

"ONE OF THE MOST UNDERRATED CREATIVE COMMUNITIES IN THE COUNTRY"

"There is a long-standing Alaskan tradition of doing things yourself," says Torrie Allan, general director of **Anchorage Opera**. "There are people who live here who may not think they like opera, but they like the fact that we're made in Alaska."

The company's "made in Alaska" ethos was born partly of necessity; because of shipping and transportation costs, the company has a full shop to build all productions locally. Local artists are hired whenever possible — Allen estimates that productions are 90% Alaskan. Onstage and off, the company provides full- and part-time employment to hundreds of people each year. "Anchorage is one of the most underrated creative communities in the country," says Allen. "But if you don't keep these people employed, they leave, and everyone has to spend more money to bring in artists." The company regularly partners with artists from Alaska Dance Theatre, Anchorage Concert Chorus, the Alaska Children's Choir and the Anchorage Festival of Music.

Allen feels that opera "made in Alaska" has the potential to enrich the community in many ways. He believes strongly in working with the tourist bureau to promote Anchorage as a cultural destination. "So many people here are unaware of the bigger picture. If you have an opera company downtown, it benefits hotels, restaurants, everything."

The company's isolation brings challenges, to be sure, but Allen also sees tremendous opportunity. "There is such a spirit of independence, such a value in being different. I can do things I might not be able to do in the lower 48, like bring a Harley into the performance hall. There is a lot of support for wild ideas." ©



Kathryn Allyn as Carmen in Anchorage Opera's production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Photo by Anchorage Opera/Chris Arend Photography.