



For Immediate Release

**FESTIVAL OPERA ANNOUNCES 2023 SEASON
BIZET'S *CARMEN* FEATURING CAST OF RISING STARS INCLUDING
TAYLOR RAVEN, HOPE BRIGGS, DANE SUAREZ AND YOUNG KWANG YOO
NEW PRODUCTION AUGUST 18 AND 20
HOFMANN THEATRE, LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS;**

**TWO POPULAR OPERA IN THE PARK CONCERTS SCHEDULED:
ORINDA COMMUNITY PARK, JUNE 22
WALNUT CREEK CIVIC PARK, AUGUST 6**

www.festivalopera.org

Walnut Creek, Calif. (May 05, 2023) — **Festival Opera** today announced plans for the company's 2023 season highlighted by a bold new production of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, a work at the heart of the repertory and one of the most performed operas in the world, set for August 18 and 20 at the Lesher Center for the Arts. Preceding these performances, Festival Opera's 32nd anniversary season will officially launch with two popular and beloved **Opera in the Park** concerts – the first set for June 22 at the verdant **Orinda Community Park**, and the other at **Walnut Creek's Civic Park** on August 6.

Festival Opera General Director **Zachary Gordin**, said "It is with great pride that Festival Opera celebrates its 32nd anniversary season with a refreshed, contemporary interpretation of Bizet's iconic opera, *Carmen*. I'm especially pleased to present a cast of rising, highly talented opera stars in such a collaborative stage production that will surely resonate with Bay Area audiences. And what better way to begin our season than with a pair of Opera in the Park concerts, reaffirming Festival Opera's commitment to enriching the lives of our community with programming of exceptional music from Grand Opera to Broadway and beyond. I look forward to welcoming you to Festival Opera's season."

The company returns to the beautiful setting of the **Orinda Community Park** Thursday, June 22 at 6 p.m., with the **13th Annual Opera in the Park** concert graciously sponsored by the **Rotary Club of Orinda**, with grateful thanks and appreciation to the **City of Orinda Parks and Recreation Department** and sponsor **Compass** realtor **Pablo Tiscareno**, and **Solano Jewelers**. An ensemble of Festival Opera singers accompanied by pianist **Chun Mei Wilson** will delight audiences with a concert of popular music from the worlds of opera, Broadway and the Great American Songbook. Free and ample lawn seating awaits attendees with a selection of food and wine trucks to enable their summer repast al fresco. The park is located at 28 Orinda Way.

On Sunday, August 6 at 4 p.m., Festival Opera will joyfully revisit the lush grounds of **Walnut Creek's Civic Park** for a different **Opera in the Park** program, this one made possible by the **Walnut Creek Civic Pride Foundation**. This free community concert will feature Festival Opera singers in highlights from Bizet's *Carmen* among many other greatest hits from the world of grand opera; Chun Mei Wilson will accompany the artists on piano. An idyllic setting for a late summer afternoon concert of beautiful music and new cherished memories. The park is located at 1375 Civic Drive.

For only the second time in the company's history, Festival Opera presents Bizet's *Carmen*, his final work for the lyric theater stage in 1875 prior to his tragically early death at age 36. The groundbreaking work abounds with raw energy and enduring melodic inspiration, wrapped within a plot that is startling in its uncompromising realism. In many ways, *Carmen* was foundational for the blood-and-guts genre of verismo, even while its origins in *opéra comique* are evident throughout the score: this is an opera that celebrates irony, dance and song itself, and *l'amour* - despite the tragic finale.

Curated by Zachary Gordin, an impressive roster of rising operatic stars has been assembled for *Carmen* beginning with the highly anticipated company debut of "vocal sensation," mezzo-soprano **Taylor Raven*** in the title role of the Iberian Gypsy, Carmen; the welcome return of successful Festival Opera alumni, soprano **Hope Briggs** (Micaëla) and tenor **Dane Suarez** (Don José); and the company premier of "magnificent" baritone, **Young Kwang Yoo*** (Escamillo).

Joining the *Carmen* cast in a number of important comprimario roles will be bass-baritone **Matthew Lovell** (Zuniga); soprano **Lila Khazoum*** (Frasquita); mezzo-soprano **Lily Bogas** (Mercédès); tenor **Taylor Thompson*** (Remendado); and baritone **Andrew Fellows*** (Moralés/Dancaïro).

On the podium leading the **Festival Opera Orchestra** will be San Francisco Opera veteran **Robert Mollicone*** alongside a highly talented creative team including stage director and choreographer **Michael Mohammed***; production designer **Peter Crompton**; and lighting designer **Matthew Antaky**. The **Festival Opera Chorus** is under the direction of **Bruce Olstad**; the production will also feature the vocal talents of the Grammy Award-winning **Pacific Boychoir Academy***. Sung in French with projected English supertitles, *Carmen* will be presented in two acts, one intermission and will last two hours and forty-five minutes.

Festival Opera was founded in 1991 by **Dr. Theodore Weis**, who, twenty years earlier had helped create the Arizona Opera Company in Tucson. Past leadership includes the artistic direction tenures of famed soprano **Olivia Stapp**, Maestro **Michael Morgan** of the Oakland Symphony, and is currently led by Zachary Gordin. Festival Opera is committed to presenting emerging and local artists in compelling and socially relevant productions of new and classic repertoire. Festival Opera proudly gives emerging artists a venue to hone their craft in leading roles with the guidance and collaboration of established professionals - providing a vital launching pad for their professional future. FO alums have gone on to perform in major opera houses and symphony halls around the globe. Memorable past productions include Mozart's *Don Giovanni* set in a contemporary nightclub, Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins* highlighting the human and political struggles we face, Floyd's *Susannah* echoing the #metoo movement, and Massenet's *Werther* set in the 1950s.

Zachary Gordin began his administrative association with Festival Opera in 2018 as Artistic Advisor, later Artistic Director, and in 2020 was appointed company General Director. A native son of Oakland, Gordin is a highly accomplished baritone singer performing opera and concert music throughout the country, and is a greatly skilled and insightful piano accompanist; the multi-talented musician is also a builder of harpsichords.

Individual tickets for Festival Opera's *Carmen* are now on sale and are \$45, \$70 and \$90. Student tickets are \$20 (age 25 and younger). Tickets may be purchased online at www.festivalopera.org/carmen or by calling the Leshner Center for the Arts Box Office, (925) 943-7469. Performances are scheduled for Friday, August 18 at 7.30 p.m. and Sunday, August 20 at 2 p.m. at the Hofmann Theatre, Leshner Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek. For more details, visit online at www.festivalopera.org.

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Note New Festival Opera Press Contact: Jon Finck, jonfincksf@gmail.com / +1 415 577 1323

Please connect for interviews, artwork and press credentials. Season calendar is attached.

Programming and casting subject to change.

Current as of April 2023

***Festival Opera Debut**