

Arts

Artifacts

They don't look a day over 49

Santa Maria's Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts, or PCPA, has recently announced its 50th season.

The 2013-2014 season kicks off Nov. 7 with the delightful *Mary Poppins*, a show that needs no introduction. The same goes for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which opens Feb. 13 after a break for the holidays.

Also opening in February is the brilliant and daring *Spring Awakening*, a rock musical based on the turn-of-the-century expressionist drama by German playwright Frank Wedekind. The musical version's book and lyrics were written by Steven Sater, with music by Duncan Sheik. In its time, Wedekind's original was frequently banned or censored due to its critical portrayal of sexual repression in late-19th century Europe and stark depictions of pubescent sexuality, homosexuality, rape, child abuse, and abortion.

The 2006 Broadway adaptation gave the play the rock 'n' roll treatment, and this suits it absurdly well: songs like "The Bitch of Living" and "Totally Fucked" feel well-suited to give voice to the angst of teen boys, and contrast strikingly with somber numbers like "The Word of Your Body" and "The Guilty Ones." *Spring Awakening* opens Feb. 27, 2014.

Starting April 24, catch Michael Frayn's hilarious *Noises Off*, a backstage farce centered on a troupe of amateur actors putting on a terrible comedy called *Nothing On*.

June and July bring us back into family musical territory, with *Forever Plaid* (opening June 14) and *Oklahoma!* (opening July 16)

On July 31 is the exciting world premiere of José Cruz González's *The San Patricios*. The writer of *The Heart's Desire* and *Inverno* presents an 1840s political drama about the "war-inside-the-war" between the U.S. and Mexico. "[I]mmigrant and native, Catholic and Protestant, officer and an enlisted collide as we rediscover the personal stories submerged in a conflict where Manifest Destiny met Conscientious Objection," the play's synopsis reads.

Lastly, Naomi Iizuka's *36 Views* opens Sept. 11, 2014. Centered upon two characters who may have discovered an ancient Japanese manuscript, *36 Views* reveals "an exotic game of greed, sensuality and shifting perceptions," according to the play's synopsis.

"Interweaving western and eastern artistic traditions, this play explores the sometimes tense relationship between restored original and replicated artifact, intension and word, expected and actual."

Single tickets go on sale Oct. 11. For more information, visit pcpa.org.

—Anna Weltner

BY ANNA WELTNER

Opera of the people

A local production of *Carmen* represents an enormous collaboration of local artists

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANIEL KEPL

THE GYPSY

Karin Mushegain, pictured, sings the titular role in *Carmen*, a collaborative production directed by Ross Halper.

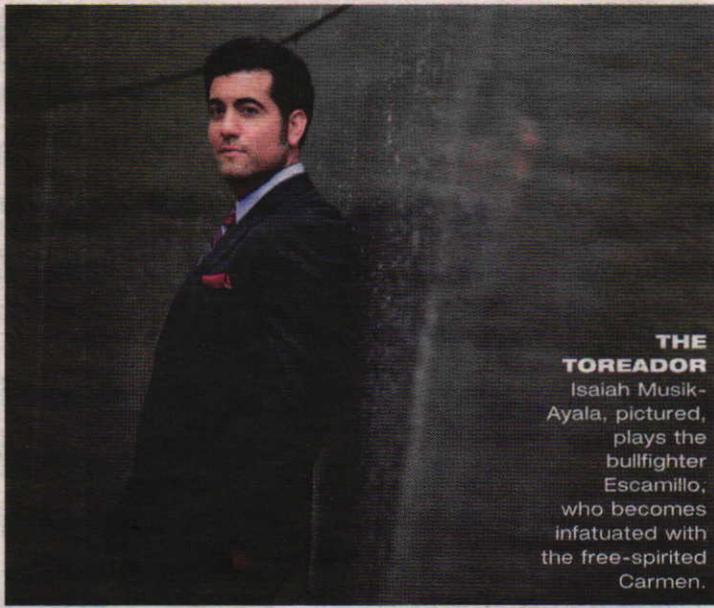


As is the case of many iconic French things, Georges Bizet's *Carmen* was reviled by Parisians upon its 1875 premiere. The *opera-comique*, after all, was for tales of gods and royalty, not prostitutes and bullfighters. The world of *Carmen* was one of seedy taverns and factories, of smugglers and urchins. Its tale of crime, seduction, and ultimately, the onstage murder of its titular character brought the medium from its heavenly heights, bidding it instead to follow the lowly wanderers of the earth.

Bizet died during *Carmen*'s first run, and never saw the opera become the internationally celebrated work it is today. From a contemporary standpoint, it is laughable to imagine *Carmen* as a work of gritty realism. *Carmen* today looks like sheer opulence, a masterpiece of heightened reality and stylized drama.

An upcoming local production of Bizet's opera, in fact, is the result of the collaboration of a wide range of artists and organizations. Opera SLO, the SLO Symphony, the Civic Ballet, the Central Coast Children's Choir, and the Cuesta College Concert Choir will bring Bizet's vision to life on Oct. 12 and 13. Staged at the Cal Poly Performing Arts Center, the production is directed by Ross Halper and conducted by Brian Asher Alhadeff.

The productions stars Karin Mushegain as the



THE TOREADOR

Isaiah Musik-Ayala, pictured, plays the bullfighter Escamillo, who becomes infatuated with the free-spirited Carmen.

fiery gypsy Carmen, who stirs up both infatuation and jealousy in the hearts of the soldier Don José, sung by Christopher Campbell, and the toreador Escamillo, sung by Isaiah Musik-Ayala. Director Halper's version seems to emphasize the passion and earthy sensuality of the story.

"You want to touch a woman any chance you get," Halper reminded singer Gabriel Vamvulescu, who plays Zuniga, at a recent rehearsal.

A tavern scene in the second act is loose and bawdy, the gypsies taunting the drunken men. A gypsy dance, choreographed by Civic Ballet Artistic Director Drew Silvaggio and featuring nine of the company's dancers, conveys both the scene's late-night mood and the competitive nature of the women, who vie for the men's attention—and their money.

"This is like the aftermath of the first wave of the party," said Silvaggio of the gypsy dance. "So people are a little tipsy, people are a little tired." Under Halper's direction, he went on, the scene "seems like it's all about the sexual tension and kind of rubbing up against each other and sweating a little bit. And that scene comes as a second wind to the party, so that it starts out kind of solemn, and kind of builds and builds to the point where everyone is jumping up and dancing once again."

Such proletarian scenes led to the controversial nature of the opera at the time of its premiere. Today, the opera is widely recognized as marking a transition from the *opera-comique* to *verisimo* traditions, as conductor Alhadeff, artistic and general director of Opera SLO, explained.

"One of the reasons Georges Bizet's opera had a tough start was it was the beginning of a new kind of opera," he said, as singers Campbell, Vamvulescu, and Karen Dunn (who plays Mercedes) rehearsed in the adjoining room. "And we call that *verisimo* opera. It stems from the Roman times in sculpture, where *verisimo* in sculpture was, you would see the sculpture of a head and it would have a wart, and the creases of the face and the furrows of a brow, and it was the artist trying to capture the real person ... The statue of David is totally chiseled and smooth, the essence of a man, whereas *verisimo* does the opposite, there's a lot of *verisimo* sculptures from Roman times of old people, handicapped, old women, young children.

"Fast forward to 1875, and the movement in *verisimo* is to have operas that are about real people, about real settings," Alhadeff continued. "It was an opera that was aimed at contemporary problems."

Silvaggio and his dancers first collaborated