



NASHVILLE
OPERA



CARMEN

An opera in four acts by Georges Bizet
Words by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy based on the novella by Prosper Mérimée
Premiere, Opéra-Comique, Paris, March 3, 1875

April 6 and 8, 2017 • Andrew Jackson Hall, TPAC

Directed by John Hoomes

Conducted by William Boggs
Featuring the Nashville Opera Orchestra

CAST & CHARACTERS

Carmen, <i>a cigarette girl and gypsy</i>	Ginger Costa-Jackson*
Don José, <i>a corporal</i>	Noah Stewart
Micaela, <i>a peasant girl</i>	Laura Wilde*
Escamillo, <i>a toreador</i>	Edward Parks*
Zuniga, <i>a captain</i>	Jeffrey Williams
Morales, <i>an officer</i>	Makoto Winkler †
Frasquita } <i>friends of Carmen</i>	Courtney Ruckman †
Mercédès } <i>friends of Carmen</i>	Melisa Bonetti †
Remendado } <i>smugglers</i>	Zachary Devin †
Dancairo } <i>smugglers</i>	Makoto Winkler †

* Nashville Opera debut

† Mary Ragland Young Artist

TICKETS

Nashville Opera, 615.832.5242, nashvilleopera.org

MORE INFORMATION

Contact Nashville Opera at 615.832.5242 or visit nashvilleopera.org.

Study Guide Contributors
Anna Young, Education Director
Cara Schneider, Creative Director

THE STORY

ACT I

Corporal Moralès and the other soldiers linger by the guard house watching the busy street. The innocent Micaela approaches the platoon in her search for Don José. The soldiers flirt and taunt her causing her to flee the scene, but she intends to return later. Shortly after, the new guard arrives including José and Zuniga, the lieutenant in command.

The cigarette girls fill the streets as they are released from the local factory. A crowd of young men wait to flirt with the women and are especially interested in spotting Carmen, the infamous and beautifully dangerous gypsy. She emerges from the crowd and sings the famous Habanera, boasting of her ability to get any man she desires only to throw them away on a whim. The only man who does not take an interest in her display is Don José. Intrigued, Carmen flirtatiously throws a flower, then quickly vanishes back in to the factory with the other women as the crowd disperses.

We soon learn that Micaela is a close friend of José's family when she rushes once again to meet him, delivering a kiss and a letter from his mother. José's mother writes of her desire for him to return home and marry Micaela. He reads the letter aloud, embarrassing Micaela who leaves once again. He declares that he will honor his mother's wishes and marry the girl.

Later that day, a fight breaks out in the factory between Carmen and one of the other cigarette girls. The streets are flooded with chaos because Carmen has cut the girl's face. She is arrested and led away by José. When Zuniga asks her what she has to say for herself, he is answered impudently with a song. Zuniga insists that José guard Carmen while he completes the warrant for her arrest. The two are left alone and Carmen begins to sing a seductive seguidilla which promises a meeting at Lillas Pastia's tavern located just outside of Seville. The entranced Don José unties Carmen and helps her escape. Zuniga returns, discovers the betrayal, and angrily arrests Don José.

ACT II

A month passes and we find Carmen and her friends Frasquita and Mercédès entertaining Zuniga and the other officers at the tavern. Zuniga invites the group to accompany him to the theatre. Carmen can only think of José who was demoted and thrown in jail after helping her escape. Zuniga informs her that José has been released. The sound of a procession hailing Escamillo, the Toreador, passes by outside, and he is invited in. Escamillo sings the Toreador Song and flirts with Carmen, but she informs him that, for

the time being, she cannot be his. He says he will wait for her.

When everyone except Carmen, Frasquita and Mercédès have departed, the smugglers Dancairo and Remendado arrive. They speak of their plans to dispose of the contraband they have smuggled and urge the women to assist in the plot. While Frasquita and Mercédès are willing, Carmen refuses to accompany them saying, to their surprise, that she is in love.

José's voice is heard in the distance, and the smugglers hide. Alone together, José returns a gold coin Carmen earlier sent him in jail. She tells him stories of her dancing for the officers, and when José reacts with jealousy, she promises to entertain him alone. During her song, the distant sound of bugles call the soldiers to return back to the barracks, and Don José begins to leave. Carmen's temper flares, but José answers by producing the flower she once threw at him. He kept the flower during his imprisonment, now revealing it as proof of his love. Carmen is unmoved and replies that if he really loved her, he would desert the platoon and join her gypsy life. Although he is tempted, he refuses saying he will never be a deserter. As he begins to leave, Zuniga enters looking for Carmen. Don José draws his sword in a jealous rage, but they are separated before they can fight. Zuniga is placed under temporary constraint. José, having threatened a senior officer, is now a wanted man and has no choice but to flee with Carmen.

ACT III

In the mountains, the smugglers along with Carmen and Don José are traveling with the contraband. Unfortunately, Carmen has grown tired of José and the two constantly argue. José begins to regret having broken the promise to marry Micaela. The smugglers have settled into a camp and Carmen, Frasquita, and Mercédès begin to read cards to tell their own fortunes. Frasquita and Mercédès foresee love, romance, wealth and luxury. Carmen's cards relentlessly spell death. The smugglers ask the girls to come and charm the customs officers who are guarding the pass, leaving José to guard the goods.

Micaela appears and vows to take Don José away from Carmen. She says she fears nothing more than meeting the woman who turned her love into a criminal. She hides soon after when José fires a gun at an intruder. The man is recognized as Escamillo who is transporting bulls to Seville. José's welcome turns to anger as Escamillo reveals his own infatuation with Carmen and his frustration of her affair with a soldier, not realizing José's identity.

José challenges Escamillo to a knife-fight, and eventually finds himself at the mercy of Escamillo who releases him saying his trade is in killing bulls, not men. Escamillo leaves, but invites Carmen and the smugglers to his next bullfight in Seville. Remendado finds Micaela hiding, and she tells José that his mother wishes to see him. At first he refuses to go until Micaela tells him that his mother is dying. Vowing that he and Carmen will meet again, José leaves with Micaela to see his mother. As he is leaving, Escamillo is heard singing in the distance.

ACT IV

It is the day of Escamillo's bull fight in Seville, and the town square is full of people. Among the excited crowd are

Frasquita and Mercédès. Carmen enters on Escamillo's arm, and they are greeted by the crowds as they sing and cheer on the procession. After Escamillo has gone into the fight, her friends warn Carmen that José is in the crowd. Carmen says she is not afraid, but before she can enter the arena, she meets Don José. He begs her to return his love and join him in starting a new life far away. She replies that she no longer loves him.

While the crowd is heard cheering for Escamillo, José prevents Carmen from joining her new lover in the arena. He asks her one final time to come back. Carmen loses her temper, takes the ring José once gave her, and throws it at his feet. In his fury, José brutally stabs her as cheers of Escamillo's victory against the bull erupt from within the arena. As the crowd exits the arena, José is seen kneeling beside Carmen's body confessing to the murder of the woman he loves.

LISTEN FOR THIS!

Prelude

One of opera's best known, the prelude includes portions of the "Toreador Song" and the "Fate" theme.

Act I

"Habanera"

As the girls emerge from the factory and Carmen appears, the men beg Carmen to

love them. Carmen replies, "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle," or, "Love is a rebellious bird that nobody can tame."

"Seguidilla"

Having instigated a fight with another woman in the factory, Carmen is being guarded by Don José as Lieutenant Zuniga writes the warrant for her arrest. To escape, Carmen seduces Don José with this song.

Act II

"Les tringles des sistres"

A month has passed, and Carmen leads her friends in this wild gypsy song at Pastia's inn, singing, "The quiet at the end of the day is broken by the gypsy dance."

"Toreador Song"

The bullfighter Escamillo delights the crowd with his stories of harrowing fights in the bullring and the fame he enjoys from his victories.

"Flower Song"

Don José calms an enraged Carmen by producing the flower she once threw at him which he has kept as proof of his love.

Act III

"Card Trio"

Carmen, Frasquita and Mercedes tell their fortunes with cards. Carmen reveals the ace of spades, the card of death.



RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

RCA, 1997

Performers: Leontyne Price, Franco Corelli, Mirella Freni, and Robert Merrill with the Vienna State Opera Choir and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Conductor: Herbert von Karajan

Decca, 1990

Performers: Tatiana Troyanos, Plácido Domingo, José van Dam, and Kiri Te Kanawa with the John Alldis Choir and London Philharmonic Orchestra

Conductor: Sir Georg Solti

Deutsche Grammophon, 1990

Performers: Teresa Berganza, Plácido Domingo, Ileana Cortrubas, Sherrill Milnes with the Ambrosian Singers and London

Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: Claudio Abbado



Nashville Opera's CARMEN, 2011

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Georges Bizet • 1838–1875

LIFE AND CAREER

Georges Bizet is best known for his well-loved masterpiece, *Carmen*. However, Bizet's life was short and full of hardships. In 1838, Bizet was born in Paris into a musical family. His father was an amateur singer and composer, and his mother was the sister of well-known singing teacher François Delsarte. Young Georges showed much promise as a child, reading music by the age of four and playing piano by the age of six. He was admitted to the Paris Conservatory at the age of nine, receiving training from artists such as Jacques-François Halévy (whose daughter he later married) and Charles Gounod. In 1855, Bizet completed his first major work, *Symphony in C*, at the age of seventeen. Bizet received the Prix de Rome in 1858, an award that provided financial support to spend three years in Rome to concentrate on composition. Bizet's years in Rome were not very productive and resulted in few works, a trend that would be echoed throughout his life.

Upon his return to Paris, he found modest success in 1863 with his opera *Les pêcheurs de perles* (*The Pearlfishers*). His next work, *La jolie fille de Perth* (*The Fair Maid of Perth*), was completed in 1866. Bizet's subsequent projects, however, did not seem to take off. When the Franco-Prussian war broke out in 1870, Bizet enlisted in the National Guard. In the years after his service, he proposed to adapt Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen* and began to write its orchestration, which was completed by the summer of 1874. Bizet truly believed in this opera, saying "They make out that I am obscure,

complicated, tedious, more fettered by technical skill than lit by inspiration. Well this time I have written a work that is all clarity and vivacity, full of color and melody." The Parisian critics and audiences, though, did not share his sentiments and were taken aback by what they considered to be a vulgar and contemptible story. Set in Spain and dealing with the exotic and foreign culture of gypsies, *Carmen's* exploration of sexual desire, moral ambiguity, and a brutal murder fated the opera's brief and controversial run.

Bizet's final years were marked by more and more problems.

Already in ill health, he deteriorated further with the harsh reaction of Parisian audiences. Bizet died of a heart attack less than three months after *Carmen's* opening. Ironically, the work returned to the Parisian stage only five years later, following successes in Vienna, Brussels, London, and New York. It has remained one of the best loved of the 19th-century operas.

In comparison to opera composers of his time, Bizet, particularly with *Carmen*, diverged from the standard *opéra lyriques*, exploring highly dramatic plots and dealing with deeper emotions. Though not straying too far from French traditions, he adopted some of the styles of Italian and German opera. In fact, it has been said that Bizet had the greatest impact in

Italy, as *Carmen* can be called the first *verismo* opera, predating the *verismo* era by two decades. Bizet's life and career, though short, left its mark on the art form, and *Carmen* is still loved by audiences around the world.



"As a musician I tell you that if you were to suppress adultery, fanaticism, crime, evil, the supernatural, there would no longer be the means for writing one note."

— Bizet, 1866

OTHER OPERAS BY BIZET

La maison du docteur • 1867 or 1859, unperformed

Le docteur Miracle • 1856

Don Procopio • 1859

La prêtresse • 1861, unperformed

La guzla de l'émir • 1862, unperformed

Ivan IV • 1865

Les pêcheurs de perles • 1863

La jolie fille de Perth • 1866

Marlbrough s'en va-t-en guerre • 1867

La coupe du roi de Thulé • 1868

Djamileh • 1871

Don Rodrigue • 1872

Carmen • 1874

TRIVIA

Bizet's given name was Alexandre-César-Léopold. He just liked Georges better.

Franz Liszt, one of the most technically advanced and greatest pianists of his time, once proclaimed Georges Bizet one of the best pianists in Europe. By the time Bizet was nine years old, he could play Mozart sonatas from memory.

Bizet originally intended the dialogue of *Carmen* to be spoken. Bizet's close friend Ernest Guiraud added recitatives after his death to satisfy producers of its Vienna debut and to broaden its appeal to producers thereafter.

Carmen is considered the most famous French opera. In the early 1900's, an aria from *Carmen* became the first opera music ever broadcast over the radio from the stage of the Manhattan Opera House.

ABOUT THE LIBRETTISTS

HENRI MEILHAC LUDOVIC HALÉVY

Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy met in the spring of 1860 and began a collaboration that would ultimately lead to their most famous libretto together, *Carmen*. Both born in Paris, Meilhac and Halévy experimented in writing for various genres, from literature and history to vaudeville and, of course, opera.

Halévy worked in public service before his popularity as an author allowed him to retire in 1865, serving last as secrétaire-rédacteur to the Corps Législatif. Earlier in his career, Halévy made the acquaintance of the composer Jacques Offenbach, who was planning to start a small theatre on the Champs-Élysées. Halévy worked with Offenbach on several small productions, and his name was made famous with the success of *Orphée aux enfers*, written in collaboration with Hector Crémieux.

It was when the manager of Variétés commissioned Halévy to write a play, though, that Halévy would meet Meilhac.

Vaudevillist Lambert Thiboust was originally to work with Halévy but dropped out of the collaboration. Meeting on the steps of the theatre, Halévy proposed the project to Meilhac, and the two began work on what would be the first of many fruitful collaborations.

Meilhac and Halévy's works have been divided into three classes: the operettas, the farces, and the comedies. The operettas were often lively parodies of French society. Windows into everyday Parisian life interwoven with wit and humor were characteristic of much of their most celebrated works, including *La belle Hélène* (1864), *Barbe Bleue* (1866), *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867), and *La Périchole* (1868).

Their most widely known success, *Carmen*, was first performed in Paris in 1875 and hailed as a rich dramatization of Mérimée's novel. Meilhac and Halévy succeeded in filling out Mérimée's single narrative to more of a pageant of Spanish life, enhancing the vibrancy of the setting and characters while maintaining the gripping nature of the original story. The assistant to the artistic director at the Opera

Comiqué voiced concerns that the librettists should change the tragic ending to make the opera more acceptable to the audiences of this traditionally family-friendly theatre. While Meilhac and Halévy agreed, Bizet did not, and the shocking, violent ending remained.

Halévy published several books towards the end of his career, including *Monsieur et Madame Cardinal* and *Les Petites Cardinal*. Both Meilhac and Halévy were elected to the French Academy for their contributions to the French language, Meilhac in 1888 and Halévy in 1884. Interestingly, while Georges Bizet's *Carmen* is their most famous collaboration, it was merely a sideshow to the majority of their body of work together. It has been said that because the two men had four other operas already on the Paris stage that they preferred over *Carmen*, they encouraged *Carmen*'s singers to over-dramatize the lyrics in an effort to downplay the importance of the opera. As it turns out, nothing can downplay *Carmen*, which remains the fourth most-performed Opera in North America.

OPERA ETIQUETTE

ALWAYS BE EARLY!

Please arrive early to ensure you are able to find your seat before the performance begins and before the orchestra tunes. If you are late, you may miss the overture or even the first act!

OPERA IS FOR ALL AGES TO ENJOY!

Opera is full of emotion, passion, human conflict, and discovery. Nashville Opera usually presents operas in their original language and projects supertitles above the stage so the audience can understand every word.

WHAT TO WEAR

Many people think of a night at the opera as a glamorous event and an excuse to bring out the fancy attire. But, it is also acceptable to dress comfortably. For dress rehearsals, the casual attire that students wear to school is perfectly acceptable. A light sweater, jacket, or wrap is suggested because the theater is air-conditioned.

USE THE RESTROOM

Once in the theater it is courteous to remain seated and involved in the production until intermission. Please do not leave the theater unless there is an emergency.

PLEASE BE COURTEOUS...

to everyone in the audience and on stage. Opera is a live performance, so any talking, cell-phone use (including texting) or other noise/light disruption takes away from everyone's experience at the opera. Remember that unlike many staged performances, opera singers do not use microphones. This makes it essential to wait until intermission to unwrap gum/candy, talk to your neighbor or use electronic devices that may distract others. Be sure to turn off cell phone and pagers.

APPLAUSE WELCOME!

There are several times during a performance when it is appropriate to applaud the performers. The first opportunity to applaud takes place when the conductor takes the podium at the very beginning of the performance and when he/she returns to the podium following intermission(s). It is also acceptable to applaud after an overture or aria in the middle of a performance. Applaud when the performance moves you. You may show your appreciation to the performers by shouting "Bravo!" for a male performer, "Brava!" for a female performer, or "Bravi!" for an ensemble. At the conclusion of the performance, singers who performed principal roles in the opera will take their "curtain call." It is appropriate to continue applauding until all singers have stepped forward to accept their applause. Sometimes, audience members are so impressed with the overall performance of the opera, they will stand and applaud the entire ensemble. This is called a "standing ovation."

NO PHOTOS OR RECORDINGS PERMITTED



A SOUND ANATOMY OF OPERA

There are many different kinds of songs in opera. Performers may sing alone, in couples (duets), trios, or larger groups, and there are also moments when no one sings at all—and each composer develops his or her own preferred combinations of these options.

THE OVERTURE

An opera usually begins with an orchestral piece of music called the overture, which functions as an introduction to the opera. Lasting anywhere from five to twenty-five minutes, these opera overtures usually contain important themes from the rest of the production. Before 1800, house lights were not dimmed while the overture played, and audience members continued to talk, drink, and even play cards! This ceased in the 1900's as the overture became a more integral part of an operatic performance. At the end of the overture, the curtain rises and the story of the opera unfolds through a series of scenes. These scenes are organized into acts.

ARIAS

An aria is a solo moment for an opera singer and is usually accompanied by the orchestra. Italian for “air” or song, an aria stops the plot momentarily, giving each character the opportunity to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. These pieces also provide an opportunity for the singer to demonstrate their vocal and artistic skill. Mozart, Verdi and Puccini were able to achieve a remarkable balance between memorable melodies that perfectly suit the human voice while still reflecting the drama of the text.

RECITATIVES

Recitatives, a type of singing unique to opera, help propel the action forward. They can be accompanied either by a full orchestra, or, as is often the case with opera written before 1800, by harpsichord or keyboard instrument. Often introducing an aria, the text is delivered quickly and encompasses a very limited melodic range. It has no recognizable melody and the rhythms follow those of the spoken word.

ENSEMBLE (“TOGETHER”)

Ensemble singing deals with two or more voices of different range performing together. These include duets, trios, quartets, quintets, and sometimes sextets. The composer blends the voices depending on the dramatic requirements of the plot. For instance, a love duet may begin with each performer singing different music at different times, then gradually unifying into harmony. Conversely, the music of a duet may depict conflict. Georges Bizet used this technique in *Carmen*: if you listen to the duets sung by Carmen and Don José, you might notice that their musical lines are never completely blended, and this foreshadows their tragic ends.

CHORUS

Most operas include music sung by a large group of singers (sometimes more than 40) called a chorus. The chorus often appears in a crowd scene and can provide a stunning contrast to solo or ensemble singing. In one opera by Benjamin Britten, the chorus is played by a single male and a single female, as in the tradition of ancient Greek theatre.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

The orchestra accompanies the singing and introduces the opera with the overture. Musical and emotional themes often appear in orchestral introductions and conclusions to arias, recitatives, and choruses. In many cases, the orchestra plays such an important role, the gravity of its existence is that of a leading character.

ON OPERATIC VOICES

Every voice is unique and no singer gets to choose the category in which they sing but must work with the vocal attributes with which they were born. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for examples.

Women

SOPRANO

This is the highest female voice and has a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the prima donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue, and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is from middle C through two octaves above middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos. In *Carmen*, the roles of Micaela and Frasquita are sung by sopranos.

MEZZO-SOPRANO

Also called a mezzo, this is the middle female voice with a range similar to an oboe. A mezzo's sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano's. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. Mezzo-sopranos also often serve as the friend or sidekick to the soprano. The mezzo-soprano's normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it. *Carmen* and *Mércèdese* are sung by mezzos.

CONTRALTO

This is the lowest female voice and has a voice similar in range to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare—some believe they don't exist at all! There is no featured contralto in *Carmen*.

Men

COUNTER-TENOR

This is the highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio. The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano's voice and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare. There are no counter-tenors in *Carmen*.

TENOR

This is usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest. In *Carmen*, the roles of Don José and Remendado are sung by a tenor. His voice ranges from the C below middle C to the above.

BARITONE

This is the middle male voice and is close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. In *Carmen*, the roles of Escamillo, Morales, and Dancairo are sung by baritones. The range is from the G an octave and a half below middle C to the G above.

BASS-BARITONE/BASS

This is the lowest male voice and is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. In *Carmen*, the role of Zuniga is sung by a bass-baritone. The range spans from roughly the F above middle C to the F an octave and a fourth below.



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