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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
& OPERA NEW JERSEY PRESENT
BIZET'S CARMEN
OPERA SUPERSTAR DENYCE GRAVES
PERFORMS TITLE ROLE
NJ PAC PARTNERS ON NEWARK PERFORMANCE
FRI., FEB. 5 IN PRINCETON
SUN., FEB. 7 IN NEW BRUNSWICK
FRI., FEB. 12 IN NEWARK**

Newark, NJ—Continuing a partnership that thrilled New Jersey audiences last summer, Opera New Jersey and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra present *Carmen*, Bizet's immortal opera of passion, jealousy and murder, in three venues across the state. The New Jersey Performing Arts Center partners with the two organizations to present the Newark performance.

Internationally renowned mezzo-soprano **Denyce Graves** will perform the opera's iconic title role. Metropolitan Opera veteran Richard Leech performs the role of Don José, and Luis Ledesma performs that of Escamillo, the dashing toreador. Joseph Rescigno conducts. The performance will be sung in French with English supertitles.

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Maestro Rescigno says he is always excited to make the well-known work feel fresh. “The ongoing challenge for a conductor—especially one who has conducted this work repeatedly—is to cut through its great audience familiarity and rediscover the magic that caused this opera to become, and remain, the most popular in the French repertoire. Very carefully, I try to strip my mind of the many performances I’ve conducted and recordings I’ve heard, and cultivate a personal connection to the printed page.

“Especially in *Carmen*, the opera’s rhythms are life’s rhythms, and the conductor must have a total command of pacing to bring this opera to life,” he says.

Performances take place on Friday, February 5, (7:30 p.m.) at the Matthews Theatre Auditorium at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, Sunday, February 7, (3 p.m.) at the State Theatre in New Brunswick and Friday, February 12 (8 p.m.) at NJPAC in Newark. Tickets range in price from \$25 to \$125 in Princeton and from \$25 to \$109 in New Brunswick and Newark.

Tickets for all performances are available for purchase from the NJSO Box Office by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or online at www.njsymphony.org. Tickets for the NJPAC engagement may also be purchased through the NJPAC Box Office by phone at 1.888.GO.NJPAC (466.5722), online at www.njpac.org or in person at 1 Center Street in Newark.

About the Music

Panned by several critics at its opening run in Paris in 1875, *Carmen*’s popularity launched after an acclaimed Viennese production later that year. The fiery opera has since become one of the most widely performed operas in the world.

The music is as zealous as its story, which chronicles the titular character—a beautiful gypsy—and her romances with the soldier Don José and toreador Escamillo. The tale of passion, jealousy and murder inspired some of Bizet’s most daring work; he brings to the French opera a distinctly exotic musical palette.

Carmen features some of opera’s most famous compositions, including the title character’s Act I Habañera aria, a lilting tease of Latin rhythms and a chromatic vocal line based on the melody of a Spanish song. Escamillo sings the bold Toreador Song as he flirts with Carmen early in Act II.

Of interpreting the music of this operatic masterpiece, Rescigno says: “I lead the chorus of cigarette girls in Act I more slowly than it’s often done nowadays. This tempo is more in line with Bizet’s original

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indications. It very clearly emphasizes the sensuality of these women. The Act II quintet, on the other hand, is like a symphonic 'scherzo and trio,' and profits from brisk pacing, with only a slight relaxation in tempo in the middle section.

“In the climactic duet in Act IV, one must pay attention to the many tempo changes that mirror the growing instability of Don José. The development of their love-hate relationship transforms *Carmen* from comedy to tragedy, from *opéra comique* to what some consider the first *verismo* opera.”

About the Artists

Joseph Rescigno has served 28 years as artistic advisor and principal conductor of the Florentine Opera Company in Milwaukee, where he will conduct the world premiere of Don Davis's *Río de Sangre* in 2010. In addition, he has conducted symphonies, concertos, operas and oratorios, from Bach through contemporary works, in the Americas, Asia and Europe. Rescigno has made six recordings, and he is working on his first book.

A frequent guest conductor, Rescigno has conducted some 50 opera companies and symphony orchestras throughout the world, among them the New York City Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, Hungarian State Opera in Budapest, Opera Theater of St. Louis, Seattle Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Vancouver Opera, Opéra de Marseille and l'Opéra de Montréal. The symphony orchestras that he has conducted include the Montreal Symphony and the Milwaukee Symphony orchestras, both of which he has conducted in regular subscription concerts and opera productions.

Dubbed “an operatic superstar of the 21st century” by *USA Today*, **Denyce Graves** continues to gather unparalleled popular and critical acclaim in performances on four continents. Her rich vocalism, elegant stage presence and exciting theatrical abilities allow her to pursue a wide breadth of operatic portrayals and delight audiences in concert and recital appearances. Her signature roles—those of the title characters in *Carmen* and *Samson et Dalila*—have brought her to the Metropolitan Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, Royal Opera, Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Opéra National de Paris, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Bayerische Staatsoper, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro Real in Madrid, Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Los Angeles Opera and the Festival Maggio Musicale in Florence.

This season, Graves celebrates the opening of the Dallas Center for the Performing Arts in a gala concert with Thomas Hampson and the Dallas Opera Orchestra and Chorus. She reprises her

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acclaimed portrayal of Judith in *Bluebeard's Castle* in concert performances of the opera with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra.

Graves appears continually in a broad range of repertoire with leading theaters and orchestras worldwide; she is one of the world's most sought-after recitalists. In addition to multiple Metropolitan Opera engagements, Graves has recently appeared with the Washington Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Cincinnati Opera and Théâtre Musical de Paris, Grand Théâtre de Genève, Genoa's Teatro Carlo Felice, the Bregenz Festival and festivals in Italy and Spain. Graves gave her first performances of Adalgisa in *Norma* for Opernhaus Zürich. She performed a rare double-bill of *El amor brujo* and *La vida breve* specifically mounted for her by Dallas Opera. She has appeared with the Israel and Los Angeles Philharmonics and the National, Chicago and BBC Symphony Orchestras.

Graves has garnered awards including the Grand Prix du Concours International de Chant de Paris, the Eleanor Steber Music Award in the Opera Columbus Vocal Competition and a Jacobson Study Grant from the Richard Tucker Music Foundation.

For more than 20 years, **Richard Leech** has been singing many of the most demanding and well-known roles of the Italian and French repertoire, both on disc and on the stages of the world's leading opera houses. Of his much anticipated 1989 debut with Metropolitan Opera as Rodolfo *La Bohème*, *The New York Times* wrote: "Other than Pavarotti on his best night, I can't think of another tenor I'd rather hear in the part." Since then, he has sung nearly 200 Met performances in a dozen leading tenor roles—many for the popular Texaco Radio Broadcast Series.

In addition to appearances with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the opera companies of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington and San Diego, Leech has regularly performed with Opéra National de Paris, Covent Garden, Wiener Staatsoper, Teatro alla Scala, Florence's Teatro Comunale and Deutsche Oper Berlin. Leech has appeared with orchestras including the Vienna and New York Philharmonics and the National and Montréal Symphonies.

His televised performances include a production of *Madama Butterfly* and the James Levine 25th Anniversary Gala with the Met and a "Live from Lincoln Center" *Rigoletto* with the New York City Opera, as well as appearances on the annual Richard Tucker Music Foundation Gala. Leech was the recipient of the prestigious Richard Tucker Award in 1989 and The Voice Foundation's "Voice Education, Research and Awareness" (VERA) Award.

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His discography boasts more than a dozen recordings; a 1991 Berlin performance of *Les Huguenots* was recently released on DVD (Arthaus).

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra is comprised of some of the country's finest musicians. The Orchestra is proud to have Jacques Lacombe as its Music Director Designate and Neeme Järvi as its Conductor Laureate. Artistic excellence, innovative programming and community engagement are hallmarks of its mission. To best serve the people of New Jersey, the orchestra brings its programs to seven different venues throughout the state. Education and outreach programs enrich the listening experience for children and adults alike. The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra Broadcast Series, presented in part by the Merck Company Foundation, is a syndicated radio program broadcast regionally and throughout North America. Continental Airlines is the official airline of the NJSO.

For more information about the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, visit www.njsymphony.org or e-mail information@njsymphony.org. Tickets are available for purchase by phone 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra's website.

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's programs are made possible in part by The New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, along with many other foundations, corporations and individual donors.

Opera New Jersey

Opera New Jersey is recognized nationally as a leader among regional opera companies, providing high-quality opera performances and exceptional educational offerings. Opera New Jersey seeks to stimulate, promote and satisfy interest in opera, build a strong and diverse audience base for the art form and foster the development of emerging artists. Opera New Jersey has received three prestigious Citations of Excellence from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA). The Citation is NJSCA's highest honor and recognizes arts organizations that "exhibit the highest standards of excellence in artistry, operations, governance, public benefit and fulfillment of areas of Council priority. Opera New Jersey is honored to be the recipient of multiple National Endowment for the Arts grants in recognition of its outstanding programming. For more information, visit www.Opera-NJ.org.

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center

New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), located in the heart of an emerging downtown Newark, New Jersey, is the sixth largest performing arts center in the United States. Home of the Grammy

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Award-winning New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, NJPAC has been widely cited as a catalyst in the revitalization of New Jersey's largest city, attracting more than 6 million visitors (including more than one million children) in its first 12 years of operation.

Programming has been made possible in part by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts and by funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

NJPAC is a wheelchair accessible facility and provides assistive services such as TTY ticket purchase, designated seating, Sennheiser infrared listening devices and seat cushions. For more information, visit www.njpac.org.

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