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ENTERTAINMENT

Spotlight: Fenlon Lamb goes from singer to director for Annapolis Opera's 'Carmen'

By SELENE SAN FELICE
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Fenlon Lamb directs "Carmen" for Annapolis Opera on March 15 and 17. (Michael Mahoney / HANDOUT)

Fenlon Lamb was a finalist in the Annapolis Opera's annual Maryland Vocal Competition as a student in the '90s. Now, she's back as the director of their latest production, "Carmen."

Lamb talked to *The Capital* about how it feels to go from singing as Carmen to directing the show, and making parts of the set out of paper.

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How did you go from being a singer to a director?

In my late 20s, I was finishing up my "young artist" years. That's the nice thing about being an opera singer. You're still a young artist at 30. I switched over to directing at 40 and created a whole new career path for myself in seven years. As soon as I made the switch, everybody said, "Yeah, that's the thing you should definitely be doing."



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I was a singing actress, so the drama was always the biggest part of my preparation. I loved that in-depth preparation rather than just vocal technique. It was a no-brainer by the time I got really into it. It made so much sense for me to get into the bigger picture and be able to do those arcs for all the characters, and to create productions where everyone is speaking the same language, dramatically. It felt like a

great fit. I sort of wished I had figured that out a little earlier.

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What have you learned going from singing as Carmen to directing “Carmen”?

I have been in Carmen’s shoes, right? So I understand all the ups and downs and the pacing of it. When you sing a role you’re very focused on your role for obvious reasons. When I got to come outside of the role and look at the piece as a whole, it’s creating connections and reasons why she does what she does and all the characters around her do what they do. Creating more intentions for Carmen that really affect all the other people around her. And, you know, I don’t get so bruised when I direct. It is a very very physical role. It’s fun. All of us mezzos are all about getting physical and we’re game for it but it’s a hard role, physically. So trying to make that safe.

What did you come to appreciate about other aspects of the show?

It is an extremely well-written piece. It has a lot of tension in it, between characters, between social classes, which is great for drama. It hits all the big ones: Sex, death and politics, which is what we talk about in theater and in film and every day in opera.



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There's a lot that still rings true today. ... Not many of us can be Carmen. "I was born free and I'll die free so don't hold me down" ... It's hard for everyday humans to say, but there's a feeling there we all understand. When you see the struggle onstage we empathize and we can go through those feelings without too much harm to our person. Being outside of it, I get this feeling of, 'How do you want to tell this story so

it affects the audience and gives them that cathartic moment?’

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Is there a special detail the audience should keep their eye out for?

I brought on my production team from Papermoon (Opera) Productions. The big portion of our work is in the medium of paper. Most people would be surprised. You’ll look at the sets and the projections and be like “Oh, no. It’s real sets.” We do have some hard pieces but the entire surround— we have a false proscenium (the theater arch) and a backdrop — that’s all done in paper. On that theme, I sort of woke up one morning and said, “If we’re working in paper, we should do tarot cards.” I’m hoping audiences will be surprised that we could create something so full of depth that is actually flat paper.

Plus we create atmosphere with the surround or paper backdrop and paper mid-stage legs. The hard set pieces are guard house, stairs, tavern and bullring arch

Why paper?

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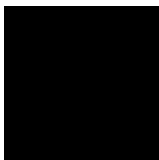
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Several reasons. There is this familiarity with the texture. People don't know it, they feel it. In a sort of different way. It's a very old style of creating sets. It's sort of a challenge and an interesting textural add to the scenario. It's that sensory feeling.

You know what it's like to touch a card. So then, the whole set becomes something you're familiar with and yet it's in this epic form.

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Selene San Felice



Selene San Felice is a features and enterprise reporter at The Capital in Annapolis, where she survived the newsroom shooting on June 28, 2018. She graduated in Dec. 2016 from the University of Tampa, where she was honored in 2019 as the school's first distinguished alumni in journalism. She is a foodie, hip-hop head and angry feminist.
