

CARMEN



BY GEORGES BIZET NOVEMBER 19/23/25 2022 CALGARYOPERA.COM

Calgary Opera Study Guide **CARMEN** by Georges Bizet

Student Dress Rehearsal at the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium
Thursday, November 17, 2022 at 7:00PM

We acknowledge that together we live, work and play on the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7 region, which includes the Blackfoot First Nation tribes of Siksika, Kainai and Piikani, the Tsuut'ina, the Iyârhe Nakoda First Nation tribes of Bearspaw, Chiniki and Wesley and the Region 3 Métis Nation of Alberta.

Hello educators and students,

Welcome to our 50th Anniversary season at Calgary Opera. We begin with the operatic classic Carmen. What can I add to the story of this work that has not already been said? Although seen as scandalous at the time of its premiere in 1875, Carmen quickly became outrageously popular and remains so to this day. What surprised audiences about the story back then is part of what intrigues audiences now. The character of Carmen is no longer seen as scandalous, but there is still power and controversy in the idea of an independent and decisive woman making her own choices in the world.

***Onstage violence advisory: We recommend this opera for those in Grade 7+.** Calgary Opera is dedicated to presenting compelling works with stories and messages that are interesting and relevant to our modern audiences. While Carmen is full of classic and memorable melodies, this story also portrays challenging themes such as intimate partner abuse, use of weapons, and the power dynamics between those with authority and those without. These themes are still present in today's world, where Carmen represents every woman whose voice is ignored, distorted, or silenced altogether.

While we are aware of the potentially disturbing effect of seeing physical violence on stage, this production is meant to spark discussions about whether we have advanced as a society and to illuminate how we are still facing these challenges today. Not to be overshadowed by violence, this story contains many more moments of humour, joy, romance, and excitement, as well as a beautiful portrayal of daily life in 1800's Spain.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic or intimate partner abuse the Distress Centre provides free, confidential help 24/7 by calling or texting 211, or call or text their 24-hour Crisis Line at 403-266-4357 (HELP)

Thank you for supporting Calgary Opera's education programs as we inspire the next generations of opera lovers. These programs help inform who we become in the future, by connecting with each other in community where we can share stories and hear voices together.

Sincerely,
Patricia Kesler

Thank you to our generous Education and Community Engagement supporters in the 2022/23 Season:

The Stalinski Family Fund



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***Carmen*—Things to Know**

The Opera

- ◆ *Carmen* is an opera in four acts
- ◆ Premiered at Paris Opéra-Comique on March 3, 1875
- ◆ Composed by French composer Georges Bizet, who sadly died 3 months after the premiere at the age of 36, never to know what a success his opera became
- ◆ The Libretto, or the text, was written by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy
- ◆ The story is based on the novella *Carmen* written by Prosper Mérimée
- ◆ The opera is written in the genre of *opéra-comique* with the singing and music interspersed with spoken dialogue, a popular opera style that was almost obsolete in Europe by the time Bizet wrote *Carmen*
- ◆ The style of the opera is *verismo*, which is an opera that deals with common people, realistic scenarios and situations, a style that brings every day life to the stage
- ◆ The opera is written and sung in French
- ◆ Setting: Seville, Spain in the early 1800's
- ◆ The story was scandalous at the time of its presentation to the French public, both for the depiction of a woman who smokes and isn't concerned with marriage and status and also for its depiction of regular people; soldiers, merchants, street people, Roma; this was a sharp departure from the operas of the day which dealt with nobility, mythological creatures and characters not found in everyday life
- ◆ The character of Carmen is a Roma, who are an ethnic group originally thought to be from northern India that now live all over the world, although predominantly in Europe. The Roma are characterized by their nomadic and artistic lifestyle and have been persecuted for centuries



1875 lithographic poster for the premiere of [Georges Bizet's *Carmen*](#), Prudent-Louis Leray (1820-1879)

***Carmen* at Calgary Opera**

- ◆ Our production of *Carmen* is 3 hours and 15 minutes long including two intermissions and a pause
- ◆ The costumes for our production come from Sarasota Opera in Florida, designed by Jane Greenwood and the set is from Atlanta Opera, designed by Charles Allen Klein
- ◆ In Calgary Opera's 50 years, *Carmen* has been performed 6 times—the first performance was in 1974 and the most recent was in 2015

Preparing for the opera—What to know before you go

PART I: PREPARING FOR THE OPERA EXPERIENCE

The more students are prepared for the experience of seeing a live opera, the more they will get out of it and enjoy it. Knowing the story, the life and times of the composer and the music is vital in making their opera experience a sensational one!

BEFORE THE OPERA

Teachers and students may review the study guide and all of the suggested activities and discussions. 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 within the context of what they will be working on after i.e. history, reviewing, character studies, discussions, etc.

- Read the enclosed synopsis of *Carmen* which provides a background and helps familiarize students and teachers with the story
- Listen to the music excerpts found on page 16
- Read the history of opera and *Carmen* on pgs 12, 13, 15, artists, conductor and director on pages 9, 10, 11 and the composer and librettists on pages 13, 14 and familiarize your group with the language of the opera on pg 15, all items in the guide can be reproduced
- Familiarize students with the characters and their opera voice types (i.e. soprano, bass, and tenor) on pg 20. A discussion can be held afterwards to see if students were able to discern between the different voice types
- 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 on page 17

ATTENDING THE OPERA

There's nothing more exciting than attending an opera! You'll be a guest at the final dress rehearsal of *Carmen*. The preparation for this opera began a long time ago, several years ago in fact, when the opera was chosen and the artists were asked to perform in the opera. From costume rentals to singers memorizing their lines to putting the lighting and set together at the Jubilee Auditorium, countless hours of creative work have gone into making this production possible for you. Here's what you'll need to know about attending the opera:

At the Jubilee Auditorium, 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, Stage Manager, Lighting Designer, 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 adjusting, the rehearsal might be stopped or a part repeated to make sure that it is perfect.

Preparing for the opera—What to know before you go

DURING THE OPERA

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 and not talking or sharing your opinions with your friends or teachers until the intermission or after the show.

Give the artists and the production your full attention!

HERE'S A LIST OF THINGS TO DO AT THE THEATRE:

Please Do...

- Use the bathrooms before the rehearsal begins or at intermission
- Enter and exit the theatre in an orderly fashion, Dress Rehearsals are General Admission, which means you can sit wherever you would like
- Turn off your cell phones and all electronic devices, no photography or video recording is allowed during the performance
- Applaud when the conductor enters and bows, then again after the overture, the 5-10 minute musical introduction played only by the orchestra that begins the show
- Applaud after the arias as well as after the performance; you can shout various forms of the word "Bravo" (see sidebar)
- Enjoy the rehearsal! It is a wonderful feeling to be in theatre with other audience members experiencing a live performance, especially after a couple of years of not being able to!
- Have a discussion with your family, friends and teachers during the intermission and after the show is over about what you liked best, what you didn't like, parts that surprised you and more. The more you talk about and think about the show after you have seen it, the better you will remember it later on.

How to show you care

There is a long tradition of audience reaction to opera that goes back to opera's earliest days in Italy.

You might hear other audience members yelling "Bravo!", which is Italian for "good, clever or skillful", when they particularly liked something on stage. However, Italian is a gendered language and the way you say some words depends upon who you are saying them to or about.

So, "Bravo!" is only said to a single male, for example after the tenor sings a heart-wrenching aria about his obsessive love for Carmen. If the singer you are cheering for is a woman you would say "Brava!"

If there are multiple people on stage of various genders you would say "Bravi!" (Brav-ee) unless they were all women, in which case you would say "Brave!" (Brah-vay).

Got it? It might sound confusing, so don't let it get in the way of you expressing your pleasure with the performance. Enthusiastic clapping is always and even cheering is always welcome at a live opera performance.

Characters in the Opera

Name	Role	Voice Type	Singer
Carmen	Bohemian Girl / Main Character	Mezzo- Soprano	Rihab Chaieb
Don José	Corporal of Dragoons	Tenor	David Pomeroy
Escamillo	Toreador	Bass- Baritone	Nmon Ford
Micaëla	Village Maiden	Soprano	Tracy Cantin
Zuniga	Lieutenant of Dragoons	Bass	Dominic Veilleux
Moralès	Corporal of Dragoons	Baritone	Branden Olsen
Frasquita	Friend of Carmen	Soprano	Nicole Leung
Mercédès	Friend of Carmen	Mezzo- Soprano	Justine Ledoux
Lillas Pastia	Innkeeper	Spoken	TBD—supernumerary
Dancaire	Smuggler	Baritone	Connor Hoppenbrouwers
Remendado	Smuggler	Tenor	Tayte Mitchell

Synopsis

An opera in 4 acts

ACT I

Place: A town square in Seville, Spain

Time: Around 1820

Moralès and his soldiers pass their time reading, playing dice and watching people around the town square. Micaëla appears, looking for her fiancé, Corporal Don José. She is told that José will arrive with the new unit and Micaëla departs. Lieutenant Zuniga and Don José arrive for the changing of the guard. The midday bell rings, and the women who have been working in the factory come outside for their break when Don José enters. Carmen flirtatiously throws a flower at him and returns to the factory.

Micaëla returns with a letter from Don José's mother. Suddenly, sounds of a fight are heard in the factory. Women burst loudly into the square, and Carmen is accused of wounding her co-worker with a knife. Don José is ordered to arrest Carmen. Once they are alone, Carmen convinces Don José to help her escape. He allows Carmen to escape and he is arrested and demoted.

Continued on next page

Synopsis continued

ACT 2

Lillas Pastia's tavern

The tavern of Lillas Pastia is full of Bohemians and soldiers enjoying their night. The famous bullfighter Escamillo arrives. He is immediately attracted to Carmen, but she refuses his advances. The smugglers Remendado and Dancaïro enter. They ask Carmen, Frasquita, and Mercédès for their help on a smuggling mission. Carmen refuses, saying again that she is waiting for the man she is in love with, Don Jose. Don José arrives and Carmen dances for him. When Don José tells Carmen he must return to the barracks, she mocks him and accuses him of not loving her; if he did, he would leave the army and join her in the mountains. Don José tells her he loves her but that he must go. Zuniga bursts in. The two men brawl. Zuniga and Don José are restrained, but now that Don José has attacked his superior officer, he has no choice but to leave the army and join the smugglers.

ACT 3

A mountain hideaway

The smugglers are on their way to the border with their stolen goods. There is tension between Carmen and Don José. They have an argument and Carmen joins the women, who are using cards to tell their fortunes. For Carmen, the cards foresee only death.

Don José is left behind to guard the camp when the smugglers leave to get some of their stolen goods past the border guard. Micaëla enters searching for Don José, but she hides when Don José fires his gun at an intruder. It is Escamillo, searching for Carmen. Don José is furious, and they fight. They are interrupted by Carmen and the other smugglers. Escamillo departs, inviting everyone — especially Carmen — to his next bullfight in Seville. Micaëla is discovered and reveals that Don José's mother is dying. She begs him to return home. Carmen urges him to go. Don José decides he must leave, but he warns Carmen that they will meet again.

ACT 4

Outside the bullring in Seville

The crowd cheers in Seville outside the arena as the bullfights and Escamillo arrive. Escamillo pulls Carmen out of the crowd and confuses his love for her. Frasquita and Mercédès warn Carmen that Don José has been seen in the crowd. Don José finds Carmen alone and pleads with her to forget the past and start a new life with him. Carmen tells Don José that everything between them is over. When Don José tries to prevent Carmen from joining her new lover, she loses her temper. She angrily throws down the ring that Don José had given her. Enraged, Don José kills Carmen as the crowd cheers Escamillo's victory.

Artist Biographies



Rihab Chaieb as Carmen

Tunisian-born Rihab Chaieb is a graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Program where she appeared in numerous productions, including *L'italiana in Algeri* (Zulma), *Luisa Miller* (Laura), *Cavalleria Rusticana* (Lola), and *Hänsel und Gretel* (Sandmännchen). Returning since as a guest in *Don Giovanni* (Zerlina) under Cornelius Meister, she appears there this season as Nefertiti in Phelim McDermott's unforgettable production of Philip Glass' *Akhnaton*, conducted by Karen Kamensek.

In the 2021/22 season, Rihab Chaieb debuted at Washington National Opera in *Così fan Tutte* (Dorabella), sang Penelope on a European concert tour and recording of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* with Ensemble I Gemelli and Emiliano Gonzalez Toro, returned to Opéra et Orchestre National de Montpellier as Maddalena in Marie-Eve Signeyrole's new staging of *Rigoletto*, and joined Palm Beach Opera in the title role of *Carmen*.



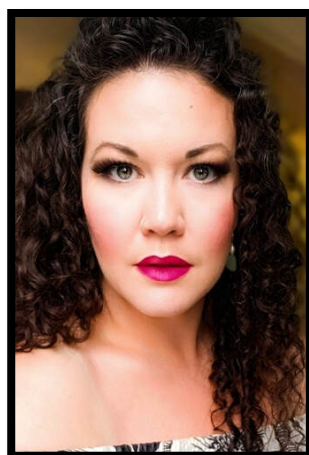
David Pomeroy as Don José

Canadian tenor David Pomeroy is establishing himself as a standout on some of the world's most important stages with his vast repertoire. The Newfoundland native made his role debut as Radames in *Aida* in 2018 at Seattle Opera. This past season, Pomeroy performed the role of Bacchus in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Gran Teatre del Liceu, Radames in *Aida* at Teatro Municipal de São Paulo, and appeared as Turridu in a concert performance of *Cavalleria rusticana* at Vancouver Opera. In recent years, Pomeroy made his Metropolitan Opera debut in the title role of *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, sang Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* with the Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and performed Verdi's *Requiem* with the Orchestre Symphonique de Quebec. This fall Pomeroy appeared at Calgary Opera in their 50th Anniversary Concert and at Edmonton Opera as Cavradossi in *Tosca*.



Nmon Ford as Escamillo

Panamanian-American baritone Nmon Ford had a smashing success as Crown in *Porgy & Bess* at the Metropolitan Opera production which he sang in London and Amsterdam. Appearing in *Don Giovanni* (title role) at Dorset Opera Festival in the UK brought him further outstanding reviews, and he returned to Denver to join the cast of Opera Colorado's *Carmen* as Escamillo, a role he repeats in London at English National Opera in February. Past highlights include Jochanaan in *Salome*, Don Pizzaro in *Fidelio*, and Iago in *Otello*. Mr Ford sings often at Hamburg State Opera in Germany and appeared as Scarpia in *Tosca*, Luna in *Il Trovatore*, as well as the title role in *Billy Budd*.



Tracy Cantin as Micaela

A graduate of the prestigious Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Cantin won magnificent critical acclaim at Lyric as Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, has appeared with the company in *Elektra*, *Rigoletto*, *Parsifal*, and most recently in the title role of Donizetti's demanding *Anna Bolena*, in which she replaced ailing super-star soprano Sondra Radvanovsky. Her operatic repertoire includes Mimi in *La Bohème*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Miss Jessel in *Turn of the Screw*, Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus*, Desdemona in *Otello*, Rusalka in *Rusalka*, Alice Ford in *Falstaff*, Eva in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and Chrysothemis in *Elektra*.

An avid concert performer, Cantin has been heard as the soprano soloist in Bernstein's *Songfest*, Handel's *Messiah*, Schubert's *Mass in Ab*, Mozart's *Requiem*, and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* introduced her to Australian audiences, singing alongside Bryn Terfel, under the baton of Sir Andrew Davis with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Cantin has recently made critically acclaimed debuts with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Ravinia Festival, Grant Park Festival, Oregon Symphony, Illinois

Philharmonic, and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago.

Artist Biographies



Dominic Veilleux as Zuniga

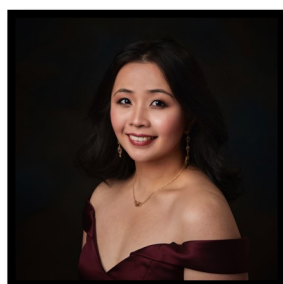
Praised for his rich voice and his comic and dramatic skills, French-Canadian bass-baritone Dominic Veilleux is an alumnus of the Calgary Opera McPhee Artist Program.

Dominic made his debut with Opéra de Québec in 2014 as the Servant in *Macbeth*. He was seen as D'Estillac (*La veuve joyeuse*), Erster Priester (*Die Zauberflöte*), Marco (*Gianni Schicchi*), Fiorello (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) and Marchese d'Obigny (*La traviata*). As part of the Festival d'opéra de Québec, he was a member of the much appreciated *Brigade Lyrique*. In 2017, he was seen as Leporello (*Don Giovanni*) and in 2018 as Agamemnon (*La belle Hélène*), both in collaboration with Jeunesses Musicales Canada. Other opera credits include Figaro (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Albert (*Werther*), Escamillo (*Carmen*), Bottom (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Bartolo (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) and Don Giovanni (*Don Giovanni*). On the concert stage, Dominic sang Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle*, Fauré's *Requiem*, Duruflé's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Bach's *Osteroratorium* and *Himmelfahrtoratorium*, and Mozart's *Requiem*.



Branden Olson as Moralès

Branden Olsen is a rising Canadian bass-baritone, pedagogical clinician, and conductor of exceptional promise. In 2021 Branden won first place (voice) at the Federation of Canadian Music Festivals National Competition. He has a master's in voice performance and choral conducting and recently conducted the Atlantic Boychoir at the Cornwall International Male Choral Festival. Branden joins the McPhee Artist Program at Calgary Opera in the 2022/23 season.



Nicole Leung as Frasquita

Nicole Leung, soprano, is from Toronto and most recently covered the role of Adina in *L'elisir d'amore* as a Manetti Shrem Opera Fellow at Festival Napa Valley. A graduate of the Yale School of Music, she was seen in the roles of Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Morgana (*Alcina*), and Rosalba (*Florenzia en el Amazonas*). Other full roles include Nerone in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Fiordiligi in *Così fan Tutte*, and Romilda in *Senso*. She also sang the role of Amy in a workshop production of the world-premier opera *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, commissioned by Houston Grand Opera. Notable concert works include soprano soloist in Mozart's *Requiem* (Waterbury Symphony Orchestra), Beethoven's *Chorale Fantasie* (Yale Philharmonia), and Vaughn Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* (NEC Symphony Orchestra). Nicole joins Calgary Opera as a McPhee Artist in the 2022/23 season.



Justine Ledoux as Mercédès

Justine Ledoux is a mezzo-soprano from Montreal known for her velvety tone and for the sincerity and the intensity that she brings to the stage. She recently completed her master's degree in vocal interpretation from the *Conservatoire de musique de Montréal* and was praised for her "remarkably communicative" voice on stage. Her repertoire is varied, with a particular fondness for Rossini, Brahms, Heggie and Bolcom. During the 2021-22 season, she qualified for the Canada District of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, she was a finalist in the *Prix d'Europe*, she was the 3rd place winner of the CFM-TA's National Singing Competition, and placed 2nd in her age category at the classical music competitions of Sherbrooke and Sorel. Justine joins Calgary Opera as a McPhee Artist in the 2022/23 season.



Connor Hoppenbrouwers as Dancaire

Baritone Connor Hoppenbrouwers has gained a reputation for the power and beauty behind his voice. Born in Edmonton Alberta, Connor started his vocal career under the tutelage of John Tessier and later went on to study with J.Patrick Raftery. Prominent roles for Connor include Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with the University of British Columbia Opera Workshop (2021), Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* with The University of Alberta Opera Workshop (2019) also as a soloist with The Alberta Baroque Ensemble. An avid musician Connor also performs regularly with orchestra and jazz bands as a double bassist. He joins Calgary Opera as a McPhee Artist in the 2022/23 season.

Artist Biographies



Tayte Mitchell as Remendado

A native of Vulcan, Alberta, Tayte recently completed his Master's degree in Voice Performance at the Cincinnati Conservatory-College of Music (CCM). Tayte's past operatic engagements include Oronte in Handel's Alcina, Le Prince Charmant in Massenet's Cendrillon, the title role in Britten's Albert Herring, Vašek in Smetana's Bartered Bride and Satirino in Cavalli's La Calisto. Tayte was named an Albert Rees Davis Scholar and a George L. Hackett Scholar by the Singer's Club of Cleveland's S. Livingston Mather Competition in 2016 and 2019. The last several summers have seen Tayte as both a Vocal Fellow at Marilyn Horne's Music Academy of the West program and a Studio Artist with Wolf Trap Opera. He returns to Calgary Opera as a McPhee Artist in the 2022/23 season.

Dancer: Rosanna Terracciano, 18-10 children from Cantaré Children's Choir, Supernumeraries (non-singers on stage)

CHORUS

SOPRANOS	MEZZOS
Naomi Derksen	Dallas Hayes-Sparks
Anna Draper	Eva Knight
Alyssa Durnie	Christina Lanz
Helen Hassinger	Sarah Nearing
Taylor Matheson	Eswina Ngai
Shannon Maynes	Sandy Nolette
Erin Moore	Cathy Robinson
Karen Shippey-Heilman	Stephania Romaniuk
Nicole Smithanik	Donna Romano
	Meghan Schulz
BARITONES	TENORS
Mark Armstrong	Réjean Campbell
Adam Arnold	Ben Coburger
Allen Crowley	Don Edie
Mike Johnson	Troy Lewis
Brendan Lengsfeld	Thomas McDonald
Paul Lloyd	Herbert Mielczarek
Stuart Lloyd	Stuart Miller
Kristian Lo	Oliver Munar
Oliver Peplowski	JT Steenkamp
Tim Vollhoffer	

ARTISTIC TEAM



Director Brenna Corner

Brenna Corner has worked as a director, actor, singer, choreographer, and fight director across Canada, the United States and Europe. Brenna has been a member of the Yulanda M. Farris Young Artist Program with Vancouver Opera as well as the Atlanta Studio Artist Program. Ms. Corner is also the artistic director of Manitoba Underground

Opera in Winnipeg, Canada.

Brenna made her directorial mainstage debut creating a new production of *Hansel and Gretel* designed by the Old Trout Puppet Workshop for Vancouver Opera. That same year she also made her American debut with New Orleans Opera creating a new production of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Since then Ms. Corner has been directing and creating shows across the United States and Canada.



Conductor Mark Morash

Mark Morash is a conductor and pianist originally from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. He is Calgary Opera's Head of Music and Chorus Master. He was Director of Musical Studies for the Opera Center at San Francisco Opera for over two decades where he conducted performances for Merola as well as the Adler Foundation. Guest appearances have

included Opera Colorado, Hawaii Opera Theatre, and Opera Santa Barbara. Orchestra appearances include San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, and the Napa Valley Symphony. Mr. Morash's performances have taken him throughout Canada, the U.S., Japan and Russia.

Fight Director: John Knight

Repetiteur: Evan Mounce

Stage Manager: Nicole Bergen

Props Assistant: Paige Prystupa

Assistant Stage Manager: Kennedy Greene

Assistant Stage Manager: Shelby-Jai Flick

Head of Wardrobe: Heather Moore

Production Manager: Bonni Baynton

Technical Director: Cody Stadel

Assistant Technical Director:

Brett Johnson

A Brief History of Opera cont.

History of opera cont.

ballad opera, Spanish *zarzuela* and Viennese *opерetta* helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

At the beginning of the 20th century, composers in North America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of folk music and legends. Composers such as the Gershwin brothers with *Porgy and Bess*, Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, Douglas Moore with *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Carlisle Floyd with *Suzanna*, and more recently John Adams with *Nixon in China* and Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut up in my Bones* all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success.

In Canada, composer John Estacio and librettist John Murrell were commissioned by Calgary Opera to create *Filumena*, based on a true Canadian story of the last woman to be hanged in Alberta. It premiered in 2003 in Calgary to great success and is one of the most produced Canadian grand operas in the world.



Laura Whalen as the title character in Calgary Opera's *Filumena* (2003)

The Composer: Georges Bizet



Georges Bizet was born in Paris on the 25th October 1838. His mother, Aimée, was a talented pianist, and his father, Adolphe, a singing teacher. Perhaps, then, it's no surprise that young Georges quickly developed an aptitude for music—he was such a virtuoso that the local Conservatoire allowed him to start his music studies from the age of 9 instead of the usual minimum entry age of 10. His early work largely flew under the radar and he managed to scrape a living together by arranging and transcribing other people's work, while working on his own operas and compositions in the background. Sadly, he would not live to see his operas take off into the much-loved blockbuster hits they are today—*Carmen* premiered in March 1875 and was not well received by the press or audiences of the time due to its shocking themes. Georges passed away of a suspected heart attack only 3 months later. His funeral was attended by more than 4000 people who mourned the early death of someone they considered, despite his

minimal box office success, a true musical talent. The night of his passing *Carmen* was performed again at the Opéra-Comique, and the press who had panned it only 3 months prior now declared Georges a "master". Today, Georges' contributions to opera, such as *Carmen* and other works like *The Pearl Fishers*, are considered opera classics, and are world-renowned for their brilliance - in particular, how Georges was able to express his character's emotions through his music. *Carmen* has gone on to be performed and reimagined time and time again, in opera, film, hip hop and pop music and even on ice.

Libretto



Libretto of *Carmen*, Metropolitan Opera House, 1920.

Libretto is Italian for “little book” or “booklet”. The libretto is the text of the opera, or of an operetta or musical theatre. From its earliest days in Italy opera was performed only for nobility. The words of the opera were printed in a small book to commemorate the performance. As opera developed into an art form for the people in the late 1600’s and 1700’s and opera houses opened across Venice, the audience purchased the libretto book and followed along at performances to understand the drama and action onstage. In modern day opera houses the complete libretto is usually only seen by the vocalists, conductors and directors of an opera, although there are projected words for the audience, usually above the stage. As opera has spread around the world, many operas are performed in a language not spoken or understood by

the audience. The projected libretto is printed in the official language of the country so that the singing and story are understood.

The Librettists: Ludovic Halévy and Henry Meilhac



Ludovic Halévy

Henri (born 23rd February 1830, died 6 June 1897) and Ludovic (born 1st January 1834, died 8th May 1908) were the librettists for *Carmen*. Having already established their own careers independently, in 1861 they met each other on the steps of a theatre in Paris when Ludovic was struggling to finish a project and enlisted Henri’s assistance. Thus began a prolific and fulfilling partnership that lasted for over 20 years,



Henry Meilhac

where they became known for their light and satirical style of writing. During their joint career, they collaborated on such works as the libretto for *La belle Hélène* by Jacques Offenbach, a popular opera that parodied Helen of

Sparta’s elopement with Paris which sparked the Trojan war. They also co-authored the vaudeville play *Le Réveillon*, which in turn inspired Strauss’s famous operetta *Die Fledermaus*, which is still performed around the world to this day. They had a friendly working relationship, with Meilhac bringing wit and imagination to the partnership and Halévy bringing a sense of dramatic framework.

History and Context

Carmen originated with French composer Georges Bizet who, in 1870's Paris, was asked to write a new work for the *Paris Opéra-Comique*. This famous theatrical house was known for presenting virtuous pieces that were meant to entertain young couples from well-to-do as they became acquainted. The works did not tend to present any deep social commentary. Along came *Carmen* and for the first time at the *Opéra-Comique*, a work on stage showed common people; factory workers, street vendors, and the Roma people.

Carmen is a strong-willed woman who smokes on stage (unheard of), gets into fights (unseemly) and is sexually free (scandalous). On opening night, March 3, 1875, the audience was shocked at the work, declaring it immoral. Bizet was crushed. He was to die three months later never knowing of the eventual popularity of *Carmen*. However, some saw the instant appeal of the opera, including Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky who proclaimed, "ten years hence *Carmen* will be the most popular opera in the world". He was not wrong.

At the time of *Carmen's* creation and for most of the 19th Century, popular opera centred mostly aristocratic or mythical characters, fairy tale scenarios and unrealistic or unattainable realities for the average citizen. Bizet wrote *Carmen* in the *verismo* style, a style that dealt with common situations and portrayed lives of regular people with regular problems on stage. He based the opera on Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen*. In the novella Carmen is a Roma, an ethnic group of people originally thought to be from India that have migrated globally. The Roma have been heavily persecuted for their nomadic and free way of life. This was certainly the climate that the Roma faced at the time of Bizet's composition of *Carmen*. The Roma were the endless victims of racial profiling and discrimination that made Carmen a bold character to centre on the stage. She did not adhere to French cultural norms of the time, socially or culturally.

On violence and domestic abuse: Carmen's desire for freedom engenders such rage in Don José that he murders her. This patriarchal and abusive attitude, although taken to the extreme, was not out of place in 1870's France. Women were under the rule of men and the incidences of domestic violence by males was high. Although France had made domestic violence punishable by law at the beginning of the 19th century, abuse and murder of women was prolific. Indeed domestic violence is rampant globally still today. While women continue to advance, there also continue to be set backs that challenge women's sovereignty and advancement. Carmen represents every woman whose voice is ignored, distorted or silenced altogether. Sadly in the world today there are countless examples of this. An opera like this helps us to bring women's rights into the spotlight, it shines a very strong light on the inequities and brutality that surround women's lives. These are important things to consider and important conversations to have.

On cultural appropriation: The Roma and the setting of Seville were both seen as exotic elements at the time in France. There was a fascination with exoticism that led many artists to use these elements in their work to create something exciting for the audiences. While we now understand that creating characters and using settings that are not from a composer or librettist's lived experiences, without consulting people from those cultures and settings, is known as cultural appropriation and is no longer acceptable, at the time this was commonplace. Thankfully, operas and artwork being created today are headed towards giving sovereignty of narrative to those that have the experience to relay it. Although this is an ongoing battle we must acknowledge as a society, it no longer as easily flies under the radar of an informed and sensitive audience.

In conclusion, there are problematic elements of this opera, to the point where one wonders where the benefit lies for the modern operagoer. In spite of it all, *Carmen* holds up a mirror to our culture, our understanding of 'other' and our treatment of women, and forces us to question how things have or have not changed. Opera houses around the world continue to present this work and that speaks of the deep impression it makes upon us, both in the achingly beautiful music and in the cultural context we inhabit.



Varduhi Abrahamyan & cast members of *Carmen* at Atlanta Opera (2018)

What to Listen for

Carmen is filled with notable and recognizable arias and melodies. You've undoubtedly heard the music for the Toreador's song in commercials, in tv shows and many other places. *Carmen* likely has the most recognizable tunes of any opera in history. Here are some of the pieces you should listen for when you attend the dress rehearsal or a performance of *Carmen*:

🎵 "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" aka Habanera (Carmen)

Carmen sings one of the most famous arias ever written, the Habanera, in Act I of the opera. This was a popular song style from Cuba that Bizet researched as he was composing *Carmen*. He originally thought the melody was a folk song but later found out that it was adapted from the habanera "El Arreglito ou la Promesse de mariage" by Spanish musician Sebastián Iradier, which was first published in 1863, hardly making it older than the opera Bizet was working on.

https://youtu.be/KJ_HHRJf0xg - The Royal Opera House presentation of *Carmen*, starring Anna Caterina Antonacci as Carmen

🎵 "Près des ramparts de Seville/Seguidilla" (Carmen)

The term Seguidilla refers to a old Castilian folksong and dance form. In the opera, Carmen sings this in Act I in an attempt to seduce Don José, which is successful.

<https://youtu.be/DkADJFzJW28> - Jessye Norman sings the role of Micaela in this performance with Neil Shiff as Don José and the Orchestre National de France conducted by Seiji Ozawa

🎵 "La fleur que tu m'avais jetée"/Flower Song(Don José)

The obsessive aria that Don José sings in prison, holding the flower that Carmen threw him the last time he saw her. This aria shows how enthralled he is with her and illustrates his descent into the detrimental and ultimately murderous fixation he has with her.

<https://youtu.be/V1dafrit10w> - The Royal Opera House presentation of *Carmen*, starring Jonas Kaufmann as Don José

🎵 "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante" (Micaela)

The aria Micaela sings in Act III to give herself courage as she comes upon Don José in the mountains where he is hiding out with the smugglers. She loves him but is frightened of the scene and of Carmen.

<https://youtu.be/IAUIbYhoPHI> - Leontyne Price sings the role of Micaela in *Carmen*

🎵 "Votre Toast"/Toreador's song (Escamillo)

The other most famous aria from *Carmen*, Votre Toast, aka Toréado's song, occurs in Act II as the bullfighter Escamillo enters the scene. He sings of various situations in the bullring and what he feels as a bullfighter as the crowds cheer and adore him

<https://youtu.be/RIQ3APm4FI> - Nmon Ford, who plays Escamillo in Calgary Opera's production, talks about and sings "Toréador Song" from his production with Opera Colorado

Activities & Ideas to Consider

Write a Review or Critique of the Performance

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.

Online students can find many reviews of *Carmen* from 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 their character? Did you feel that the characters were believable? Sympathetic? How well are they giving and taking focus?

Technical Aspects

It is 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, not distract from it.

☐ 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? Was it appropriate to the character? 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?

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.

Activities & Ideas to Consider

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. Pick one, watch the clip, and compare it to the corresponding clip of the traditional operatic version found on page 16, “What to Listen for”.

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/ Toréador song)***

<https://youtu.be/to6fHiaavw8>

The Broadway musical *Carmen Jones* from 1943 was based on Bizet's *Carmen*, with updated lyrics to reflect a modern setting and storyline by Oscar Hammerstein. In 1954 it was adapted into a movie of the same name. Here is a excerpt from the movie which is adapted from the famous *Toréador* song “Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre” by the bullfighter Escamillo. In the movie Escamillo is replaced by the Heavy weight boxing champ Husky Miller, played here by Joe Adams with voiceover by baritone Brock Peters.

🌀 ***Carmen on Ice: Près des ramparts de Seville/Seguidilla***

<https://youtu.be/-MIObunmbbk> (begin video at 15:10 time mark)

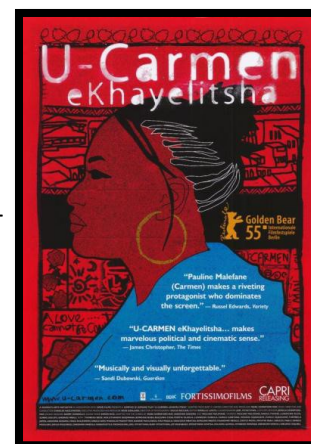
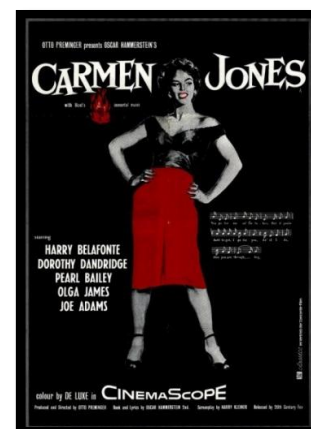
Some people find Bizet's compositions so charming, even without the lyrics, that they use them in other non-lyric ways like this production of *Carmen on Ice*. This ice dance film from 1990 features Katarina Witt, a very talented figure skater who'd only two years previously won her second Olympic Gold 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.

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

<https://youtu.be/M7KVnHDRako>

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. All of the characters African, and 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 creative adaptation.

🌀 Other adaptations to check out:



Activities & Ideas to Consider

As mentioned on the previous page, Carmen has inspired everything from commercials to children's television characters and here are a few more to entertain as well as to further illustrate the ubiquity of the presence this artwork continues to exude in our modern times:

🌀 Belgian pop singer Stromae wrote the song *Carmen* in 2015 as a commentary on both falling in love and the fragility of love, especially when social media is involved (note the big blue "twitter" bird that weighs him down in the video) see it here: <https://youtu.be/UKftOH54iNU>

🌀 In this classic take on *Habanera (l'amour est un oiseau rebelle)* the Swedish chef, Beaker and Animal from the Muppet Show deliver a hilarious interpretation <https://youtu.be/jXKU5A1auM>

🌀 Although you can't find a complete version online, in 2001 Beyoncé Knowles and Mekhi Phifer starred in *Carmen: A Hip Hopera* that brought Carmen to a whole new audience of young people, pop and hip hop fans. It is possible to rent it from iTunes on AppleTV. The producers made the story relevant and interesting for a new generation, ultimately securing *Carmen's* continued legacy and illustrating how themes in classic opera can continue to inform and engage audiences today.

🌀 The Metropolitan opera consistently creates insightful and indepth education resources for the operas they present each season. One fun element of their work are the "illustrated synopses", here is the one for Carmen: <https://www.metopera.org/discover/education/illustrated-synopses/carmen/>

Language of Opera & Voice Types

Act - Main sections of a play or opera

Aria - A solo song sung in an opera

Ballet - Dance set to music within an Opera, particularly common in French opera

Blocking - the precise movement and positioning of actors on a stage in order to facilitate the performance of a play, ballet, film or opera

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, the chorus support the story

Conductor - Person who rehearses and leads the orchestra & the singers in time with each other

Duet - A song performed by two singers, usually to set up a relationship between the two or illustrate their differences

Leitmotif A melodic theme associated with a particular character, place, thing or idea in opera or a recurring theme

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, Italian in origin

Opera Seria - Serious, dramatic opera, Italian in origin

Operetta - Light, comic with some spoken dialogues

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, sets a tone or feeling for the opera and often introduces musical themes that will be heard throughout the work

Program - Booklet that contains information about the

opera, composer, performers, and the opera company

Quartet— A song performed by four singers, often with an individual story or viewpoint being expressed by each

Recitative - Words that are sung in the rhythm of natural speech, serves the purpose of carrying the action of the story forward in a timely manner

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

Répétiteur - Plays piano for all rehearsals leading up to the opera, prior to the orchestra taking over

Scene - Segments of action within the acts of an opera

Synopsis—an abbreviated version of the plot or story of the opera or play, written in the program for the audience to familiarize themselves with the action on stage

Trio—A song performed by three singers, generally used to illustrate the relationship between the three characters, as in a love triangle, or their differences

VOICE TYPES

Soprano - Highest pitched female voice

Mezzo-Soprano - Female voice between soprano and contralto

Contralto - Lowest pitched female voice

Counter-tenor—the equivalent male form of the contralto, highest pitched male voice

Tenor - Second highest pitched male voice

Baritone - Male voice between tenor and bass

Bass - Lowest pitched male voice

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