



FESTIVAL
OPERA

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**FESTIVAL OPERA 2007 SEASON TO INCLUDE
WEST COAST PREMIERE OF *OUR TOWN* BY NED ROREM**

Carmen by Georges Bizet
July 7, 10, 13 and 15, 2007

Our Town by Ned Rorem
August 11, 14, 17 and 19, 2007

Walnut Creek, CA – Festival Opera’s 2007 season will feature the West Coast premiere of *Our Town* by noted American composer Ned Rorem, based on the classic drama by Thornton Wilder. Rorem, acclaimed for his vocal music and art songs, worked with poet/librettist J.D. McClatchy on this project. Festival Opera was one of five co-commissioning companies for this work, which made its debut in February at Indiana University Opera Theater. Artistic and music director **Michael Morgan** will conduct the production of *Our Town*, which will be directed by **Beth Greenberg**. The company’s season will open in July with perennial opera favorite *Carmen*, by Georges Bizet, directed by **Heather Carolo** and conducted by **Bryan Nies**. Performances will be at the Dean Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek.

“We were very excited by the invitation to co-commission *Our Town*,” said Helen Sheaff, executive director for Festival Opera. “Based on one of the most widely-performed American plays, we believe the opera will appeal to a broad range of audiences and that Festival Opera is the ideally-sized company to present it. Combined with *Carmen*, one of the world’s best-known operas, our 2007 season offers a wonderful blend of operatic old and new.”

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Festival Opera's season opens with Bizet's *Carmen* on July 7, 2007. Written in 1875 and filled with familiar melodies, the opera follows the tumultuous story of the alluring Spanish gypsy Carmen as she first inspires the passion of the young soldier Don José, then provokes his jealous rage by transferring her favors to the brash toreador Escamillo. Director **Heather Carolo** returns to Festival Opera, where her work as assistant director last season was instrumental in bringing artistic director Michael Morgan's vision of *Don Giovanni* to life. A full-time faculty member of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's opera and musical theater program, Carolo has staged dozens of productions for San Francisco Lyric Opera and throughout the Bay Area. *Carmen* will be conducted by **Bryan Nies**, who made his debut with Festival Opera in 2001 as assistant conductor. He has since returned in that capacity multiple times, most recently for *Don Giovanni*. Nies is the resident conductor of the Oakland Youth Orchestra and holds the Bruno Walter Assistant Conductor Chair with the Oakland East Bay Symphony. Set designs for *Carmen* are by **Peter Crompton** in co-production with Tacoma Opera.

The West Coast premiere of *Our Town* opens August 11, 2007. Based on the quintessential American play by Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* provides a snapshot of small-town life. In viewing the simple lives of the townspeople, the audience witnesses the growing love between a boy and his girl-next-door. Their life doesn't turn out as hoped, and George and Emily's story eventually speaks to the value of treasuring daily life with those we love. The play's remarkable ability to emotionally connect the audience to each character has been preserved in an intimate, accessible chamber opera. Composer **Ned Rorem** is particularly well known for his vocal works and has been called by *Time Magazine* "the world's best composer of art songs." His works for the voice are only a portion of his extensive compositions, which include the 1976 Pulitzer Prize-winning orchestral suite *Air Music*. Librettist **J.D. McClatchy** is a distinguished American poet and long-time Thornton Wilder scholar. Author of five poetry collections and numerous literary essays, he is gaining prominence as a librettist for American opera, including

Tobias Picker's *Emmeline* for Santa Fe Opera, and Saylor's *Orpheus Descending* for Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Our Town is Festival Opera's first premiere but not its first venture into American opera. Earlier productions included a highly acclaimed 2002 production of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* in 2005. *Our Town* will be conducted by Festival Opera's artistic and music director **Michael Morgan** and directed by **Beth Greenberg**. Greenberg returns to Festival Opera after stepping in as stage director during the last week of rehearsals for *Tosca* last season. She is particularly well qualified to stage *Our Town*, given her extensive experience with New York City Opera, as well as her work in the development of new operas, including *Before the Night Falls* by Jorge Martin and *The Rat Land* by Gordon Beeferman. Production design will be by **Matthew Antaky** in his third full production for Festival Opera, following *Candide* and *Don Giovanni*.

Festival Opera's artistic and music director **Michael Morgan** will conduct the premiere of *Our Town*, following his acclaimed opera staging debut in last season's *Don Giovanni*. Morgan served as assistant conductor of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin. He made his operatic debut in 1982 at the Vienna State Opera and became assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1986. Now in his sixteenth year as music director of the Oakland East Bay Symphony, Morgan also serves as artistic director of the Oakland Youth Orchestra, music director of the Sacramento Philharmonic, makes guest conducting appearances throughout the United States, and is on the board of the American Symphony Orchestra League. He is very involved in schools throughout the Bay Area and nationally, and is widely regarded as an expert on the importance of arts education and minority access to the arts.

Festival Opera is the third largest opera company in the San Francisco Bay Area. Founded in 1991, it is considered a showcase for young American singers, directors and conductors. For more information about the company and its productions, visit the Festival Opera website at www.festivalopera.com.

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