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MINNESOTA OPERA CLOSES ITS 2021-2022 SEASON WITH BIZET'S *CARMEN*, DIRECTED BY INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR DENYCE GRAVES

More than thirty years after her Minnesota Opera debut as the title character in *Carmen*, Denyce Graves returns to the Twin Cities to lead a new production of Bizet's thrilling tale in directorial debut.

MINNEAPOLIS (April 7, 2022) – In 1991, Denyce Graves made her Minnesota Opera debut playing *Carmen*, for the first time in her career. Graves went on to make *Carmen* one of her signature roles, and now, more than three decades later, the operatic superstar returns to Minnesota Opera in May 2022 to make her directorial debut with a brand-new production of *Carmen*.

This new production tells the classic story of *Carmen*, an iconic and beautiful woman who is bound to live life on her own terms. Shortly after a corporal military officer falls for her, what begins as a passionate story of desire quickly turns into a struggle for liberation. Featuring some of the most popular music to ever grace the operatic stage, Minnesota Opera's *Carmen* brings every aspect of Bizet's thrilling tale to life, from its tantalizing beginning to its devastating climax.

The opera's composer, Georges Bizet died suddenly three months after the opera's premiere on June 3, 1875 and did not live to see his masterpiece gain international acclaim over the next decade. Today, *Carmen* has become a staple of the operatic canon and is lauded in the world of classical music for its bold music and powerful story.

Carmen is written in the genre of opéra comique, which includes musical numbers separated by spoken dialogue. The opera's themes broke barriers in French opera but were highly controversial, leading to negative reviews and indifference among French operagoers. The opera's success outside of France in the coming years led scholars to argue that *Carmen* bridges the tradition of opéra comique and the *verismo* or realism movement that characterizes late 19th century Italian literature and opera. Minnesota Opera's production will be performed in the original French.

"*Carmen* has played an important role in our company's rich history, and we're delighted to have Denyce return to Minnesota Opera to direct a new and exciting production," says Minnesota Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. "Denyce is internationally known for her portrayal of *Carmen* that started with her premiere of the role here at Minnesota Opera. We're excited to bring her relationship with Minnesota Opera full circle and welcome her back."

Carmen features Israeli mezzo-soprano Maya Lahyani and Project Opera Alumnus and current Minnesota Opera Company Artist mezzo-soprano Zoie Reams alternating in the opera's title role. They are joined by tenors Won Whi Choi and Rafael Moras in the role of Don José, baritone Conor



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McDonald as Dancaire, Charles H. Eaton as Moralès, Resident Artist Alumna Mia Athey as Mercédès as well as current Minnesota Opera Resident Artists baritone Aaron Keeney as Escamillo, soprano Symone Harcum as Micaëla, bass Allen Michael Jones as Zuniga, tenor Joseph Lepppek as Remendado and soprano Leah Brzyski as Frasquita.

Elias Grandy (*Elektra*, 2019) returns to conduct this new production with the Minnesota Opera Orchestra and the Minnesota Opera Chorus at the Ordway Music Theater.

Minnesota Opera will present an evening of thought-provoking conversation, drinks and music to explore the complexity behind the beloved *Carmen* at MetroNOME Brewery on April 27, 2022. Learn more in advance of the event at mnopera.org/off-stage.

What: *Carmen*
Music by Georges Bizet
Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy
Sung in French with English captions projected above the stage

Where: Ordway Music Theater, 345 Washington St., St. Paul, MN 55102

When: Saturday, May 7, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, May 8, 2022 at 2 p.m.
Thursday, May 12, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, May 14, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, May 15, 2022 at 2 p.m.
Thursday, May 19, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, May 21, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, May 22, 2022 at 2 p.m.

Tickets: \$25-\$228. Call Minnesota Opera Patron Services at 612-333-6669, Monday–Thursday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., or purchase online at mnopera.org/carmen.

Media: Digital assets are available on our [Online Press Room](#).

Creative Team

Conductor | Elias Grandy
Stage Director | Denyce Graves
Scenic Designer | Riccardo Hernández
Costume Designer | Oana Botez
Co-Lighting Designers | Amith Chandrashaker, Robert Wierzel
Associate Director/Choreographer | Eric Sean Fogel

Cast

Carmen | Maya Lahyani (May 7, 12, 15 and 21), Zoie Reams*** (May 8, 14, 19 and 22)
Don José | Won Whi Choi (May 7, 12, 15 and 21), Rafael Moras (May 8, 14, 19 and 22)



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Micaëla | Symone Harcum*
Escamillo | Aaron Keeney*
Dancaïre | Conor McDonald
Moralès | Charles H. Eaton
Zuniga | Allen Michael Jones*
Remendado | Joseph Leppek*
Frasquita | Leah Brzyski*
Mercédès | Mia Athey°

*MN Opera Resident Artist
°MN Opera Resident Artist Alum
**Project Opera Alum
†Company Artist

To learn more about *Carmen*, please visit mnopera.org/carmen.

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Minnesota Opera changes lives by bringing together artists, audiences and community, advancing the art of opera for today and for future generations.