

Carmen

opéra-comique in quattro atti

Libretto di Henri Meilhac e Ludovic Halévy, dalla novella di Prosper Mérimée

Musica di Georges Bizet

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ACT 1

In a plaza of Seville. Fifteen dragoons gather, smoking and watching the passers-by. Micaëla arrives, and with an embarrassed look asks for the brigadier don José, who is off-duty at that moment; the girl leaves as the soldiers try to detain her. To the sound of a march Officer Zuniga and Brigadier don José arrive for the change of the guard; a group of urchins imitates the soldiers' marching, the guard which has ended its shift exits; don José is informed of Micaëla's arrival. The plaza is filling up with young men who are waiting for the cigarette girls to come out of the tobacco works in front of the barracks. The cigarette girls come out slowly, smoking. Among them, a little late, arrives Carmen. Several young men approach her. She tries to attract don José's attention, and seeing he is distracted, she throws him a small bouquet of flowers, making every one laugh. When the tobacco works' bell rings and everyone leaves, don José is left alone and meditates on what has happened. Micaëla comes back, with news for don José about his mother who is far away, with a letter from her with money enclosed; she even kisses him for her. Don José is moved and says that his mother, though she is far away, has saved him: Micaëla does not understand and leaves, promising to return. Alone again, don José re-reads his mother's words and declares to himself that he wants to marry Micaëla, as his mother herself, indirectly, advises him to do. But at the very moment when he is about to tear the flowers Carmen had thrown him off of his coat, a loud noise comes from the tobacco works. Officer Zuniga runs up, chaotically the cigarette girls come in. In the riot, Carmen has injured one of the girls and is arrested; don José himself is to take her to prison, but she is able to bewitch him and convinces him to free her; she then makes an appointment to meet him at the tavern of Lillas Pastia, promising herself to him. A dazed don José agrees; Carmen escapes.

ATTO 2

The tavern of Lillas Pastia. Carmen dances together with her friends Mercédès and Frasquita; among the guests are captain Zuniga and brigadier Moralès. The bullfighter Escamillo enters with his following of



admirers, flirts with Carmen, then leaves with his entourage followed by the officers. Lillas Pastia closes the shutters. Remendado and Dancaire, smuggler friends of Carmen's, are preparing a big coup, though Carmen tells them she cannot go with them because she is in love: she wants to wait for don José, sure that he will meet her when he leaves the prison where he has been detained after her escape. The voice of don José is heard, as he approaches declaring all his love to Carmen; though when the trumpet sounds the evening retreat he hints at wanting to return to the barracks. Disappointed, Carmen teases him and insults him. But José shows her the flowers she gave him which he has kept. Carmen then puts him to the test: let him leave with her to the mountains. Suddenly Zuniga bursts in, forcing the door open, and fights with don José for Carmen. The captain is dragged away by the smugglers, and all don José can do is join the band, which sings to freedom.

ATTO 3

A wild and rocky place, at night. The smugglers arrive with their merchandise. José is torn by the remorse he feels towards his mother; Carmen is not satisfied. The cards read by her friends announce a destiny of death. Despite the difficulties, the smugglers decide to try and transport the merchandise anyway: the women will take care of the customs police. Micaëla arrives, led by a guide, to look for her beloved whom she wants to save. Soon after Escamillo also arrives, and fights with don José at the navaja for the sake of Carmen's heart: Carmen is able to fend off the fatal blow which don José is about to deliver to the bullfighter. Micaëla finally convinces José to follow her: his mother is dying.

ATTO 4

A plaza in Seville before the arena. The crowd awaits Escamillo's procession. At the entrance to the Cuadrilla, the people are celebrating. The celebration is at its height when Escamillo appears with Carmen; Frasquita gives the woman some advice: she had better leave and in a hurry, don José is looking for her. Carmen does not seem to fear him. Everyone enters the arena, except Carmen who remains alone with don José; he begs her to return to him, and in the face of her resistance (as she haughtily throws away the ring he has given her as a symbol of their union), loses control and stabs her, while the clamor of the crowd arises from the arena. José throws himself over Carmen's lifeless body, desperately crying out his own guilt.



