STUDY GUIDE

For Students Only Dress Rehearsal

April 16, 2015
7:00 PM
Jubilee Auditorium
www.calgaryopera.com
Welcome to Calgary Opera’s production of Carmen!

Opéra is a unique and exciting art form that combines the disciplines of music, drama, literature, dance, visual, and technical arts like no other.

This guide will give you a backstage tour of all that is opera - terminology, inside information on the production, the history behind the opera and the composer, as well as ideas for including opera in your students’ learning.

We hope that this guide will assist you in making opera connections in your classroom in a fun and interesting ways as well as to use Carmen as a point of departure for their learning. Exposure to performing and fine arts helps students develop critical analysis and problem solving skills, perseverance, and a drive for excellence. The creative skills students develop through the arts carry them toward new ideas, new experiences and new challenges. Plus, there’s nothing like the excitement and magic of a live professional performance!

Thank you for giving your students this special opportunity.

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Preparation

The more students are prepared for this experience, the more they will get out of it. Knowing the story, the life and times of the composer and music is very important in making the student opera experience a sensational one.

Before the Opera

- Review the study guide, including the suggested preparation and learning activities, before deciding on which will be the best fit for your students. Some of the activities/discussions should be started prior to seeing the opera. Preparing students ahead of time gives them a chance to view the opera with understanding i.e. history, reviewing, character studies, discussions, etc.
- Read the enclosed Carmen synopsis, which provides background information and helps familiarize students and teachers with the story.
- Read the history of the opera, composer and director, and familiarize your group with opera terms (all items in the guide can be reproduced).
- Familiarize students with the characters and their corresponding opera voice types (i.e. soprano, mezzo-soprano, bass, baritone, and tenor.) This enables students to identify them during the opera.
- Discuss the characters and plot, and engage students in discussion around the suggested themes.
- You may wish to assign students to write a review on the opera – a guideline for writing reviews is included in this study guide.
- You may assign some students to report on singing, characters, orchestra, costumes, scenery etc. after the dress rehearsal.
- Make sure that meeting places and times are clear at the Jubilee Auditorium.
- Review the audience expectations in our “Attending the Opera” section.

Some teachers have found it advisable to give out assigned seat tickets at a meeting place in the hall just before a performance, as lost tickets cannot be replaced.
Attending the Opera

There’s nothing more exciting than attending an opera! You’ll be a guest at the final dress rehearsal of Georges Bizet’s Carmen. Here’s what you’ll need to know about attending the opera:

You may notice a long table with lights and people sitting behind it in the centre of the main floor of the auditorium. Seated in this area is the production team: Director, Lighting Designer, Fight Director, and Choreographer (among others.) They’ll be taking notes and communicating with the many people backstage who help make all of the operatic magic happen. They’ll be able to talk to the crew so changes can be made. Should anything need some adjustments, the rehearsal might be stopped or a part repeated to make sure that it is perfect.

SHOW SOME R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

Unlike actors on television or in the movies, performers onstage are very aware of the audience. They want to share their love of performing with you. Everything you do in the audience affects what happens on stage. You can show them how much you appreciate their work and the opportunity to come to the rehearsal by being as quiet as possible.

Show your respect for the cast, musicians, the production team, and everyone in the theatre by not talking. Give the artists and the production your full attention!

Here’s a list of DOs and DON’Ts so that everyone in the theatre can enjoy the opera:

Please Do...

› Use the bathrooms before the rehearsal begins or at intermission.

› Enter and exit the theatre in an orderly fashion.

› Think about what makes a good audience member.

› Turn off your cell phones and all electronic devices.

› Applaud when the conductor enters and bows, then again after the overture.

› Applaud after the arias as well as after the performance; you can shout “Bravo!” for a man, “Brava!” for a woman, and “Bravi!” for more than one person, or the whole performance.

› Enjoy the rehearsal. You’ve worked too hard preparing for the rehearsal not to!
**Don’t Forget...**

› When you are seated, you may be able to see the orchestra tuning their instruments in the orchestra pit.

› Keep movement and voices down to a minimum as this is a live dress rehearsal performance.

› Keep food, drinks and gum outside of the auditorium – the Jubilee Auditorium has great acoustics so every sound can be heard in the theatre. Bottled water is allowed.

**When the house lights dim, it’s time to:**

› Turn off all cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices. The use of cameras or recording devices is strictly forbidden.

› After the curtain goes down and the lights go up, the intermission (20 minutes) begins. Now is the time to talk, eat (in the lobby) and use the washroom.

› Be silent if the performance has to stop for a few moments (this is a performance, but also a working rehearsal so it may be necessary to stop at times).

› If you must use the washroom during the performance, please be accompanied by an adult supervisor. The ushers will let you in again but you will have to wait until there is an appropriate break in the opera. Many times this is not until intermission.
Part One: Preparation and follow-up activities

1. Write a Review or Critique of the Performance
   A sample review is found in Part Two of this study guide.

One of the best ways to encourage critical thinking of a performing arts production is to encourage students’ honesty and draw out detailed opinions. A productive evaluation session - spoken, written, visual or dramatized - should follow this basic ‘how-to’ outline below.

On the internet, students can find many reviews of Carmen from other opera companies’ performances to use as a guideline or example.

Guidelines for writing a review

When writing an opera review you can focus on many different elements, but keep in mind the acting, singing, technical aspects, orchestration, and the overall view of the performance.

Performance of the Singers

The acting and singing are probably the most important aspects of the opera. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the opera and its characters before you go see it. Make sure you know all of the characters’ names and the singers who are playing them; the study guide or the Calgary Opera website is an ideal place to find all this information.

- Did they bring the music to life? Could you see and hear the emotion while they sang? Did they interact well with others on stage?
- Did any particular performer stand out to you and why? How did the singer communicate his/her character? Did you feel that the singer’s character was believable? Sympathetic? How well are they giving and taking focus?

Technical Aspects

It has been said that if the technical aspects of a performance become noticeable, then they are not effective. Keep in mind that the sets, lights, sound, make-up, and costumes are there to enhance the performance.

- Were the costumes appropriate to the time period? Did they enhance the characters?
- Did the lighting design communicate time of day and/or mood? Did it cast unflattering or distracting shadows? Was the set complex or simple? How did this help or hinder the production?
- What do you notice about the make-up worn by the singers on stage that differs from what people might wear out in public? Did it age a singer? Make them appear more youthful? Was it done well?
Musical Aspects

Reviewing the musical performance is a tricky thing, and most reviewers continue to develop their ear for the music and knowledge of the art form their entire lives.

- Did you enjoy the music? Did you feel that the singers performed it smooth and effortlessly? What was your favourite musical moment? What part did you feel had the power to move you emotionally?

So in conclusion, remember the singing, acting, music, the technical and the overall view, and you’ll have written a successful theatre review. Try to keep in mind that to be a theatre critic you often have to be critical, so if you feel that something was badly done include that in your review. Constructive criticism can be helpful. Keep these things in mind when writing your review and it will be great. Have fun!

2. Engage Students in Meaningful Discussions

- In what ways does opera differ from a musical? How is it similar?
- *Carmen* explores themes of loyalty and love, freedom and betrayal. Which of these themes are still relevant today? How do they continue to influence popular culture?
- Who is the villain in this opera? Is there one? Why, or why not? Do you think this is fair?
- Exoticism, meaning the artistic use of foreign cultures based on both a love of fantasy and unfamiliarity, is a major theme used in *Carmen* and its exploration of gypsy and Spanish culture. What are some examples of exoticism in *Carmen*? How is exoticism used as an engaging way to touch audiences?

Background information for the following questions and activities can be found in Part Two of the Study Guide.
3. **Compare and Contrast**

*Carmen* is not just any opera; it is a story of love, fate and morality with a deep, impactful connection to society and culture. As such, there have been many creative and innovative interpretations over the years—over 30 silent films, non-lyric adaptations, as well as plays, movies, and other lyric and dramatic works.

The following three examples are adaptations of the opera or its source novella (*Carmen*); pick one, watch the clip, and compare it to the corresponding clip of the traditional operatic version. How is it similar? How is it different? Think about music, theme, design and characterizations. Is this adaptation trying to be like the original opera, or is it trying to do something completely new? How successful do you think it is? Which do you prefer, and why?

**Carmen Jones:  Stan’ Up An’ Fight! (Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre)**

http://youtu.be/FPQ3BD6MeTQ

This excerpt is from *Carmen Jones*, a Broadway musical from 1943 based on Bizet’s *Carmen*, with more updated, “modern” lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein. This musical is normally played by an all-black cast in a World War II, African-American setting. Later, the musical was adapted into film in 1954, starring Dorothy Dandridge in the title role. This particular piece is adapted from the famous *Toreador* song “Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre” by the bullfighter Escamillo.

Traditional Operatic Version: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Nzsh60MQto](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Nzsh60MQto)
**Carmen on Ice: Seguidilla (Près des remparts de Séville)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3CkejdkSOs

Some people find Bizet’s compositions so charming, even without the lyrics, that they use them in other non-lyric ways, such as the upcoming production of Alberta Ballet’s own *Carmen*, or, in this case, *Carmen on Ice*! This dance film from 1990 features Katarina Witt, a very talented figure skater who’d only two years previously won her second Olympic Gold Medal at the Winter Games in Calgary, by free skating to music from Carmen. The skater depicting Don José, Brian Boitano, won his first medal that same year. *Carmen on Ice* won an Emmy for Outstanding Performance in a Classical Music or Dance Program in 1990, and is a fresh take on the classic opera.

Traditional Operatic Version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3RaYSzOQv0

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**U-Carmen eKhayelitsha: Habanera (L’amour est un oiseau rebelle)**

https://youtu.be/M7KVnHDRAko?t=45s

Perhaps the freshest and most innovative example presented in this guide, *U-Carmen* is an exciting take on the opera *Carmen*. Not only does the story of *U-Carmen* take place in Khayelitsha, South Africa, but the original text of *Carmen* was translated completely into the South African dialect of Xhosa. Not only are all characters African, but Carmen herself defies the typical image of a slender, skin-baring European woman, showcasing a different cultural take on attraction and seduction. All musical numbers in this film were recorded live without any dubbing, another credit to the artistic value of this fascinating adaptation.

Traditional Operatic Version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YSYRDUXGC8

Bonus: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXKUb5A1auM
4. **Research and Report**

Carmen is known as a world-famous gypsy, and there are many examples of famous gypsies in popular culture, such as Esmerelda in Disney’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. However, this fantastic and exotic style is based off of a real group of people, known as the “Roma” or “Romani”. Research this interesting and distinct ethnic group, their culture, and their history.

- Who are the Romani?
- How do the Romani differ from other members of European society?
- How do they fit into European culture today? What challenges do the Romani face?

5. **Be a Costume Designer**

Read the synopsis in Part Two of this study guide, as well as the character list. Think about the gypsy Carmen, or the bullfighter Escamillo, and design a costume for one of the two. Think about a variety of colors and designs, as well as style inspirations from the gypsy and Spanish cultures.

6. **Research Georges Bizet, the composer of Carmen**

Georges Bizet is one of the most highly-regarded composers of all-time, and his early and unfortunate death was a huge loss to the music community of his time. More unfortunate still is the fact that Bizet died never knowing the fame he would attain after his death. Many of his works are still played to this day, and many of Bizet’s tunes (especially from *Carmen*) are so popular, you’ve probably heard them before in surprising and unexpected ways. For more information, read the accompanying biography in Part 2 of this guide, and find answers in there (and elsewhere) for the following questions:

- Who was Georges Bizet? What is he best known for?
- Why do you think Bizet has had such an impact in Opera?
- What exciting historical milestones of Bizet’s time could have impacted or inspired this composer and his work?
7. **Listen to the following music selections to learn more about the music in Carmen**

### Overture

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQI5LtRtrb0**

The overture is an introduction to the whole opera, and sets the mood for what’s to come. This one is vibrant and sets the tone for the bohemian joy and excitement which mark this entire opera, as well as the themes of fate and heartbreak to come. It also contains many of the biggest themes of the opera, as a way to hint at some of the great tunes to come.

### Act II, Quintet: *Nous avons en tête une affaire*

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpWxfb3V36I**

In this excerpt, Carmen and her friends, Frasquita (soprano) and Mercédès (mezzo-soprano), and the smugglers Dancaïre (baritone) and Remendado (tenor), sing about a clever plan to dispose of some unwanted stolen goods. This arrangement of voices is called a quintet, meaning five voices collaborating in the same song.

### Act III, Micaëla: *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante*

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peh-fSo3FvM**

Micaëla is the perfect “foil” or opposite of Carmen, and here we see just what makes Micaëla so profoundly different from our title character. Micaëla has traveled far to the somewhat frightening place where her once-beloved Don José has followed Carmen, losing everything in the process. In following his obsession and passion for Carmen, Don José has abandoned everything, including Micaëla, and yet this strong and soft-spoken character hasn’t come for vengeance, or out of anger, or even to beg for his love once more. Rather, Micaëla has bravely come to tell Don José that his mother is dying, and to encourage him to not let her die without seeing her. Micaëla’s selflessness, strength and serenity are what make her so very different from the bold, incendiary and often selfish Carmen.
Act II, Don José: "La fleur que tu m'avais jetée"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVY3vKQK5v4

Here we see the soft and sympathetic side of tenor Don José, as he sings of his continued love and devotion for Carmen, despite his desire to return to his post. Don José has been imprisoned for a month for having let Carmen escape from his custody, and he shows her the flower she gave him at first meeting as a sign of his continued thoughts of and devotion to her, no matter how long he was gone or how he may want to return to his work.

8. Explore Calgary Opera’s website to find out more about Calgary Opera

There are videos, synopses, artist bios and more at www.calgaryopera.com

NOTE: Background information for all activities found in Part Two: Teacher resource materials
An opera, especially one with the dramatic force of Carmen, Georges Bizet's most famous work, needs to be the whole package – well sung, well played and smartly staged – in a day when the world's finest productions are available at the movie theatre on a Saturday afternoon.

The Canadian Opera Company's refreshed older production, which opened on Wednesday night at the Four Seasons Centre, is very well sung and has some moments of true spark. But the staging too often robs it of the necessary vitality to hold interest.

Fortunately, the role of Carmen, the love-'em-and-leave-'em gypsy girl, is being sung in the first eight of 12 performances by someone who is the whole package: Israeli-born mezzo soprano Rinat Shaham. She has all the dramatic vocal timbre, temperamental spark and the tightly coiled energy anyone could wish for.

You would never know she was a last-minute replacement last week in the way she commands the stage with confidence.

One more terrific singer in the cast is mellower-voiced soprano Jessica Muirhead, a company regular, ideally cast as Micaëla, the sole voice of sanity and rectitude.

The COC Orchestra is another star under debuting young Scottish conductor Rory Macdonald, who teases all the fine nuances out of Bizet's 1875 score.

The rest of the cast and chorus sound just fine, but the two males who vie for Carmen's affections are both less than ideal actors.

Tenor Bryan Hymel plays Don José as a slouching wimp, as awkward and gormless as a 40-year-old virgin. When he finally shows some signs of true passion in the second act
and in the final scene, where he stabs the woman who spurns his love, the emotion comes as a surprise rather than as a culmination of pent-up desire.

Paul Gay cuts a fine figure as toreador Escamillo. But the French singer is more baritone than bass-baritone, and his acting is wooden.

Michael Yeargan's naturalistic set feels cramped as it herds the large cast and chorus toward the edge of the stage. Director Justin Way, making his COC debut, creates more stasis than movement. Aaron Black's lighting verges on murky, much of the time.

If you want to go for the music alone, you would not be disappointed with this production. But if you want opera as a visceral, emotionally engaging experience, you might have to look elsewhere for more satisfying melodrama.
Context and Background

**The History of Opera**

Theatrical performances that use music, song and dance to tell a story can be found in many cultures. Opera is just one example of music drama.

Have you ever wondered where opera got its start? Back in the late 1500s during the height of the Renaissance, a group of men called the Florentine Camerata got together to create a new and moving theatrical experience. They wanted to recreate what the ancient Greeks did during their legendary dramas. The result was something entirely new – opera!

Most of the early operas were based on Greek myths. The first opera that we know of was called *Dafne* by Jacopo Peri in 1598, but the most famous opera of this early period that is still performed today is Claudio Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* (1607). Certain basic ingredients were included in opera: songs, instrumental accompaniments, costumes, dance, and scenery. We still use all of these ingredients today! The early operas were first performed in the grand courts of Italian nobility, but soon opera became popular with the public, too. As it became all the rage, productions became more lavish.

Soon, theatres began to be built just to mount operas. These theatres had elaborate stage machinery to create special effects like flying actors or crumbling buildings. Not everyone embraced the new form of theatre. Some critics thought that all of the stage antics in opera detracted from the music and drama. Some people even believed that seeing too much comedy in opera could make you immoral.

During the Baroque period (about 1600 to 1750), Italian opera spread all over Europe. The Italian style of opera was so popular that even non-Italians wrote in this style. For example George Frederic Handel (1685–1759) was a German-born composer who lived and worked in England. His operas, like *Julius Caesar* (1724), were written in the Italian language and used an Italian style of music. The only nation to create its own national operatic style was France. Ballet played a large role in the French culture, and operas often included ballets in the middle of the opera. The most famous French Baroque opera composers were Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687) and Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764).

The 18th century was full of change for both Europe and opera. This time period was known as the Age of Enlightenment. People were starting to talk about new forms of government and organization in society, especially the ever-growing middle class. Music displayed this new thinking as composers dropped the Baroque era’s complicated musical style for simpler, more emotional music. In less-flashy music, characters could express their thoughts and feelings more believably. One of the first operas to use this new style was Christoph Willibald Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762).
In 1789 the French Revolution changed the world. The first modern democracies were born, and to match the times in which they were created, audiences wanted to see characters like themselves on stage, not gods and goddesses. They also wanted to see issues that were important to them. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) featured a timely story of aristocratic class struggles that had both servants and nobility in lead roles. The ideals of the Enlightenment also came to the stage in Ludwig van Beethoven’s only opera, *Fidelio*, a story about equality and freedom.

In the 1800s opera continued to grow. The Italian tradition continued in the bel canto movement, which literally translates to “beautiful singing.” These operas asked performers to sing complicated groups of fast notes in the melodies. The most famous bel canto composers were Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868), Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848), and Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835). Their operas, like Rossini’s popular comedies *The Barber of Seville* (1816) and Cinderella (1817), are still some of the most popular operas performed today. By the middle of the century, the Romantic Movement led many composers to champion their own national identities. As a result, operas in languages other than Italian became more common; new works often reflected pride in a country’s people, history, and folklore. German operas like Carl Maria von Weber’s *Der Freischütz* (1821), Russian operas like Mikhail Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar* (1836) and French operas like Georges Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* (1836) started to be performed across Europe. By using nationalism in his operas like *Nabucco* (1842), Italian Giuseppe Verdi became a national hero.

In Germany Richard Wagner took Romanticism to the extreme in a four-part operatic miniseries based on Norse mythology, *The Ring of the Nibelung* (1876), which takes over 15 hours to perform! The operatic stereotype of the singer in the Viking helmet comes from these operas.

Opera in 20th century became even more experimental. Composers like Georges Bizet (La *Bohème*, 1896), Claude Debussy (Pelléas et Mélisande, 1902), Richard Strauss (Salome, 1905), and Benjamin Britten (Peter Grimes, 1945) evolved their national styles. Others, horrified by the destruction of World War I (1914-1919) and other aspects of modern life, created music that was new and drastically dissonant. These operas often explored either dark psychological topics (Wozzeck by Alban Berg, 1925), or simple and absurd (*The Rake’s Progress* by Igor Stravinsky, 1951). American opera had a huge hit with George and Ira Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* (1935) which included jazz and blues musical styles. Not only did American composers embrace popular music in opera but also a repetitive, hypnotic style called minimalism. American composer Philip Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) is the popular example of minimalism in opera.
Opera in Canada

At Calgary Opera, we have been more than fortunate to be able to expose our patrons to several new Canadian operas. New operas, though not rare, are expensive and very labour intensive to create.

Opera came to Canada with the first French settlements. Samuel de Champlain organized an opera performance even before he founded Quebec in 1608. As the railroads moved westward in the 19th Century, so did opera. Each province eventually established at least one opera company.

There is evidence of light operas being performed in Canada from 1914 onward, but there was a real outburst of activity in the early 1940s due to the patronage of the burgeoning Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Many operas were written for radio, such as Healy Willan’s *Transit Through Fire*, which was broadcast in 1942. Canada’s 100th birthday in 1967 marked a high moment of Canadian nationalism, so it is not surprising that Canadian opera flourished. Government money through the Canada Council was made available for new commissions and there was an explosion of new productions, such as Murray Adaskin’s *Grant, Warden of the Plains*, Raymond Pannell’s *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, and perhaps the best known, Mavor Moore and Harry Somers’ *Louis Riel*.

*Louis Riel* was first performed at the O’Keefe Centre in Toronto in 1967 and had a revival as a McGill University student production in 2005. Harry Somers, in collaboration with Rod Anderson, has also written *Mario and the Magician*, based on Thomas Mann’s novel of the same name, which was performed by the Canadian Opera Company at the Elgin Theatre in Toronto in 1992.

*The Golden Ass*, written by Randolph Peters and the late Robertson Davies, was performed at the O’Keefe Centre to great acclaim in 1999. Pacific Opera Victoria produced Mavor Moore and Louis Applebaum’s *Erewhon* in 2000. Tapestry Music Theatre produced Chan Ka Nin’s *The Iron Road*, an opera about Chinese labourers on the Western Canadian Railway. Another exciting operatic venture about Canada’s little discussed history of slavery is the passionate tale of *Beatrice Chancy* by James Rolfe and George Elliot Clarke.

In 2003, Calgary Opera embarked on our first full-length new work, a co-commission with The Banff Centre, *Filumena*. The opera told the true story of Filumena, a young immigrant woman hanged for the death of an RCMP officer. It was presented to standing ovations and rave reviews, so in 2007 Calgary Opera and The Banff Centre reunited the creative team - John Estacio, John Murrell, Kelly Robinson, Harry Frehner, Sue LePage - to create *Frobisher*. *Frobisher* tells a story of love, loss, and adventure in Canada’s North. Set against the backdrop of the Northern Lights and the forbiddingly beautiful Arctic landscape, the story weaves back and forth in time, with powerful parallel stories of exploration and discovery, 500 years apart.
Who best to receive new Canadian works but children? Many new works that have been created are geared towards the younger generation, an audience virtually ignored in the history of opera. In 2008 Hannaraptor, by Allan Gilliland and Val Brandt, was created. Taking place in the rugged landscape of the Drumheller area, Hannaraptor followed the emotional story of a young girl who discovers a fossil of a yet undiscovered dinosaur. The production struck a cord with young people as it toured to communities and schools throughout southern Alberta. Hannaraptor was remounted in Calgary Opera’s 2012-13 season and toured to communities in and around Calgary as well as towns as far reaching as Lac la Biche and Bonnyville in northern Alberta.

Dean Burry’s The Hobbit and The Brothers Grimm have been produced across Canada. The Brothers Grimm toured with our own Emerging Artists in March 2007 and again in March 2011. By 2012 it had been performed over 500 times, making it the most performed new Canadian work of all time. Vancouver Opera has toured Naomi’s Road and the Canadian Children’s Opera chorus has generated Dr. Cannon’s Cure and A Mid-Winter Night’s Dream. In 2009 Calgary Opera performed Vancouver Opera’s production of The Barber of Barrhead, a Canadian adaptation of The Barber of Seville.

Reuniting Calgary Opera’s creative team of John Murrell and John Estacio, Vancouver Opera recently entered onto the new work front with Lillian Alling, the story of an intrepid yet mysterious woman searching for a man she scarcely knew, wherever it might take her. In 2011, Calgary Opera presented the world premiere of Bramwell Tovey and John Murrell’s The Inventor, the story of the black sheep nephew of the famous Keith brewing family.

Most recently, Calgary Opera has embarked on a new venture with, What Brought Us Here - A New Community Opera, by Arthur Bachmann and Clem Martini, created from the collected stories of new immigrants to Canada. This new opera premiered in September 2012 at the Arrata Opera Centre with a hugely positive response.

In the landscape of opera, new Canadian operas are alive and well, and we hope that they will continue to flourish.
What in the World?

About the time

The 1870s were a fascinating time, in keeping with other decades of the late 1800s. New trends and world players came to the stage, and war and recovery marked a time of decisive change. Following the devastating Civil War, American reconstruction was underway through 1877 as the country tried to heal its wounds and reunite two formerly bitter rivals. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 struck into the heart of the French Empire and created two new and distinct entities, the French Third Republic and the German Second Reich, and the British Empire tried to push for federation in South Africa through the Anglo-Zulu war in 1879. The first prototype telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, and an early version of the lightbulb was invented by Thomas Edison. Jules Verne’s famous Around the World in Eighty Days was published in 1873, Lewis Carroll published Through the Looking-Glass in 1871, and Henrik Ibsen released A Doll’s House in 1879. This was a period of remarkable culture, scientific, technological, political, and world change. Carmen’s composer, Georges Bizet, was living in Paris, France, and was therefore at the cultural heart of the world, and part of all the excitement of this time period.

Life in Europe: Who are the Roma?

The title character of Carmen is a famous literary depiction of a mysterious and often misunderstood group of people living in Europe, who have no real cultural equivalent in North America, despite 1 million American citizens of Romani descent having immigrated to (and been assimilated in) the United States. The “Roma” or “Romani” people, more popularly known as “Gypsies”, are of North Indian origin, having immigrated to mainland Europe around 1000 years ago.

Roma have a very interesting and tight-knit culture, which is often misunderstood by those unfamiliar with its people and customs. Due to their traditionally nomadic lifestyle and vastly different cultures, religions and even languages, the Romani have historically been distrusted and sometimes discriminated against and persecuted by their neighbors. Some of this distrust and racism is even evident in Carmen itself, as a nomadic and exotic woman is treated as an
object of conquest as well as distrust for her love of freedom and her unusual lifestyle. The Romani have often been depicted as thieves and ne’er-do-wells, ergo the derogatory term “gypsy” and it’s root, “gyp”, or “cheat.”

Unfortunately, many still espouse these views, claiming the Romani take advantage of social systems and even thieve from European non-Romani people. With time, exposure and evolving views on “otherness” will hopefully contribute to a safer and better life for this unique people.
Historic and Cultural Events in Bizet’s time

Listed below are some historic and cultural events that took place in 1875.

January 12th: Guangxu becomes 11th Qing dynasty Emperor of China at the age of 4 in succession to his cousin.

March 1st: The United States Congress passes the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits racial discrimination in public accommodations and jury duty.

March 3rd: Bizet’s Carmen is first performed at the Opéra-Comique, Paris.

April 25th: Ten sophomores from Rutgers College (now Rutgers University) steal a one-ton cannon from the campus of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) and start the Rutgers–Princeton Cannon War.

August 25th: Captain Matthew Webb becomes the first person to swim the English Channel.

October 25th: The first performance of the Piano Concerto No. 1 by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is given in Boston, Massachusetts with Hans von Bülow as soloist.

December 5th/6th: German emigrant ship SS Deutschland runs aground in the English Channel resulting in the death of 157 passengers and crew.

Births

January 14th: Albert Schweitzer, Alsatian philosopher, and musician, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize (d. 1965)

February 21st: Jeanne Calment, world’s longest lived person (122 years old, d. 1997)

March 7th: Maurice Ravel, French composer (d. 1937)

June 6th: Thomas Mann, German writer, Nobel Prize laureate (d. 1955)
July 26th:  Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist (d. 1961), and Antonio Machado, Spanish poet (d. 1939)

August 15th:  Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, English composer (d. 1912)

September 3rd:  Ferdinand Porsche, Austrian automotive engineer (d. 1951)

December 4th:  Rainer Maria Rilke, Austrian poet (d. 1926)

December 5th:  Arthur Currie, Canadian military leader (d. 1933)

Deaths

April 25th:  the 12th Dalai Lama (b. 1857)

June 3rd:  Georges Bizet, French composer (b. 1836)

July 31:  Andrew Johnson, 17th President of the United States (b. 1808)

August 4th:  Hans Christian Andersen, Danish writer (b. 1805)

November 22nd:  Henry Wilson, 18th Vice President of the United States (b. 1812)
The History of Carmen

Carmen, the opera, was not actually the original source of this famously tragic love story. Rather, it was the French author, Prosper Mérimée (1803 – 1870) who created this celebrated tale. First published in 1845, this novella has four parts, with the main character as the author himself, telling romanticized tales of his travels in 1830’s Spain. The opera of Carmen is based purely off of the fourth part of the novella, in which a prisoner recounts to Mérimée the tale of his imprisonment. Much like the opera, José Lizarrabengoa (Don José in the opera) is a soldier who meets the gypsy Carmen, who seduces and uses him, he forsakes all for, and eventually kills. Some elements of the original novella are worked into new versions of Carmen, but Bizet’s opera itself has many elements of the original work removed, such as Carmen’s first husband (who José kills), and has many roles elevated in importance, such as the toreador Escamillo (in the novella, named “Lucas”). The popularity of Mérimée’s novella was a contributing factor to the chilly reception of Bizet’s opera, as many were not comfortable with the changes Bizet had made to a favorite book.

Carmen: a Flop? The Critical Reception

In the days following the world première of Carmen, the Paris music critics gave their responses. Here are some of the things they said:

Jean Henri Dupin, friend and fellow-librettist of Meilhac, commented to him the morning after the première:

"I won't mince words. Your Carmen is a flop, a disaster! It will never play more than twenty times. The music goes on and on. It never stops. There's not even time to applaud. That's not music! And your play -- that's not a play! A man meets a woman. He finds her pretty. That's the first act. He loves her, she loves him. That's the second act. She doesn't love him anymore. That's the third act. He kills her. That's the fourth! And you call that a play? It's a crime, do you hear me, a crime!"

Achille de Lauzières, in La Patrie, treats Carmen as just one more in a progressive depravation of female characters on the stage in recent years:

"The stage [in general] is given over more and more to women of dubious morals... once they have sunk to the sewers of society they have to do so again and again; it is from down there that they have to choose their models... Carmen is the daughter [of these] in the most revolting sense of the word ... the veritable prostitute of the gutter and the street-corner."

Of Galli-Marié, who sang the part of Carmen, Oscar Comettant, wrote:

"The Bohemian character [Carmen] heartless, lawless, devoid of honour... was portrayed as shocking and repugnant on stage. [Soprano Galli-Marié] exaggerated Carmen's vices by means of a degree of realism that would be barely acceptable in operetta."
About the composer

Georges Bizet (25 October 1838 – 3 June 1875), registered at birth as Alexandre César Léopold Bizet, was a French composer of the romantic era. Best known for his operas in a career cut short by his early death, Bizet achieved few successes before his final work, Carmen, which has become one of the most popular and frequently performed works in the entire opera repertoire.

During a brilliant student career at the Conservatoire de Paris, Bizet won many prizes, including the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1857. He was recognised as an outstanding pianist, though he chose not to capitalise on this skill and rarely performed in public. Returning to Paris after almost three years in Italy, he found that the main Parisian opera theatres preferred the established classical repertoire to the works of newcomers. His keyboard and orchestral compositions were likewise largely ignored; as a result, his career stalled, and he earned his living mainly by arranging and transcribing the music of others. Restless for success, he began many theatrical projects during the 1860s, most of which were abandoned. Neither of his two operas that reached the stage in this time—Les pêcheurs de perles and La jolie fille de Perth—were immediately successful.

After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, during which Bizet served in the National Guard, he had little success with his one-act opera Djamileh, though an orchestral suite derived from his incidental music to Alphonse Daudet’s play L’Arlésienne was instantly popular. The production of Bizet’s final opera, Carmen, was delayed because of fears that its themes of betrayal and murder would offend audiences. After its premiere on 3 March 1875, Bizet was convinced that the work was a failure; he died of a heart attack three months later, unaware that it would prove a spectacular and enduring success.

Bizet’s marriage to Geneviève Halévy was intermittently happy and produced one son. After his death, his work, apart from Carmen, was generally neglected. Manuscripts were given away or lost, and published versions of his works were frequently revised and adapted by other hands. He founded no school and had no obvious disciples or successors. After years of neglect, his works began to be performed more frequently in the 20th century. Later commentators have acclaimed him as a composer of brilliance and originality whose premature death was a significant loss to French musical theatre.
About the librettists

Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halevy

Henri Meilhac (21 February 1831 – 6 July 1897) was born in Paris. As a young man, he began writing fanciful articles for Parisian newspapers and vaudevilles, in a vivacious boulevardier spirit which brought him to the forefront. About 1860, he met Ludovic Halévy, and their collaboration for the stage lasted twenty years.

Ludovic Halévy (1 January 1834 – 7 May 1908) was a Parisian author and playwright. While a proficient writer with a mind for lyricism, at eighteen he joined the ranks of the French administration and occupied various posts, until 1865, when his increasing popularity as an author enabled him to retire from the public service. Ten years earlier, he had become acquainted with the musician Jacques Offenbach, who was about to start a small theatre of his own in the Champs-Élysées, and he wrote a sort of prologue, Entrez, messieurs, mesdames, for the opening night.

Ludovic’s chance encounter with Henri began a connection which was to last over twenty years, and which proved most fruitful both for the reputation of the two authors and the prosperity of the minor Paris theatres. Their joint works may be divided into three classes: the operettas, the farces, the comedies. The opérettes were lively libels against the society of the time, but savoured strongly of the vices and follies they were supposed to satirize. After 1870, the vogue of parody rapidly declined. During this period, they wrote the libretto to Carmen but it was a sideshow to their other work.

Halévy remained an assiduous frequenter of the Academy, the Conservatoire, the Comédie Française, and the Society of Dramatic Authors, but, when he died in Paris on 7 May 1908, he had produced practically nothing new for many years. His last romance, Kari Kari, appeared in 1892.

Meilhac was elected in 1888 to the Académie française. He died in Paris in 1897.
The Language of Opera

Act - Main sections of a play or opera.

Aria - A solo song sung in an opera.

Audience - People who watch a performance and sit in the “house” or auditorium.

Ballet - Dance set to music within an opera.

Blocking - Action on stage.

Character - Person who is part of the opera’s story.

Chorus - Music composed for a group of singers or the name of a group of singers in an opera.

Conductor - Person who rehearses and leads the orchestra.

Duet - A song performed by two singers.

Libretto - the words of the opera.

Opera - a musical work in one or more acts, made for singers and instrumentalists.

Opera Buffa - Funny, light opera.

Opera Seria - Serious, dramatic opera.

Orchestra - A group of musicians who play together on various musical instruments.

Overture - A piece of instrumental music played at the beginning of an opera.

Program - Booklet that contains information about the opera, composer, performers, and the opera company.

Recitative - Words that are sung in the rhythm of natural speech.

Rehearsal - Time when singers/actors practice with or without the orchestra; time when musicians practice together with the conductor.

Scene - Segments of action within the acts of an opera.

Types of Singers

Soprano - Highest pitched female voice.

Mezzo-Soprano - Female voice between soprano and contralto.

Contralto – Lowest pitched female voice

Tenor - Highest pitched male voice.

Baritone - Male voice between tenor and bass.

Bass - Lowest pitched male voice.
# Learning Activity: The Language of Opera

*Connect the terms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opera Seria</td>
<td>A. Dance spectacle set to music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>B. Highest pitched woman’s voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opera</td>
<td>C. Dramatic text adapted for opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet</td>
<td>D. Low female voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>E. Comic opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libretto</td>
<td>F. A dramatic or comedic musical work in which singing is the essential factor; very little is spoken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duet</td>
<td>G. Opera with dramatic and intense plots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aria</td>
<td>H. Music composed for a singing group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>I. A song written for two performers to sing together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>J. A group of musicians who play together on various musical instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td>K. Highest pitched man’s voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contralto</td>
<td>L. A musical style in which the words are spoken in the rhythm of natural speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>M. Male voice between bass and tenor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opera Buffa</td>
<td>N. A piece of music originally designed to be played before an opera or musical play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recitative</td>
<td>O. Deepest male voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>P. Elaborate solo in an opera or oratorio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overture</td>
<td>Q. Main division of a play or opera.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE STUDENT OPERA EXPERIENCE
Part Three: Characters, Synopsis & Cast

Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Voice Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Gypsy Girl/ Main Character</td>
<td>Mezzo- Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don José</td>
<td>Corporal of Dragoons</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escamillo</td>
<td>Toreador</td>
<td>Bass- Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micaëla</td>
<td>Village Maiden</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuniga</td>
<td>Lieutenant of Dragoons</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moralès</td>
<td>Corporal of Dragoons</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frasquita</td>
<td>Friend of Carmen</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercédès</td>
<td>Friend of Carmen</td>
<td>Mezzo- Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillas Pastia</td>
<td>Innkeeper</td>
<td>Spoken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Dancaïre</td>
<td>Smuggler</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Remendado</td>
<td>Smuggler</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Guide</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spoken</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chorus: Soldiers, young men, cigarette factory girls, Escamillo's fans, Gypsies, merchants and orange sellers, police, bullfighters, people, street urchins
Synopsis

Act I

A square in Seville in the 1800s, with a cigarette factory and a guardhouse

Micaëla enters, looking for her fiancé Don José. Sgt. Moralès tells her that Don José is part of a different company, but asks her to stay with them instead. Their advances force her to run away.

Don José enters with the changing of the guard. Street urchins are imitating the soldiers. Lieutenant Zuniga mentions that he wants to stay and watch the pretty girls at the cigarette factory; José states that he only has eyes for Micaëla. The women of the factory come out, greeted by the waiting men. Among them is Carmen. All the men try to woo her, but it is the disinterested José that catches her eye. She sings the habanera, and throws José a flower. He is momentarily entranced by Carmen, but Micaëla returns and the two of them sing a love duet. There is a scream from the factory; Zuniga sends José to investigate. He brings out Carmen, who has stabbed another woman. Zuniga orders José to tie her up while he prepares to take her to the guardhouse.

Carmen tempts José to release her, saying that he is now in love with her. He begins to loosen her bonds, and she escapes. Don José is arrested for releasing her.

Act II

Lillas Pastia’s Tavern, in the middle of a party

Carmen and her friends, Frasquita and Mercédès, sing about the gypsy life to the delight of Captain Zuniga and his soldiers, who flirt with the girls. Zuniga mentions that José will be released from prison today. The matador Escamillo enters with his friends, who sing of his success both in the bullring, and in love. Escamillo tries to woo Carmen, who spurns him, thinking of José.

As the tavern closes, smugglers invite the girls to join them on some misadventure. Carmen declines, saying she is waiting for her lover. José arrives, and declares his love for her. He sings that the faded scent of the flower she threw him was what helped José get through prison. Carmen replies that if he loved her, he would escape into the mountains with her. Zuniga then bursts in, and orders José back to the barracks. José refuses, and they fight. The smugglers re-enter, and Zuniga is disarmed and chased from the tavern. José realizes he must now flee with the smugglers as an outlaw.
Act III

A mountain pass

The gypsies set up camp. José struggles with his deserter status, while Carmen starts to feel bored with José. Frasquita, Mercédès, and Carmen start to tell fortunes with their cards. Frasquita sees love; Mercédès sees wealth; Carmen sees only death for herself and José. She accepts the prophecy of the cards. They all depart to deal with a nearby customs officer.

Micaëla enters, looking for José, but afraid to meet the woman who had stolen her love. She runs away though when she hears a gunshot. The shot turns out to be from José, who was firing at an intruder. The intruder was actually the approaching Escamillo transporting bulls to Spain. He makes a comment about the soldier Carmen once loved, and José attacks him. The gypsies return and separate them.

Escamillo then invites everyone, particularly Carmen, to his next bullfight in Seville. José is furious. Micaëla is discovered, and begs José to return with her to his mother. José at first refuses, but Micaëla reveals that his mother is dying. José warns Carmen they will meet again. As José and Micaëla leave, they can hear Escamillo singing...

Act IV

Outside a bullring

A crowd has formed to see Escamillo, who enters with Carmen. Frasquita and Mercédès warn her that José has been seen in the crowd, but Carmen is not worried. As everyone else exits into the ring, she waits, and a desperate José enters.

He pleads with her to come with him and start a new life. She tells him that it is finished between them, that she now loves the bullfighter. She vows never to be held by any man. When she throws back the ring he gave her, José stabs Carmen at the same time Escamillo wins in the ring. The spectators begin to enter, and José confesses to all, saying, “Ah! Carmen! ma Carmen adorée!”
Cast and Company Biographies

Timothy Vernon
Conductor

Recently invested as a Member of the Order of Canada, Timothy Vernon is the Founder and Artistic Director of Pacific Opera Victoria and Conductor Laureate of Orchestra London. As a guest conductor he has been engaged by the Calgary Opera, Opera de Montreal, L’Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, Opera de Quebec, the Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto symphonies and Ottawa’s Thirteen Strings. As Laureate Conductor of Orchestra London he led a wide range or repertoire and recent Pacific Opera’s productions included Ariadne auf Naxos, Falstaff, Vanessa, and Rodelinda. Maestro Vernon’s creative imagination in opera was honored in 2005, when he received the prestigious ‘Ruby’ at the annual Opera Canada Awards Ceremony. Internationally renowned for his work with young musicians, he conducted the McGill Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Roy Thomson Hall, and Ottawa’s National Arts Centre.

Alain Gauthier
Stage Director

Alain Gauthier earned his bachelor’s degree in theatre from the Université du Québec à Montréal. As a former apprentice director at l’Opéra de Montréal, he directed several productions for the company, including Suor Angelica/Il Tabarro, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Pagliacci/Gianni Schicchi, Faust, Dead Man Walking, and Lakmé. He also worked with the Cincinnati Opera, the Austin Lyric Opera, the Minnesota Opera, L’Opéra de Québec and the New York City Opera. His future projects include a new production of Samson et Dalila for the Opéra de Montréal, and Il Barbiere di Siviglia for the Austin Lyric Opera.
Sandra Piques Eddy
Mezzo-Soprano: Carmen

In 2013-14 Sandra Piques Eddy returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Fiona in Nico Muhly’s Two Boys (American premiere), sang Carmen (Opera Colorado), Rosina in Il barbiere di Siviglia (Nashville Opera), and Dorabella in Cosi fan tutte at Hyogo Performing Arts Center (Japan). Past Metropolitan Opera roles include Mercédès in Carmen, Cherubino in Le nozze di Figaro, Lola in Cavalleria rusticana, and Zulma in L’italiana in Algeri. Career highlights include Dorabella (Boston Lyric Opera), Isabella in L’italiana in Algeri (Atlanta Opera), title role in Carmen (Opera North, UK), and Béatrice in Béatrice et Bénédicte and Cherubino (Chicago Opera Theater).

Antoine Bélanger
Tenor: Don José

Antoine Bélanger is a former member of the Atelier Lyrique de l’Opéra de Montréal. He has appeared as Alfredo in La Traviata with Saskatoon Opera and Opéra de Québec, Rodolfo in La Bohème with Calgary Opera, Opera de Montreal and Opéra Éclaté in France, Tybalt in Roméo et Juliette with Vancouver Opera, Pinkerton in Madama Butterfly with Opéra de Quebec and the title role in Faust with Opéra de Montréal. Upcoming is Pinkerton in Madama Butterfly with Opera Lyra Ottawa and Ismaele in Nabucco with Opéra de Montréal. Mr. Bélanger performs regularly with different ensembles and orchestras.
Gregory Dahl

*Baritone: Escamillo*

Gregory Dahl has attained a position of prominence among baritones of his generation with performances notable for richness of characterization and a remarkable vocal authority. Dahl’s 2014-2015 season is highlighted by Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* for the Canadian Opera Company, Scarpia in *Tosca* for l’Opéra de Québec and Nilakantha in *Samson et Dalila* for Opéra de Montréal. The Winnipeg baritone joined the Met roster in 2014 as cover artist for Mandryka in *Arabella* and was Golaud in *Pelléas et Mélisande* for Against the Grain Theatre of Toronto, a role he first sang for Opera Theater of St. Louis. On the concert stage he has been featured by Vancouver Symphony, Symphony Nova Scotia and the Winnipeg Symphony.

Jessica Strong

*Soprano: Micaëla*

Jessica Strong has been hailed as a confident and accomplished soprano. Ms. Strong has performed leading roles in *L’Italiana in Algeri, The Rake’s Progress, La Traviata, Ariodante, Don Giovanni, Hansel and Gretel, Candide* and *Die Fledermaus*. Ms. Strong has won prizes from the Sylva Gelber Foundation, the National Music Festival, the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, the Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition, the George London Foundation, the Marilyn Horne Song Competition, the Vancouver Opera Guild, the Solti Foundation, the Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation and the WMC McLellan Competition. Originally from Winnipeg, Ms. Strong is a recent graduate of the Calgary Opera Emerging Artist Program.