

CARMEN'S MUSICAL MAKEOVER

Amaya's Flamenco Traditions Carried On

DM Sometimes even the world's most famous Spanish seductress needs a makeover. *Carmen*, the tale of a beautiful gypsy's doomed romances, has been one of the world's most performed operas since its debut in 1875. This month, director Franco Dragone, choreographer Sarah Miles, and flamenco dance royalty Omayra Amaya collaborate to take the tale of love and betrayal from opera house to contemporary dance stage in their new *Carmen*.

Dragone's mark on the theatrical world is unmistakable. The creative vision behind Cirque du Soleil's *Mystère* and *O* in Las Vegas, this Belgian director's work is full of lithe bodies that hurl through the air in acrobatic feats, leaving audiences breathless. For *Carmen*, he has traded the cavernous stages of Sin City for the intimate quarters of the acclaimed La Jolla Playhouse near San Diego, where the show runs June 5–July 22.

Carmen is the passionate story of love and loss from the perspective of an enraptured Spanish soldier. The production has a cast of 18. Grandniece of the great Carmen Amaya, Omayra says, "This production gives us the chance to use flamenco in a new way to tell a tale that is set in the south of Spain, flamenco's home." In his reinterpretation, Dragone has not abandoned his style of blending elements from diverse artistic disciplines. "I want to make a

performance that pushes the dancing, singing, and acting to the highest levels," he says. As Dragone's chief choreographer, Miles will combine modern dance, ballet, and athletic movement to achieve this artistic vision. Miles, who trained at The Royal Ballet School and performed with the Paris Opera Ballet, has choreographed for film, television, and Broadway—including *Victor/Victoria* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

Miles is working with Amaya, who is known for a modern take on flamenco that incorporates elements of jazz and ballet. "Carmen Amaya was known for taking risks in flamenco," Omayra says of her world famous relative. "In this way, working on a project that mixes flamenco with other dance styles continues her legacy."

This new *Carmen* will not use Bizet's original operatic score. Dragone admits that for the most part, he did not like the original opera, finding it "too simplistic." Instead, he is using a new score by the European songwriter Jon Ewbanks.

But why make another version of *Carmen* now? Miles says that the story is not just about love, but touches on themes of war and the obsession to destroy what one cannot change. Dragone wants to present *Carmen* in a way no one has seen before, "with dance that will make the audience's eyes pop." The story, he says, "is not just about a gypsy's passion, but about human love, life, and death."

—Richa Gulati



Omayra Amaya

Sarah Silver, Courtesy Omayra Amaya

COMINGS AND GOINGS

ADAM SKLUTE has been appointed the new artistic director of Ballet West. Currently associate artistic director of the Joffrey Ballet, he also danced with the Joffrey for 11 years. ■ **AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE** has promoted **CRAIG SALSTEIN** to soloist. ■ **MICHELLE AUDET** has been named the executive director of Dance New Amsterdam. Audet has been the director of development and special projects at Ballet Hispanico. ■ **HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO** welcomes **JASON PALMQUIST** as executive director. He was previously the executive director of Washington Ballet.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

NEW YORK CITY CENTER has launched a campaign to establish a \$10 million endowment fund for the Fall for Dance Festival. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has given \$3.5 million in support. **HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO** also received a two-year \$200,000 grant from Mellon. ■ **LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO** won the London Theater Managers Award for best visiting company last October, and the London Critics' Circle National Dance Award for outstanding classical repertoire in January. ■ In February, **CARLOS ACOSTA** won a Laurence Olivier Award for outstanding achievement in dance for his performances at Sadler's Wells. **THE ROYAL BALLET'S CHROMA** by Wayne McGregor at the Royal Opera House won best new dance production. ■ **Dance Advance in Philadelphia** announced \$693,000 to 27 grantees for the 2007-2008 season, including **BALLET X**, **DANCEFUSION**, **ELEONE DANCE THEATRE**, **FLAMENCO OLÉ**, **HEADLONG DANCE THEATRE**, **JEANNE RUDDY DANCE**, **KORESH DANCE COMPANY**, **LEAH STEIN DANCE COMPANY**, **NICHOLE CANUSO DANCE COMPANY**, **PAINTED BRIDE ART CENTER**, **PHILADANCO**, and **SUSAN HESS MODERN DANCE**. ■ **Legendary tapper BUNNY BRIGGS** received the Tap Dance Hall of Fame award last February.