Carmen

Music by Georges Bizet
Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy
Based on the novella by Prosper Mérimée

Photo Credit: Fares Micue

Prepared for The Glimmerglass Festival by Kelley Rourke and Nick Richardson

From the Dramaturgs

¡Hola, Glimmerglass!

This dramaturgy packet covers a few topics from *Carmen*, its inspirations, and the setting of our production. We also included links to external sites, including a Google Drive with PDFs. (Click around! Kelley is hiding even more great research in these links…)

A small note: The term "g*psy" to describe Romani people and culture is derogatory, and we censor it throughout the packet. For more information about this term, check out the glossary.

There's so much to explore here. If you'd like any help pursuing a topic more thoroughly, please reach out to us!

Saludos,
Kelley and Nick
krourke@glimmerglass.org
nicholas.k.richardson@gmail.com

Contents

Director's Note

***Carmen* is a co-production between The Glimmerglass Festival and Minnesota Opera. Ms. Graves' note comes from Minnesota's program.**

More from Ms. Graves:

- The Festival featured Ms. Graves in the Spring edition of *Fanfare*, our donor magazine. She discussed her career as Carmen, her directorial vision, and *The Passion of Mary Cardwell Dawson* as well. You can read Nick's interview with her here.
- Hear Ms. Graves take on the "Habanera" in this clip from the Richard Tucker 20th Anniversary Gala.
- See Ms. Graves in action – both as Carmen and as a director – in this preview from Minnesota Opera.

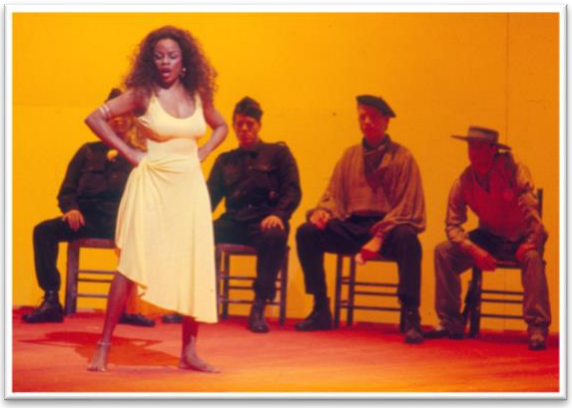
Below: Ms. Graves in her role debut at Minnesota Opera, 1991.

35+ years on the lyric stage and a major portion of that time I portrayed one of opera's greatest protagonists, Carmen. I lived the life of this amazing and emancipated woman in productions at the world's greatest opera houses through the eyes of the worlds' greatest directors that for me, extended over an entire range. Sometimes focused on all things French, sometimes all things Spanish, and Carmens comical, serious, evil, delightful, scary, or dramatic. It ran the gamut—each having validity in the production, with the casts and audiences. As different, as interesting, as varied, as shaping, they are all part of my Carmen.

The incredible honor, the gift Minnesota Opera offered me to direct my vision of Carmen, bringing this femme fatal to the very stage (or Company if not actually the stage) at which I first portrayed her is a complete wonderment and life-cycle event for me. After researching and preparing a few different 'concepts,' some ideas remained in place. I knew I wanted the show to be gritty, to be natural, organic, undecorated, raw, and truthful. For our production I went first directly to the literary source, Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen*, keenly aware that although the libretto of the opera shares the same name, the Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy libretto is a distinct work of art.

I am telling our opera through the lens of Romani culture, a culture rich in oral tradition with an emphasis on family. They are one of the largest ethnic minorities in Europe: a closed and bound, compressed community that is economically dislocated and excluded—a pressure cooker society, if you will? No buses go to where they live, the only people who come there are people who don't live there, people with authority over them, and most often in confrontation with them. There's a sense of a squashed spirit in the community. Inhabitants are subject to racism, discrimination, and persecution. Limitation and internal frustration are ripe and play out in our production of Carmen. Highly romanticized, stereotypic, even derogatory in many ways, *Carmen* reigns as a musical masterpiece and perhaps the most-beloved work in the operatic cannon.

Carmen is a character who transcends her circumstance, even the Romani culture wherein women have no power, no authority, and no political voice. Even more so, and exaggerated for a young unmarried woman like the Carmen in our opera, she would be invisible in her society. However, in the novella, Carmen *is* married. Don José, on the other hand, from overture to finale is a fleshed-out character and the most expansive and dramatic. In him we see a man who never finds his place in his society, who is lost from the beginning. From the moment Don José comes on stage, you will see him in a constant spiral downwards and as each act plays, he becomes more angry, unhinged, and diminished. I intend to show Don José is falling irreversibly as Carmen is rising without obstacle.



Denyce Graves
Director

Selected Timeline, 1875-1935

1875 Premiere in Paris at the Opéra-Comique. 50 nights.
Vienna. Translated to German. The spoken dialogue scenes were done as recitatives. Introduced the "G*psy dance" from Bizet's *La jolie Fille de Perth* (later on mostly replaced by dances from Bizet's *L'Arlésienne*). The spoken scenes eventually returned in later German-language productions both in and outside of Vienna.

1876 Brussels. In French. Reaches 500 performances there in 1913.
Budapest. Translated to Hungarian.

1878 St. Petersburg. Translated to Italian. Later translated to Russian twice (two versions).
Stockholm. Translated to Swedish.
London at Her Majesty's Theatre. In Italian. Later translated to English. Also hosts production in French.
Dublin. In Italian.
New York. In Italian. Later hosts productions in English, French, and German.
Philadelphia. In Italian.

1879 Melbourne, Australia.
Naples at the Teatro Bellini.

1880 Oslo.
Hamburg. First production in Germany.
Berlin. 850 performances there until 1935.
Prague. In German. Later translated to Czech.

1881 Mexico. In French. Later translated to Spanish.
Rio de Janeiro. In French.

1882 London at Covent Garden.

1883 Revival in Paris at the Opéra-Comique. Over 2,200 performances.
Riga, Latvia. In German. Later translated to Latvian.

1885 Reval (Tallinn), Estonia. In German. Later translated to Estonian.

1887 Amsterdam. In Dutch.
Copenhagen. In Danish.

1889 Helsinki. In Russian. Later in Swedish and translated to Finnish.

1891 500th performance in Paris at the Opéra-Comique.

1893 Zagreb, Croatia. Translated to Croatian.

1894 Ljubljana, Slovenia. In German. Later translated to Slovenian.

1895 Cape Town. In Italian.

1900 Second production in Oslo. Translated to Norwegian. Opens the Norwegian State Opera-House.

1904 1,000th performance in Paris at the Opéra-Comique.

1909 150th performance in London at Covent Garden.

1910 1,200th performance in Paris at the Opéra-Comique. Later, over 2,200 total performances.

1912 Sofia, Bulgaria. Translated to Bulgarian.

1918 Shanghai. In Russian.

1919 Yokohama. In Italian.

1920 Bucharest, Romania. Translated to Romanian.

1922 Seattle. In Russian.
Belgrade, Serbia. Translated to Serbian.

1924 Kaunas, Lithuania. Translated to Lithuanian.
Moscow. In Russian as *Karmencita i Soldat*, a Russian adaptation from the original Mérimée.

1925 Kharkiv, Ukraine. Translated to Ukrainian.
Tel Aviv. Translated to Hebrew.

1935 Tokyo. Translated to Japanese.

Production History

The year 2025 will mark 150 years since the premiere of *Carmen*. The opera has been seen and heard around the world, translated into numerous languages.

Recordings: There are over 200 known recordings of *Carmen*, well-catalogued here at Operadis. Their list ends at 2009, though, so it's missing some recordings from the last decade. For a more opinionated review, peruse Ralph Moore's survey of *Carmen* recordings for Music Web International.

Picture This: Here's a look at *Carmen*'s history through production photos and publicity shots, thanks to *The Guardian*.

Sources for this section:

Annals of Opera, 1597-1940 by Alfred Loewenberg
Brent on Film
City Garage Theatre
Classic FM
Classic Stage Company
The Guardian
New York Times

At the Opéra-Comique, Paris

Classic FM reports that *Carmen* "had a completely DISASTROUS premiere," though that might be hyperbolic clickbait. (See Kelley's piece, "Death – at the Opéra-Comique!" on page 5.) The premiere started with applause, then the audience's appreciation waned as the performance continued. By Act IV, the audience was silent. Bizet's music was well-received, but attendees were scandalized by the "obscene," "immoral" story. A review from *Le moniteur* said, "The role of Carmen is not a success for Mme. Galli-Marié. She is trivial and brutal; she turns this feline girl into a cynical harlot." (Fun fact: Bizet rewrote the "Habanera" at least 14 times for singer Célestine Galli-Marié.)

Bizet died of a heart attack 33 performances into *Carmen*. He was only 36 years old. But he seemed proud of his final work, 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 full of clarity and vivacity, full of color and melody."

Left: An illustration of *Carmen*'s premiere at the Opéra-Comique, 1875.

Carmen Jones (1943)

Two years before Rodgers and Hammerstein revolutionized musical theatre by integrating music, theatre, and dance in service of story, Hammerstein attempted to do so on his own with *Carmen Jones*. (Some scholars name *Carmen Jones* along with Kern and Hammerstein's *Show Boat* from 1927 as forerunners of the integrated musical.) The show set Bizet's *Carmen* in North Carolina during World War II and featured an all-Black cast on Broadway.

A decade later, *Carmen Jones* became a Golden-Globe winning film. It starred Dorothy Dandridge in the title role, which earned her a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actress – the first African-American woman nominated. The film also cast Harry Belafonte, Pearl Bailey, and Diahann Carroll. Though Dandridge was also a singer, her singing voice was dubbed over by Marilyn Horne, a white mezzo-soprano who later had a major opera career. Enjoy Dandridge/Horne's performance of the "Habanera" and Bailey's up-tempo take on the "G*psy Song." James Baldwin penned an essay reviewing the film: "*Carmen Jones*: The Dark is Light Enough."

Classic Stage Company staged the musical's first New York revival in 2019 with Anika Noni Rose as Carmen Jones, a role Rose yearned to play for years. John Doyle directed a minimalist production (similar to his revival of *The Color Purple* that played the West End and Broadway) in the round. Hammerstein's English lyrics approximated Black dialects, but the revival avoided those stereotypical pronunciations, a choice noted in the show's positive reviews.

You can watch snippets from the 2019 revival here, including Rose's "Habanera." There are also performance clips from the Olivier Awards, year unknown. The original cast album and the film soundtrack are both on Spotify.

Adaptations

Bizet's *Carmen* is an adaptation itself, but the opera – its music coupled with Mérimée's story – has also inspired other variations on stage and screen… and even on ice.

Fire and ice:

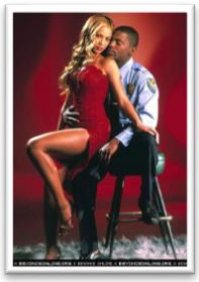
- Opera has always made fine fodder for figure skating programs, and *Carmen* is no exception. American Mirai Nagasu sparkled in her *Carmen*-themed long program, which won her a silver medal at the 2010 U.S. National Championship. East German Katarina Witt and American Debi Thomas both used selections from *Carmen* at the 1988 Winter Olympics (the "Battle of the Carmens"), winning gold and bronze overall, respectively.
- Need more? Try *Carmen on Ice* (1990) starring Olympians Katarina Witt, Brian Boitano, and Brian Orser. There's no text, only an orchestral arrangement of Bizet's melodies to accompany the storytelling told through figure skating. The three leads won Emmy Awards for Outstanding Performance in a Classical Music or Dance Program.

Carmen Disruption (2015)

British playwright Simon Stephens (perhaps best known for his stage adaptation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*) had never listened to an opera until theatre director Sebastian Nübling approached him about writing a play based on *Carmen*. Actually, the inspiration wasn't *Carmen*, but rather Israeli mezzo-soprano Rinat Shaham, who has sung the role over 40 times. Her disorienting experiences as a travelling performer in an increasingly globalized world resonated with Stephens, as he explains in *The Guardian*.

In his play, an opera singer flies to yet another European city to perform in yet another production of *Carmen*. Her real life and the world of the opera begin to blur, and she sees the characters in different people on the street: a male sex worker becomes Carmen, whose ego and lust falter; a female taxi driver who misses her son is Don José; Micaela is a college student going through a break up; and Escamillo is a corrupt futures trader. A series of monologues pairs with aria snippets from Bizet's opera to depict one night in an interconnected yet alienated society.

Carmen Disruption premiered in 2015 at London's Almeida Theatre to positive reviews. The 2017 U.S. premiere in California got mixed reviews. The Almeida's website (linked above) archived samples of music from the play, reviews, as well as production and rehearsal photos.



Carmen *on Camera*

MTV's *Carmen: A Hip Hopera* (2001) remixed Bizet's classic tunes and featured a cast that would later become music legends: Beyoncé, Wyclef Jean, and Jermaine Dupri, to name a few. The film follows the opera's storyline through a combination of music videos and dialogue scenes. You can stream the full movie on Amazon, YouTube, and Apple TV. The soundtrack is available on Spotify, though the original songs (music by Kip Collins, lyrics by Sekani Williams) are greyed out. Read *Variety*'s favorable review here.

U-Carmen eKhayelitsha (2005) moves the action from Spain to Cape Town, South Africa. It's performed entirely in the Xhosa language and incorporates traditional African music in Bizet's score. The cast – all first-time actors – sang live on camera. *U-Carmen* played at Cannes, Toronto, and Berlin film festivals, winning the Golden Bear award for best film in Berlin. The full movie does not appear to be available to stream online, though clips abound on YouTube.

Carmen as a silent film might sound ridiculous, but the opera was so popular that at least two dozen film adaptations were made during the silent era. The opera was still under copyright, so filmmakers used Mérimée's novella. American directors and film pioneers Cecil B. DeMille and Raoul Walsh both released their versions of *Carmen* on the same day in 1915, and DeMille's became the inspiration for Charlie Chaplin's *Burlesque on Carmen* (1916). Re-issues of Chaplin's comedy have since incorporated Bizet's music into the film. You can read about Chaplin's version – and even watch the whole thing! – at Brent Reid's fan website.

From left to right: Anika Noni Rose as Carmen Jones at Classic Stage Company in 2019; the Almeida Theatre production of *Carmen Disruption* in 2015; Beyoncé with Mehki Phifer in *Carmen: A Hip Hopera* (2001).

From Mérimée's Novella

"One day the jailer came in, and gave me an Alcala roll.

"'Look here,' said he, 'this is what your cousin has sent you.'

"I took the loaf, very much astonished, for I had no cousin in Seville. It may be a mistake, thought I, as I looked at the roll, but it was so appetizing and smelt so good, that I made up my mind to eat it, without troubling my head as to whence it came, or for whom it was really intended.

"When I tried to cut it, my knife struck on something hard. I looked, and found a little English file, which had been slipped into the dough before the roll had been baked. The roll also contained a gold piece of two piastres. Then I had no further doubt—it was a present from Carmen. **To people of her blood, liberty is everything**, and they would set a town on fire to save themselves one day in prison. The girl was artful, indeed, and armed with that roll, I might have snapped my fingers at the jailers. In one hour, with that little file, I could have sawn through the thickest bar, and with the gold coin I could have exchanged my soldier's cloak for civilian garb at the nearest shop. You may fancy that a man who has often taken the eaglets out of their nests in our cliff would have found no difficulty in getting down to the street out of a window less than thirty feet above it. But I didn't choose to escape. **I still had a soldier's code of honour**, and desertion appeared to me in the light of a heinous crime."

The Roma Today

The popular success of *Carmen* and her band of "g*psies" has led many to associate the Romani people with Spain, but the ethnic group, which most scholars agree originated in India, is found across Europe and Asia, and has long been persecuted. Spain drafted its first "anti-G*psy" law in 1492; over the years, the nomadic people have been repeatedly subject to orders of expulsion and imprisonment, as well as the banning of their dress and language.

In the nineteenth century, even as the Romani people were made unwelcome in European cities and town, representations showed up across artistic genres as a part of the Orientalist craze. Carmen was one of many fictional characters who sprang from European brushes and pens, offering a scandalous thrill, inevitably imagined in opposition to legal, religious and moral norms.

Today, we need not rely on the narratives invented by outsiders to know something of this vibrant culture. The Romani scholar Ian Hancock has authored more than 300 publications, including *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of G*psy Slavery and Persecution*. The European Roma Rights Centre works at the national and international level to ensure that human rights issues facing Romani communities in Europe are firmly on the political agenda.

And a selection of the vibrant art being made by members of the community is showcased in the Roma Biennale.

Mérimée and the Roma

The French writer and archeologist Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870) first traveled to Spain in 1830, writing four "Letters from Spain" that were published in the *Revue de Paris*. During that trip, he also met the Countess of Montijo, who relayed the story of a beautiful woman whose seduction and subsequent rejection of a soldier leads him to kill her. This incident, along with other bits of lore gathered during Merimée's travels, was eventually reworked as *Carmen*, a novella published in 1845.

The protagonist of Mérimée's tale is an archeologist, traveling through Spain, who crosses paths with a former soldier (Don José) at various points during the soldier's ill-fated entanglement with a Romani woman. Placing Carmen among the Roma was Mérimée's innovation, allowing him to weave in his academic interest in Roma culture.

An annotated copy of Mérimée's novella can be found here.

Side-by-side synopses of the novella and libretto can be found here.

Additional Resources

Meet the Roma: Actress and Roma activist Dijana Pavlovic gives a poignant TED Talk on the struggles of growing up Romani, the discrimination they continue to face today, and a path forward for all people. Musician Oliver Rajamani's TED Talk is part concert and part lecture on "Flamenco India," tracing his musical inspirations alongside the migration of Romani people. VICE News reported in 2014 on anti-Roma sentiment across Europe, part of a larger xenophobic movement seen worldwide. Roma communities face even greater challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as BBC News reported earlier this year.

Harvard University researchers recently published one of the first studies of Romani people living in the United States. Their wide-ranging questionnaire aimed to collect data on Romani social, economic, cultural, and health status. You can check out the highlights in this infographic and read the full report online. Last November, the journal *Nature* reported that DNA taken from Roma people was often done without consent and interpreted improperly in genetics research. *Nature* suggests multiple solutions towards more ethical genetic study.

Let Professor Ian Hancock of the Vlax Romani dialect group tell you about the history of the Romani, their language, food, and more in his handy introduction, *We Are the Romani People*. His book also distinguishes what is and is not Romani and works to subvert stereotypes and prejudices against Romani worldwide. Hancock also compiled a Glossary of Romani Terms.

Writer Isabel Fonseca lived with different Romani groups across Europe from 1991 to 1995 as the Soviet Union collapsed. She documented her experiences in her book *Bury Me Standing: The G*psies and Their Journey*. Though there's history and analysis in her book, Fonseca does not always aim to detach herself from her subjects of study. The result is personal and even lyrical. She named her book after a Romani saying (translated into English): "Bury me standing. I've been on my knees all my life."

Today, *Carmen* needs no introduction — long ago, her seductive melodies escaped the confines of the opera house and took their place in our subconscious songbook. For many operagoers, familiarity can breed forgetfulness — forgetfulness that today's top-10 opera was nothing but trouble for Camille du Locle and Adolphe de Leuven, who presided over the Opéra-Comique at the time of *Carmen*'s premiere. Their Opéra-Comique then specialized in entertainment for a more conservative, family-oriented crowd. *Carmen* — a story of g*psies, cigarette girls, thieves — violated the house's contract with its audience. Most shocking of all, it included a murder onstage.

The composer Georges Bizet knew that Mérimée's novella was an off-key choice for an *opéra comique*, which was precisely the point: he hoped to revolutionize the genre. He and his librettists struggled to assure their employers they would take measures to make Carmen's story more suitable for the stage.

"I persisted, explaining that ours would be a softer, tamer *Carmen*," recalled Ludovic Halévy on the occasion of Carmen's 1,000th performance. "In addition, we would introduce a character in the tradition of the Opéra-Comique — a young, innocent girl, very pure. True, we would have G*psies, but G*psy comedians. And the death of Carmen would be glossed over at the very end, in a holiday atmosphere, with a parade, a ballet, a joyful fanfare. After a long, difficult struggle, M. De Leuven acceded. 'But I pray you,' he said, 'try not to have her die. Death — at the Opéra-Comique! This has never been seen, never!'"

"Death – at the Opéra-Comique!"

By Kelley Rourke

Below: "Le théatre classique – *Carmen*." A sketch by Dessin de Luc. Published in *Journal Amusant*, a French weekly satirical magazine, in 1875. (Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France)

"She had another acacia blossom in the corner of her mouth, and she walked along, swaying her hips, like a filly from the Cordova stud farm. In my country anybody who had seen a woman dressed in that fashion would have crossed himself... At first I didn't like her looks, and I fell to my work again. But she, like all women and cats, who won't come if you call them, and do come if you don't call them, stopped short in front of me."

~Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen*

The premiere was neither a triumph nor a disaster. The enthusiastic ovations that greeted the first act ebbed as the evening wore on. Bizet was hailed by colleagues including Massenet ("It's a great success!") and Saint-Saëns ("I found it marvelous and I am telling you the truth."). At the same time, critics objected not only to the lurid subject matter but also Wagnerian influences in the music. Still, *Carmen* held the stage for 33 performances, a considerable improvement over the composer's earlier *Djamileh*, which ran for 11 nights only.

Despite its unpromising arrival, *Carmen* was soon taken up in opera houses around the world. In 1883, the Opéra-Comique re-admitted the difficult heroine, who established something like permanent quarters, racking up 1,200 performances by January 1910. By this time the opera had been given around the world, in languages including Italian, English, German, Czech, Spanish, Estonian, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Finnish, Croatian, Slovenian and Norwegian.

For some, Bizet's free-spirited, loose-living g*psy remained difficult to like. "If it were possible to imagine His Satanic Majesty writing an opera, *Carmen* would be the sort of work he might be expected to turn out," read an 1878 piece in London's *Music Trade Review*. "After hearing it, we seem to have been assisting at some unholy rites, weirdly fascinating, but painful." Difficult to like, perhaps — but impossible to resist.

setting the stage for *Carmen*: a selective timeline*

1399, Bohemia: the first "G*psy" is mentioned in a chronicle | 1416, Germany: *Roma expelled* from Meissen region | 1417, Holy Roman Empire: King Sigismund grants safe conduct to Roma | 1418, France: First Roma reported in Comar | 1418, Switzerland: First Roma arrive | 1419, Belgium: First Roma reported in Antwerp. | 1420, Holland: First Roma reported in Deventer | 1423, Slovakia: Roma in Spissky | 1425 Spain: Roma in Zaragoza | 1447, Catalonia: First report of Roma | 1471, Switzerland: Parliament meeting *banishes Roma* |1472, Rhine Palatinate: Duke Friedrich asks his people to help the "G*psy" pilgrims | **1478: Spanish Inquisition** begins | 1485, Sicily: first reports of Roma | 1492: Christian Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon conquer the Emirate of Granada, ending nearly 800 years of Muslim rule in the south and founding modern Spain as a united state |1492, Spain: first draft of forthcoming *anti-Roma law* | 1493, Italy: *Roma expelled* from Milan | 1498, Germany: *Expulsion of Roma* ordered | 1499, Spain: Expulsion of Roma ordered by Pragmatica of the Catholic Kings | 1500, Russia: First record of Roma | 1504, France: *Expulsion of the Roma* ordered | 1505, Scotland: Roma pilgrims arrive, probably from Spain | 1510, Switzerland: *Death penalty* introduced for any Roma found in the country | 1512, Catalonia: Roma expelled; Sweden: First Roma arrive | 1514, England: first mention of Roma in the country | 1515, Germany: Bavaria *borders are closed* to the Roma | 1525, Sweden: Roma are *ordered to leave* the country | 1525, Portugal: The Roma are *banned* from Portugal | 1526, Holland: Roma *transit banned* | 1530, England and Wales: *Expulsion of Roma* ordered | 1536, Denmark: The Roma are *ordered to leave the country* | 1538, *Deportation of Roma* to the colonies begins | **1539, Spain: Any male found nomadizing ordered by law to be sent to the galleys** | 1540, Scotland: G*psies allowed to live under their own laws |1547, Bohemia: *Roma are declared outlaws* and are to be *expelled* |1554, England: the *death penalty* is imposed for any G*psy not leaving the country within a month | 1557, Poland and Lithuania: *Expulsion of Roma* ordered | 1563, Italy: Council of Trent affirms that *G*psies cannot be priests* | 1573 Scotland: G*psies either to *settle down or leave the country* | 1574, Portugal: *Wearing of Romani dress banned* | 1584, Denmark and Norway: *Expulsion of the Roma* ordered |1589, Denmark: *Death penalty imposed* for Roma not leaving the country | 1611, Scotland: Three G*psies *hanged* |**1633, Spain: Expulsion of Roma** | 1637 Sweden: *Death penalty for Roma* not leaving the country | 1714, Scotland: Two female Roma *executed* | 1715, Scotland: Ten Roma *deported* to Virginia | 1721, Austro-Hungarian Empire: Emperor Karl VI orders *extermination of Roma* 1726**, Francisco Romero of Ronda introduces the cape and the sword to bullfighting; seen as the beginning of the modern sport** | 1749, Spain: *Round-up and imprisonment* of all Roma ordered | 1758, Austro-Hungarian Empire: Maria Theresa begins Roma *assimilation program* | 1758**: Royal Tobacco Factory (Real Fábrica de Tabacos) begins operating in Seville, with an all-male workforce; the men's lack of discipline and demand for higher wages**

meant the factory was less profitable than those with female workers | 1763: Holland: Pastor Vályi is the first European to learn of the Indian origin of the Romani people; Székely Von Doba first brings findings of Indian origins to academic attention in the November 6 edition of the Vienna Gazette | 1783**, Spain: Romani language and dress banned** | 1783, UK: Most legislation against Roma repealed 1802, France: Roma in Basque province *rounded up and imprisoned* | 1812: The first Constitution of Spain, one of the earliest constitutions in world history, is ratified; Napoleon's France occupies Spain, which has been a French satellite since 1795; fierce nationalist resistance and British intervention gradually force French troops out | 1812, Finland: Roma are *confined to workhouses* | 1814: King Ferdinand returns to power and re-establishes absolute monarchy in Spain | 1827**: Alexander Pushkin publishes "The G*psies," which inspires at least 18 operas and several ballets** | 1829: The workforce at Spain's Royal Tobacco Factory becomes all female | 1830**: Prosper Mérimée travels to Spain**; Germany: *Authorities remove Roma children from their families* for fostering with non-Roma | 1836: ***El Trovador*** (play by Antonio García Gutiérrez), featuring the vengeful "g*psy" Azucena, premieres and goes on to become the most popular and successful drama of the Romanic period in Spain; it will be the source for Verdi's *Trovatore* | 1837, The Constitution of 1837 restores the most progressive features of the Spanish Constitution of 1812 and entrenches the concepts of constitutionalism, parliamentarism, and separation of powers in Spain | 1838: Georges Bizet is born in Paris | 1841: George Borrow publishes *The Zincali, or an account of the G*psies of Spain* | 1843: Balfe's ***The Bohemian Girl*** premieres in London | 1845: Mérimée publishes his novella *Carmen* in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; Wagner's *Tannhäuser* premieres in Dresden | 1847: Verdi's *Macbeth* premieres in Florence | 1848: Bizet begins studies at Paris Conservatoire; Donizetti dies; A group of abolitionist activists, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, gather in Seneca Falls, NY to press for women's rights | 1849, Denmark: Roma allowed in the country again; Adam's *Le Toréador* premieres in Paris; *Luisa Miller* premieres in Naples; Amelia Bloomer begins American women's dress reform | 1850: ***Lohengrin*** premieres at Weimar; Jenny Lind tours America | 1851***: Rigoletto*** premieres in Venice; Gounod's ***Sapho*** premieres in Paris | 1852: Alexandre Dumas *fils* makes a play from his 1848 novel ***La Dame aux Camélias***; New French constitution gives president monarchical powers; Louis Napoleon has Orleans family banished from France; two weeks later the president proclaims himself Emperor Napoleon III | 1853: ***Il Trovatore*** premieres in Rome; plays in Paris in 1854 and 1857; ***La Traviata*** premieres in Venice; plays in Paris 1856| 1854: **"Le Figaro"** begins publication in Paris | 1855: Emancipation of Romani slaves in Moldavia; ***Les Vêpres Siciliennes*** premieres at the Paris Opera | 1856: Emancipation of Romani slaves in Wallachia; Bizet writes his second opera, ***Le Docteur Miracle*** 1857: Bizet is awarded Prix de Rome and spends three years in Italy; ***Simon Boccanegra*** premieres in Venice | 1858: ***Orphée aux Enfers*** premieres at the Bouffes-Parisiens | 1859: ***Un ballo in maschera*** premieres in Rome; Gounod's ***Faust*** premieres in Paris | 1861: The American Civil War begins; ***Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management***, an extensive guide to running a household in Victorian Britain, is first published; nearly two million copies were sold by 1868, and it remains in print today |

1862: Inauguration of the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris; ***La forza del destino*** premieres in St. Petersburg; **Sarah Bernhardt makes her debut** at the Comédie Française in Racine's *Iphigénie en Aulide*; Victor Hugo's ***Les Misérables*** is published; Debussy is born | 1863: Bizet's ***Les pêcheurs de perles*** premieres; reception is mixed and it drops out of the repertory; ***Les Troyens*** premieres in Paris | 1864: Romania: Final post-emancipation laws against Roma are rescinded, allowing them to own land; ***La belle Hélène*** premieres in Paris; Richard Strauss is born | 1865: Cholera epidemic in kills four thousand Parisians in two months; Meyerbeer's ***L'Africaine*** premieres in Paris: the 100th performance takes place within less than a year, with 485 performances there by 1893; ***Tristan und Isolde*** premieres in Munich; Abraham Lincoln is assassinated; Civil War comes to an end; Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery | 1866: Mozart's ***Zaide*** premieres in Frankfurt; Smetana's ***The Bartered Bride*** premieres in Prague; Degas begins to paint his ballet scenes | 1867: ***La jolie fille de Perth***, ***La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein***, ***Don Carlos***, and ***Roméo et Juliette*** premiere in Paris | 1868: Richard Liebich's work on Roma introduces the phrase "lives unworthy of life" with specific reference to them, and later used as a racial category against Roma in Nazi Germany; ***Die Meistersinger*** premieres in Munich; Thomas' ***Hamlet*** premieres and Offenbach's ***La Périchole*** premiere in Paris | 1869: ***Das Rheingold*** premieres in Munich | 1870: Franco-Prussian war: France declares war on Prussia and is defeated at Weissenburg, Worth, Mars-la-Tour, Gravelotte, and finally Napoleon III capitulates at Sedan. Revolt in Paris and proclamation of the Third Republic; siege of Paris by Prussians begins; ***Die Walkure*** premieres in Munich; Merimée dies | 1871: The Paris Commune officially takes power on March 27. In May it is suppressed by the French Army. Seven to ten thousand Communards are killed, 43,000 Parisians are taken prisoner, and the city is placed under martial law; ***Aida*** premieres in Cairo (first plays in Paris in 1876); P.T. Barnum opens ***"The Greatest Show on Earth"*** in Brooklyn | 1872: Civil war in Spain: Carlists are defeated and Don Carlos escapes to France | 1873: Republic is proclaimed in Spain; Germans evacuate France | 1874: ***Die Fledermaus*** premieres in Vienna; Alfonso XII, son of Queen Isabella, is proclaimed King of Spain; The **first Impressionist Exhibition** is held in Paris (term derived from Monet's "Impression: Sunrise") 1875: *Carmen* premieres at Opéra Comique, with decidedly mixed reception; Georges Bizet dies on the night of *Carmen*'s 33rd performance; ***Trial by Jury*** (Gilbert & Sullivan's first operetta) premieres | 1876: Bayreuth Festspielhaus opens with first complete *Ring* performance | 1881: France grants women the right to own bank accounts; five years later, the right is extended to married women, who are allowed to open accounts without their husbands' permission | 1890: Germany: A conference on "The G*psy Scum" is held in Swabia | 1899: Germany: Police G*psy Information Service is set up in Munich, later renamed "The Central Office for Fighting the G*psy Nuisance" |1891: *Carmen* has its 500th performance at the Opéra-Comique | 1904: *Carmen* has its 1000th performance at the Opéra-Comique |1912: Leoncavallo's *Gli Zingari*, based on a narrative poem by Pushkin, premieres in London | 1943: Oscar Hammerstein II's *Carmen Jones* premieres | 1950: **Real Fábrica de Tabacos is repurposed as the University of Seville**

*See page 13 for the list of sources for this section

Critical Perspectives

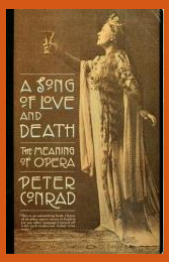
Applying feminist and gender studies lenses in music scholarship is still a relatively new venture in the field – only beginning to appear in the late '80s. Naturally, *Carmen* is a productive site for such an exploration.

Feminist Studies

Clément, Catherine. *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. Translated by Betsy Wing. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Clément's groundbreaking analysis of the opera canon remains a touchstone in feminist criticism of music. Writing mostly from a literary studies approach, Clément reads the libretti of operas through the eyes of their female protagonists and reaches an overarching conclusion: women "suffer, they cry, they die." If not, they are reduced or suppressed by men, a death of its own. Carmen "is the image, foreseen and doomed, of a woman who refuses masculine yokes and who must pay for it with her life." Yet Clémont also sees Carmen in charge of her destiny. The tarot scene not only connects Carmen with her ancestral roots in Egypt and India, but also foretells her death. By believing the tarot reading, "Carmen is the somber and revolutionary proclamation of a woman who chooses to die before a man decides it for her." Though musicologists lament Clément's lack of music analysis, Susan McClary's forward to this edition rectifies that. She applies Clément's idea of chromaticism in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* to *Carmen*. Carmen's chromaticism (marked at her entrance, the "Habanera") gives her a slippery, seductive quality. She and her "harmonic promiscuity" must die in order for Don José – and the opera itself – to achieve tonal closure. "Cadence at all cost."

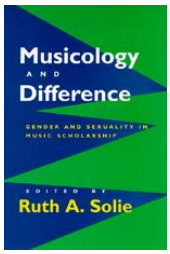
Literary Studies



Conrad, Peter. *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1987.

Conrad, an Australian academic specializing in English literature, divides his broad look at opera into three sections: "Rite," in which he traces themes of operas to antecedents from Greek mythology and other pagan sites; "Repertory," in which he outlines the opera canon through music history; and "Performance," in which he reviews major opera companies, singers, and adaptations of the canon. *Carmen* is paired with Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Section 1 as exemplifying Eros. This is Conrad's most sustained analysis of *Carmen*, explaining the title character through plot and Bizet's music as driven by erotic impulse. *Carmen* is oddly not covered in Section 2, but returns in Section 3 in discussions of contemporary stagings and adaptations.

Gender and Musicology



Abbate, Carolyn. "Opera; Or, the Envoicing of Women." In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, edited by Ruth A. Solie, 225-258. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995.

Abbate writes in direct response to Catherine Clément's *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. Whereas Clément reads operas as the narratives of men, Abbate listens for the female voices and finds subversive power. Though classic operas are written by men, opera "displaces the authorial musical voice onto female characters and female singers," which reverses "a conventional opposition of male (speaking) subject and female (observed) object." She makes her argument through a close reading of Patrick Conrad's 1978 murder mystery film *Mascara*, which heavily features the music of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Strauss' *Salome*. She then analyses *Salome*, specifically the motifs of "acoustic delusion" that blur speaker and subject. Performance implies authorship. As Abbate writes, "…no boy soprano could ever sing operatic female roles. Women are thus critical in authoring the operatic work as an audible reality; they cannot be prohibited from the work's production unless (as Britten did) the composer limits himself to an all-male cast. And once they start singing, these women — cozily envisaged as pleasurable objects — will begin creating sound instead." (PDF)

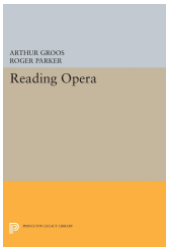
Gender and Musicology (More!)

McClary, Susan. "Structures of Identity and Difference in *Carmen*." *Women: A Cultural Review* 3, no. 1 (1992): 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/09574049208578099

McClary explains the ways in which Bizet, Meilhac, and Halévy modified Mérimée's novella for the stage. Beyond a study of adaptation, McClary focuses her study on these central questions: How do the writers depict Carmen as "the Other" through story and music? How do they continue to mediate Carmen so her presentation onstage does not threaten white male patriarchy beyond the confines of the theater? By opening with the soldiers, set to contemporary music (akin to light Parisian entertainments of the 1870s), the creators encourage the audience to view the story through the Spanish men's perspective. The invention of Micaëla serves as a foil to Carmen – the image of a "normative good girl" to Carmen's ethnic rebel. But the main way Carmen is Othered is through Bizet's music, illustrating Carmen's sexuality, race, and class through Orientalist composition techniques such as particular intervals, harmonics, and ornamentations. McClary compares the music of Carmen to the music of Don José: Wagnerian and Germanic. Neither character sonically fits the tastes of the period; both are Others. But Don José's music drives the narrative undercurrent of the opera and tells the listener with whom to sympathize. (PDF)

Critical Perspectives (cont.)

Literary Studies (Again!)

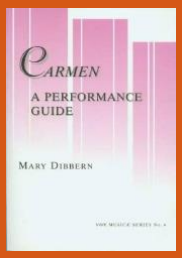


Furman, Nelly. "The Languages of Love in *Carmen*." In *Reading Opera*, edited by Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, 168-183. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Reading Opera is a step toward establishing the legitimacy of studying opera libretti after years of denigration and "libretto-bashing" in the academy. Furman is a scholar of French 19th- and 20th-century literature who taught at Cornell and worked for the Modern Languages Association. Her contribution to this collection begins with a look at the proliferation of productions of *Carmen* in the 1980s, seeing its themes of nationalism and feminism. She further explores both of these themes by analyzing the master/slave dichotomy of Carmen and Don José's romance – each occupying both roles. Furman argues that *Carmen* is not a "battle of the sexes" in a traditional male versus female sense, but a battle of gender expectations: masculinity versus femininity within each gender. Carmen and Don José each have a foil that presents the ideal performance of gender in this society. The latter half of Furman's chapter looks at the French text to understand how the characters' language and grammar choices reflect their individual ethos. There's an impressive amount of theory in Furman's textual analysis; she cites Barthes and Lévi-Strauss, among others. (PDF)

BONUS: Furman recently published a book with close readings of the libretto and Mérimée's novella. Look for *George Bizet's* Carmen from Oxford University Press (2020).

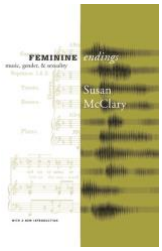
In Performance



Dibbern, Mary. *Carmen: A Performance Guide*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2000.

Dibbern's guide is an incredibly useful resource for anyone looking to perform *Carmen*, stage it, or even study it. She covers both the dialogue and recitative versions of the opera, providing word-for-word translations into English and IPA transcriptions (a la Nico Castel) of both. In addition, she annotates full texts of *Carmen*'s source materials: not only Mérimée's novella, but also his *Letters from Spain* and *The Story of Rondino*, which predate the novella and show how his themes developed over time. Also helpful is the chronology on Bizet and Mérimée. Her selected bibliography is grouped by subject to easily point users toward further readings.

Gender and Musicology (Thrice!)



McClary, Susan. "Sexual Politics in Classical Music." In *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, 53-79. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

University of Minnesota Press notes that when first published in 1991, "*Feminine Endings* was immediately controversial for its unprecedented intermingling of cultural criticism and musical studies, an approach that came to be called 'the New Musicology.'" McClary's chapter on sexual politics begins with the assertion that "classical music—no less than pop —is bound up with issues of gender construction and the channeling of desire." She marks that music scholarship frequently avoids signification of gender and, moreover, prioritizes the mind over the body and its desires. Her analysis of *Carmen* is twofold: one of musical analysis (how Bizet's music signifies gender and sex) and one of critical reception (how existing conventions of music scholarship inform readings of the opera). The music itself reflects Cartesian dualism: Carmen's chromaticism calls listeners' attentions and her rhythms beg to be physically embodied, while Don José's music (mostly) reflects transcendent, Western standards. To avoid potential criticism of being influenced by the text of the libretto, McClary applies a similar approach to analyzing Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony in the same chapter. (PDF)

Interlude (Extras)

A hodgepodge of fun videos, blogs, and other content that needed a home somewhere…

Remixes: *Carmen* + *Phanton of the Opera* + a ukulele = one incredible mashup, thanks to the amazing skills of Hawaiian musician Taimane. Or how about *Carmen* on the melodica? The Melodica Men have gone viral for their arrangements of classical favorites, including the *Carmen Fantasy*. If those doesn't impress you, try this version of the "Habanera" by Polish string quartet/cabaret act/comedians MozART Group.

Her-story, rewritten: In recent years, opera companies around the world have put their own spin on *Carmen* to reflect changing social mores and understandings of gender. Writing for BBC, Sophia Smith Galer investigates some of these productions and describes "How Carmen Went from Tragic Heroine to Feminist Icon." Opera America explores how various companies and opera-makers approached women's narratives on stage in the wake of the 2019 #MeToo movement – including our own Francesca Zambello. Read how today's opera can signal "The Redoing of Women."

Glossary

General Terms:

Cassia: Cassia are a genus of trees with bold yellow flowers. The *Cassia fistula* is commonly known as the "golden shower tree" because its bunches of cascading yellow flowers can even obscure the green leaves of the tree.

Gitane: A female g*psy. ***(Note: "G*psy" is an exonym, meaning a word that is used to name a group of people by members not of that group. It is often used as an offensive slur.)*** The French feminine form of *gitan*, borrowed from the Spanish *gitano*. (The Italian *zingara* and its diminuitive, *zingarella*, also come from this word.) "G*psy" actually refers to Egypt, a misnomer for Romani people who were exiled from India. They traveled through Northern Africa to reach Europe. As Jeremy Johnson, dramaturg at Houston Grand Opera, notes, Roma first arrived in Spain by the 15th century, though they may have been present centuries earlier. As Spanish monarchies consolidated, Roma were the frequent targets of oppressive rule. In 1609, King Phillip III of Spain banished all Roma, but with no place of asylum, many stayed in the country as fugitives. They were forced to assimilate or face punishment of death. To survive, Romani people lived and worked at the fringes of society, sometimes in illegal drug smuggling, which began the stereotypes of Roma. King Ferdinand the VI ordered *La gran redada*, "The Great Raid," to imprison all Romani people for a perceived lack of religion, characterizing them as "evil, godless, and lazy people" – a threat to Spanish values. This established an ethnic and religious hierarchy in Spain that lasted for centuries. Roma people continue to face persecution in Europe to this day.

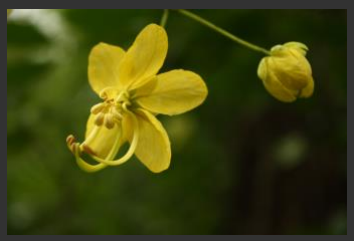
Manzanilla: A kind of sherry (white wine) from Spain.

Real fábrica de tabacos: Royal Tobacco Factory in Seville, Spain. The setting of Act I of *Carmen*, based on the real factory. Construction took 30 years, from 1728 to 1758, but officially finished in 1770. When it opened in 1758, the factory exclusively manufactured snuff (tobacco intended for inhaling or sniffing through the nose) using tobacco imported from Virginia and Spain's colonies in the New World. For centuries, Seville was the only snuff factory in Spain. It added cigars to its product line in the early 1800s. Cigar rollers were exclusively male, at first. The quality of Seville's cigars fell due to labor issues – more common in their factory than in women-operated factories elsewhere. Since men earned higher wages than women, these cigars were more costly, but of lower quality. In 1811 the factory closed its cigar operations, but reopened them in 1813 with a fully female workforce. In 1816 they welcomed a mixed workforce, but by 1828 the factory was back to women-only cigar rollers. In 1950, the factory was refurbished to become part of the University of Seville.

Seguidilla: From the Spanish for "continuous," the *seguidilla* is a music form with an accompanying partner dance (those the dance form is plural: *seguidillas*). A *seguidilla* is typically in quick triple time and in a major key, performed by a singer and guitar, castanets, or tambourine. The dance involves animated footwork while the upper body remains mostly still. There are regional variations of the *seguidilla* from across Spain. According to Oxford's Grove Music dictionary, "The famous *seguidilla* in Bizet's *Carmen* (Act 1, no.10) has, with some reason, been criticized as untypical, yet the triple time, sprightly rhythms and vocal melismas are not far removed from Spanish *seguidillas* of the 18th and 19th centuries."

Top: The flowers of the ***Cassia*** *fistula* or golden shower tree cascading, along with a closeup of the flower and its bud.

Below: The façade of the ***Real fábrica de tabacos*** remains a stunning example of neoclassical architecture. A *cigarrera* (female cigar roller) stands in one of the factory's patios in 1865. (Source: Universidad de Sevilla)



Glossary (cont.)

Military Terms:

Dragoon: A soldier on horseback, perhaps of a low rank. Spanish dragoons were common in the New World, where they protected Spain's missions, villages, and allied native tribes from other Europeans and rival indigenous groups, though they did also exist in Spain.

Brigadier: An intermediate military rank, between a colonel and a full general.

Bullfighting Terms:

Toreador: A bullfighter, especially one on horseback. Also known as a *matador*.

Cuadrilla: In bullfighting, a toreador's team of assistants, including *picadors* and *banderilleros*.

Picador: A man on horseback armed with a barbed lance. During the first "act" of bullfighting, the *picador* impales the bull with the lance in order to stop it from making sudden movements. *Picador* comes from the verb *picar*, which means to sting or bite.

Banderilla: From the Spanish for "little flag," a *banderilla* is a colorfully decorated stick with a barb at the end. In the second of three "acts" of bullfighting, a fighter must land at least four *banderillas* in the bull within the allotted time. A person who throws the *banderilla* is known as a *banderillero*.

***Sources for "Setting the Stage for *Carmen*: Selected Timeline":** *The Annals of Opera* (Alfred Loewenberg, John Calder Publishers, London, 1978); *The Grove Dictionary of Opera* (ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Reference Limited, 1997); *The Timetables of History* (Bernard Grunn, Simon & Schuster, 1991); *The Roads of the Roma* (eds. Ian Hancock, Siobhan Dowd, Rajko Djurić, University of Hertfordshire Press, 1998)

Top: A ***picador*** on horseback lances a bull.

Below: A *banderillero* stabs a bull with a blue and white ***banderilla***.

Kelley's Korner: Last year, Kelley visited Ronda, Spain, the home of modern bullfighting.

Top: Photos from the *Plaza de toros de Ronda*, a bullring.

Below: A statue of a woman holding a guitar. The inscription reads, "In commemoration [of the] 150th anniversary of the birth of the queen of the G*psies. 1855-1933."