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MUST-SEE, ALL-STAR CAST HEADLINES COC'S BLOCKBUSTER *CARMEN*

Toronto – Two dazzling mezzo-sopranos take centre stage in the **Canadian Opera Company's** *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. The wildly popular opera draws audiences into a high-stakes game between soldiers, smugglers, and a superstar bullfighter, all vying for the attention of fiercely independent Carmen. Two-time Grammy Award-winner **J'Nai Bridges** makes her COC debut, sharing the title role with Metropolitan Opera regular and **COC Ensemble Studio** alumna **Rihab Chaieb**. *Carmen* runs for eight performances at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts** on **October 14, 16, 20, 22, 26, 28, 30, and November 4, 2022**.

American mezzo-soprano **J'Nai Bridges** is a "rising star" (*Los Angeles Times*) who says she greatly admires the opera's fiery lead character. "She's just brutally honest, and she's the freest character in all of opera," **Bridges** shared with the *Classical Review*. Tunisian-Canadian mezzo-soprano **Rihab Chaieb** sees plenty of nuance in Carmen's bold persona, saying, "She's in charge, she takes the space, and goes to get what she wants...[but] we can't forget she can also be a dreamer and enjoy moments of tenderness" (*La Scena Musicale*).

Argentine tenor **Marcelo Puente** (last seen in the COC's 2017 *Tosca*) returns to Toronto as Carmen's hot-tempered love interest Don José, while Juno-nominated Lebanese-Canadian soprano **Joyce El-Khoury** shares the role of sweet Micaëla with **Anna-Sophie Neher**, an **Ensemble Studio** alumna whose performance as Pamina in the COC's *The Magic Flute* (2022) recently earned her a Dora Mavor Moore Award nomination.

American Grammy Award-winning baritone **Lucas Meachem** shares the role of Escamillo, bringing his "commanding presence" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) to the charismatic matador, alongside Canadian baritone **Gregory Dahl** who was last featured on the COC stage in the 2018 world premiere of *Hadrian*. French Canadian bass **Alain Coulombe** and Canadian tenor **Jean-Philippe Lazure** sing the roles of Lieutenant Zuniga and Le Remendado, a local smuggler. And a number of current **Ensemble Studio** artists round out the cast: bass-baritone **Alex Halliday** as Morales, soprano **Ariane Cossette** as Frasquita, mezzo-soprano **Alex Hetherington** as Mercedes, and baritone **Jonah Spungin** as Le Dancaïre.

Carmen's hit-parade of recognizable music includes the explosive overture, sultry "Habanera," and swaggering "Toreador Song," all of which have been featured in countless places ranging from Disney Pixar's *Up!* to the 2018 musical biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Canadian conductor **Jacques Lacombe** leads the **COC Orchestra**, alongside the **COC Chorus** led by **Price Family Chorus Master Sandra Horst**.

Joel Ivany of Edmonton Opera and Against the Grain Theatre returns to the COC to put his unique directorial stamp on the sun-drenched production, while lighting from Toronto-based **Jason Hand**, combined with original set and costume designs from **Michael Yeargan** and **François St-Aubin**, whisks audiences away to bustling street scenes and danger-laced outlaw hideaways.

Carmen is sung in French and presented by the COC with English SURTITLES™.

Cast and Creative Team

Carmen	J'Nai Bridges Rihab Chaieb (Oct. 20, 22)
Don José	Marcelo Puente

Micaëla	Joyce El-Khoury Anna-Sophie Neher (Oct. 28, 30, Nov. 4)
Escamillo	Lucas Meachem Gregory Dahl (Oct. 30, Nov. 4)
Zuniga	Alain Coulombe
Morales	Alex Halliday
Frasquita	Ariane Cossette
Mercedes	Alex Hetherington
Le Dancaire	Jonah Spungin
Le Remendado	Jean-Philippe Lazure

Conductor	Jacques Lacombe
Director	Joel Ivany
Original Set Designer	Michael Yeagan
Original Costume Designer	François St-Aubin
Lighting Designer	Jason Hand
Intimacy Coordinator	Siobhan Richardson
Price Family Chorus Master	Sandra Horst

With the COC Orchestra and COC Chorus

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Carmen* range from **\$35 – \$250 for adults**, with Grand Ring seats available at **\$290 and \$350**, and **\$22 tickets available for guests between the ages of 16 and 29** through the COC’s **Opera Under 30** program. Tickets can be purchased online at coc.ca or by calling the Four Seasons Centre Box Office at **416-363-8231**. For more information on booking **student groups, standing room, and rush tickets**, as well as other specially priced tickets available to **young people under the age of 15**, please visit coc.ca.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The **COC Orchestra** is generously sponsored, in part, by:

Bruce C. Bailey, in honour of Christie Darville, COC Deputy General Director, and Johannes Debus, COC Music Director

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ABOUT THE CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. General Director Perryn Leech joined the company in 2021, forming a leadership team with Music Director Johannes Debus and Deputy General Director Christie Darville. The COC enjoys a loyal audience, including a dedicated base of subscribers, and has an international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation. Its diverse repertoire includes new commissions and productions, local and international collaborations with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracts the world’s foremost Canadian and international artists. The company is an incubator for the future of the art form, nurturing Canada’s new wave of opera performers and creators with customized training and support. The COC’s purpose-built opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, is hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world. For more information, visit coc.ca.

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