

Carmen Features Local Talent

By Sarah Henningsen

Although shows by the Walnut Creek-based Festival Opera company attract professionals from throughout the Bay Area, the July production of Georges Bizet's Carmen, one of the most famous operas of all time, is rich with Lamorinda talent. Individuals from throughout the community have actively participated during the past few months to put on a great show, both as on-stage performers and behind-the-scenes workers.

The majority of Lamorinda locals performing in Carmen are serving as members of the chorus ensemble. This ensemble is composed largely of students, many of whom participate in their school choirs during the year. Shannon Bruce, who will be a junior at Campolindo High School in the fall, commented on her experience as a chorus member in Carmen: "I feel so privileged to have worked with such a talented cast of people. I've learned so much about opera music."

Even some younger kids from the Lamorinda community are represented in the production of Carmen, as part of the smaller Boys Chorus that makes several appearances throughout the lengthy opera. Although the boys sing only two songs, they have a huge presence onstage and make a great impression on the audience. The group includes elementary and middle school kids as well as more experienced singers that lead the way for the younger ones, like Tylor Bruns, Alejandro Cervantes, and John Cogswell, who will be entering the local high schools



Clockwise from top left: Stefan Miller, Tim Quock, Robin Miller, Shannon Bruce, John Cogswell

next year. As Chorus Master James Toland expressed, "The boys have been a terrific bonus to the overall quality of the chorus."

Toland, a Moraga resident who teaches part time at Campolindo and Acalanes in addition to assisting premiere opera companies, spent the past few months helping to develop the chorus as a whole. Leading the majority of pre-staging music rehearsals with the chorus ensemble, Toland thoroughly enjoyed working with the younger set of chorale members: "The young people singing in the chorus are a remarkable addition to a very talented group of singers. The students have just made an enormous contribution to the beauty and power of the sound of the chorus. Their participation has helped create a stage full of people of

all ages and types and it is just a wonderfully vibrant group of people onstage." As evidenced by the beautiful sound of the choir ensemble, Toland has proven to be a huge asset to the production of a musical as challenging as Carmen and has inspired countless students from throughout the Lamorinda region.

The first weekend of performances was received positively by both critics and the community. The final two performances of Carmen will be held at the Dean Leshar Center on Friday July 13th and Sunday July 15th, at an afternoon matinee. Tickets can either be ordered at www.festivalopera.com or by phone, 925-943-SHOW.

Carmen's local performers:

High School Students:

- Jason Long
- Tylor Bruns
- John Cogswell
- Alejandro Cervantes
- Cameron Gordon
- Matt Boone
- Shannon Bruce
- Mayra Swatt

Middle School:

- Ben Thomas
- Jeremy Raine

College:

- Piper Haywood
- Chelsea Nenni
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