

THE CARMEN PROJECT: A CITY-WIDE CELEBRATION OF THE CLASSICAL ARTS

By Kathryn Bumpass



Carmen AN OPERA IN
FOUR ACTS BY
GEORGES BIZET

THE CARMEN PROJECT IS A CITY-WIDE
ARTS COLLABORATION FEATURING:
CENTRAL COAST CHILDREN'S CHOIR
CIVIC BALLET SAN LUIS OBISPO
CUESTA COLLEGE CONCERT CHOIR
OPERA SAN LUIS OBISPO
SAN LUIS OBISPO SYMPHONY

STAGE DIRECTOR:
ROSS HALPER

CONDUCTED BY:
BRIAN ASHER ALHADEFF
OPERA SAN LUIS OBISPO
ARTISTIC & GENERAL DIRECTOR

SATURDAY	2
OCTOBER 12 - 7PM	0
SUNDAY	1
OCTOBER 13 - 2PM	3

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
SAN LUIS OBISPO
(805) 756-4849
WWW.PACCSLO.ORG

Original Watercolor Carmen
by David Kreitzer

The *Carmen Project* is a major collaborative undertaking by classical performing arts groups in San Luis Obispo. Bizet's opera *Carmen*, probably the most famous opera ever composed, requires more than just singing. A large and colorful orchestra, ballet dancers, a children's chorus and large adult chorus are also essential parts of the production.

Dr. Brian Asher Alhadeff, artistic and general director of Opera San Luis Obispo, has assembled an impressive list of local groups for *The Carmen Project* that includes the San Luis Obispo Symphony, Civic Ballet of San Luis Obispo, the Cuesta College Chorus and the Central Coast Children's Choir.

Lead soloists hail from all over the United States including recent favorite tenor Ben Gulley, in the role of *Don José*. Last April, Gulley successfully debuted in the role of *Prince Tamino* in OperaSLO and Cal Poly's *Co-Opera* production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

The title role of *Carmen* will be played by mezzo-soprano Karen Mushegain, who made her debut in SLO last year when maestro Alhadeff recommended her to open Festival Mozaic's 2012 season in a performance of Villa Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras No.5*; Mushegain received an immediate standing ovation. Soprano Ciera Lambourn will sing the role of *Micäela*, and bass-baritone Isaac Musik-Ayala will sing the role of *Escamillo*.

The Carmen Project is more than a collaboration between arts organizations; it's also a picture of SLO-life and civic arts support as well, says Alhadeff. "Los Osos artist David Kreitzer is behind the beautiful poster of *Carmen*. The original image is his glorious large watercolor entitled *Carmen*. Wedell Cellars winery has designated an entire barrel special release pinot noir from their Santa Rita Hills vineyard entitled the *Carmen* wine, also bearing the Kreitzer image."

Carmen is a musical tale of romance, seduction, jealousy and violence, peopled by soldiers, cigarette girls, a bullfighter and his retinue, gypsies and bandits, as well as a sexy heroine and a corporal who is helplessly captivated by her. *Carmen*, as she tells us in her opening aria, the famous *Habanera*, is like a bird free to fly. She may love a man, but if he loves her, her love may vanish.

She successfully seduces the soldier Don José and causes him to desert the army, spend time in jail, and take up with her gypsy and bandit cohorts. Destroyed by his mad passion for *Carmen*, he flies into a jealous rage when she falls in love with the bullfighter Escamillo. You'll have to buy a ticket to see how it all ends.

TO SEE THE COLLABORATIVE DREAM MANIFEST, PLAN TO ATTEND BIZET'S *CARMEN* SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12 AT 7:00PM OR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13 AT 2:00PM AT THE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER SAN LUIS OBISPO. TICKETS ARE \$10 - \$75 AND ARE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE 24/7 AT WWW.OPERASLO.ORG, OR BY PHONE TUESDAY-SATURDAY, NOON-6:00PM AT 756-4849.

The Carmen Project is so far the largest of three collaborations maestro Alhadeff has created for OperaSLO and the Central Coast. Over the last two years Alhadeff has set OperaSLO on a new path with a focus on large-scale partnerships between local arts groups yielding grand productions.

An ardent advocate of collaboration in the classical arts, Alhadeff says “opera is the Olympics of classical arts! It’s the only place where every performing arts group comes together at the same and on the same stage. Chorus, orchestra, ballet, soloist, acting, set design, and costume design are among the largest contributors, and, this is precisely why opera is so perfect for San Luis Obispo. Here, our special community boasts several orchestras, choruses, dance companies, and a huge number of visual and textile artists! Our community clearly loves the arts and our ability to collaborate celebrates that support. When we all hold hands and work together, creative forces mingle revealing new marketing strategies for successful performances outcomes – in essence, the planets align and produce extraordinary results.”

This visionary collaborative process began in early 2012 when Alhadeff joined forces with Jacalyn Kreitzer, the director of the Cal Poly Student Opera Theater Workshop to create “Co-Opera”, an annual spring production that pairs the professional resources of OperaSLO with Cal Poly’s vocal and instrumental students.

Kreitzer says “Co-Opera” gives students the chance to work side-by-side with OperaSLO’s internationally acclaimed soloists, chorus, and professional orchestra. They also learn stage management, set and costume design. And, Kreitzer notes, they experience “the rigors and challenges of preparing performances for a paying audience.”

“Co-opera offers the perfect bridge between education and the real world of arts while at the same time honoring Cal Poly’s *Learn by Doing* educational philosophy”, notes Alhadeff. “Co-Opera is a vital component of OperaSLO’s *Opera in Education Program* (OEP). OperaSLO has many education-focused donors and Co-Opera has successfully stimulated new interest and funding. It’s a very popular event for education minded donors to contribute towards.”

Alhadeff’s second collaboration was launched this past December in the world of ballet. “Back in December of 2011, shortly after I got the job with OperaSLO, I noticed a startling similarity between Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo and State Street Ballet of Santa Barbara: both companies perform *The Nutcracker* the same way on different December weekends, two performances on a Saturday, and one



Alhadeff speaks to an audience in Shell Beach

performance on a Sunday, and, both have never performed with a live orchestra! Why not have the OperaSLO Orchestra accompany the ballets?” And thus was born a collaboration that immediately generated \$50,000 for Central Coast orchestra musicians. And there was room for even more collaboration. *The Nutcracker* calls for a chorus too, and Alhadeff successfully secured the participation of the Morro Bay High School Chorus with choir director Colleen Wall.

Drew Silvaggio, artistic director of Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo, had always dreamed of having an orchestra. Alhadeff called the project the “work of two dreamers inspired by a community

of dreamers on the Central Coast.” Along with Rodney Gustufson, artistic director of State Street Ballet of Santa Barbara, Alhadeff noted “we all took risks to depart from the status quo. We challenged our communities to believe in the potential this collaboration promised, in turn, our communities warmly and lovingly supported us with sold out houses.”

When dreams come to life so tangibly, they create an especially important impression on children and parents. “Collaborations of this magnitude send a critical message of validation to young people and parents: *this is real, this is your community, if you practice hard and unleash your dreams, you can play with us too!*” Alhadeff observed.

Alhadeff’s final passionate comment was “none of this would be possible without the tireless support and positive cheering of Sharon Dobson, and OperaSLO’s dream-team board of directors. It’s a great place to work. We dream together and make beautiful music...” Sharon Dobson was OperaSLO’s past executive director before taking on a full-time position at the PAC. She now serves as OperaSLO’s Board Treasurer.



Alhadeff meets with *Carmen* stage director Ross Halper and choreographer Drew Silvaggio