



**FESTIVAL OPERA ANNOUNCES MAJOR CAST CHANGE
HIGHLY ACCLAIMED BAY AREA ARTIST NIKOLA PRINTZ
SAVES THE SUMMER OPERA SEASON AND AGREES TO SING TITLE ROLE OF
*CARMEN***

**REPLACING TAYLOR RAVEN WHO HAS WITHDRAWN DUE TO ILLNESS;
NEW PRODUCTION OF *CARMEN* TO OPEN AUGUST 18 & 20
HOFMANN THEATRE, LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS**



Nikola Printz



Zachary Gordin

www.festivalopera.org/carmen

Walnut Creek, Calif. (August 5, 2023) — With two weeks remaining in the rehearsal period, **Festival Opera** today announced a major and unforeseen cast change in the company's new production of Georges Bizet's iconic opera, *Carmen*: acclaimed Bay Area mezzo-soprano **Nikola Printz** will now assume the title role replacing previously announced artist and rising star, **Taylor Raven**, who has withdrawn due to illness. *Carmen* is scheduled to open Festival Opera's summer season Friday, August 18 and repeated Sunday, August 20 at the Hofmann Theatre, Leshar Center for the Arts.

Festival Opera General Director **Zachary Gordin** said, "It is with regret that I announce mezzo-soprano Taylor Raven has unexpectedly withdrawn from our production of *Carmen* due to illness. On behalf of the company, we wish Taylor a speedy recovery and look for new opportunities to present her in the future. Today I also wish to announce - and am truly grateful - that an artist as fantastic as Nikola Printz is willing to step in last minute as our Carmen. Nikola's voice and stage presence will be an ideal fit in our updated setting of this legendary opera. I believe audiences will be gobsmacked by the display of talent on our stage."

ABOUT NIKOLA PRINTZ

Known for their “sheer stylistic range...full-throated vocalism and raw emotional honesty” (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), artistically fluid mezzo Nikola Printz uses music to communicate who they are, and not just what they can do. That sense of personal conviction was evident in their recent Schwabacher Debut Recital at San Francisco Opera Center. The *San Francisco Chronicle* named the performance one of San Francisco’s Best of 2022, writing, “Listeners reveled in the beauty of Printz’s singing – their lustrously dark chest tones, their elegant phrasing... such commitment and tonal splendor.”

Following three pandemic-era summers as a participant in the Merola Opera Program, Printz began their tenure as an Adler Fellow with San Francisco Opera in 2023. During SF Opera’s centennial season, Printz covered the role of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo in the Bay Area premiere of Gabriela Lena Frank’s *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, as well as singing Frida Image #2; sang various roles in Richard Strauss’ *Die Frau ohne Schatten*; and performed Musetta in the company’s innovative *Bohème Out of The Box*.

Recent performance highlights include the title roles in *Carmen* and *Dido and Aeneas* with Opera San José; *L’italiana in Algeri* with Opera Memphis; *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein* with Pocket Opera; Freschi’s *Ermelinda* with Ars Minerva; *Orfeo ed Eurydice* with West Edge Opera; and *The Rape of Lucretia* with Green Mountain Opera Festival. Printz has also appeared as Elle in Poulenc’s monodrama, *La Voix humaine*; Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; The Fox in *Cunning Little Vixen*; Olga in *Eugene Onegin*; Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*; and Aldonza in *Man of La Mancha* for Shreveport Opera.

Printz’s first musical homes were in jazz and cabaret clubs, and they are well-versed in crossover styles of singing. In addition to engagements at Yoshi’s Jazz Lounge and Club 1923, Printz also created the role of Velma Louise Cole in Boxcar Theater’s immersive *Speakeasy SF* and joined San Francisco Symphony for their annual queer variety show, *Holiday Gaiety*. An accomplished aerialist, Printz has also developed and performed on spinning trapeze in both grand concert halls and smoky cabaret clubs. Printz is currently performing in Opera Parallèle and the San Francisco Transgender District’s second annual *Expansive: A Showcase of Transgender and Non-Binary Classical Artists*, held this year at A.C.T.’s Strand Theater.

For only the second time in the company’s 32-year history, Festival Opera presents Bizet’s *Carmen*, the composer’s final work for the Paris Opéra-Comique stage in 1875 prior to his tragically early death at age 36. The trailblazing work overflows with raw energy and enduring melodic inspiration, wrapped within a plot that is startling in its uncompromising realism. Today, *Carmen* remains at the very core of the opera repertory, one of the most often performed works in the world attracting the greatest singing artists of the day to interpret the title role, the ultimate femme fatale and tragic heroine of *l’amour*.

As previously announced, an impressive roster of rising operatic stars has been assembled for *Carmen* including 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**; lighting designer **Matthew Antaky**; costume designer **Joy Graham-Korst**; and makeup design by **Kristen Campbell** and **Denise Gutierrez**. Festival Opera's Director of Production is **Frédéric O. Boulay**. **Patricia Kristof Moy** is the French language coach.

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 with one intermission, and will last two hours and forty-five minutes.

Individual tickets for Festival Opera's *Carmen* 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 Leshar 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., the Hofmann Theatre, Leshar Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek.

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 repertoire and concert music throughout the country, and is a greatly skilled and insightful piano accompanist; a dedicated health and fitness advocate, the multi-talented musician and impresario is also a builder of harpsichords.

Festival Opera will present its annual free **Opera in the Park** concert at **Walnut Creek's Civic Park on Sunday, August 6 at 4 p.m.** featuring six singers performing cherished works from the opera and Broadway musical theater repertoire; **Chun Mei Wilson**, pianist and Zachary Gordin, program host. Opera in the Park is sponsored by the Walnut Creek Civic Pride Foundation. To mark the occasion of this concert, an official welcome greeting will be proffered by Walnut Creek City Mayor Pro Tem, **Loella Haskew**. Civic Park is located at 1375 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek.

For more details about Festival Opera, visit online at www.festivalopera.org.

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