

Carmen – Georges Bizet

First Performance – Opéra-Comique, Paris - March 1875

With its succession of classical ‘pops’, compelling story and exotic settings; Carmen is the perhaps the most frequently performed of all operas and among the best-loved works in the repertoire. Everyone can find something in it; great tunes, a fast moving dramatic story and a charismatic heroine in Carmen.

Plot Outline

The story is set in Seville about 1820. Carmen, the gypsy girl has left her people to come to Seville to work in a cigarette factory. She emerges into the town square to have a break with her work mates.

Soldiers from the barracks opposite have come off guard and she flirts with one of them, Don José. After she has returned to the factory, Micaela, Don José’s sweetheart, arrives with a message from his mother.

Suddenly there is a fight, Carmen has stabbed one of the girls and Zuniga sends José to arrest her.

Carmen works her charms on the soldier and persuades him to free her. Don José is imprisoned and demoted for his trouble.

A few days later, at a local tavern, a haunt for gypsies and smugglers, Zuniga watches Carmen and her friends dance. Escamillo, the popular bullfighter, pays a visit to the tavern and sees Carmen.

Once Escamillo has gone, Don José newly released, arrives and declares his love for Carmen. A love that leads him to quit the troops and join the smugglers and gypsies.

In the rocky mountain pass where smugglers have their camp, Carmen reads her fortune in the cards and foresees death.

She is already tiring of Don José who, whilst disenchanted with his new life, is completely under Carmen’s spell and consumed with jealousy toward Escamillo.

Micaela comes to the camp to tell José that his mother is dying. She is followed by the bullfighter, who is looking for Carmen. The two men fight and José torn between duty and passion leaves with Micaela to the sound of Carmen’s taunts.

Seville, is celebrating the famous bullfight, where Escamillo is appearing. José driven close to insanity approaches Carmen and begs her to return to him. She now loves Escamillo and pushes him away. José stabs her.

Escamillo emerges triumphant from the arena to find her dead with Don José nearby, sobbing his confession.

In this version by W McNaught the objective has been to include the best of the music and to arrange it in an effective sequence. It has also been apportioned equally between chorus and soloists to indicate the course of the drama. The Toreador's Song has been placed at the end as no other effective section of music offered itself as a good way to draw the concert to a close. Each soloist has their favourite aria and the chorus used effectively at all times.

1. Overture
2. Chorus – From our places
3. Chorus – When the guard comes
4. Chorus – Now the clock has struck
5. Carmen and Chorus - Introduction and Habanera
6. Micaela and Don José – Give me news of my mother
7. Carmen and Chorus – Till tambourine and gay guitar
8. Carmen and Don José – Now I will dance
9. Chorus – Beware! Beware!
10. Carmen and Chorus – The Card Song'
11. Micaela – Yes this must be the place
12. Principles and Chorus – Scene
13. Escamillo and Chorus – The Toreador Song