

= Carmen =

Carmen (French pronunciation : ? [ka?m?n] ; Spanish : [?karmen]) is an opera in four acts by French composer Georges Bizet . The libretto was written by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy , based on a novella of the same title by Prosper Mérimée . The opera was first performed at the Opéra @-@ Comique in Paris on 3 March 1875 , where its breaking of conventions shocked and scandalized its first audiences . Bizet died suddenly after the 33rd performance , unaware that the work would achieve international acclaim within the following ten years . Carmen has since become one of the most popular and frequently performed operas in the classical canon ; the " Habanera " from act 1 and the " Toreador Song " from act 2 are among the best known of all operatic arias .

The opera is written in the genre of opéra comique with musical numbers separated by dialogue . It is set in southern Spain and tells the story of the downfall of Don José , a naïve soldier who is seduced by the wiles of the fiery gypsy Carmen . José abandons his childhood sweetheart and deserts from his military duties , yet loses Carmen 's love to the glamorous toreador Escamillo , after which José kills her in a jealous rage . The depictions of proletarian life , immorality , and lawlessness , and the tragic death of the main character on stage , broke new ground in French opera and were highly controversial .

After the premiere , most reviews were critical , and the French public was generally indifferent . Carmen initially gained its reputation through a series of productions outside France , and was not revived in Paris until 1883 ; thereafter it rapidly acquired popularity at home and abroad . Later commentators have asserted that Carmen forms the bridge between the tradition of opéra comique and the realism or verismo that characterised late 19th @-@ century Italian opera .

The music of Carmen has since been widely acclaimed for brilliance of melody , harmony , atmosphere , and orchestration , and for the skill with which Bizet musically represented the emotions and suffering of his characters . After the composer 's death , the score was subject to significant amendment , including the introduction of recitative in place of the original dialogue ; there is no standard edition of the opera , and different views exist as to what versions best express Bizet 's intentions . The opera has been recorded many times since the first acoustical recording in 1908 , and the story has been the subject of many screen and stage adaptations .

= = Background = =

In the Paris of the 1860s , despite being a Prix de Rome laureate , Bizet struggled to get his stage works performed . The capital 's two main state @-@ funded opera houses ? the Opéra and the Opéra @-@ Comique ? followed conservative repertoires that restricted opportunities for young native talent . Bizet 's professional relationship with Léon Carvalho , manager of the independent Théâtre Lyrique company , enabled him to bring to the stage two full @-@ scale operas , *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1863) and *La jolie fille de Perth* (1867) , but neither enjoyed much public success .

When artistic life in Paris resumed after the Franco @-@ Prussian War of 1870 ? 71 , Bizet found wider opportunities for the performance of his works ; his one @-@ act opera *Djamileh* opened at the Opéra @-@ Comique in May 1872 . Although this failed and was withdrawn after 11 performances , it led to a further commission from the theatre , this time for a full @-@ length opera for which Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy would provide the libretto . Halévy , who had written the text for Bizet 's student opera *Le docteur Miracle* (1856) , was a cousin of Bizet 's wife , Geneviève ; he and Meilhac had a solid reputation as the librettists of many of Jacques Offenbach 's operettas .

Bizet was delighted with the Opéra @-@ Comique commission , and expressed to his friend Edmund Galabert his satisfaction in " the absolute certainty of having found my path " . The subject of the projected work was a matter of discussion between composer , librettists and the Opéra @-@ Comique management ; Adolphe de Leuven , on behalf of the theatre , made several suggestions that were politely rejected . It was Bizet who first proposed an adaptation of Prosper Mérimée 's novella *Carmen* . Mérimée 's story is a blend of travelogue and adventure yarn , possibly inspired by

the writer 's lengthy travels in Spain in 1830 , and had originally been published in 1845 in the journal *Revue des deux Mondes* . It may have been influenced in part by Alexander Pushkin 's 1824 poem " The Gypsies " , a work Mérimée had translated into French ; it has also been suggested that the story was developed from an incident told to Mérimée by his friend the Countess Montijo . Bizet may first have encountered the story during his Rome sojourn of 1858 ? 60 , since his journals record Mérimée as one of the writers whose works he absorbed in those years .

= = Roles = =

Cast details are as provided by Mina Curtiss (*Bizet and His World* , 1959) from the original piano and vocal score . The stage designs are credited to Charles Ponchard .

= = Synopsis = =

Place : Seville , Spain , and surrounding hills

Time : Around 1820

Act 1

A square , in Seville . On the right , a door to the tobacco factory . At the back , a bridge . On the left , a guardhouse .

A group of soldiers relaxes in the square , waiting for the changing of the guard and commenting on the passers @-@ by (" Sur la place , chacun passe ") . Micaëla appears , seeking José . Moralès tells her that " José is not yet on duty " and invites her to wait with them . She declines , saying she will return later . José arrives with the new guard , which is greeted and imitated by a crowd of urchins (" Avec la garde montante ") .

As the factory bell rings , the cigarette girls emerge and exchange banter with young men in the crowd (" La cloche a sonné ") . Carmen enters and sings her provocative habanera on the untameable nature of love (" L 'amour est un oiseau rebelle ") . The men plead with her to choose a lover , and after some teasing she throws a flower to Don José , who thus far has been ignoring her but is now annoyed by her insolence .

As the women go back to the factory , Micaëla returns and gives José a letter and a kiss from his mother (" Parle @-@ moi de ma mère ! ") . He reads that his mother wants him to return home and marry Micaëla , who retreats in shy embarrassment on learning this . Just as José declares that he is ready to heed his mother 's wishes , the women stream from the factory in great agitation . Zuniga , the officer of the guard , learns that Carmen has attacked a woman with a knife . When challenged , Carmen answers with mocking defiance (" Tra la la ... Coupe @-@ moi , brûle @-@ moi ") ; Zuniga orders José to tie her hands while he prepares the prison warrant . Left alone with José , Carmen beguiles him with a seguidilla , in which she sings of a night of dancing and passion with her lover ? whoever that may be ? in Lillas Pastia 's tavern . Confused yet mesmerised , José agrees to free her hands ; as she is led away she pushes her escort to the ground and runs off laughing . José is arrested for dereliction of duty .

Act 2

Lillas Pastia 's Inn

A month has passed . Carmen and her friends Frasquita and Mercédès are entertaining Zuniga and other officers (" Les tringles des sistres tintaient ") in Pastia 's inn . Carmen is delighted to learn of José 's release from a month 's detention . Outside , a chorus and procession announces the arrival of the toreador Escamillo (" Vivat , vivat le Toréro ") . Invited inside , he introduces himself with the " Toreador Song " (" Votre toast , je peux vous le rendre ") and sets his sights on Carmen , who brushes him aside . Lillas Pastia hustles the crowds and the soldiers away .

When only Carmen , Frasquita and Mercédès remain , the smugglers Dancaïre and Remendado arrive and reveal their plans to dispose of some recently acquired contraband (" Nous avons en tête une affaire ") . Frasquita and Mercédès are keen to help them , but Carmen refuses , since she wishes to wait for José . After the smugglers leave , José arrives . Carmen treats him to a private exotic dance (" Je vais danser en votre honneur ... La la la ") , but her song is joined by a distant

bugle call from the barracks . When José says he must return to duty , she mocks him , and he answers by showing her the flower that she threw to him in the square (" La fleur que tu m 'avais jetée ") . Unconvinced , Carmen demands he show his love by leaving with her . José refuses to desert , but as he prepares to depart , Zuniga enters looking for Carmen . He and José fight , and are separated by the returning smugglers , who restrain Zuniga . Having attacked a superior officer , José now has no choice but to join Carmen and the smugglers (" Suis @-@ nous à travers la campagne ") .

Act 3

A wild spot in the mountains

Carmen and José enter with the smugglers and their booty (" Écoute , écoute , compagnons ") ; Carmen has now become bored with José and tells him scornfully that he should go back to his mother . Frasquita and Mercédès amuse themselves by reading their fortunes from the cards ; Carmen joins them and finds that the cards are foretelling her death , and José 's . The women depart to suborn the customs officers who are watching the locality . José is placed on guard duty .

Micaëla enters with a guide , seeking José and determined to rescue him from Carmen (" Je dis que rien ne m 'épouvante ") . On hearing a gunshot she hides in fear ; it is José , who has fired at an intruder who proves to be Escamillo . José 's pleasure at meeting the bullfighter turns to anger when Escamillo declares his infatuation with Carmen . The pair fight (" Je suis Escamillo , toréro de Grenade ") , but are interrupted by the returning smugglers and girls (" Holà , holà José ") . As Escamillo leaves he invites everyone to his next bullfight in Seville . Micaëla is discovered ; at first , José will not leave with her despite Carmen 's mockery , but he agrees to go when told that his mother is dying . As he departs , vowing he will return , Escamillo is heard in the distance , singing the toreador 's song .

Act 4

A square in Seville . At the back , the walls of an ancient amphitheatre

Zuniga , Frasquita and Mercédès are among the crowd awaiting the arrival of the bullfighters (" Les voici ! Voici la quadrille ! ") . Escamillo enters with Carmen , and they express their mutual love (" Si tu m 'aimes , Carmen ") . As Escamillo goes into the arena , Frasquita warns Carmen that José is nearby , but Carmen is unafraid and willing to speak to him . Alone , she is confronted by the desperate José (" C 'est toi ! C 'est moi ! ") . While he pleads vainly for her to return to him , cheers are heard from the arena . As José makes his last entreaty , Carmen contemptuously throws down the ring he gave her and attempts to enter the arena . He then stabs her , and as Escamillo is acclaimed by the crowds , Carmen dies . José kneels and sings " Ah ! Carmen ! ma Carmen adorée ! " ; as the crowd exits the arena , José confesses to killing the woman he loved .

= = Creation = =

= = = Writing history = = =

Meilhac and Halévy were a long @-@ standing duo with an established division of labour : Meilhac , who was completely unmusical , wrote the dialogue and Halévy the verses . There is no clear indication of when work began on Carmen . Bizet and the two librettists were all in Paris during 1873 and easily able to meet ; thus there is little written record or correspondence relating to the beginning of the collaboration . The libretto was prepared in accordance with the conventions of opéra comique , with dialogue separating musical numbers . It deviates from Mérimée 's novella in a number of significant respects . In the original , events are spread over a much longer period of time , and much of the main story is narrated by José from his prison cell , as he awaits execution for Carmen 's murder . Micaëla does not feature in Mérimée 's version , and the Escamillo character is peripheral ? a picador named Lucas who is only briefly Carmen 's grand passion . Carmen has a husband called Garcia , whom José kills during a quarrel . In the novella , Carmen and José are presented much less sympathetically than they are in the opera ; Bizet 's biographer Mina Curtiss comments that Mérimée 's Carmen , on stage , would have seemed " an unmitigated and

unconvincing monster , had her character not been simplified and deepened " .

With rehearsals due to begin in October 1873 , Bizet began composing in or around January of that year , and by the summer had completed the music for the first act and perhaps sketched more . At that point , according to Bizet 's biographer Winton Dean , " some hitch at the Opéra @-@ Comique intervened " , and the project was suspended for a while . One reason for the delay may have been the difficulties in finding a singer for the title role . Another was a split that developed between the joint directors of the theatre , Camille du Locle and Adolphe de Leuven , over the advisability of staging the work . De Leuven had vociferously opposed the entire notion of presenting so risqué a story in what he considered a family theatre and was sure that audiences would be frightened away . He was assured by Halévy that the story would be toned down , that Carmen 's character would be softened , and offset by Micaëla , described by Halévy as " a very innocent , very chaste young girl " . Furthermore , the gypsies would be presented as comic characters , and Carmen 's death would be overshadowed at the end by " triumphal processions , ballets and joyous fanfares " . De Leuven reluctantly agreed , but his continuing hostility towards the project led to his resignation from the theatre early in 1874 .

After the various delays , Bizet appears to have resumed work on Carmen early in 1874 . He completed the draft of the composition ? 1 @,@ 200 pages of music ? in the summer , which he spent at the artists ' colony at Bougival , just outside Paris . He was pleased with the result , informing a friend : " I have written a work that is all clarity and vivacity , full of colour and melody " . During the period of rehearsals , which began in October , Bizet repeatedly altered the music ? sometimes at the request of the orchestra who found some of it impossible to perform , sometimes to meet the demands of individual singers , and otherwise in response to the demands of the theatre 's management . The vocal score that Bizet published in March 1875 shows significant changes from the version of the score that he sold to the publishers , Choudens , in January 1875 ; the conducting score used at the premiere differs from each of these documents . There is no definitive edition , and there are differences among musicologists about which version represents the composer 's true intentions . Bizet also changed the libretto , reordering sequences and imposing his own verses where he felt that the librettists had strayed too far from the character of Mérimée 's original . Among other changes , he provided new words for Carmen 's " Habanera " , and rewrote the text of Carmen 's solo in the act 3 card scene . He also provided a new opening line for the " Seguidilla " in act 1 .

= = = Characterisation = = =

Most of the characters in Carmen ? the soldiers , the smugglers , the Gypsy women and the secondary leads Micaëla and Escamillo ? are reasonably familiar types within the opéra comique tradition , although drawing them from proletarian life was unusual . The two principals , José and Carmen , lie outside the genre . While each is presented quite differently from Mérimée 's portrayals of a murderous brigand and a treacherous , amoral schemer , even in their relatively sanitised forms neither corresponds to the norms of opéra comique . They are more akin to the verismo style that would find fuller expression in the works of Puccini .

Dean considers that José is the central figure of the opera : " It is his fate rather than Carmen 's that interests us " . The music characterizes his gradual decline , act by act , from honest soldier to deserter , vagabond and finally murderer . In act 1 he is a simple countryman aligned musically with Micaëla ; in act 2 he evinces a greater toughness , the result of his experiences as a prisoner , but it is clear that by the end of the act his infatuation with Carmen has driven his emotions beyond control . Dean describes him in act 3 as a trapped animal who refuses to leave his cage even when the door is opened for him , ravaged by a mix of conscience , jealousy and despair . In the final act his music assumes a grimness and purposefulness that reflects his new fatalism : " He will make one more appeal ; if Carmen refuses , he knows what to do " .

Carmen herself , says Dean , is a new type of operatic heroine representing a new kind of love , not the innocent kind associated with the " spotless soprano " school , but something altogether more vital and dangerous . Her capriciousness , fearlessness and love of freedom are all musically

represented : " She is redeemed from any suspicion of vulgarity by her qualities of courage and fatalism so vividly realised in the music " . Curtiss suggests that Carmen 's character , spiritually and musically , may be a realisation of the composer 's own unconscious longing for a freedom denied to him by his stifling marriage . Harold C. Schonberg likens Carmen to " a female Don Giovanni . She would rather die than be false to herself " . The dramatic personality of the character , and the range of moods she is required to express , call for exceptional acting and singing talents . This has deterred some of opera 's most distinguished exponents ; Maria Callas , though she recorded the part , never performed it on stage . The musicologist Hugh Macdonald observes that " French opera never produced another femme fatale as Carmen " , though she may have influenced some of Massenet 's heroines . Macdonald suggests that outside the French repertoire , Richard Strauss 's Salome and Alban Berg 's Lulu " may be seen as distant degenerate descendants of Bizet 's temptress " .

Bizet was reportedly contemptuous of the music that he wrote for Escamillo : " Well , they asked for ordure , and they 've got it " , he is said to have remarked about the toreador 's song ? but , as Dean comments , " the triteness lies in the character , not in the music " . Micaëla 's music has been criticised for its " Gounodesque " elements , although Dean maintains that her music has greater vitality than that of any of Gounod 's own heroines .

= = Performance history = =

= = = Assembling the cast = = =

The search for a singer @-@ actress to play Carmen began in the summer of 1873 . Press speculation favoured Zulma Bouffar , who was perhaps the librettists ' preferred choice . She had sung leading roles in many of Offenbach 's operas , but she was unacceptable to Bizet and was turned down by du Locle as unsuitable . In September an approach was made to Marie Roze , well known for previous triumphs at the Opéra @-@ Comique , the Opéra and in London . She refused the part when she learned that she would be required to die on stage . The role was then offered to Célestine Galli @-@ Marié , who agreed to terms with du Locle after several months ' negotiation . Galli @-@ Marié , a demanding and at times tempestuous performer , would prove a staunch ally of Bizet , often supporting his resistance to demands from the management that the work should be toned down . At the time it was generally believed that she and the composer were conducting a love affair during the months of rehearsal .

The leading tenor part of Don José was given to Paul Lhérie , a rising star of the Opéra @-@ Comique who had recently appeared in works by Massenet and Delibes . He would later become a baritone , and in 1887 sang the role of Zurga in the Covent Garden premiere of Les pêcheurs de perles . Jacques Bouhy , engaged to sing Escamillo , was a young Belgian @-@ born baritone who had already appeared in demanding roles such as Méphistophélès in Gounod 's Faust and as Mozart 's Figaro . Marguerite Chapuy , who sang Micaëla , was at the beginning of a short career in which she was briefly a star at London 's Theatre Royal , Drury Lane ; the impresario James H. Mapleson thought her " one of the most charming vocalists it has been my pleasure to know " . However , she married and left the stage altogether in 1876 , refusing Mapleson 's considerable cash inducements to return .

= = = Premiere and initial run = = =

Because rehearsals did not start until October 1874 and lasted longer than anticipated , the premiere was delayed . The final rehearsals went well , and in a generally optimistic mood the first night was fixed for 3 March 1875 , the day on which , coincidentally , Bizet 's appointment as a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour was formally announced . The premiere , which was conducted by Adolphe Deloffre , was attended by many of Paris 's leading musical figures , including Massenet , Offenbach , Delibes and Gounod ; during the performance the last @-@ named was overheard

complaining bitterly that Bizet had stolen the music of Micaëla 's act 3 aria from him : " That melody is mine ! " Halévy recorded his impressions of the premiere in a letter to a friend ; the first act was evidently well received , with applause for the main numbers and numerous curtain calls . The first part of act 2 also went well , but after the toreador 's song there was , Halévy noted , " coldness " . In act 3 only Micaëla 's aria earned applause as the audience became increasingly disconcerted . The final act was " glacial from first to last " , and Bizet was left " only with the consolations of a few friends " . The critic Ernest Newman wrote later that the sentimentalist Opéra @-@ Comique audience was " shocked by the drastic realism of the action " and by the low standing and defective morality of most of the characters . According to the composer Benjamin Godard , Bizet retorted , in response to a compliment , " Don 't you see that all these bourgeois have not understood a wretched word of the work I have written for them ? " In a different vein , shortly after the work had concluded , Massenet sent Bizet a congratulatory note : " How happy you must be at this time ? it 's a great success ! " .

The general tone of the next day 's press reviews ranged from disappointment to outrage . The more conservative critics complained about " Wagnerism " and the subordination of the voice to the noise of the orchestra . There was consternation that the heroine was an amoral seductress rather than a woman of virtue ; Galli @-@ Marié 's interpretation of the role was described by one critic as " the very incarnation of vice " . Others compared the work unfavourably with the traditional Opéra @-@ Comique repertoire of Auber and Boieldieu . Léon Escudier in L 'Art Musical called Carmen 's music " dull and obscure ... the ear grows weary of waiting for the cadence that never comes " . It seemed that Bizet had generally failed to fulfill expectations , both of those who (given Halévy 's and Meilhac 's past associations) had expected something in the Offenbach mould , and of critics such as Adolphe Jullien who had anticipated a Wagnerian music drama . Among the few supportive critics was the poet Théodore de Banville ; writing in Le National , he applauded Bizet for presenting a drama with real men and women instead of the usual Opéra @-@ Comique " puppets " .

In its initial run at the Opéra @-@ Comique , Carmen provoked little public enthusiasm ; it shared the theatre for a while with Verdi 's much more popular Requiem . Carmen was often performed to half @-@ empty houses , even when the management gave away large numbers of tickets . Early on 3 June , the day after the opera 's 33rd performance , Bizet died suddenly of heart disease , at the age of 36 . It was his wedding anniversary . That night 's performance was cancelled ; the tragic circumstances brought a temporary increase in public interest during the brief period before the season ended . Du Locle brought Carmen back in November 1875 , with the original cast , and it ran for a further 12 performances until 15 February 1876 to give a year 's total for the original production of 48 . Among those who attended one of these later performances was Tchaikovsky , who wrote to his benefactor , Nadezhda von Meck : " Carmen is a masterpiece in every sense of the word ... one of those rare creations which expresses the efforts of a whole musical epoch " . After the final performance , Carmen was not seen in Paris again until 1883 .

= = = Early revivals = = =

Shortly before his death Bizet signed a contract for a production of Carmen by the Vienna Court Opera . For this version , first staged on 23 October 1875 , Bizet 's friend Ernest Guiraud replaced the original dialogue with recitatives , to create a " grand opera " format . Guiraud also reorchestrated music from Bizet 's L 'Arlésienne suite to provide a spectacular ballet for Carmen 's second act . Shortly before the initial Vienna performance the Court Opera 's director Franz von Jauner decided to use parts of the original dialogue along with some of Guiraud 's recitatives ; this hybrid and the full recitative version became the norms for productions of the opera outside France for most of the next century .

Despite its deviations from Bizet 's original format , and some critical reservations , the 1875 Vienna production was a great success with the city 's public , and won praise from both Wagner and Brahms . The latter reportedly saw the opera 20 times , and said that he would have " gone to the ends of the earth to embrace Bizet " . The Viennese triumph began the opera 's rapid ascent towards worldwide fame . In February 1876 it began a run in Brussels at La Monnaie ; it returned

there the following year , with Galli @-@ Marié in the title role , and thereafter became a permanent fixture in the Brussels repertory . On 17 June 1878 Carmen was produced in London , at Her Majesty 's Theatre , where Minnie Hauk began her long association with the part of Carmen . A parallel London production at Covent Garden , with Adelina Patti , was cancelled when Patti withdrew . The successful Her Majesty 's production , sung in Italian , had an equally enthusiastic reception in Dublin . On 23 October 1878 the opera received its American premiere , at the New York Academy of Music , and in the same year was introduced to Saint Petersburg .

In the following five years performances were given in numerous American and European cities , the opera finding particular favour in Germany , where the Chancellor , Otto von Bismarck , apparently saw it on 27 different occasions and where Friedrich Nietzsche opined that he " became a better man when Bizet speaks to me " . Carmen was also acclaimed in numerous French provincial cities including Marseille , Lyon and , in 1881 , Dieppe , where Galli @-@ Marié returned to the role . In August 1881 the singer wrote to Bizet 's widow to report that Carmen 's Spanish premiere , in Barcelona , had been " another great success " . But Carvalho , who had assumed the management of the Opéra @-@ Comique , thought the work immoral and refused to reinstate it . Meilhac and Halévy were more prepared to countenance a revival , provided that Galli @-@ Marié had no part in it ; they blamed her interpretation for the relative failure of the opening run .

In April 1883 Carvalho finally revived Carmen at the Opéra @-@ Comique , with Adèle Isaac featuring in an under @-@ rehearsed production that removed some of the controversial aspects of the original . Carvalho was roundly condemned by the critics for offering a travesty of what had come to be regarded as a masterpiece of French opera ; nevertheless , this version was acclaimed by the public and played to full houses . In October Carvalho yielded to pressure and revised the production ; he brought back Galli @-@ Marié , and restored the score and libretto to their 1875 forms .

= = = Worldwide success = = =

On 9 January 1884 Carmen was given its first New York Metropolitan Opera performance , to a mixed critical reception . The New York Times welcomed Bizet 's " pretty and effective work " , but compared Zelia Trebelli 's interpretation of the title role unfavourably with that of Minnie Hauk . Thereafter Carmen was quickly incorporated into the Met 's regular repertory . In February 1906 Enrico Caruso sang José at the Met for the first time ; he continued to perform in this role until 1919 , two years before his death . On 17 April 1906 , on tour with the Met , he sang the role at the Grand Opera House in San Francisco . Afterwards he sat up until 3 am reading the reviews in the early editions of the following day 's papers . Two hours later he was awakened by the first violent shocks of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake , after which he and his fellow performers made a hurried escape from the Palace Hotel .

The popularity of Carmen continued through succeeding generations of American opera @-@ goers ; by the beginning of 2011 the Met alone had performed it almost a thousand times . It enjoyed similar success in other American cities and in all parts of the world , in many different languages . Carmen 's habanera from act 1 , and the toreador 's song " Votre toast " from act 2 , are among the most popular and best @-@ known of all operatic arias , the latter " a splendid piece of swagger " according to Newman , " against which the voices and the eyebrows of purists have long been raised in vain " . Most of the productions outside France followed the example created in Vienna and incorporated lavish ballet interludes and other spectacles , a practice which Mahler abandoned in Vienna when he revived the work there in 1900 . In 1919 Bizet 's aged contemporary Camille Saint @-@ Saëns was still complaining about the " strange idea " of adding a ballet , which he considered " a hideous blemish in that masterpiece " , and he wondered why Bizet 's widow , at that time still living , permitted it .

At the Opéra @-@ Comique , after its 1883 revival , Carmen was always presented in the dialogue version with minimal musical embellishments . By 1888 , the year of the 50th anniversary of Bizet 's birth , the opera had been performed there 330 times ; by 1938 , his centenary year , the total of performances at the theatre had reached 2 @, @ 271 . However , outside France the practice of

using recitatives remained the norm for many years ; the Carl Rosa Opera Company 's 1947 London production , and Walter Felsenstein 's 1949 staging at the Berlin Komische Oper , are among the first known instances in which the dialogue version was used other than in France . Neither of these innovations led to much change in practice ; a similar experiment was tried at Covent Garden in 1953 but hurriedly withdrawn , and the first American production with spoken dialogue , in Colorado in 1953 , met with a similar fate .

Dean has commented on the dramatic distortions that arise from the suppression of the dialogue ; the effect , he says , is that the action moves forward " in a series of jerks , rather instead of by smooth transition " , and that most of the minor characters are substantially diminished . Only late in the 20th century did dialogue versions become common in opera houses outside France , but there is still no universally recognised full score . Fritz Oeser 's 1964 edition is an attempt to fill this gap , but in Dean 's view is unsatisfactory . Oeser reintroduces material removed by Bizet during the first rehearsals , and ignores many of the late changes and improvements that the composer made immediately before the first performance ; he thus , according to Susan McClary , " inadvertently preserves as definitive an early draft of the opera " . In the early 21st century new editions were prepared by Robert Didion and Richard Langham @-@ Smith , published by Schott and Peters respectively . Each departs significantly from Bizet 's vocal score of March 1875 , published during his lifetime after he had personally corrected the proofs ; Dean believes that this vocal score should be the basis of any standard edition . Lesley Wright , a contemporary Bizet scholar , remarks that , unlike his compatriots Rameau and Debussy , Bizet has not been accorded a critical edition of his principal works ; should this transpire , she says , " we might expect yet another scholar to attempt to refine the details of this vibrant score which has so fascinated the public and performers for more than a century " . Meanwhile , Carmen 's popularity endures ; according to Macdonald : " The memorability of Bizet 's tunes will keep the music of Carmen alive in perpetuity " , and its status as a popular classic is unchallenged by any other French opera .

= = Music = =

Hervé Lacombe , in his survey of 19th @-@ century French opera , contends that Carmen is one of the few works from that large repertory to have stood the test of time . While he places the opera firmly within the long opéra comique tradition , Macdonald considers that it transcends the genre and that its immortality is assured by " the combination in abundance of striking melody , deft harmony and perfectly judged orchestration " . Dean sees Bizet 's principal achievement in the demonstration of the main actions of the opera in the music , rather than in the dialogue , writing that " Few artists have expressed so vividly the torments inflicted by sexual passions and jealousy " . Dean places Bizet 's realism in a different category from the verismo of Puccini and others ; he likens the composer to Mozart and Verdi in his ability to engage his audiences with the emotions and sufferings of his characters .

Bizet , who had never visited Spain , sought out appropriate ethnic material to provide an authentic Spanish flavour to his music . Carmen 's habanera is based on an idiomatic song , " El Arreglito " , by the Spanish composer Sebastián Yradier (1809 ? 65) . Bizet had taken this to be a genuine folk melody ; when he learned its recent origin he added a note to the vocal score , crediting Yradier . He used a genuine folksong as the source of Carmen 's defiant " Coupe @-@ moi , brûle @-@ moi " while other parts of the score , notably the " Seguidilla " , utilise the rhythms and instrumentation associated with flamenco music . However , Dean insists that " [t] his is a French , not a Spanish opera " ; the " foreign bodies " , while they undoubtedly contribute to the unique atmosphere of the opera , form only a small ingredient of the complete music .

The prelude to act 1 combines three recurrent themes : the entry of the bullfighters from act 4 , the refrain from the Toreador Song from act 2 , and the motif that , in two slightly differing forms , represents both Carmen herself and the fate that she personifies . This motif , played on clarinet , bassoon , cornet and cellos over tremolo strings , concludes the prelude with an abrupt crescendo . When the curtain rises a light and sunny atmosphere is soon established , and pervades the opening scenes . The mock solemnities of the changing of the guard , and the flirtatious exchanges

between the townsfolk and the factory girls , precede a mood change when a brief phrase from the fate motif announces Carmen 's entrance . After her provocative habanera , with its persistent insidious rhythm and changes of key , the fate motif sounds in full when Carmen throws her flower to José before departing . This action elicits from José a passionate A major solo that Dean suggests is the turning @-@ point in his musical characterisation . The softer vein returns briefly , as Micaëla reappears and joins with José in a duet to a warm clarinet and strings accompaniment . The tranquillity is shattered by the women 's noisy quarrel , Carmen 's dramatic re @-@ entry and her defiant interaction with Zuniga . After her beguiling " Seguidilla " provokes José to an exasperated high A sharp shout , Carmen 's escape is preceded by the brief but disconcerting reprise of a fragment from the habanera . Bizet revised this finale several times to increase its dramatic effect .

Act 2 begins with a short prelude , based on a melody that José will sing offstage before his next entry . A festive scene in the inn precedes Escamillo 's tumultuous entrance , in which brass and percussion provide prominent backing while the crowd sings along . The quintet that follows is described by Newman as " of incomparable verve and musical wit " . José 's appearance precipitates a long mutual wooing scene ; Carmen sings , dances and plays the castanets ; a distant cornet @-@ call summoning José to duty is blended with Carmen 's melody so as to be barely discernible . A muted reference to the fate motif on an English horn leads to José 's " Flower Song " , a flowing continuous melody that ends pianissimo on a sustained high B @-@ flat . José 's insistence that , despite Carmen 's blandishments , he must return to duty leads to a quarrel ; the arrival of Zuniga , the consequent fight and José 's unavoidable ensnarement into the lawless life culminates musically in the triumphant hymn to freedom that closes the act .

The prelude to act 3 was originally intended for Bizet 's L 'Arlésienne score . Newman describes it as " an exquisite miniature , with much dialoguing and intertwining between the woodwind instruments " . As the action unfolds , the tension between Carmen and José is evident in the music . In the card scene , the lively duet for Frasquita and Mercédès turns ominous when Carmen intervenes ; the fate motif underlines her premonition of death . Micaëla 's aria , after her entry in search of José , is a conventional piece , though of deep feeling , preceded and concluded by horn calls . The middle part of the act is occupied by Escamillo and José , now acknowledged as rivals for Carmen 's favour . The music reflects their contrasting attitudes : Escamillo remains , says Newman , " invincibly polite and ironic " , while José is sullen and aggressive . When Micaëla pleads with José to go with her to his mother , the harshness of Carmen 's music reveals her most unsympathetic side . As José departs , vowing to return , the fate theme is heard briefly in the woodwind . The confident , off @-@ stage sound of the departing Escamillo singing the toreador 's refrain provides a distinct contrast to José 's increasing desperation .

The final act is prefaced with a lively orchestral piece derived from Manuel García 's short operetta El Criado Fingido . After the opening crowd scene , the bullfighters ' march is led by the children 's chorus ; the crowd hails Escamillo before his short love scene with Carmen . The long finale , in which José makes his last pleas to Carmen and is decisively rejected , is punctuated at critical moments by enthusiastic off @-@ stage shouts from the bullfighting arena . As José kills Carmen , the chorus sing the refrain of the Toreador Song off @-@ stage ; the fate motif , which has been suggestively present at various points during the act , is heard fortissimo , together with a brief reference to Carmen 's card scene music . Jose 's last words of love and despair are followed by a final long chord , on which the curtain falls without further musical or vocal comment .

= = Musical numbers = =

Numbers are from the vocal score (English version) printed by G. Schirmer Inc . , New York , 1958 from Giraud 's 1875 arrangement .

= = Recordings and adaptations = =

Carmen has been the subject of many recordings , beginning with early wax cylinder recordings of excerpts in the 1890s , a nearly complete performance in German from 1908 with Emmy Destinn in

the title role , and a complete 1911 Opéra @-@ Comique recording in French . Since then , many of the leading opera houses and artistes have recorded the work , in both studio and live performances . Over the years many versions have been commended and reissued . From the mid @-@ 1990s numerous video recordings have become available . These include David McVicar 's Glyndebourne production of 2002 , and the Royal Opera productions of 2007 and 2010 , each designed by Francesca Zambello .

In 1883 the Spanish violinist and composer Pablo de Sarasate (1844 ? 1908) wrote a Carmen Fantasy for violin , described as " ingenious and technically difficult " . Ferruccio Busoni 's 1920 piece , Piano Sonatina No. 6 (Fantasia da camera super Carmen) , is based on themes from Carmen . In 1967 the Russian composer Rodion Shchedrin adapted parts of the Carmen music into a ballet , the Carmen Suite , written specifically for his wife Maya Plisetskaya , then the Bolshoi Ballet 's principal ballerina .

The character " Carmen " has been a regular subject of film treatment since the earliest days of cinema . The films range across many languages and cultures , and have been created by prominent directors including Raoul Walsh (1915) , Cecil B. DeMille (1915) , Otto Preminger (1954) and Jean @-@ Luc Godard (1984) . Preminger 's Carmen Jones was adapted from a 1943 Broadway musical of the same name . The story is transposed to 1940s Chicago , and employs an all @-@ black cast . Francesco Rosi 's film of 1984 , with Julia Migenes and Plácido Domingo , is generally faithful to the original story and to Bizet 's music . Carmen on Ice (1990) , starring Katarina Witt , Brian Boitano and Brian Orser , was inspired by Witt 's gold medal @-@ winning performance during the 1988 Winter Olympics . Robert Townsend 's 2001 film , Carmen : A Hip Hopera , starring Beyoncé Knowles , is a more recent attempt to create an African @-@ American version .