

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Opera Kelowna Announces Scintillating 2018 Season **Featuring Bizet's *Carmen***

Classical music innovators heat up the summer with expanded main stage run and pop-up events throughout the Okanagan

Kelowna, BC – Opera Kelowna presents its 2018 summer production of Georges Bizet's ***Carmen***, running **August 16 to 19, 2018** at the **Kelowna Community Theatre**. A heart-wrenching story of fiery passions and desperate acts, the luscious work overflows with some of opera's best-known arias, such as Habanera and the Toreador Song. The production's illustrious cast and creative team were announced at a special event at Kelowna's new Porsche Dealership on February 14, and features the anticipated return of conductor Bernard McDonald and the Opera Kelowna debut of award-winning theatre & opera director Amiel Gladstone. In addition to the main stage production, the company will share special concerts and events throughout the Okanagan.

"As a young company bringing opera to the Okanagan, we strive to select programming that introduces audiences to the most iconic experiences the art form has to offer with a contemporary twist," says Alexandra Babel, Artistic Director of Opera Kelowna. "Having delighted our opera-goers with the magic of Mozart and set them swooning at *La bohème*, we decided this year to set their blood racing with the unbridled heat and dangerous passions of Bizet. We are thrilled to share our unique vision of this venerated work – and to welcome the stellar line-up of inspiring artists who will bring this production to life."

Set in Spain, though written and sung in French, *Carmen* follows the story of a flirtatious and hot-tempered Gypsy seductress, who steals the hearts of an army officer, Don José, and bullfighter, Escamillo. Its four acts begin with the titular temptress attacking another woman in the streets of Seville, then convincing Don José to let her go free. Act Two sees the nomad and her companions raising rabble at a cantina, having a chance encounter with the toreador Escamillo, and ultimately reconnecting with Don José, convincing him to abandon the army and join her in living the gypsy life. Don José decides to follow this course – and sets events in motion that whisk audiences to a smugglers hideout in the mountains and on to a bloody final confrontation outside a bullfighting arena.

Opera Kelowna's production of *Carmen* will be staged in a fantastical, exaggerated modern setting and take on the flavour of the inner-city with an aesthetic similar to the street art of Banksy. JESSIE Award-winning costume and set designer Drew Facey will create an animated contemporary setting. Makeup artist Missy MacKintosh will incorporate body tattooing, while master cutter Keren Huyter will design corsets, all with a cutting-edge, modern take on steam punk style. The production will draw particular focus on nomadic global residents, immigration and urbanization, which are all relevant themes in today's world.

As the 2018 season will double the number of main stage performances to four, Opera Kelowna will embrace the tradition of double casting lead roles. Alternating in the title role are mezzo-soprano **Barbara King**, a celebrated artist who has been seen with Calgary and Edmonton Opera, as well as Opera Kelowna's In the Park and Under the Stars concert series; and **Suzanne Lommler**, an American mezzo-

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soprano who makes her Opera Kelowna debut. Lommler's stellar voice has rung out with Chicago's Haymarket Opera, Italy's Spoleto Festival, and the Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Tenors **Jason Slayden** (Vancouver Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Seattle Opera) and **Ernesto Ramirez** (Opera de Leon, Canadian Opera Company) will share the role of Don José, joined by soprano **Lara Ciekiewicz** (Calgary Opera, L'Opera de Montréal) as Micaela and baritone **Geoffrey Sirrett** (Edmonton Opera, Toronto Symphony Orchestra) as toreador Escamillo.

Opera Kelowna audience favourite **Bernard McDonald** will return to conduct the production, after amazing local arts-lovers with his skilled, virtuosic presentations of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Making his Opera Kelowna debut is director **Amiel Gladstone**, whose 2016 adaptation of *Onegin* with Arts Club Theatre Company became a national sensation and who has crafted many memorable visions with Vancouver Opera, including *Dark Sisters* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

Georges Bizet (1838–1875) was a French composer of the romantic era. A child prodigy, he began his studies at the Conservatoire de Paris at age nine where he won many awards, including the prestigious Music Composition scholarship of the Prix de Rome in 1857. Throughout his career, Bizet composed several keyboard and orchestral works, as well as the operas *Don Procopio*, *The Pearl Fishers*, and *Djamileh*. However, he was met with little success before his final opera *Carmen*.

When *Carmen* premiered on March 3, 1875, the production's breaking of conventions shocked and scandalized its first audiences, and Bizet was convinced the opera was a failure. Due to his sudden death after the 33rd performance, he was unaware that the opera would become a triumphant success within ten years. Today, Bizet is hailed as a composer of brilliance and originality, and *Carmen* is one of the most celebrated and frequently performed works in the entire operatic repertoire.

A series of free concerts and community engagements will support and inform *Carmen*'s run. These include:

Carmencita: Opera Kelowna's Annual Gala

May 26 at 6pm ~ Okanagan Innovation Centre

A spectacular Latin street parade traverses through downtown Kelowna, culminating in a colourful evening of couture fashion, nomadic art, artisan food, and fine wine. Music will be provided courtesy of Vancouver's *Toque Flamenco Ensemble*, with all proceeds benefitting Opera Kelowna's Summer Opera Program.

Opera Under the Stars

August 1 at 8:30pm ~ UBCO Kelowna

A free concert in the courtyard of the UBCO campus offers the world-class voices of the *Carmen* company in a relaxed and casual environment. Audiences of all ages are invited to bring their own blankets and chairs, enjoy refreshments available for purchase, and be enthralled by the happiness and beauty of classical singing.

Opera in the Park Festival

August 2 at 6:30pm ~ Guisachan Park Kelowna with Festivals Kelowna

August 3 at 6:30pm ~ Memorial Park, West Kelowna with Music in the Park

August 12 at 6:30pm ~ Heritage Park, Peachland with the Rotary Club of Peachland

A series of free, live opera concerts, presented in partnership with local organizations, feature the incredible emerging talents of the Summer Intensive Opera Training program.

For tickets and further information about Bizet's *Carmen*, visit: operakelowna.com

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About Opera Kelowna (operakelowna.com):

The Opera Kelowna Society is a registered non-profit professional opera company and training centre for promising operatic artists. Opera Kelowna creates high calibre opera that is accessible to both opera lovers and future enthusiasts. The company is dedicated to equipping, educating, enlightening, enriching, and entertaining diverse audiences through a rich array of operatic performing arts and programming of the most compelling vocal works, both past and present.

Opera Kelowna acknowledges the generous support of its funders and supporters:



The Central Okanagan Foundation is a community foundation providing an ongoing contribution to the quality of life in our community through building endowments, grant making and community leadership. We bring donors and charities together to provide for the needs of the community today, tomorrow and forever.

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