his wife Barbara, the Wisconsin Governor’s Award in Support of the Arts. Barbara was never far from his thoughts. Together, they attended more than forty Florentine productions and brought a sense of style to countless Opera Club events. Ted and Barbara never stopped investing in the arts, and will continue to be remembered through their endowment gift.

Lloyd Gerlach, 1930-2019
An opera-lover of world-wide proportions, Lloyd and his late wife Mary Ann, would travel the world for a great or unusual opera performance, but they were just as at home in Milwaukee. It was the Gerlachs who first saw Lowell Liebermann’s The Picture of Dorian Gray, on one of their many excursions, and enthusiastically brought the production back to Milwaukee for the Florentine’s first American premiere in 1999. New works were a particular favorite, and the Gerlachs invested in many Florentine projects, most recently the world-premiere recording of Carlisle Floyd’s Prince of Players. Lloyd served on the Florentine’s Board of Directors from 1982-1994 when he became a Life Director. At the national level, Lloyd and Mary Ann supported OPERA America’s National Opera Center and their repertoire development fund to develop new American opera. Their family is proud to sponsor the matinee of The Tragedy of Carmen in memory of their parents and their love for opera.

Ruth Taylor, 1928-2019
Before she joined the Florentine Board of Directors in 1985, Ruth was an accomplished professional musician and an opera singer in her own right. She had studied voice and opera performance with Leopold Sachse in New York, and would go on to compose a number of educational works for children. She and her late husband Donald moved to Milwaukee in 1969 when he took the helm of Nordberg, which later became Rexnord Corporation. Don was musically trained too, and they both loved a great performance, and even performed together in a number of bands, including the Little River Trio. Although they retired to New England, Ruth was proud to serve as a Life Director and maintained both her support and friendship with the Florentine and Milwaukee.
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Christopher Rountree*

STAGE DIRECTOR & CHOREOGRAPHER
Eugenia Arsenis*

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Lighting Designer: Chad Jung
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Wig and Makeup Designer: Erica Cartledge
Fight Choreographer: Christopher Elst
Musical Preparation: Janna Ernst
Stage Manager: Jonathan Campbell
Assistant Stage Manager: Emily Butzi
Supertitle Prompter: Tamara Jasinski
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THE CAST

Carmen ..............................................................Laurel Semerdjian*
Michaela.................................................................Kathryn Henry**
Don José.................................................................Luke Selker**
Escamillo............................................................ Luis Alejandro Orozco
Zuniga/Garcia .................................................. Samuel James Dewese **
Lila Pastia............................................................Megan Folkerts **

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Micaëla, a young country girl, arrives in Seville looking for her childhood sweetheart, Don José. She brings him a letter from his mother. A gitano, Carmen, throws a flower to the young corporal and sings an erotic love song.

The two girls fight and José’s superior, Zuniga, appears. Unable to control Carmen, he orders José to take her to jail. En route, Carmen promises José that if he lets her escape she will meet him at the inn of her friend Lillias Pastia. José lets Carmen go, whereupon Zuniga locks him up and takes away the corporal’s rank. Carmen arrives at the inn with stolen goods. Zuniga comes to see Carmen and offers money for her favors. Carmen accepts, but shortly thereafter Jose enters.

Carmen abandons Zuniga and sings for José. At this moment the bugles blow, summoning José back to the barracks. Carmen is furious and taunts him; the situation becomes tense. José discovers Zuniga, loses control and kills the officer.

The body is quickly hidden as Escamillo, a famous bullfighter, enters. Buying drinks all around, he announces that he, too, wants Carmen. José, jealous, picks a fight with Escamillo. Carmen separates them and Escamillo withdraws, inviting all to his next bullfight.

José, who has now killed for Carmen, sings of his love for her. They go to the mountains where an old gypsy woman unites them.

While they are sleeping, Garcia appears at the camp. He is Carmen’s husband, though she has hidden his existence from José. The two men challenge each other and as they go off to fight, Carmen reads her tragic fate in the cards. The song ends, Garcia returns wounded and falls dead at Carmen’s feet.

Micaëla appears again searching for José; the two women seem to understand each other. They sing while José, twice a murderer and abandoned by Carmen, flees. Carmen becomes Escamillo’s mistress. José returns to persuade her to leave with him to start a new life. She refuses, knowing she is putting her life in jeopardy.

Escamillo is killed in the bullring. Carmen still refuses José’s offer, but she goes with him as far as the place where the cards have foretold that she will die.

Credit: San Diego Opera Company

*The Tragedy of Carmen* is not *Carmen*! Although you’ll easily recognize Bizet’s music, this is a version of the opera as a musical theatre piece devised by famed director Peter Brook to tell the story in a completely new way...or perhaps, depending on your point of view, the original way.

This version of the Bizet opera was devised by eminent director Peter Brook in the ‘80s to focus intensely on the story and the important relationships in it. More truthful to the Prosper Merimee novella upon which the Bizet is based, *The Tragedy of Carmen* brings us much closer to the characters, especially the elemental power of the main character, while still using the great tunes and musical moments that we all know and love.
The 21st century landscape of music, film, and other media is full of repurposed materials, from rebooted cinematic franchises to remixed pop songs to the reimagined grooves of sample-based hip hop. Such revisiting of the stories and sounds of the past is not new, though—think of the fairy tales, hero’s journeys, and rhymes that permeate our childhood experiences. The history of opera is replete with recycling, beginning with the ancient Greek philosophy and mythology that suffuse the works of Monteverdi and Handel, and continuing to the staples of repertoire such as Don Giovanni, La Bohème, and Carmen, whose every new production invites artists and audiences to participate in reiterations, reassessments, and renewals of the aesthetic and ethical values of our society.

Since its premiere in 1875, Georges Bizet’s Carmen has been staged countless times, in the theater and in more than 80 filmed versions. Many of these iterations follow a historical model of story and script modifications in response to the priorities of their time and place. Some, including a 1933 version by German animation pioneer Lotte Reiniger, break with the tragic to allow Carmen a happy ending. Others, such as the 1943 Broadway musical (and 1954 film) Carmen Jones and 2001’s TV musical Carmen: A Hip Hopera (featuring Beyoncé as Carmen), transplant the story to an entirely different social context. Particularly in the 21st century, revisionist approaches to the canonical repertoire have attempted to ameliorate the issues of racism, sexism, and colonialism seen by many modern audiences in historical operas. A notable example from the #MeToo era is a 2018 production in Florence, Italy, in which Carmen survives by turning the gun on Don José in the end.

The Tragedy of Carmen is a 1981 reimagining of Carmen by the director Peter Brook, who aimed to restore the transgressive power of the original production, lost through its subsequent adaptation to the Viennese grand opera style and its ubiquity in every opera season and “greatest classical hits” CD. Seeking a more “authentic” and grounded approach, Brook researched the life of an actual flamenco dancer and revisited the original novella by the anthropologically minded Prosper Mérimée. The result is a taut psychological drama featuring the central characters of Carmen, Don José, Micaela, and Escamillo that retains a strong connection to Bizet’s music but divorces the story from many of the trappings of Europe’s colonial era.

A central feature of Bizet’s Carmen is its Orientalism—a vision of “Eastern” cultures that freely mixes impressionistic caricatures of Arabic, African, and Asian people with little regard for their realities. A specific vocabulary of harmonies, scales, and rhythms marks the characters as “others,” people unbound by the conventions of bourgeois society and full of an excess of passion, with violence bubbling below the surface of every encounter. Although many of these sounds are commonplace in the globalized world of 21st-century listeners, to 19th-century ears they bore clearly encoded stereotypes of race, gender, and class. Carmen’s musical depictions of “gypsies” (a term now widely regarded as a pejorative racial slur) are also inherently linked to ideas of femininity, specifically a hyper-sexualized “femme fatale”: alluring and dangerous, fiery but fickle, a threat to both herself and others.

In Tragedy, the colorful pageantry of Carmen’s choruses and ensemble numbers is absent, and the core characters follow a somewhat different path through the “civilized” and “uncivilized” spaces (city, tavern, wilderness) that make up their world. Each character’s signature music is rearranged or reframed: Carmen’s habanera is divested of its pseudo-
Spanish flair and accompanied only by timpani, Escamillo’s “Toreador Song” is sung mostly for himself rather than an adoring crowd, José’s “Flower Song” succeeds in softening Carmen, and Micaela and Carmen share a duet that belies their opposition in a love triangle. All of Brook’s changes serve to disrupt an opera fan’s familiarity with Carmen and to place the story somewhere between the “Romanticism” of Italian verismo (think Verdi’s La Traviata or Cavalieri’s I Pagliacci) with the “Modernism” of German expressionism (Strauss’s Salome and Berg’s Wozzeck and Lulu).

Modern reinterpretations of operas like Carmen allow for artists and audiences to both celebrate the aesthetic triumphs of the past and to participate in the ongoing process of re-evaluating, redefining, and rearticulating the values of our culture. Brook’s Tragedy of Carmen invites us to consider the story in new ways, whether in terms of the 21st-century discourse surrounding post-colonialism, feminism, toxic masculinity, and domestic violence, or simply as an opportunity to consider the real people who inspired historical stories of fantasy.
Passion, revolution, fear, unfulfilled emotions, *eros and thanatos*. Characters limbering between their insecurity and their deep desires, each of them for a different reason, each of them in a dissimilar way. Characters mirroring one another, yet, as opposite idols, seeking for a justification in order to free their repressed self. Carmen, as a tragic figure, is, for me, another of these heroes, which Freud would describe as, “those who fail because of their success”. She can never reach happiness because she is afraid of it; she can never let herself to love, as is afraid of her vulnerability; and, even more, she is afraid of losing her affection. The death of her sensuality is what she fears more than her actual death: “I was born free and I will die free”. *La Tragédie de Carmen*, carries the gist of the story as well as the sublimity of the music of Bizet. Peter Brook’s ingenious dramaturgy motivate us to explore deeper the intensity among the characters in a unique alternation among the singing parts and the spoken dialogue. Furthermore, the form of the work enriches the theatricality of the opera and makes it even more relevant to contemporary audiences. Therefore, while inspired by and based on the legendary opera, *La Tragédie de Carmen* has its autonomous artistic importance. Our aesthetic approach of the work embraces both Apollonian and Dionysian forces, which are vivid throughout the opera, from the characters to the drama, where sensuality is presented as beautiful and refined and yet, it still is frenzied and passionate. The non-demonization of sensuality, especially of the female characters, is central to our approach. I choose the yellow rose as the omnipresent symbol of the production, as for me it reflects the combination of jealousy and passion; jealousy because of love, a feeling that we are called to recognize and embrace for all the characters. In my interpretation, Michaela reappears towards the end of the opera as Carmen in disguise in her attempt to employ the tools of Carmen in order to become stronger. The tarot cards are conceived as a source of strength and security by the characters, in contradiction to what they symbolize; as much as the characters are driven by Fate, Fate also becomes the main excuse for their unjustified actions.

I would like to thank from my heart all my collaborators in this production for this beautiful and creative journey and, the Florentine Opera for inviting me to dream without fear about passionate characters on stage.
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Christopher Rountree, CONDUCTOR

Conductor, composer, and curator Christopher Rountree has distinguished himself as one of classical music’s most forward-thinking innovators in programming, conducting, and community building. Whether presenting his beloved chamber group wild Up in a museum bathroom or leading the country’s most renowned ensembles through new music’s most exciting works at the world’s greatest concert halls, Rountree is the linchpin between orchestral music and the future of performance.

Rountree founded the renegade ensemble wild Up in 2010. The group’s eccentric mix of new music, pop, and performance art quickly jumped from raucous DIY bar shows to being lauded as the vanguard for classical music by critics for The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal and public radio’s Performance Today. The success of wild Up has led Rountree to collaborations with Björk, John Adams, David Lang, Scott Walker, and many of the planet’s greatest orchestras and ensembles.

This season, Rountree’s vision is fully realized as he curates and conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s sixteen-concert FLUXUS Festival, the experimental music component of the Phil’s 100th season in collaboration with the Getty Research Institute. Rountree’s 2018-19 season also includes debuts with the Cincinnati and Berkeley Symphonies, and the New York premiere of Missy Mazzoli’s Proving Up. He takes wild Up on tour with audience-interactive programs, celebrating local communities and the intersection of art and social justice; unveils an evening-length program with Ted Hearne, George Lewis, Jen Hill, and Weston Olencki about religion, space, and the Internet called of Ascension; makes his debut on the Ecstatic Music Festival; plays a live radio show at the ACE Hotel with Nadia Sirota, Andrew Norman, and Caroline Shaw; curates a joint program with Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and Four Larks; and conducts a new program called Eve with Martha Graham Dance Company.

In September 2018, Rountree debuted with Martha Graham Dance Company and Opéra national de Paris conducting The Rite of Spring, Barber’s Medea, and the Paris premiere of the Graham-Copland Appalachian Spring at Palais Garnier. Recently, Rountree made his Lincoln Center debut premiering Ashley Fure’s Pulitzer Prize finalist piece Bound to the Bow on the New York Philharmonic’s Biennial; conducted Ted Hearne’s Law of Mosaics with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; gave the world premiere of Missy Mazzoli’s opera Proving Up; conducted the world premiere of David Lang’s opera anatomy theater at Los Angeles Opera; and premiered Annie Gosfield and Yuval Sharon’s War of the Worlds with Sigourney Weaver and Mayor Eric Garcetti and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, simultaneously performed across downtown Los Angeles and at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

A seventh-generation California native, Rountree lives in Los Angeles.
Eugenia Arsenis is a Director and Dramaturg and Dr. in Philosophical Aesthetics. As a director, she has collaborated with international organizations (Royal Albert Hall, Center for Contemporary Opera, San Francisco Opera Center, Skylight Music Theatre, Greek National Opera, National Theatre of Northern Greece etc). For her artistic work, she was honored by important festivals all over the world, from the BBC Proms in London to the San Francisco Opera Center in the United States. As a writer, her play, Women of Passion, Women of Greece, has travelled the past few years from Australia to India. She was the Coordinator and Dramaturg of the Experimental Stage of the Greek National Opera from the moment of its inception and she is the Dramaturg of the Center for Contemporary Opera in New York. Her education includes Directing and Dramaturgy at Royal Holloway University of London, Musical Analysis and Opera Directing at Boston University, Philosophy at University College London, Film Directing and Screenwriting at the New York Film Academy and, she hold a Doctorate in Philosophical Aesthetics, Opera and Greek Drama from the University of London. Holder of numerous scholarships, she has participated with lectures in international conferences and, has taught at many Universities. She was Board Member of the National Theatre of Northern Greece, the Greek Film Center, Registrar of Public Relations of the Hellenic Theatre Studies Association and President of the Hellenic Center of the International Theatre Institute. She is Creative Director of the international forum Artivism Drives Democracy and the delegate of the Greek Directors’ Guild at the Federation of European Directors (FERA).
The Anello Society

The Anello Society is named after Florentine Opera’s visionary founder, John David Anello. This group of forward looking people have provided a gift to the Florentine Opera in their wills or estate plans. These planned gifts assure that future financial support to the Florentine Opera remains strong, while helping to perpetuate the work of this organization for the enjoyment of future generations. We welcome and value gifts of all sizes. If you have already made provisions for the Florentine in your will or estate planning, please inform us, so we may acknowledge your generosity.

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Laurel Semerdjian, Carmen

Laurel Semerdjian, an American mezzo-soprano of Armenian descent, has recently been hailed as “a dramatic and musical tour de force” (Pittsburgh Tribune) for her portrayal of Asakir in Pittsburgh Opera’s production of Mohammed Fairouz’s *Sumeida’s Song*. Her voice has been praised for its “guttural low notes” (Pittsburgh Post Gazette) and “appealing weight, intensity and flexibility”.

During the 2018–2019 season, Ms. Semerdjian returned to Pittsburgh Opera as Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*, sings the title role of Benazir Bhutto in a workshop of Mohammed Fairouz’s *Bhutto* with Pittsburgh Opera / Beth Morrison Projects, joins Symphony Tacoma as the alto soloist in Handel’s *Messiah*, rejoins Tacoma Opera for her debut in the title role of The Rape of Lucretia, and performs with Syracuse’s Symphoria as mezzo soloist in Haydn’s *Mass in Time of War* and Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*. In the summer of 2019, Ms. Semerdjian will make her company debut as Flora in *La traviata* with Summer Garden Opera and in the fall of 2019, Ms. Semerdjian will make her Opera Southwest debut in Bottesini’s rarely performed *Ali Baba*. In January 2020, she will return to Pittsburgh Opera, singing the role of Bradamante in Handel’s *Alcina* and March of 2020, Ms. Semerdjian will make a company debut with Florentine Opera, singing the title role in *Le Tragédie de Carmen*.

During the 2017–2018 season, Ms. Semerdjian returned to both Sarasota Opera, as Flora in *La traviata*, and Syracuse Opera as Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*. She made company debuts with St. Petersburg Opera (Florida) as Dritte Dame in *Die Zauberflöte*, with Pittsburgh’s Resonance Works as Ježibaba in *Rusalka*, and with Washington Concert Opera debut as guest soloist in their Opera’s Greatest Heroines gala concert. She also performed both Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* and Haydn’s *Mass in Time of War* with Washington DC’s Cathedral Choral Society at the Washington National Cathedral.

Ms. Semerdjian was born in San Diego, CA and raised in Tacoma, WA. She holds a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of North Texas and a Bachelors of Music in Vocal Arts with a Minor in Music Industry from the University of Southern California.

Kathryn Henry, Michaela

Soprano Kathryn Henry, a Wisconsin native, received her Master of Music degree from The Juilliard School as a proud recipient of the Toulmin Foundation Scholarship in 2018. At The Juilliard School, she performed the role of Arminda in Mozart’s *La finta giardiniera*, as well as featured performances in Liederabend, opera scene showcases, and recital programs. After finishing her degree, she was a member of the Wolf Trap Opera Studio where she covered the role of Juliette in Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette*. Acclaimed for her “magnificent color and simplicity” (Urban Milwaukee), her opera credits include Governess, *The Turn of the Screw*, Erste Dame, *Die Zauberflöte*, Suor Angelica, *Suor Angelica*, Gretel, *Hansel and Gretel*, Clarina, *La cambiale di matrimonio*, and L’écureuil, *L’enfant et les Sortilèges*. Additionally, Ms. Henry has covered roles including Katya, Kátá Kabanová and Mimi, *La Bohême*. Ms. Henry has appeared as a guest soloist with ensembles including the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra. In recital, she has performed alongside pianists Brian Zeger, Craig Rutenburg, and Mikael Eliasen. In the summer of 2017, Ms. Henry participated as a guest singer in the Kyoto International Student Music Festival of Kyoto, Japan. Ms. Henry has been a finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the 30th Eleanor McCallum Competition for Young Singers.
Luke Selker, Don José

A Wisconsin native, tenor Luke Selker has had the privilege of performing many diverse roles, recently as Lenny in Carlisle Floyd’s American classic Of Mice and Men from the Steinbeck novella. He has also recently been seen as Rodolfo in La Bohème. Other roles Luke has sung include Don Basilio from Le nozze di Figaro, Chevalier de la Force from The Dialogues of the Carmelites, Vašek from Prodaná nevěsta, The Gobernador from Candide, and music from many other roles and operas. He is known for his deeply nuanced interpretation of character and for the burnished warmth and brilliance in his vocal tone. Luke has recently graduated from Florida State University with his Master’s degree in Music. He also holds a Bachelor’s degree in Music from Belmont University. He has enjoyed a varied range of solo repertoire, including newly written works such as the premiere of On Death, a new work for tenor voice and orchestra written by Ian Good; oratorio and sacred works such as Vaughan Williams’ Hodie and Handel’s Messiah; as well as an extensive array of art song, with special attention to the music of Robert Schumann.

Luis Alejanaro Orozco, Escamillo

Mexican American baritone Luis Alejandro Orozco is known as the leading interpreter in the United States for the role of El Payador in Piazzolla’s Maria de Buenos Aires. Orozco is an El Paso Texas/ Cd. Juarez México native. He has performed with such companies as: Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Cincinnati Opera, San Diego Opera, Nashville Opera, Ft. Worth Opera Festival, The Aspen Music Festival, Des Moines Metro Opera, Michigan Opera Theater, Florentine Opera, New Orleans Opera, Atlanta Opera, Arizona Opera, Washington National Opera, Mill City Summer Opera, Opera Saratoga, Austin Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, El Paso Opera, Lexington Philharmonic, Syracuse Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Opera Naples, Anchorage Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, Lyric Opera Baltimore, and Urban Arias.

In the 18-19 Season, he made his Teatro di San Carlo (Napoli, Italy), and Pensacola Opera debuts, as well as returns to Cincinnati Opera for the role debut of Harlekin in Ariadne auf Naxos. He also made a return to Anchorage Opera, Opera Santa Barbara and Arizona Opera.

Orozco was a recent guest soloist with the Evgeny Svetlanov State Symphony in Moscow Russia for Leonard Bernstein’s 100th anniversary tribute concert. Orozco has performed the roles of Figaro in Il barbiere di Siviglia, Escamillo in Carmen, Don Giovanni, Giulio Cesare, Count Almaviva in Le nozze di Figaro, Tarquinius in The Rape of Lucretia, Harry Easter in Street Scene, Le Docteur Miracle, Taddeo in L’Italiana in Algeri, Marcello in La bohème, le Dancaïre in Carmen, Mercutio in Roméo et Juliette, Riolobo in Florencia en el Amazonas, Hannah before in As One, and Belcore in L’elisir d’amore. Overseas, Orozco has performed the role of Papageno in Mozart’s Magic Flute with The Seoul International Opera Festival in South Korea, and the title role in Rossini’s Il Signor Bruschino with the CCM Spoleto Festival. Orozco was a part of the Kennedy Center World Stages Festival in the premiere staged reading of Fallujah by composer Tobin Stokes in 2013.

Luis Alejandro Orozco is a proud graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso where he studied and learned of his love for Opera from Dr. Christopher Meerdink, and the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music where he was a student of William McGraw.
Samuel James Dewese, Zuniga/Garcia

American baritone Samuel James Dewese is rapidly making a name for himself as an evocative artist in the US and abroad. Samuel is a graduate of the Royal College of Music, London (Perf with Distinction). He was supported there by a Vivian Prins Award, studying under Graeme Broadbent and Gary Matthewman. On the competition stage Samuel has twice been honored as a district winner by the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, captured second prize in the 2015 James Toland Vocal Arts International Competition, was a grand finalist in the 2017 Hariclea Darclée International Competition (Braila, Romania), and was invited to the 55th Francisco Viñas International Singing Contest 2018 in Barcelona. In June 2017, Samuel gave the European premiere of Eric Malmquist’s Chicago Songs in London and appeared as the baritone soloist in Handel’s Chandos Anthem No. 9 in Portsmouth Cathedral. In 2018, Samuel performed the title role of Eugene Onegin by Tchaikovsky in scenes at the RCM and appeared as a soloist with Highgate Choral Society. He also created the title role in the world premiere opera John Henry by McCarthy with Tête à Tete Opera, and joined Opera Della Luna singing Astrophel in The Arcadians at Wilton’s Music Hall. In August 2019, Samuel sang Lady Macbeth in the world premiere of The Perfect Opera by Davis at the Edinburgh Festival.

Meghan Folkerts, Lila Pastia

Mezzo-soprano Meghan Folkerts, a native of Scottsdale, AZ, has sung with Seattle Opera, Shreveport Opera, Seagle Music Colony, and Opera in the Ozarks. Her recent roles include Countess Ceprano, Rigoletto, Madrastra/Madrina, Cinderella in Spain, Toledo, The Falling and the Rising, Autumn, Service Provider, Jordan Baker, The Great Gatsby, Babette, Beauty and the Beast, Domme, Safe Word, Second Lady, Die Zauberflöte, and Franca Naccarelli, The Light in the Piazza. Her concert work includes Vivaldi’s Gloria, Berg’s Sieben Fruhe Lieder, and Brahn’s Liebeslieder, Op. 52. Folkerts completed her Master’s degree at the prestigious Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. She received her Bachelor’s degree from Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, so she is thrilled to be returning to Milwaukee for Florentine’s 2019-2020 season! rnestin’s Trouble in Tahiti.
Christopher Elst, Fight Choreographer

A prominent member of several national theater organizations (Society of American Fight Directors, Dueling Arts International, Intimacy Directors International) and an advocate for new and safer practices for theaters nationwide, Christopher has performed, directed, and designed violence and intimacy for professional theaters across the country, including Ogunquit Playhouse, Finger Lakes Musical Theatre Festival, Skylight Music Theatre, Next Act Theatre, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Renaissance Theatre Works, and The Milwaukee Rep. He thanks his wife, Marcee, for late nights and joint locks.

Mel Benson, Costume Designer

Mel Benson has been the costume shop manager for Florentine Opera since 2011 and was honored to have her Florentine Opera main-stage debut with the costume design for L’incoronazione di Poppea last season. She holds a bachelor’s from the University of Northern Colorado and an MFA in Costume Technology from the Professional Theatre Training Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Costume design credits include Florentine Opera’s educational tour The Three Little Pigs, Little Red’s Most Unusual Day, Pinocchio, Goldie B Locks and the Three Singing Bears, Jack and the Beanstalk, Billy Goats Gruff, A Busy Bee, and Cinderella. She has also designed and produced the BMO Harris Holiday display in downtown Milwaukee since 2009. Previously, she worked at First Stage Children’s Theatre as the Cutter/Draper and Olympus Group producing walk around mascots.

Lisa Schlenker, Scenic Designer

Ms. Schlenker is pleased to work with the staff of the Florentine Opera Company as Scenic Designer for our la Tragédie de Carmen. As FOC continues the long tradition of storytelling and artistry through opera, Lisa looks forward to building relationships and experiences with opera lovers and professionals throughout our community. Lisa is a Milwaukee based Scenic Designer who also works in production management. An Augustana College BA alumna in Music, and a 1988 MFA graduate in Theatre Technology at UW – Madison, Ms. Schlenker enjoys an active freelance scenic design career with a variety of Wisconsin based theatres. Avocationally, Lisa can be found giving care to Wisconsin’s native bats at Wisconsin Humane Society Wildlife Center, where she is an active wildlife rehabilitator. Lisa’s book with co-author Sandra Strawn: The Properties Director’s Tool Kit is available on Amazon.com. Recent design work: WINDJAMMERS, WE LIKE IT WHERE, DAD’S SEASON TICKETS (Northern Sky); MARY JANE (Forward Theatre); FIRES IN THE MIRROR (MCT); NUNSENSE (Milwaukee Rep); HAPPY DAYS (Renaissance Theaterworks). Upcoming design projects: THE BLACKSMITH (Opera Lafayette at the Kennedy Center); ADMISSIONS (Forward). ** Member of Local USA829
**Chad Jung, Lighting Designer**

Chad R. Jung has designed more than 300 productions for Opera, Theatre, Music, and Dance. As Resident Designer for Fort Worth Opera, he has designed a vast repertoire including the World Premiere of *JFK*. Additional Opera credits include productions for Atlanta Opera, Austin Opera, Dallas Opera, Opéra de Montréal, Palm Beach Opera, Opera San Antonio, Opera Tampa, and Opera Australia at the iconic Sydney Opera House.

Jung has also collaborated on a variety of unique projects with: Ballet Austin, Bruce Wood, Caroline Calouche, Casa Mañana, Chad Lawson, Dallas Museum of Art, Drew Holcomb, FW Symphony Orchestra, Lyle Lovett, Metropolitan Classical Ballet, Renée Fleming, Texas Ballet Theatre, Willie Nelson, and Washington Ballet at the Kennedy Center. Theatre productions of note include: Off-Broadway: *Leonce & Lena*; NY: *Julia Pastrana, A Leopard Complains of Its Spots, Shelf Life*; International: Festival of Russian Drama in Togliatti, Russia & Theatro Lab in Italy.

As the Resident Designer & Production Manager for Kids Who Care Inc, Jung is devoted to mentoring the next generation of young leaders and artists who will reach far beyond musical theatre productions to promote positive change in world.

www.chadrjungdesign.com

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**Janna Ernst, Pianist-Musical Preperations**

Janna Ernst has worked continuously as a vocal coach and repetiteur for over 20 years. Most recently she has served as Music Director at Skylight Opera Theater and has also performed for New Orleans Opera, Virginia Opera, and Cincinnati Opera. A dedicated educator, Janna has held teaching, coaching and accompanying positions at Southern Methodist University, the University of Oklahoma and, most currently, the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. She and her husband, Matthew-Principal Trumpet of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra-perform and tour extensively as a duo, giving performances and masterclasses throughout the country. Janna has a Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from San Diego State University, a Master of Music in Collaborative Piano from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a Vocal Specialist degree from the University of Michigan where she studied with renowned collaborative pianist and teacher, Martin Katz.
**ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES**

**Erica Cartledge, Wig & Makeup Designer**

Recent wig and makeup designs include Poppea, The Magic Flute, The Prince of Players, Venus & Adonis/Dido & Aeneas, Merry Widow (Florentine Opera); Beauty and the Beast, Dracula, Cinderella (Milwaukee Ballet); La Traviata (Skylight Opera). Erica has worked on world premiere productions of Don Davis’ opera Rio de Sangre and Robert Aldridge & Herschel Garfien’s Sister Carrie (Florentine Opera). Past Florentine Opera engagements include Don Giovanni, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Die Fledermaus, Madama Butterfly, Elixir of Love, Elmer Gantry, La Boheme, Julius Caesar, La Traviata, Albert Herring, Carmen, Le nozze di Figaro, Idomeneo, Rigoletto, Tosca, I Capuleti ei Montecchi, Merry Widow, Salome, Macbeth. Erica has been a part of all wig and makeup for Florentine Opera productions since 2006.

**Jonathan S. Campbell, Stage Manager**

Jonathan S. Campbell is a freelance stage manager and production coordinator specializing in operatic productions and large-scale corporate events. His work in opera has included collaborations with Opera Southwest, Chicago Opera Theater, Haymarket Opera, and DePaul Opera Theatre among others. He has worked on many events including the Bloomberg C40 Awards and this year’s NBA All-Star Weekend in Chicago. When not on the road for work he enjoys spending time on the golf links or with his two kittens Hocus and Pocus.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
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<tr>
<td>Violins</td>
<td>Sarah Kim &amp; Eric Segnitz</td>
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<td>Viola</td>
<td>Kevin Lin</td>
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<td>Cello</td>
<td>Adam Ayers</td>
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<td>Bass</td>
<td>David Chapman-Orr</td>
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<td>Flute</td>
<td>Lucy Song</td>
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<td>Oboe</td>
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<td>Clarinet</td>
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<td>Bassoon</td>
<td>Tsz-Ho Liu</td>
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<td>Horn</td>
<td>Kelly Hoffman</td>
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<td>Trumpet</td>
<td>Adrian Speyrer</td>
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<td>Trombone</td>
<td>Joseph Aumann</td>
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<td>Timpani</td>
<td>Thomas Wetzel</td>
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<td>Percussion</td>
<td>Michelle Cozzi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harp</td>
<td>Rebecca Royce</td>
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Prosper Mérimée’s 1845 novel CARMEN was inspired by a local story told to him by the Countess of Montijo during his 1830 visit to Spain. A beautiful ‘gitana’ robs a young soldier then falls for him. He finds out that she is already married and kills her husband. In the original tale, Carmen is not a ‘gitana’, but since Mérimée was studying the Romani language of the ‘gitanos’ he decided Carmen would work better as a manipulative seductress from that tribe known for thievery and loose morals. ‘Gitanos’ were indeed a marginalized group whose opportunities were limited as most were illiterate and thought never to be trusted. They were allowed to provide music, dance, and easy women; occasionally they produced an outstanding bullfighter who might become well-off and a celebrity if he survived long enough.

Carmen had escaped the suffocating life in the north and found, in Andalucía, surroundings filled with music, dance, flirtatious ‘piropos’ (compliments, sometimes lewd) in the streets and a paid occupation among other women. Her overt sexuality and unapologetic decision to sleep with whomever she chose made her a target of jealousy, but also an asset to the ‘gitanos’ bandits with whom she eventually stays. The tavern and inn of Lilas Pastias was located in the Sierra Morena Mountains outside Seville and was notorious for sheltering bandits, deserters, runaways, and sometimes unwed girls who had been disowned by their families. Carmen’s character revels in a life of freedom, and she forms a link between past literary figures such as the famous Serranas (mountain dwelling women) described in works such as V. De Guevara’s La Serrana de la Vera in which a marginalized, unattractive woman becomes a sexual predator attacking travelers if they pass by her lair.

Carmen provides a glimpse of later women both real and fictitious who became the stuff of legend in popular literature known as ‘Pliegos de Cordel’ or Chap Books in English society. They were the cheap sensationalist reading for the masses, most of whom were illiterate, that were read out loud to those gathered in taverns, cheap boarding houses or work places such as the tobacco factory. Many of the women depicted in these ‘sueltos’ (single pages) are portrayed as conforming to the rigid, frequently hypocritical, norms of Spanish society. Typically, an outrage against the girl causes her to explode, rebel and set out to seek revenge or join the man she loves at all costs.

The popularity of an actual news story gives rise to embellished tales of female bandits, amazons who ride the hills, rob men and later murder them if no ransom is forthcoming. These women have nothing to lose. They will not be able to return to family, have no means of support and turn to crime in order to survive. Others, like Carmen and her friends, are used as decoys to entice men of means to follow them where the men were robbed or killed. Arcos de la Frontera, one of the white villages of the Sierra, was once known for harboring bandits and receiving rewards for their help.

Thank you to Cynthia Vasques for her generosity in sharing her incomparable history and knowledge.
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