



MASTEROICES PRESENTS *CARMEN* IN BIZET'S ORIGINAL OPÉRA COMIQUE VERSION
USING ACCLAIMED ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRANSLATION BY SHELDON HARNICK
OCTOBER 25, ROSE THEATER AT JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Conducted by Ted Sperling, Directed by Sammi Cannold, and Choreographed by Gustavo Zajac,
Performance will feature singers Ginger Costa-Jackson, Terrence Chin-Loy,
Mikaela Bennett, and John Brancy, with Orchestra of St. Luke's



New York, NY, September 19, 2022 – MasterVoices begins its 2022-23 season on **October 25** at the **Rose Theater at Jazz at Lincoln Center** with **Ted Sperling** leading a staged performance of **Bizet's Carmen** in its original Opéra Comique version, with dialogue rather than recitative, sung in an English translation by legendary Broadway lyricist **Sheldon Harnick**. The MasterVoices performance, suspended in March 2020 due to the pandemic, will mark the **New York premiere** of Harnick's full translation. His translation of *Carmen* was commissioned and premiered by the Houston Grand Opera in 1981 and served as the English text for Peter Brook's ingenious 90-minute *La tragédie de Carmen* which was performed at the Vivian Beaumont Theater in New York in 1984.

Joining the 120-member **MasterVoices** chorus and **Orchestra of St. Luke's** is mezzo soprano **Ginger Costa-Jackson**, "a singer, stylist and actress of tremendous gifts" (*Opera Today*), as Carmen. **Terrence Chin-Loy**, who possesses "a beautiful lyric tenor voice," (*Opera News*) is Don José. MasterVoices favorite, rising soprano **Mikaela Bennett**, who was featured in the chorus' *A Joyful Noise* concert last December at Carnegie Hall, sings the role of Micaëla; and baritone **John Brancy**, featured in MasterVoices' theatrical song cycle *Myths and Hymns*, which is **nominated for a 2022 New York Emmy Award**, appears as Escamillo. **Sammi Cannold**, recently recognized in *Forbes* Magazine's "30 Under 30 in Hollywood & Entertainment," directs, and the choreographer is **Gustavo Zajac**, who staged the dances for MasterVoices' 2015 *The Pirates of Penzance*.

On her approach to the project Ms. Cannold expressed: "I'm exceptionally excited to be bringing *Carmen* to life with MasterVoices and under Ted Sperling's tremendous leadership. This production aims to explore Carmen's relationship to freedom, manipulation, and liberation in service of probing at what power meant for

women in 19th century Europe and more importantly, how we view that power now. Ted and I are so fortunate to be joined by such phenomenal performers as well as our choreographer Gustavo Zajac, whose work in the piece will revolve around bringing the above narrative to life through lyrical and flamenco dance."

Maestro Sperling says, "At MasterVoices, we enjoy performing in many genres, with a long tradition of blurring the line between opera and musical theater. *Carmen* was originally a piece of music theater, and only later became the grand opera we are most familiar with. I'm excited to perform it as originally conceived, and also to be presenting it in a sleek, modern dress production, with the orchestra visible, so that the audience can enjoy the intricacies of the orchestration. The intimate Rose Theater at Jazz at Lincoln Center is an ideal place to present the piece this way: the cast will practically be in the audience's lap! We will be making judicious edits in both score and dialogue, preserving the riches of the music while keeping the plot moving forward with great momentum under Sammi Cannold's direction."

Tuesday, October 25, 2022, 8:00 pm

Rose Theater at Jazz at Lincoln Center

Carmen

Music by Georges Bizet, libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, English Translation by Sheldon Harnick

MasterVoices

Orchestra of St. Luke's

Conducted by **Ted Sperling**

Directed by **Sammi Cannold**

Choreography by **Gustavo Zajac**

Scenic design by **Ann Beyersdorfer**

Costume design by **Nicole Slaven**

Lighting design by **Brian Tovar**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CARMEN **Ginger Costa-Jackson** (mezzo soprano)

DON JOSÉ **Terrence Chin-Loy** (tenor)

MICAËLA **Mikaela Bennett** (soprano)

ESCAMILLO **John Brancy** (baritone)

FRASQUITA **Nicole Fernandez-Coffaro** (soprano)

MERCEDES **Kimberly Sogioka** (mezzo soprano)

REMENDADO **Zhengyi Bai** (tenor)

DANCAIRO & MORALES **Michael Kelly** (baritone)

ZUNIGA **Leo Radosavljevic** (bass)

DANCERS: Camila Cardona, Laura Peralta, and Isaac Tovar

Tickets, priced from \$30 to \$175, may be purchased online at jazz.org, at the Jazz at Lincoln Center box office, Broadway at 60th Street, or by calling 212-721-6500. Ticket holders will need to comply with the venue's health and safety requirements, which can be found [here](#).

More About *Carmen*

Tchaikovsky once predicted that Bizet's *Carmen* would be one of the best-known operas of all time. This of course has proven to be true, yet it would have been a surprise to Bizet, who died three months after the

opera's premiere at the Opéra Comique in Paris in 1875, believing his greatest work to be a failure. The Metropolitan Opera alone has performed it more than a thousand times. It has been adapted and modernized as a Broadway show, *Carmen Jones*, with an entirely Black cast, set during World War II, and as *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*, starring Beyoncé. In addition to hearing Harnick's translation, this performance of *Carmen* will showcase the work as it was performed at Paris's Opéra Comique in 1875, with spoken dialogue, rather than the sung recitative which was composed by Ernest Guiraud after Bizet's death.

Following the success of his one act opera, *Djamileh*, the directors of the Opéra Comique commissioned 33-year-old Georges Bizet to write a full-length opera. They paired him with the experienced librettists Henri Meilhac who wrote the dialogue and Ludovic Halévy who wrote the lyrics. Bizet suggested adapting the novel *Carmen* by Prosper Mérimée. But the Opéra was a family-oriented institution and *Carmen* was the story of a hardened brigand, Don José, and his tumultuous affair with a smuggler and sexual temptress. The story was softened somewhat and Don José was changed from a menacing outlaw to a naïve young soldier. A new character was introduced, the dutiful and virtuous young Micaëla, who loves Don José and keeps him connected with his elderly mother.

Despite these concessions, the opera had a difficult path to its first night. The orchestra called some of the music unplayable. One critic wrote that the music "could not redeem the shame of such a subject, the like of which has never in two centuries dishonored a stage dedicated to the delicate pleasures and sentiments of polite society." The chorus had equal difficulty, especially with the unusual demands made on them to act while singing, for instance in the brawl that erupts between two factions of cigarette factory girls in the first act. And the management kept pressing Bizet to dilute the savage nature of the work, and even to eliminate Carmen's murder at the end. However, the lead singers strongly supported Bizet, and the work was by and large left in its original form.

The day before he died, Bizet had agreed to create a version of *Carmen* for the Vienna Opera that would substitute sung recitative for the spoken dialogue, so that it could be presented in the form of a grand opera. The task to fulfill this commission fell to his friend Ernest Guiraud, who wrote the recitative commonly heard today. In the process, some of the subtleties of the plot were inevitably lost. Other changes were also made to the score, including the addition of a ballet based on music drawn from Bizet's *Jolie Fille de Perth* and incidental music he had written for the play *L'Arlesienne*. In this grand opera version, *Carmen* began its astonishing rise in popularity.

Because of the prominence of the Vienna Opera version, and because Bizet died before he could work on a score for publication, no definitive form of the opera exists. MasterVoices has chosen to return to the opera's roots at the Opéra Comique, presenting the work with its original dialogue, and in English for greater immediacy.

Sheldon Harnick, with his late partner, composer Jerry Bock, created some of the most beloved musicals of the 20th century, including *Fiorello!* (1959), *She Loves Me* (1963), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), *The Apple Tree* (1966) and *The Rothschilds* (1970). In addition to *Carmen*, Harnick has provided English-language librettos for numerous classical operas and oratorios, including works by Stravinsky, Ravel, Mozart, Bach and Verdi. His version of Lehár's *The Merry Widow* (1977) was premiered by the San Diego Opera starring Beverly Sills (a subsequent album won the 1979 Grammy Award for best new opera recording). His translations of several Yiddish songs were featured in the Los Angeles and New York productions of Joshua Sobol's play *Ghetto* in 1986 and he collaborated on the English libretto for the Broadway production of the Dutch musical *Cyrano* in 1993. National Yiddish Theatre Folksbienne will present a

revival of its award-winning production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in Harnick's Yiddish translation for seven weeks only, November 12, 2022-January 1, 2023 at New World Stages in New York.

About MasterVoices

MasterVoices (formerly The Collegiate Chorale) was founded in 1941 by legendary American choral conductor Robert Shaw. Under the artistic direction of Tony Award winner Ted Sperling since 2013, the group is known for its versatility and a repertoire that ranges from choral masterpieces and operas in concert to operettas and musical theater. Season concerts feature a volunteer chorus of 100+ members from all walks of life, alongside a diverse roster of world-class soloists from across the musical spectrum, including Julia Bullock, Dove Cameron, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Renée Fleming, John Holiday, Jennifer Holliday, Norm Lewis, Victoria Clark, and Kelli O'Hara. Under Sperling's direction the group has created cross-disciplinary collaborations with such diverse creative minds as *Vogue* Editor-at-Large Hamish Bowles, fashion designer Zac Posen, Silk Road visual artist Kevork Mourad, illustrator Manik Choksi, stage designer Doug Fitch, and choreographers Doug Varone and Andrew Palermo. Roger Rees was the group's Artistic Associate from 2003–2015, and in 2021 the group received a New York Emmy Award nomination and a Drama League Award nomination for its multi-genre digital concert production, *Myths and Hymns*.

Known for its presentation of lesser-known artistic treasures such as Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, and Tchaikovsky's *Maid of Orleans*, the group has received recent accolades for productions of rarely-heard works such as the 2018-19 season's *Lady in the Dark* by Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin, Victor Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*, the Gershwins' *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, and Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents's *Anyone Can Whistle*. They also commission and premiere new works; recent examples include choral works by Ricky Ian Gordon, Marisa Michelson, Tariq Al-Sabir, and Randall Eng.

As one of the country's first interracial and interfaith choruses, MasterVoices (as The Collegiate Chorale) performed at the opening of the United Nations and has sung and recorded under the batons of esteemed conductors including Serge Koussevitzky, Arturo Toscanini, and Leonard Bernstein, among others. It has been engaged by top-tier orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Israel Philharmonic, and has appeared at the Verbier and Salzburg Festivals.

For more information, visit mastervoices.org. Connect with MasterVoices on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) (@mastervoicesny).

About Ted Sperling

One of today's leading musical artists, Tony Award-winning Maestro Ted Sperling is a classically trained musician whose career has spanned from the concert hall and the opera house to the Broadway stage. Presently Artistic Director of MasterVoices, he has led such symphony orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Boston Pops, San Diego Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, the Iceland Symphony, Czech National Symphony, and BBC Concert Orchestra, as well as New York City Opera and Houston Grand Opera. Formerly Principal Conductor of the Westchester Philharmonic, Mr. Sperling is a multi-faceted artist also known for his work as orchestrator, singer, pianist, violinist, violist, director, and music director.

With MasterVoices, Maestro Sperling has led acclaimed productions of rarely-heard gems as both director and conductor. These include Kurt Weill's *The Firebrand of Florence*, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, *The Road of Promise* (based on *The Eternal Road* and subsequently recorded on Navona Records), and the 2018-19 season's sold-out three-performance run of *Lady in the Dark* at New York City Center. Other notable

productions with the group include Carnegie Hall performances of Stephen Sondheim's *Anyone Can Whistle*, George and Ira Gershwin's satirical musicals *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, a reconstruction of Victor Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*, and *Song of Norway*; the New York City premieres of David Lang's *battle hymns* at the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum; and Ricky Ian Gordon's operas *The Grapes of Wrath* at Carnegie Hall and *27* at New York City Center.

During the pandemic season of 2020-2021, Maestro Sperling spearheaded a filmed production of Adam Guettel's *Myths and Hymns* for MasterVoices, producing and music directing 24 short musical films and directing roughly half of them. This project was nominated for a Drama League Award, and featured over 100 artists collaborating remotely, including Renée Fleming, Take 6, Jennifer Holliday and Julia Bullock. Now that live performances are back, Maestro Sperling is supervising national and international productions of *My Fair Lady*, *The King and I*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. He has symphonic engagements in the U.S. and Europe and continues to teach at NYU, conducting three different orchestras and training the next generation of Broadway musicians and conductors.

Sperling has conducted multiple concerts for PBS's *Live From Lincoln Center*, the American Songbook Series at Lincoln Center, and the *Lyrics and Lyricists* series at the 92nd Street Y. He conducted Audra McDonald in a double bill of *La Voix Humaine* and the world premiere of *Send: Who Are You? I Love You?* at the Houston Grand Opera. He won the 2005 Tony and Drama Desk Awards for his orchestrations of Adam Guettel's *The Light in the Piazza*, for which he was also Music Director.

In addition to his directing work with MasterVoices, Mr. Sperling's work as a stage director includes the world premieres of four critically acclaimed original musicals Off-Broadway—including *The Other Josh Cohen* and *See What I Wanna See*—and a noted production of *Lady in the Dark* at the Prince Theater in Philadelphia, starring Andrea Marcovicci. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Yale University, and received the Faculty Prize at The Juilliard School. He made his Broadway stage debut as Wallace Hartley in *Titanic* and appeared as Steve Allen in the finale of Season Two of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel."

Images from left to right: Ginger Costa-Jackson, Terrence Chin-Loy, Mikaela Bennett, and John Brancy, courtesy of MasterVoices

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