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## 2019/20 SEASON TO FEATURE THE ICONIC **CARMEN** & THE COMPANY PREMIERE OF THE AMERICAN CLASSIC **SUSANNAH**

Manitoba Opera will present an iconic opera and a company premiere in its 47<sup>th</sup> season. ***Susannah***, American composer Carlisle Floyd's third and most well-known opera, opens the season **November 23, 26, 29, 2019**. This opera will be paired with the most popular of all operas, Bizet's ***Carmen***, **March 28, 31, April 3, 2020**. Both productions will be staged at the Centennial Concert Hall.

Winner of the New York Music Critic Circle Award for best new opera in 1956, *Susannah* is the most-performed American opera after *Porgy and Bess*. This "powerfully emotional piece is among the finest achievements in American opera." (*Nashville Music Scene* 2015) and was chosen by the United States to represent American music at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels.

Floyd, the son of a southern Methodist Minister, reset the Apocryphal story of *Susanna and the Elders* to 1950's rural Tennessee during a revival meeting. Floyd's music for *Susannah* is rooted in Appalachian folk melodies, Protestant hymns, and traditional classical music with hints of Copeland and Bernstein. The opera features memorable songs and folksy arias like "Ain't It a Pretty Night" and "The Trees on the Mountains."

"With themes of intolerance, religious hypocrisy, social harassment, and alienation, this incredibly moving story with unforgettable music continues to be so very poignant over sixty years after its debut," commented Larry Desrochers, Manitoba Opera General Director & CEO. "And like Gershwin's *Porgy*, Floyd's opera is thoroughly American, making it a remarkably relatable work."

*Carmen* features some of opera's most beloved arias and is unrivaled in its procession of hit melodies. Over 140 years after its premiere in Paris, this sexy thriller continues to bewitch the audience with every note. Carmen can have any man she wants and when she seduces the young soldier Don José only to cast him aside for the handsome bullfighter, she seals her tragic fate.

"Who can resist the sensuous music of Bizet? With its lavish score and brilliant orchestration, *Carmen* is an irresistible theatrical event. Last performed by the company in 2010, we are very pleased to bring this opera to the stage for an entirely new audience," added Desrochers.

"Both productions feature exciting and talented Canadians in the title roles, supported by equally accomplished singers. We are pleased to welcome back to our stage, Winnipeg's Lara Ciekiewicz who will be in a role debut as Susannah. As Jenůfa in the Pacific Opera Victoria's production of the same name last season, *The Times Colonist* said, "(Ciekiewicz was) captivating in the title role, a voice of light amid dark subject matter and ravaged emotions."

## 2. Manitoba Opera announces 2019/20 Season

French-Canadian mezzo Nora Sourouzian has sung the role of Carmen a number of times. Of her interpretation in the Minnesota Opera production, the *Star Tribune* said, "(Sourouzian) moved onstage with easy, tiger-like grace and brought to the vocal line a richly colored, evenly produced mezzo with sensitive inflections of the text."

### MANITOBA OPERA PREMIERE: *SUSANNAH*

Saturday, November 23    Tuesday, November 26    Friday, November 29

Music and libretto by Carlisle Floyd  
Sung in English with English projections

#### **THE STORY:** *Loosely based on the Apocryphal tale of Susanna and the Elders*

Susannah Polk, a wide-eyed, beautiful eighteen-year-old, lives simply, but happily with her older brother Sam who raised her in a small Tennessee mountain village. She faces accusations of promiscuity and is shunned by a community caught up in a frenzy of religious zeal, innuendo, and intimidation after a group of church elders discover her bathing nude in a secluded stream near her home.

Entirely innocent, Susannah is painted as a sinning seductress by the elders who are eager to conceal their own lustful feelings. They force her intellectually disabled best friend, Little Bat, to say that he had sex with her, and the entire town turns against her.

At a revival meeting, a visiting preacher, Reverend Olin Blicht, tries to force her into repentance to "save her soul," but she runs from the church. He follows her home to convince her to repent, but he lets her know he's a lonely man and interested in more than her soul. Exhausted and beaten down by the treatment of the townsfolk, she lets him lead her into the house. The next day, alone and praying, he knows now the townsfolk were lying - she was a virgin. He begs her and the Lord for forgiveness, but is shot dead by Sam as revenge for violating his sister. Unable to catch Sam, the town descends on Susannah, but she stands her ground, laughing as she chases them off her property with a shotgun. She has survived their attack and remains standing there, an inviolably strong and inexorably lonely prisoner of a self-imposed exile.

#### **THE ARTISTS**

The principal artists for this company premiere include Winnipegger **Lara Ciekiewicz** who returns to the MO stage to sing the role of the young Susannah Polk. Ciekiewicz gave a very touching performance as the Countess in the 2015 production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. **Michael Robert Hendrick**, who so memorably sang the role of Lennie in Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* in 2016, makes a return as Susannah's older brother and guardian, Sam. Fellow American **Kristopher Irmiter** also makes a return to sing the role of the itinerant evangelist preacher Reverend Blicht. He last performed with the company in *Fidelio* as Don Pizarro in 2014. **James McLennan**, who makes Winnipeg his home as well, sings the role of Little Bat McLean, McLennan last performed with Manitoba Opera as Goro in *Madama Butterfly*, 2017.

**MUSIC HIGHLIGHTS:** Features Puccini-like Melodies, Hymns, Folk Tunes, and Ballads

- "Ain't It a Pretty Night"
- "The Trees on the Mountains"
- "It's About the Way People is Made"
- "Are You Saved from Sin?"

**SETTING AND TIME:** 1950s' New Hope Valley, Tennessee

**SET AND COSTUMES:** Virginia Opera

## THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR OPERA: **CARMEN**

Saturday, March 28      Tuesday, March 31      Friday, April 3

Music by Georges Bizet      Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy

*Based on the story of the same name by French novelist, Prosper Mérimée*

Sung in French with French dialogue; projected English translations

### THE STORY

As the workers at a Seville cigarette factory enter the city square on their lunch break, the sensual and seductive Carmen teases her many admirers. Only the corporal Don José is resistant to her charms. Piqued by his disinterest, she playfully tosses a flower at him.

Later, Carmen is arrested for wounding a co-worker in a rowdy fight. Don José is to take her to prison, but has fallen under her spell and lets her escape. He later deserts the army to join Carmen and her band of smugglers, disregarding his life-long sweetheart and his dying mother. Carmen has tired of the jealous José however, and decides to take on a new lover, the bullfighter Escamillo. Jealousy ignites and José is pushed to the brink of obsessive madness that leads to shocking, murderous consequences.

### THE ARTISTS

Canadians making their mark will dominate the roster for this production. French-Canadian mezzo, **Nora Sourouzian** makes her company debut as the fiery temptress with the celebrated tenor **David Pomeroy** reprising his role as the obsessive corporal. Pomeroy was with MO last season as Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*. Baritone **Keith Phares** also returns to the MO stage, this time in the role of Escamillo the bullfighter. Keith was Albert in the 2017 production of *Werther*. Winnipegger **Lida Szkwarek** (Michaela), **Hugo Laporte** (Morales/Dancairo), and **Jean-Phillipe Lazure** (Remendado) make company debuts. Winnipeg-born soprano **Lara Secord-Haid** will sing Frasquita. Secord-Haid was last on the Manitoba Opera stage as Sophie in *Werther*. **Brian Deedrick** directs.

**Tyrone Paterson** will conduct both productions which also feature the **Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra** and the **Manitoba Opera Chorus**.

**THE MUSIC:** A Procession of Hit Melodies that Capture the Spirit of Spain and the Passionate Heroine

- Carmen's smoky Habanera, "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle"
- Don José's Flower Song, "La fleur que tu m'avais jeté"
- The seductive "Seguidilla"
- Escamillo's rousing "Toreador Song"
- Michaela's aria
- Final Duet

**SETTING AND TIME:** In and around Seville about 1820    **SET:** Edmonton Opera    **COSTUMES:** Malabar

### TICKETS

Tickets are currently available by subscription only; single tickets will be available beginning in September. For more information, contact the Manitoba Opera Box Office, 204-957-7842 or online at [www.mbopera.ca](http://www.mbopera.ca)

4. *Manitoba Opera announces 2019/20 Season*

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