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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

Study Guides
2015·2016

CARMEN

Georges Bizet (1792 – 1868)

Carmen Production Sponsor

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All production photographs are from the Canadian Opera Company production of *Carmen* and are by Michael Cooper

Cover: Rinat Shaham as Carmen, 2010.
Above: Brian Hymel as Don José and Rinat Shaham as Carmen, 2010.

Welcome!

Welcome to the Canadian Opera Company's production of *Carmen*. Whether this is your first time bringing students to the opera or if you're a seasoned opera-going teacher, you and your students are bound to experience a truly enjoyable night of passionate and memorable melodies, compelling storytelling, and incredible performances by the singers and COC Orchestra. This Study Guide invites you to dig more deeply into the opera and the making of this production. You'll find a wealth of topics to further explore and discuss with your students in class or on the ride to and from the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. These topics include Bizet's music and Spanish dance (music, dance), the culture and history of the Roma community, and the roles of women in social, economic, and cultural contexts (Social Sciences and Humanities).

Carmen is sung in French with English SURTITLES™.

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STUDENT DRESS REHEARSALS 2015/2016

PLAN YOUR NEXT VISIT IN 2015/2016!

La Traviata Verdi
Monday, October 5, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

Pyramus and Thisbe Monk Feldman/Monteverdi
Sunday, October 18, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

Siegfried Wagner
Wednesday, January 20, 2016 at 5:30 p.m.*

The Marriage of Figaro Mozart
Monday, February 1, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Carmen Bizet
Saturday, April 9, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Maometto II Rossini
Monday, April 25, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

*Please note the earlier start time to accommodate the length of the opera, approx. five hours including two intermissions.

Opera 101

WHAT IS OPERA?

The term "opera" comes from the Italian word for "work" or "piece," and is usually applied to the European tradition of grand opera. Opera is a form of storytelling which incorporates music, drama and design.

Though its origins date back to ancient Greece, the form of opera we are familiar with today started in the late 16th century in Florence, Italy. Count Giovanni de' Bardi was a patron and host to a group of intellectuals, poets, artists, scientists and humanists including Giulio Caccini (composer) and Vincenzo Galilei (father to the astronomer and scientist, Galileo Galilei, who was most famous for his improvements to the telescope). These individuals explored trends in the arts, focusing on music and drama in particular. They were unified in their belief that the arts had become over-embellished and that returning to the transparency of the music of the ancient Greeks, which incorporated both speech and song, and a chorus to further the plot and provide commentary on the action, would present a more pure, natural and powerful way to tell stories and express emotions.

The first opera, *Dafne*, about a nymph who fled from Apollo and was subsequently transformed by the gods into a laurel tree, was composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597. From then on, the early operas recreated Greek tragedies with mythological themes. During the 17th and 18th centuries, topics expanded to include stories about royalty, and everyday or common people. Some operas were of a serious nature (called *opera seria*) and some light-hearted (called *opera buffa*). Since then operas have been written on a wide variety of topics such as cultural clashes (*Madama Butterfly*), comedic farce (*The Barber of Seville*), politicians on foreign visits (*Nixon in China*), the celebration of Canadian heroes (*Louis Riel*), and children's stories (*The Little Prince*), to name a few.

The COC presents works in the western European tradition but musical equivalents to European opera can be found in Japan, at the Peking Opera in China, and in Africa where it is called Epic Storytelling.

What are the differences between operas, musicals and plays?

Traditionally operas are through-sung, meaning they are sung from beginning to end with no dialogue in between. Singers must have powerful voices in order to be heard over the orchestra (the ensemble of instrumental musicians that accompanies the dramatic action on stage during an opera). Remember: opera singers don't use microphones!

Musicals are a combination of dialogue and sung pieces and often include choreographed numbers. The singers often use microphones and are accompanied by a pit band which includes more modern instruments like a drum kit, guitar and electronic instruments.

Plays are primarily spoken works of theatre with minimal singing or music.

There are always exceptions to the rule: though *Les Misérables* is through-sung it is still classified as a piece of musical theatre because of its style of music. By the same token, some operas, like Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, have spoken dialogue in addition to singing.

What does opera feel like?

Take five minutes out of the school day and instead of using regular voices to converse, ask the class to commit to singing everything. Make an agreement with the students that it's not about judging people's voices but about freeing our natural sounds. Make up the melodies on the spot and don't worry about singing "correctly." Did the musical lines help express or emphasize certain emotions? If so, how?

Attending the Opera:
Make the most of your experience

WELCOME TO THE FOUR SEASONS CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Photo: Sam Javanrouh

So you're headed to the opera, and there are a few questions on your mind. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your opera experience.

First, there's the question of **what to wear**. People wear all sorts of things to the opera—jeans, dress pants, cocktail dresses, suits, etc. The important thing is to be comfortable. Wear something that makes you feel good, whether it be jeans or your nicest tie. But skip that spritz of perfume or cologne before you go out; the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts is scent-free. Many fellow patrons and performers are allergic to strong scents.

Once you're dressed, it's important to **arrive on time** for the show. Late patrons cannot be admitted to the theatre, and you may have to watch the first act on a television screen in the lobby rather than from your seat. If you don't have your ticket yet, arrive as early as possible—the line-up for the box office can often be quite long prior to a performance! The main doors open one hour before the performance. Line up there and have your ticket ready to present to the usher. If you have any questions about tonight's performance, drop by the Welcome Desk (just inside the main doors) to ask a member of the COC staff, who are full of useful information not only about tonight's opera, but also about COC programs in general. A **pre-performance chat** takes place in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre (Ring 3) about 45 minutes before the show. These chats offer valuable insight into the opera and the specific production that you'll be seeing.

Before the opera starts, take the opportunity to **explore the lobby**, known as the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room. Stop by concessions and **pre-order a beverage for intermission or purchase a snack**. Walk up the stairs, passing a sculpture as you go, and note the floating glass staircase—the longest free-span glass staircase in the world! On the third floor, you'll see the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, home to our Free Concert Series. You'll also see a mobile by artist Alexander Calder, adding some colour and whimsy to the space.

Chimes will ring throughout the lobby **ten minutes** before the performance, reminding everyone to find their seats. Head towards the door noted on your ticket, get a

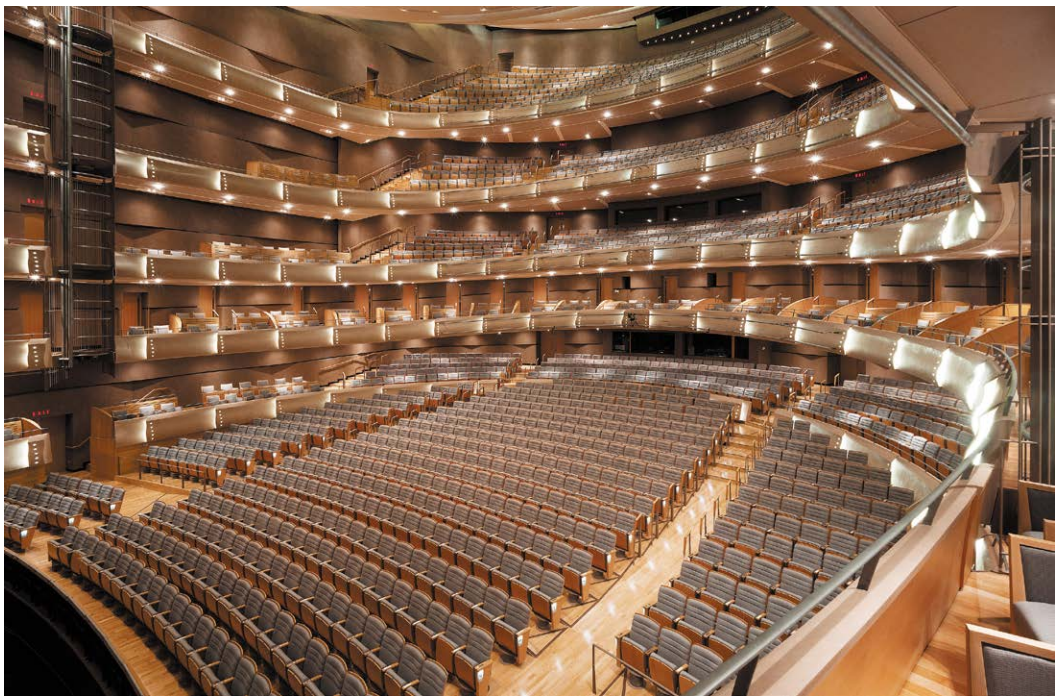
program from the usher, and find your designated seat in R. Fraser Elliott Hall. It's best to use this time to open any candies you might have and turn off your cell phone—the hall is built to carry sound, so small sounds travel further than you may think! Photography is not permitted once the show starts. The design and direction of the show is under intellectual property and only the official COC photographer and/or members of the media can take pictures and even then, only under special circumstances that require prior arrangements.

As the lights go down and the audience quiets, **listen carefully**. Remember all of that traffic you heard in the lobby? And now... not a peep! The auditorium is physically separated from the outside and the ground below, making for the best acoustic experience possible.

Now it's time to sit back and **enjoy the opera**! **SURTITLES™** will be projected on a horizontal screen above the stage. SURTITLES™ originate from the idea of "subtitles", which are most commonly used in foreign films to make them more accessible outside of their country of origin. The COC was the first opera company to adapt this concept for the operatic stage. Slides containing the English translation of the *libretto* (text for the opera) are projected in a more visible place for the audience: above the stage. SURTITLES™ were first used by the COC at the premiere of the opera *Elektra* in 1983. Only the name could be trademarked, as the technology for the projections was already in existence. Opera companies from around the world have adopted this audience initiative under different names, and it has revolutionized opera stages everywhere.

Feel free to show your **appreciation to the performers** by laughing at humorous bits or applauding after a well-performed aria. If a performer has pulled off some particularly impressive vocal fireworks, it's absolutely acceptable to yell out your appreciation in addition to applause. You may hear your fellow audience members shouting "bravo!" for a man, "brava!" for a woman, or "bravi!" for a group of performers. Feel free to join in!

Carmen lasts approximately two hours and 55 minutes, including two intermissions. The opera is sung in French with English SURTITLES™.



R. Fraser Elliott Hall.
Photo: Tim Griffith

Characters and Synopsis

MAIN CHARACTERS (in order of vocal appearance)

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Moralès	an officer	baritone	moh-RAH-les
Micaëla	a village girl in love with Don José	soprano	mee-kah-EH-lah
Don José	a corporal of the guard	tenor	dohn zho-ZEH
Zuniga	a lieutenant of the guard	bass	dzoo-NEE-gah
Carmen	a gypsy	mezzo-soprano	car-MEN
Frasquita	Carmen's friend	soprano	fras-KEE-tah
Mercédès	Carmen's friend	mezzo-soprano	mer-SEH-des
Escamillo	a toreador	baritone	es-ca-MEE-yoh
Lillas Pastia	an innkeeper	actor	LEE-las PAHS-tyah
Le Dancaïre	a smuggler	baritone	luh dahn-kah-EE-reh
Le Remendado	a smuggler	tenor	luh re-men-DAH-doh

SYNOPSIS

ACT I
A group of guards is stationed outside Seville's cigarette factory, and among them is the corporal Don José.

Returning to the factory after siesta, the gypsy girl Carmen taunts the men, warning them to beware her charm. Don José denies his attraction and tries to ignore her, but Carmen throws a flower at him before going back into work.

Micaëla, a young country girl, enters to deliver a letter to Don José from his estranged mother which advises him to marry Micaëla. He realizes he must oblige his mother to combat his newfound obsession for Carmen.

Suddenly a fight breaks out in the factory between Carmen and another of the cigarette factory girls, and Don José is sent to arrest her. Carmen promises him that if he releases her, she will be his lover. He cannot resist, and allows her to escape.

Intermission

ACT II
The gypsy girls are dancing in a tavern.

Don José has been imprisoned for a month for allowing Carmen to escape. Zuniga, another soldier obsessed with Carmen, tells her that Don José has just been released.

A passing parade is celebrating the victories of the bull fighter, Escamillo. As the crowd disperses, the gypsy smugglers urge Carmen to join them in the mountains. She refuses, wishing to wait for Don José.

Don José arrives, and Carmen demands he abandon his call back to service and accompany her into the mountains with the gypsies. Don José is torn between his loyalty and his desire.

Zuniga appears in search of Carmen, and in a jealous act of insubordination, Don José attacks him. Having no choice, he realizes he must now join the band of gypsies.

Intermission

ACT III
The smugglers are moving through the mountains. Don José has become possessive and controlling, and quarrels with Carmen. The girls begin to tell fortunes for themselves, but all that reads in the cards for Carmen is death.

The smugglers leave the camp, stationing Don José behind to guard the contraband. Micaëla enters in search of Don José, and at a distance she sees him fight with Escamillo who is looking for Carmen.

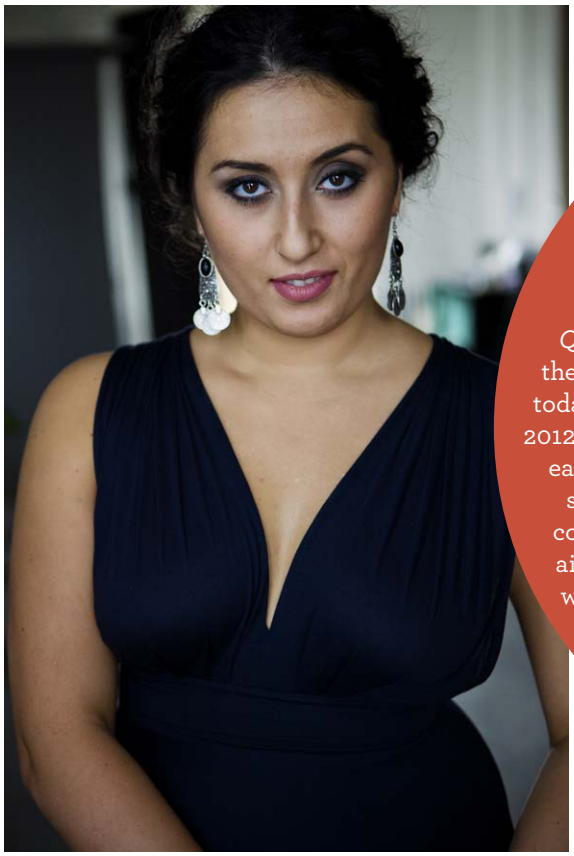
Hearing a gunshot, the smugglers return to diffuse the situation. Micaëla pleads with Don José to return to her and his mother. Carmen encourages him to go, and upon hearing that his mother is dying, he reluctantly agrees.

ACT IV

On the day of Escamillo's great bullfight, Carmen accompanies the toreador to the arena. They swear their love for each other before separating.

Don José appears at the arena and begs Carmen to come back to him. She refuses, denying that she loves him and claiming she now loves Escamillo.

In a jealous rage, Don José charges at Carmen, stabbing her. She dies as the crowd inside the arena cheers the victorious toreador.



ANITA RACHVELISHVILI

The sultry and charismatic Georgian mezzo-soprano returns to the COC following performances here in the title role of *Carmen* (2010, her North American debut) and as Dulcinée in *Don Quichotte* (2014). Having sung Carmen at La Scala, the Met, Seattle, San Francisco and Berlin, she's one of today's IT Carmens, garnering this review following her 2012 Met performances in the role: "With her smoldering, earthy sexuality she is ideal for the role, managing to seem untamed, almost unhinged at times, yet also coolly calculating. She performed with a proprietary air, flashing her legs at every opportunity, when she wasn't wrapping them around her prey, the hapless corporal Don José." (*The New York Times*) One more thing, her surname is pronounced "Rach-VEH-lish-VILL-lee."

Genesis of the Opera

IT WASN'T EASY BEING BIZET

Although he was an exceptionally talented musician, and his opera *Carmen* is one of the most popular in the world, composer Georges Bizet (1838–1875) did not have an easy life... or a long one. Born into a musical family, he enjoyed early success as a pianist and composer, entering the Paris Conservatoire before his 10th birthday and composing his Symphony in C at the age of 17. Bizet suffered from ill health and depression through most of his life and a short stint in the army weakened him further. After early success with *Le Docteur Miracle* (1857) he had only moderate success with operas such as *The Pearl Fishers* (1863) and *La jolie fille de Perth* (1867). After the poor public reception for his final opera, *Carmen* (1875), Bizet returned dejected to his family home and died of a heart attack at the age of 36.

WHATEVER THE CRITICS THOUGHT... THE OTHER COMPOSERS LIKED HIM!

The great French composer Charles Gounod was one of the early admirers of the young prodigy Bizet, who was also a very talented pianist, also admired by Berlioz and Liszt. As a young man Bizet attended a party where he sight-read a very challenging piece by Liszt, who was present, prompting Liszt to declare Bizet one of the three greatest pianists in Europe. In later years, both *Djamileh* (1872) and *Carmen* (1875) were not critical successes, but both were enthusiastically acclaimed: the former by Richard Strauss and the latter by Tchaikovsky.

FINDING HIS VOICE

Charles Gounod was an early compositional inspiration for Bizet, who, throughout his life, made extra money arranging Gounod's music at the composer's request. Schubert was another influence on the young composer, as were Offenbach and Rossini, especially on his early operetta *Le Docteur Miracle* (1857). Bizet admired great creators such as Mozart, Beethoven, Gluck, Weber and, somewhat reluctantly, Verdi, but ultimately he was hindered in finding his own voice by focusing on moulding his style to fit those of the legendary composers. Determined to cease striving to fit a certain style, he worked hard to let his natural gifts flow, and to explore the vivacious melodies and exotic overtones that he was drawn to. His achievement with *Carmen* was the culmination of his life and work. In it he used the music to drive the drama and action instead of just relying on the spoken dialogue in between to achieve the same result. In *Carmen* the emotions of real people were powerfully expressed, marking the work as a strong precursor to *verismo* opera.*

Georges Bizet in a photograph by Étienne Carjat

**Verismo* was a literary movement which developed in southern Italy in the early 1870s, characterized by gritty realism, a concern with poverty, the use of everyday rather than poetic language, quotes from popular songs of the day, and a tragic ending. The *verismo* movement influenced the creation of other operas including Puccini's *La Bohème*.

WHEN MEILHAC MET HALÉVY

The success of *Carmen* can be attributed to the work of the duo who wrote the *libretto* (script) as much as it can be to Bizet's musical treatment. Who were these two writers and what brought them together?

Before his career as a librettist took off, Meilhac worked in a book shop and as a cartoonist and writer for newspapers in Paris. He was known for his vivacious and witty style. In 1856 he wrote the libretto for a one-act musical comedy called *La Sarabande du cardinal*. From then on Meilhac wrote exclusively for the theatre, eventually producing 115 works.

In 1860 Halevy was commissioned to co-author a libretto but part way through the project, the second librettist left abruptly. Halévy needed to finish the contract, and was at a loss for a partner to help. He bumped into Meilhac outside the theatre and even though he did not really know him, Halévy offered him the job. This fortuitous meeting resulted in a fruitful partnership which lasted over 20 years, with Meilhac writing the dialogue and Halévy the lyrics. Together they wrote for several composers, most notably for Jacques Offenbach, providing librettos for *La Belle Hélène* (1864), *La Vie parisienne* (1866), *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867) and *La Périchole* (1868).

Brian Hymel as Don José and Rinat Shaham as Carmen, 2010.

However it was with Bizet, for whom they provided the libretto for *Carmen* (1875), that they achieved their most noticeable and notable success.

HOW *CARMEN* ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN

In 1869, Bizet received an invitation from Camille Du Locle, the joint director of the Opéra-Comique to compose for the theatre. After several false starts and the failure of *Djamileh* (1872), Du Locle suggested Bizet work with librettists Meilhac and Halévy. Bizet chose Prosper Mérimée's novel *Carmen* (1845) as his subject matter. Aldoph De Leuven, Du Locle's co-director, was scandalized by the subject matter, especially the violent end, and he eventually resigned his position. The first singer selected to sing the role of Carmen actually turned it down, so outraged was she by the character. Rehearsals didn't go well as members of both the orchestra and the chorus claimed parts of the music were incapable of being performed, and even Du Locle was worried about the reaction of the Opéra-Comique's audience, which was used to light and sentimental fare.

CARMEN'S PREMIERE AND RECEPTION

When at last *Carmen* had its world premiere at the Opéra-Comique on March 3, 1875, there was outcry about its scandalous nature. Most of the press was outraged, declaring the story obscene and the characters repulsive and uninteresting, but it enjoyed a modest success, with a few critics recognizing that it had real worth, and would stand the test of time. In Vienna, later the same year, *Carmen* was a huge triumph and in subsequent years it would premiere all over the world, including debuting in Toronto in 1879. Tchaikovsky, who saw the opera in 1876, predicted that *Carmen* would be the world's most popular opera.

TCHAIKOVSKY WAS RIGHT!

Carmen continues to appeal to audiences everywhere, holding a firm position in the top 10 list of most frequently performed operas around the world. There are several good reasons. Its music is universally appealing, emotional and unforgettable. Most composers would gnash their teeth in envy at the sheer quantity and quality of the melodies, and every major character gets at least one: Carmen's seductively teasing *Habanera*, Escamillo's swaggering "Toreador Aria", Don José's desperately pleading "Flower Song" and Micaëla's innocently determined "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante". The supporting characters, chorus and orchestra all have their moments too. But under the irresistible appeal of the music lays a richly psychological interaction between the characters. These are real people with stories that could be ripped from today's headlines.

Celestine Galli-Marié (1840–1905), the mezzo-soprano who created the role of Carmen. This portrait from 1884 is by Henri Lucien Doucet.

The Romani People

THE ROMANI PEOPLE

The word Gypsy is a derogatory term for the Roma—a culture that can be traced to a group that lived in Northwest India in the 10th century. The name Gypsy originated because Europeans believed that the Roma culture originated in Egypt, leading to the name "Gyptians," which then became "Gypsy."

The Gypsy archetype has been used in literature and theatre to connote mysterious exotic and somewhat devious characters time and time again. It is not chance that the title character in Merimée's and Bizet's work is a gypsy, as it allows her to be a free spirit and live life as she pleases.

For centuries the Roma have traveled throughout Europe, often moving out of necessity rather than choice. While the Roma have a place of origin, they do not currently have a state. This has forced them to travel continuously, and this struggle has often led to battles with the governments of countries where the Roma live.

There are four main tenets in the belief system of the Roma. They are: loyalty to family, which includes the extended family and larger clan; belief in god (*Del*) and the devil (*Beng*); belief in pre-destiny; and adaptability to changing conditions. They also maintain rich customs and traditions around birth, death, marriage, and cleanliness. These beliefs and customs have led to many assumptions being made about the group as a whole, and have no doubt contributed to the notion that Romani people are mysterious and strange.

The Roma have suffered direct persecution well into the 20th century. The Nazi regime put 500,000 Romani people to death, as they were considered dangerously non-Aryan.

Closer to home, Roma people have emigrated to Canada and the U.S. since the 1870s. By the 1990s there were at least 80,000 Roma integrated into Canadian society. Canadian media and the public most recently became aware of the Roma when Czech-Romani refugees began to arrive in Canada in 1997. Unlike previous refugees, the Czech-Roma came fleeing persecution for being Roma in the Czech Republic.

The public has long been fascinated with the mythological, racial and stereotypical image of the Romani people created by Victorian writers and perpetuated by writers such as the noted Canadian author Robertson Davies; his novel *The Rebel Angels* depict Roma as magical, surrealistic, phantasmagorical, light-fingered characters likely to pick pockets of Canadians in general. Fortunately, perceptions have improved but the Roma, even in Canada, are sometimes viewed with suspicion and fear.

Organizations like the **Education of Roma Children in Europe** and the **Roma Community Centre in Toronto** actively engage in activities to help breakdown the stereotypes associated with Romani people and welcome individuals to learn more about their culture through online fact sheets about their history and in-person events.

Carmen and her gypsy friends in a scene from *Carmen*, 2010.

Listening Guide

INTRODUCTION
This Listening Guide is modified from the original guide produced for the 2009/2010 season, written by Andrew Harper, the COC's former music library and resource centre assistant.

The heat, dust, blood and sand of the story of *Carmen* are illustrated magnificently in Bizet's sensual music. Some of the melodies might be recognizable to you, but no matter how familiar or unfamiliar you are with *Carmen*, we hope this listening guide will give some added insight into this exciting opera.

1

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Overture

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
An overture is an orchestral piece which introduces a larger musical work.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
The overture or prelude introduces an audience to musical themes and melodies in the opera. The overture to *Carmen* is comprised of three major themes: it begins with the music that is sung by the chorus at the beginning of Act IV as they excitedly prepare for the bull fight, with an interjection of the theme from the famous Toreador aria sung by Escamillo in Act II. The overture finishes with a mysterious and unsettling musical theme which is meant to represent both Carmen as well as the concept of "fate." This theme will appear many times during the opera, usually accompanying important events in the plot.

STRATEGIES FOR LISTENING
Based on what you heard in the overture, predict how the story will unfold. How do you think the opera will end? Why?

2

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Act II: Habanera: "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" ("Love is a rebellious bird")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
A crowd of men has gathered to watch the cigarette girls pass by as they leave the factory. The men are particularly interested in catching a glimpse of the gypsy woman Carmen, who makes a grand entrance and sings the Habanera. Don José is the only one who seems uninterested in Carmen; she responds by throwing him a flower, essentially establishing power over him.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
The Habanera is perhaps the most recognizable *aria* (solo) in the opera. It is heavily influenced by Spanish musical style, both metrically and melodically. The *habañera* is a song style that originated in Cuba and became popular in the 19th century, spreading throughout Spanish colonies all over the world, including those in Europe. The four-note tango rhythm heard at the very beginning plays continuously throughout the aria. The cellos play this rhythm over one hundred times! The chromatic intervals and scale produce a very sensuous and seductive sound.

STRATEGIES FOR LISTENING
How does the music shape your opinion about Carmen's character? Based on what you've heard, describe how you think she looks? How does she move? How does the music influence your choices?

3

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Act II: Toreador Song: "Votre toast... je peux vous le rendre" ("Your toast... I can return")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
The famous *toreador* (bull fighter) Escamillo has just entered the tavern, surrounded by an entourage of admirers. He leads the crowd in a lively song depicting the life of a *toreador*.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
The Toreador Song alternates between two contrasting styles; the verses are sung in a minor key, which give Escamillo's words a heightened sense of drama and suspense as he sings about the heroic activities of the toreador during a bull fight. The refrain (line or lines of music that are repeated in a song), however, is in a major key. This change of key complements the Toreador's words: he switches from singing about bull fights to dreaming of potential love. Still very dramatic, the music sets a more joyful mood, and, as the chorus joins Escamillo later in the refrain, the excitement of the crowd becomes increasingly apparent.

STRATEGIES FOR LISTENING
The grandeur of this music is quite exaggerated; what does this say about Escamillo's character? Based on this piece, how do you think Escamillo feels about being a *toreador*? What gives you this impression?

4

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Act III: "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante" ("I say that nothing can frighten me")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
Micaëla is travelling alone through the mountains in search of Don José with the intention of convincing him to return home. She is afraid, but also very determined, and prays for the courage to continue.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
This is Micaëla's only aria in the opera, and a prime example of the extent to which a character can be represented by the music they sing. The mood of this aria is completely different than that of any of the music Carmen sings, which is indicative of how dissimilar the two women are. Micaëla sings of the courage she will need when facing Carmen who has bewitched her beloved Don José. The aria starts off quite timid, with the tempo and dynamics increasing as Micaëla gains strength and conviction in her quest, and ends with a gentle plea for God to protect her and give her courage.

STRATEGIES FOR LISTENING
Listen to Micaëla's aria and then listen to the Habanera from Act I. Compare and contrast the music. What personality traits do you think the music suggests about each woman? How are the traits represented in the music?

5

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Act III: "Les voici, voici le quadrille!" ("Here they are, here's the quadrille!")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
A large crowd of spectators has gathered and excitedly awaits the procession of the bull fighters and Escamillo.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
This section begins quietly as members of the crowd sing the words "Les voici!" ("Here they are!"); this text is sung numerous times throughout the chorus as the excitement builds. The entrance of the toreadors is marked with a cymbal crash and a reprise of the lively music that was heard at the beginning of the overture. To achieve the effect of a large crowd of people who are all talking excitedly, Bizet divides up the chorus and has them take turns singing about different aspects of the procession. When Escamillo finally enters, the crowd once again sings the theme from the Toreador aria.

STRATEGIES FOR LISTENING
This theme is heard when we first meet Escamillo. What do you think of when you hear this theme again? Why is it useful to use the same tune again in an opera? Imagine you are directing this scene: what do you visualize happening when you hear this piece?

You may already know several of Bizet's more acclaimed pieces, such as his **Symphony in C** (1855), his incidental music for ***L'Arlésienne*** (1872) and his opera ***Les pêcheurs de perles*** (*The Pearl Fishers*, 1863) with its very popular tenor and baritone duet, a must-have in any opera highlights concert or recording.

Where have you heard the music from *Carmen*? Everywhere! From ads (Pepsi, Doritos, KFC), movies (*The Bad News Bears*, *the Marx Brothers*), to television (*Doctor Who*, *Sesame Street*,) and cartoons (The Simpsons, *Tom and Jerry*, *Family Guy*), for figure-skating routines, in flash mobs, and in countless professional and amateur performances live and on YouTube, *Carmen*'s melodies have infiltrated the consciousness of millions around the world, and they're here to stay.

What to Look for

The Canadian Opera Company first mounted this production of *Carmen* in 2005, in collaboration with San Diego Opera and Opéra de Montréal. At that time the original director, Mark Lamos, and set designer, Michael Yeargan emphasised outdoor living, in a non-specific Latin-American country.

This production of *Carmen* is set in the mid-20th century. The costumes, by François St-Aubin, are colourful and range from the simple dresses of the cigarette factory workers in Act I to the party dresses of those attending the bullfight in the final act. Escamillo, the star bullfighter whose character epitomizes a vintage machismo, looks like a rockstar of the era. The women in Escamillo's entourage are dressed in a more Hollywood style, with tighter-fitting dresses and more pronounced make-up.

The men in the chorus wear wide legged pants, with singlets (tank tops) and summer shirts. The cigarette girls combine peasant tops, with scoop necklines and short sleeves, with multi-coloured skirts and wedge shoes.

Everyone has a headpiece of some kind: the men sport straw hats in many shapes and the women, headscarves, small hats and flowers. Micaëla stands out from the group. As a young and innocent woman from a rural village, she wears more traditional and modest clothes with a shawl over her head.

The main set features a small-town square in Act I, with crumbling plastered walls painted with graffiti and covered with peeling posters. Act II sets the scene at an outdoor tavern. It's shabby but the patrons indulge in drinking and dancing, enlivened by the presence of the gypsy smugglers. When Escamillo enters, the glamour and wealth of his entourage excite the tavern's patrons. The smugglers in Act III loiter in the ruins of a church in the mountains. In Act IV the action takes place in the most unglamorous part of a bullfight arena, in the hallways under the seats. It is against this grubby backdrop that Carmen's carefree existence comes to a sordid end at the hands of her abandoned soldier boyfriend.

Paulo Szot (centre) as Escamillo, 2005.

This season *Carmen*, one of the COC's vital productions, gets an update from director Joel Ivany, an exciting young talent on the Canadian opera scene. Ivany is also head of independent opera company, Against the Grain Theatre, an artist collective known for their unconventional stagings in unconventional spaces.

Ivany is working with frequent collaborators Camellia Koo (costumes) and Jason Hand (lighting), who are both enjoying flourishing careers in their field that have taken them to the Shaw Festival, Stratford Festival, Tarragon Theatre, Soulpepper Theatre and many others in Canada and abroad.

Director Joel Ivany has an interesting connection to this particular production of *Carmen*: he was chosen to be a supernumerary (an extra or "silent acting role") when the production was first performed at the COC in 2005. Then new to the opera field, Joel learned a lot about the industry and the role of a director by observing from backstage.

Left: Rinat Shaham as Carmen and Paul Guy as Escamillo, 2010.

Right: Ana Ibarra as Micaëla with members of the COC Chorus, 2005.

Active Learning

One of the best parts of taking your students to the opera is the discussion and further exploration that live theatre can inspire. Take a deeper look into the themes and story of *Carmen* with these discussion questions and ideas for further exploration.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Carmen faces a great deal of discrimination based on how her actions reflect on her gender. How would the story have gone differently if Carmen was a man?
- Where else have you heard the iconic "Habanera?"
- This production is set in the mid-20th century, as opposed to the 1800s (when it was written and initially set). How does this historical context alter the story? Specifically, think of the changing roles of women in society from the 1800s to the 1900s.

EXTENSIONS

- Explore two forms of Spanish dance, the flamenco and seguidilla. Find videos to show your classmates and learn more about the music, steps, and origin. If you feel like dancing yourself, see if you can learn a few steps to teach to your classmates.
- Learn more about women's rights in Spain in the 1800s. How do you see this history reflected in the libretto of the opera?
- Investigate toreador culture, including its rise, decline, and their status in society during Carmen's time. What happens during a bullfight? How did this come to be such a symbol of Spanish culture?

Did viewing the opera spark some scintillating debates or discussions? Would your students like to share examples of their work with the COC? E-mail us at **education@coc.ca**. We'd love to hear from you!

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Ana Ibarra as Micaëla and Atilla B. Kiss as Don José, 2005.

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TORONTO Culture

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Charitable Registration Number: 11883 4829 RR0001

Above: Workshop at Howard Park Jr. P.S. Photo: COC