

PRESS RELEASE

**Opera Hong Kong celebrates 2021 with
 Bizet's *Carmen***

One of the greatest operas of all time



(14 April 2021, Hong Kong) With its tremendous success in 2018, Opera Hong Kong's production of ***Bizet's Carmen*** will return this year on May 13-16 at the Grand Theatre of Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Apart from the popular household melodies and the dramatic story relived by the new overseas casts, audience will also be dazzled by the exquisite costumes and the innovative nested rotating set embellished with creative lighting.

Georges Bizet's ***Carmen*** is a four-act opera with the story set in Seville, Spain in around 1830. Carmen is a gypsy cigarette factory worker who persuades a soldier Don José to release her from custody through cunning manipulation. For her, he gives up everything, abandoning his post, career, family and childhood sweetheart Micaëla, only to be rebuffed when she makes clear her preference for bull-fighter Escamillo. Unable to cope with this rejection and Carmen's refusal to comply with societal norms, Don José's jealousy consumes him, and he stabs her to death in the final scene. Written in 1875, the opera was panned by critics and many believe the terrible response contributed to Bizet's early death. The raw sexual connotations and lack of morality on display proved far too-high-a-dose of realism for French audiences, and the opera did not gain true acceptance until far after the composer's lifetime. Today, it remains one of, if not, the most performed operas of all time, featuring one of the world's best-known arias: *Habanera*, which has been featured countless times in popular culture, from a Doritos' Super Bowl advert to Pixar's *Up*.

Carmen's character and her absolute belief in her right to liberty in her life and love choices has made her character increasingly relatable and heroic with time. While the set and costumes will remain period in feel and intention, the direction of all the singers and the set design will be completely contemporary, allowing the audience to fully immerse themselves in harshness of the Sevillian environment and the huge variety of characters on stage.

Conductor **Gianna Fratta** began her career as a pianist winning many international competitions. In 1998, she had her conducting debut in Stravinsky's ballet *Pulcinella*. Since then she has worked with prestigious orchestras including Berliner Symphoniker, Orchestra del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Orchestra Internazionale d'Italia in the Festival della Valle d'Itria, Royal Academy of Music Symphony Orchestra, Belgrade Opera Orchestra and many others. The great Russian conductor Yuri Ahronovitch described her as "a musician so gifted with heart and arm".

Revival Director **Enrico Castiglione** is one of the internationally acclaimed theatre and video directors and set designers. He was also a television director of mega concerts featuring artists of high caliber like José Carreras and Lorin Maazel. He was the Founder and Artistic Director of Taormina Opera Festival, Euro Mediterranean Festival, Easter Festival in Rome and Italian Bellini Opera Festival. He was also a President of Una Vita per la Musica Award conferred each year for the recognition of greatest musical figures worldwide.

Starring as Carmen will be **Carolyn Sproule** and **Gosha Kowalinska**. Canadian mezzo-soprano **Carolyn Sproule** is the winner of 2019 George London Prize winner. She made her Pacific Opera Victoria debut as Carmen. Highlights of past seasons include a critically acclaimed European debut singing Erika in Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* at the Wexford Festival for which critics praised her performance as “vocally and theatrically flawless performance”. Polish mezzo-soprano **Gosha Kowalinska** won the first prize in Spazio Musica in Orvieto in 2010 and special prize in the International Armell Opera Contest in Budapest. She has been well experienced in singing as title role of *Carmen*, Amneris in *Aida* and Azucena in *Il Trovatore*.

Georgian tenors **Mikheil Sheshaberidze** and **Irakli Kakhidze** will take on the leading role as Don José. **Mikheil Sheshaberidze** was the second runner-up at Gaetano Fraschini Competition in Pavia in 2011 and La Città Sonora Competition in Milan in 2012. He was invited as Don José in *Carmen* at the Festival Luglio Musicale Trapanese at the Giuseppe Di Stefano Theater with Ivo Lipanović in 2014. **Irakli Kakhidze**'s recent highlights included the title roles in *Ernani* and *Don Carlo*. He was the previous soloist at Tbilisi Opera House. He was awarded by Georgia Theatre Society for the best performance of the role Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana* and won the Lado Atanéli Competition in 2011.

The accomplished sopranos, **Louise Kwong** and **Li Yang** will be playing Micaëla this time. **Louise Kwong** was a soprano at the Young Artist Programme of Rome Opera House in Italy from 2018-2019 and an awardee of the Hong Kong Ten Outstanding Young Persons in 2019. She won the 2nd prize, Audience prize and the Best Soprano prize in the 18th International Singing Competition Ferruccio Tagliavini in Austria. A highly versatile soprano, **Li Yang** embraces repertoire and operatic roles. Li's operatic credits include Liù in *Turandot*, Micaëla in *Carmen* and Angelica in *Suor Angelica*.

Carmen is one of the most frequently performed operas in the world. Audience who has never seen an opera can still recognize the beautiful melodies of the world's best-known arias “*Habanera*” and the “*Toreador Song*”. With its multi-dimensional art-form comprising music, sets, lighting, stage management, singing and dancing...*Carmen* is properly one of the best operas for beginners and first-timers.

Opera Hong Kong sincerely thanks to the support of Bank of China (Hong Kong) Private Banking (title sponsor of 13 May performance), Prince Jewellery & Watch (title sponsor of 14 May performance), Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Leisure and Cultural Services Department and New World Millennium Hong Kong Hotel which makes this production possible.

Programme Details

Date and time: 13-15 May (Thu-Sat) 7:30 pm | 16 May 2021 (Sun) 2:45 pm & 7:30pm

Venue: Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Ticket price: \$900, \$780, \$620, \$480, \$320, \$180

Tickets are now available at URBTIX

Performed in French with Chinese and English surtitles.

Please visit <http://operahongkong.org> for more details.

Production team

Producer Warren Mok

Conductor Gianna Fratta

Director Jean-Romain Vesperini

Revival Director
 Set Designer
 Costumes Designer

Enrico Castiglione
 Bruno de Lavenère
 Thibaut Welchlin

— With the special support of Vannina Vesperini for the costume design of Carmen, Frasquita and Mercédès.

Lighting Designer
 Video Designer
 Chorus Director
 Orchestra Executive
 Assistant Rehearsal Conductor &
 Principal Répétiteur

Christophe Chaupin
 Etienne Guiol
 Alex Tam
 Anders Hui
 Nina Yip

Performers

Carmen	Carolyn Sproule (13, 15, 16 May 7:30 pm) / Gosha Kowalinska (14 May, 16 May 2:45 pm)
Don José	Mikheil Sheshaberidze (13, 15, 16 May 7:30 pm) / Irakli Kakhidze (14 May, 16 May 2:45 pm)
Micaëla	Louise Kwong (13, 15, 16 May 7:30 pm) / Li Yang (14 May, 16 May 2:45 pm)
Escamillo	Pierre Doyen
Zuniga	Apollo Wong
Frasquita	Yanna Chen (13, 15, 16 May 7:30 pm) / Gladys Ho (14 May, 16 May 2:45 pm)
Mercédès	Dominique Chan (13, 15, 16 May 7:30 pm) / Ashley Chui (14 May, 16 May 2:45 pm)
Dancairo	Sammy Chien
Remendado	Henry Ngan (13, 15, 16 May 7:30 pm) / Wesley Lam (14 May, 16 May 2:45 pm)
Moralès	Lam Kwok Ho (13, 15, 16 May 7:30 pm) / Alex Kwok (14 May, 16 May 2:45 pm)

Opera Hong Kong Orchestra
 Opera Hong Kong Chorus
 Opera Hong Kong Children Chorus
 Edge 'n Pointe Dance Centre

High resolution photos can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/3tIZIWI>

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Media Enquiry

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About Opera Hong Kong

Founded in 2003 Opera Hong Kong (OHK) is Hong Kong's first professional opera company. Over the years, the company has gone from strength to strength under the Artistic Director Warren Mok, the internationally acclaimed Hong Kong tenor. OHK has elevated opera in the Asia's world city, with many world-class productions covering all major works in the operatic canon and has collaborated with opera houses and festivals including Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Taormina Opera Festival, Theater Erfurt, Opéra de Nice, National Centre for the Performing Arts and Shanghai Opera House.

In 2019, OHK was selected by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council as one of the three recipients of the coveted "Eminent Arts Group Scheme". The Scheme's consecutive 5-year funding has become a boost to further the company's development.

OHK is committed to promoting the city's brightest, young opera singers. In 2015, OHK launched the Jockey Club Opera Hong Kong Young Artist Development and Education Programme (the Programme), a three-year opera training programme designed to nurture ten young local artists. The success of the Programme led to its renewal by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust for another three years from 2019 to 2022, providing intensive training to 12 local artists.

OHK also places a strong emphasis on its education and community activities. Opera school tours, summer schools and master classes are held regularly to reach young audiences. The music centre in Wanchai provides a wide range of courses for early age children to adult in addition to Children Chorus classes. The OHK Chorus and the OHK Children Chorus were established in 2004 and 2008 respectively and are becoming recognised contributors on the local choral scene.

The recent development of the Greater Bay Area has created an environment for OHK to initiate more collaborations and bring the art of opera to a wider audience.

Official website: www.operahongkong.org

Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/OperaHongKongLimited

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