



# **Teatro Lirico D'Europa: CARMEN**

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## **About Teatro Lirico D'Europa**

Teatro Lirico D'Europa, the European opera touring company formed in 1988 by former Bulgarian opera singer Giorgio Lalov, has now completed over 3,000 performances worldwide including nine consecutive seasons of American tours! The popular company embarks on its 10th season of US tours in fall 2008 and winter 2009 with over 80 performances of several different full-scale operas, including a traditional production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Soloists for the productions were chosen from major opera houses in Russia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and the US. Artistic Director Giorgio Lalov engages only seasoned professionals who have performed their roles many times. Teatro Lirico D'Europa holds the outstanding distinction of being the only European opera touring company to present its own season of opera in a US theatre supported by its very own subscription series. The company has presented over 15 different full-scale productions of opera at the historic Majestic Theatre in Boston since winter 2000 and now performs there 10-12 times a year, often to sold out audiences. This season, in addition to its US performances, Teatro Lirico will perform by invitation in Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Martinique, Jamaica and Denmark. For an in-depth history of Teatro Lirico D'Europa, plus a large photo gallery of all Teatro' Lirico's productions, US reviews and video clips, go to: [www.jennykellyproductions.com](http://www.jennykellyproductions.com)

# Teatro Lirico D'Europa

## CARMEN

by **Georges Bizet**

Artistic Director/ Stage Director.....Giorgio Lalov  
Musical Direction.....Krassimir Topolov  
Sets and Costumes.....Valentine Topencharov  
Flamenco Dancers.....Ballet Arabesk

*English Supertitles by Sonya Friedman*

### CAST

MORALÈS.....	Plamen Dimitrov
MICAËLA.....	Olga Chernisheva
DON JOSÉ.....	Gabriel Gonzalez
ZUNIGA.....	Vladimir Hristov
CARMEN.....	Galia Ibragimova
FRASQUITA.....	Svetomira Gitsova
MERCEDES.....	Viara Zhelezova
ESCAMILLO.....	James Bobick
REMENDADO.....	Gueorgui Dinev
DANCAÏRO.....	Hristo Sarafov

Chorus of cigarette factory girls, gypsies, townspeople and soldiers:

**TIME AND PLACE:** Seville, mid-19th century

There will be a change of scenery pause after each act and a twenty minute intermission after Act II.

## Artists Bios

**Mezzo Soprano Galia Ibragimova (CARMEN)** studied at Moscow's Gnesin Academy of Music (1992-1997). She is the laureate of the Vincenzo Bellini Competition (Italy, 1995) and the Belvedere Competition (Vienna, 1996). She is the winner of the 1997 edition of the Angelica Catalani Competition (Italy). Since 1998, she has been a soloist at the State Opera in Prague. Her portrayals on its stage have included: the title role in Bizet's *Carmen*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, Amneris in *Aida*, Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*, Olga in *Eugene Onegin*, Alice in Meyerbeer's *Robert Le Diable*, Gertrude in Thomas's *Hamlet*, and others. Her chief international triumphs have included an operatic recital tour of the US (Atlanta, Georgia; Washington, DC, 1999), as well as guest appearances as Amneris in Japan (with José Cura as Radames in 2001), and in The Netherlands, during an operatic tour where she sang Carmen and Adalgisa in *Norma* (2003). Taking part in the Wagner Festival at Wells, Austria, she was Waltraute in *Die Walkure* (2001); at Dublin's Opera Festival she made a guest appearance in the role of Countess Coigny in Giordano's *Andrea Chenier* (2002); and at the Opera Festival of Gars, Austria, sang Carmen (2003). Ms. Ibragimova is touring with Teatro Lirico as Carmen for the 3rd time on the fall 2008 and winter 2009 US tours. Having enjoyed a huge success as Carmen with the company on two previous tours, she will also perform the role of Amneris in *Aida* on the winter 2009 US tour.

**Tenor Gabriel González (DON JOSÉ)** was born in Monterrey, Mexico where he made his operatic debut as Normanno in Donizetti's *Lucia Di Lammermoor*. Since then, he has sung in *Pagliacci*, *Tosca*, *Rigoletto* and *La Boheme* for Opera de Monterrey. He has participated in the Palm Beach Opera productions of *La Boheme*, *Il Trovatore*, *The Magic Flute*, *Lucia Di Lammermoor*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* and in December, 2005, he sang Radames in *Aida*. Mr. Gonzalez made his Houston Grand Opera debut as The Italian Singer in R. Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* opposite Renee Fleming and he sang in Verdi's *Attila* with Samuel Ramey. He enjoyed great success for his portrayals of French heroes for Houston Grand Opera where he sang Romeo in Gounod's *Romeo Et Juliette* and the title role in Gounod's *Faust*. For Aspen Music Festival, Rice University and Teatro Lirico D'Europa ad Opera 2001 in Spain, he appeared as B.F. Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and for Sarasota Opera he portrayed Federico in the American premiere of Cilea's *L'arlesiana* in its American Premiere. He was Don José in Bizet's *Carmen* and Corrado in Verdi's *Il Corsaro*, for Connecticut Grand Opera. For Teatro Lirico d'Europa, he appeared as Duca di Mantova in Verdi's *Rigoletto* and for Opera Tampa, Gars Festival in Austria, Connecticut Opera, Edmonton Opera and Cy-Fair College as Alfredo in Verdi's *La Traviata*. Mr. González had a wonderful debut at the Los Angeles Music Center Opera as Rodolfo in Puccini's *La Boheme* followed by *Lucia Di Lammermoor* and *La Boheme* again in 2000. His European debut took place in Barcelona, Spain, in Verdi's *Messa Da Requiem* with the Barcelona Symphony. His debut with the Mexican National Symphony was followed by performances of B.F. Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* for Opera de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. In Houston he recently portrayed Don Alvaro in Verdi's *La Forza Del Destino*, Manrico in Verdi's *Il Trovatore* and Rodolfo in Verdi's *Luisa Miller*. He is the winner of many vocal competitions and awards, among them the Sullivan Foundation and FONCA México Grant, Palm Beach Opera and Houston Grand Opera Voice Competitions. His upcoming engagements include Don Ottavio in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for Opera de Zapopan in Zapopan, Mexico, as Don José in Bizet's *Carmen*, as Rodolfo in Puccini's *La Boheme*, as B.F. Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and as Calaf in Puccini's *Turandot* for Teatro Lirico d'Europa in the US and Concerts in Houston, Texas and Tijuana, Mexicali, Cabo San Lucas and Monterrey in Mexico.

**Soprano Olga Chernisheva (MICAËLA)** has career highlights that include Maria in *Mazeppa*, Prilepa in *Pique Dame*, Brigitta in *Iolanta*, Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress*, Mlle. Jovenot in *Adriana Lecouvreur*, and Ninetta in Prokofiev's *The Love For Three Oranges* with the Bolshoi Opera; Mimi in *La Bohème* with the Kazan Opera Theater, Gold Coast Opera, and Teatro Lirico; Micaëla in *Carmen* with the Stanislavsky Opera Theater and Teatro Lirico; Musetta in *La Bohème* with the Bolshoi Opera, Sweden's Malmo Opera Theater, and San Francisco Opera Center's Merola Opera Program; Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin* and Persephone in the European premiere of Joel Feigin's opera *Mysteries Of Eleusis* with the Moscow Conservatory Opera Studio; the title role in *Tosca* with Opera Illinois; Liu in *Turandot* with Opera Hong Kong; the title role in *Madama Butterfly* with Gold Coast Opera and Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre; the title role in *Manon Lescaut* with West Bay Opera; *Le Donne Di Giacomo Puccini* with Opera Santa Barbara; and First Soprano in the Russian premiere of McNally's *Master Class*, produced as an independent theater project. Concert highlights have included the title role in Rachmaninoff's *Francesca Da Rimini* with Dicapo Opera Theatre; Bach's *Mass In B-Minor* at the Nizhny Novgorod Concert Hall, at the Grand Hall of the Moscow State Conservatory, and with Russia's Saratov Opera Theater; Bach's *Easter Oratorio* at Moscow's Cathedral Catholic Church; Mahler's *Fourth Symphony* at the Grand Hall of the Moscow State Conservatory; and *Carmina Burana* at the Grand Hall of Moscow's Gnessin College.

**Baritone James Bobick (ESCAMILLO)** has had a versatile career, performing roles from Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* to Bendrix in Jake Heggie's *End of the Affair* with Seattle Opera. Mr. Bobick has been seen in over 20 roles at New York City Opera, including Kinesias in Adamo's *Lysistrata*, Ping in Puccini's *Turandot*, Faninal in Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*, Masetto in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Captain Corcoran in Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and St. Brioche in Lehar's *The Merry Widow*. He has also sung in two *Live from Lincoln Center* telecasts, including the Emmy-winning broadcast of Puccini's *La Bohème*. Mr. Bobick has appeared as Sharpless, Silvio, and Marcello with Connecticut Opera; The High Priest (*Samson et Dalila*) and Angelotti with Opera Omaha; Angelotti with Opera Pacific; Figaro with Opera Delaware; Marcello with Baltimore Opera; Enrico and Figaro with Wichita Grand Opera; Gulglielmo with Dayton and Portland Operas; Ford, Jack Rance, and Schaunard with Central City Opera; Schaunard with Fort Worth Opera; Figaro and Schaunard with Opera Colorado; Escamillo, Sharpless, Marcello, Enrico, Il Conte, and Figaro with Teatro Lirico d'Europa, and Top (*The Tender Land*) with the Bard Festival.

James Bobick is regularly praised for both the quality of his singing and for his acting. When he sang with Connecticut Opera, *Opera News* noted that he "was an ideal Marcello, singing with comic point, emotionally volatile and vocally splendid in the Act IV duet with [the Rodolfo, Raúl] Melo." In the *New York Times*, Mr. Bobick's portrayal of Elmer Gantry garnered the mention, "Many of the vocal performances were impressive, including that of James Bobick as Elmer." The *Times* also praised James for his "burnished sound and incisive diction" when reviewing his performance as the Gambler in Jack Beeson's *Hello Out There*. When he bowed as Figaro in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Virginia Opera, the *Washington Post* singled him out for particular praise: "Among the many good things about Virginia Opera's production of Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, the best was baritone James Bobick as Figaro... Bobick was a standout in a strongly cast production. He has a fine voice and his first-act aria *Largo al factotum*, was given a bravura performance. With his good looks, excellent comic timing and strong stage presence, he exuded confidence and joie de vivre. It is a Figaro to remember."

Mr. Bobick has also had a busy concert career. At Carnegie Hall, he has been heard in Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Mendelssohn's *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* with the Oratorio Society of New York and in 2007 in Mozart's *Coronation Mass*. Around the country, Mr. Bobick has performed Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Bach's *Magnificat* and *B-Minor Mass*,

Handel's *Messiah*, *Israel in Egypt* and in the title role of Saul, in Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*, and in Paul McCartney's *Liverpool Oratorio*. He has also been heard internationally in Handel's *Messiah* in Prague with the Prague Symphony; in San Jose, Costa Rica with the San Jose Symphony in *Carmina Burana* and *Messiah*; in *Tu es Petrus* in Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris; and in the Fauré *Requiem* in Paris, Reims and Chartres, with the Orchestre Padeloup. Most recently, Mr. Bobick was heard once again at Avery Fisher Hall in Haydn's *Creation* and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, at Carnegie Hall in Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*, at New York City Opera's VOX festival in the powerfully received song cycle *Soldier Songs*, as Dr. Bloom in John Eaton's *Pumped Fiction*, a role he created, and as Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Teatro Lirico d'Europa. Upcoming, James will make his return to Avery Fisher Hall where he will reprise his critically acclaimed performance of *Carmina Burana*. Mr. Bobick has been the recipient of a Shoshana Foundation Award and was a member of the Juilliard Opera Center.

**Baritone Plamen Dimitrov (MORALÈS)** has performed various roles with Teatro Lirico on tour in the US over the last six seasons, including Schaunard in *La Bohème*, Morales in *Carmen*, and Ping in *Turandot*. He debuted in the roles of Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* and Germont in *La Traviata* with Teatro on its eighth season of US tours, in 2007-2008, and returns to the US for the 2008-2009 season to perform a variety of baritone roles with the company.

**Bass Vladimir Hristov (ZUNIGA)** graduated from the National Academy of Music in Sofia. He has been a soloist with Teatro Lirico D'Europa on its US tours since winter 2003. Mr. Hristov is also a soloist with Sofia National Opera and is a frequent guest soloist with other regional opera companies throughout Bulgaria and Eastern Europe.

**Baritone Hristo Sarafov (DANCAÏRO)** has been active on the stage for his entire adult life as a soloist in operetta, opera and as an actor. The talented baritone graduated from the National Academy of Music in Sofia and was immediately engaged by the Sofia National Opera for the role of Bartolo in Rossini's *Barbiere Di Siviglia*. He has performed numerous roles with Teatro Lirico D'Europa worldwide since 1990, and has performed both the role of Masetto in *Don Giovanni* and Antonio in *Nozze Di Figaro* with Mozart Festival Opera.

**Tenor/Actor Gueorgui Dinev (REMENDADO)** has worked professionally in his native Bulgaria for more than 20 years, onstage and in film, and has performed with Teatro Lirico D'Europa on tour in the US since winter 2000.

**Soprano Svetomira Gitsova (FRASQUITA)** has been a principal soloist with opera companies in Bulgaria since graduating from the Bulgarian National Conservatory of Music in Sofia. She has performed with Teatro Lirico on tour in the US for the past three seasons in many different supporting roles.

**Mezzo Soprano Viara Zhelezova (MERCEDES)** graduated from the National Conservatory of Music in 1985 and joined the roster of the Bulgarian National Opera, where she has performed leading mezzo soprano roles alongside such singers as Ghena Dimitrova, Nicolai Giuselev, Anna Tomova Sintova and others. She has appeared as a guest artist with opera companies throughout Eastern Europe and has been a principal soloist with Teatro Lirico D'Europa since 1992, performing such roles as Rosina in *The Barber Of Seville*, Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*, Flora in *La Traviata* and others.

**Conductor Krassimir Topolov** was educated in Vienna, Austria. He has been the principal conductor for Teatro Lirico D'Europa since 1995. In addition to conducting hundreds of performances for the company on tour in central Europe, he has conducted all eight American tours for the company since its US debut in winter 2000. Maestro Topolov is also a guest conductor with opera companies in Bulgaria, as well as other Eastern European countries.

**Artistic Director/Stage Director Giorgio Lalov**, Co-founder of Teatro Lirico D'Europa and current General Manager/Artistic Director, Gueorgui (Giorgio) Lalov was born in Telesh, Bulgaria, in June, 1958. His father, "Lalo," a doctor, and his mother, Stoiyanka, an elementary school teacher and Bulgarian folk singer, were educated patrons of the arts. When Lalo Lalov died, Giorgio was only nine years old, but because he was an excellent student, he had the good fortune to be accepted at an elite boarding school in the capitol city of Bulgaria where all lessons were taught in French. When he graduated from high school in 1976, he was fluent in French and English. That fall he entered the Bulgarian National Academy of Music and went on tour throughout Italy with a choir from the university. While in Milan, he auditioned for the famous International School for Young Opera Singers at La Scala. He was accepted, and went on to make his operatic debut at La Scala at the age of 25. After living in Italy for a short time, Lalov became fluent in Italian. In 1986, while on tour with an opera company in France, he met his future business partner, Yves Josse, a former ballet dancer who was booking opera and ballet tours. The two hit it off. Giorgio had many resources. He spoke several languages; he was able to organize the creation of sets and costumes in Bulgaria and he put together an excellent orchestra and chorus. He also knew many fine opera singers in Bulgaria, central Europe and the US. By 1988, Josse and Lalov were collaborating on what was to become the most successful opera touring company in Europe. At the time of Josse's death in 1995, Teatro Lirico was averaging over 250 performances a season throughout Europe. In 1990 Lalov established the Sofia Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. Since that time, it has been the orchestra and chorus for all of Teatro Lirico D'Europa's productions worldwide. Winter 2000 marked Teatro's first major American tour. Since its debut in the US Teatro Lirico has completed hundreds of performances of ten different productions and has been presented by 92 different venues. The company also has its own season of opera at the Majestic Theatre in Boston, where it presents a run of three shows every fall and twice in the winter, supported by its own subscription series.

"I'm not alone in hoping that Giorgio Lalov, the talented opera singer turned creator of Teatro Lirico D'Europa stays happy and healthy and continues to bring us such magnificent productions. We can only hope to see more from this company in years to come." *Illinois Times* - Ann Kerr

## SYNOPSIS OF THE OPERA

**ACT I:** Corporal Moralès and the soldiers while away the time watching the passers-by, among whom is Micaëla, a peasant girl from Navarre. She asks Moralès if he knows Don José, and is told that he is a corporal in another platoon expected shortly to relieve the present guard. Avoiding their invitation to step inside the guardroom, Micaëla escapes. A trumpet call heralds the approach not only of the relief guard but also of a gang of street urchins imitating their drill. As the guards are changed, Moralès tells José that a girl is looking for him. Zuniga, the lieutenant in command of the new guard, questions Corporal José about the tobacco factory. A stranger in Seville, Zuniga is apprehensive of the dangerous atmosphere of the locale.

The factory bell rings and the men of Seville gather round the female workers as they return after their lunch break. The gypsy Carmen is awaited with anticipation. When the men gather round her, she tells them love obeys no known laws (Habañera: "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle"). Only one man pays no attention to her - Don José. Carmen throws a flower at him. The women go back into the factory and the crowd disperses.

Micaëla returns, bringing news of José's mother. She has sent the young girl, who lives with her, to give him a letter ("Parle-moi de ma mère"). José feels that his mother is protecting him from afar. When he starts to read her letter, Micaëla runs off in embarrassment since it suggests that he marry her. At the moment that he decides to obey, a fight is heard from within the factory. The girls stream out with sharply conflicting accounts of what has occurred, but it is certain that Carmen and one of her fellow workers quarreled and that the other girl was wounded. Carmen, led out by José, refuses to answer any of Zuniga's questions. José is ordered to tie her up and take her to prison. Carmen entices him to go dancing at Lillas Pastia's tavern outside the walls of Seville (Séguedille: "Près des remparts de Séville"). Mesmerized, José agrees to help her escape. He unties the rope and, as they leave for prison, Carmen slips away. Don José is arrested.

**ACT II:** Carmen and her friends Frasquita and Mercédès entertain Zuniga and other officers ("Les tringles des sistres tintaient"). Zuniga tells Carmen that José has been released this very day. A torchlight procession in honor of the bullfighter Escamillo is heard, and the officers invite him in. He describes the excitements of his profession, in particular the amorous rewards that follow a successful bullfight (Toreador's Song: "Votre toast"). Escamillo then propositions Carmen, but she replies that she is engaged for the moment. He says he will wait. Carmen refuses to leave with Zuniga, who threatens to return later.

When the company has departed, the smugglers Dancaïre and Remendado enter. They have business in hand for which their regular female accomplices are essential ("Nous avons en tête une affaire"). Frasquita and Mercédès are game, but Carmen refuses to leave Seville: she is in love. Her friends are incredulous. José's song is heard in the distance. ("Dragon d'Alcala"). The smugglers withdraw. Carmen tells José that she has been dancing for his officers. When he reacts jealously, she agrees to entertain him alone (Finale: "Je vais danser en votre honneur"). Bugles are heard sounding the retreat. José says that he must return to barracks. Stupefied, Carmen mocks him, but he answers by producing the flower she threw and telling her how its faded scent sustained his love during the long weeks in prison (Flower Song: "La fleur que tu m'avais jetée"). But she replies that he doesn't love her; if he did he would desert and join her in a life of freedom in the mountains. Torn with doubts, he finally refuses and she dismisses him contemptuously. As he leaves, Zuniga bursts in. In jealous rage José attacks him. The smugglers return, separate them, and put Zuniga under temporary constraint ("Bel officier"). José now has no choice but to desert and join the smugglers.



## INTERMISSION - TWENTY MINUTES

**ACT III:** The gang enters with contraband and pauses for a brief rest while Dancaïre and Remendado go on a reconnaissance mission. Carmen and José quarrel, and José gazes regretfully down to the valley where his mother is living. Carmen advises him to join her. The women turn the cards to tell their fortunes: Frasquita and Mercédès foresee rich and gallant lovers, but Carmen's cards spell death, for her and for José. She accepts the prophecy (Card Song: "En vain pour éviter les réponses amères"). Remendado and Dancaïre return announcing that customs officers are guarding the pass: Carmen, Frasquita, and Mercédès know how to deal with them ("Quant au douanier"). All depart. Micaëla appears, led by a mountaineer. She says that she fears nothing so much as meeting the woman who has turned the man she once loved into a criminal ("Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante"). But she hurries away in fear when a shot rings out. It is José firing at an intruder, who turns out to be Escamillo, transporting bulls to Seville ("Je suis Escamillo"). When he refers to the soldier whom Carmen once loved, José reveals himself and they fight. Carmen and the smugglers return and separate them. Escamillo invites everyone, especially Carmen, to be his guests at the next bullfight in Seville. José is at the end of his tether. Micaëla is discovered, and she begs José to go with her to his mother but he furiously refuses ("Dût-il m'en coûter la vie"). Micaëla then reveals that his mother is dying. José promises Carmen that they will meet again. As José and Micaëla leave, Escamillo is heard singing in the distance.

**ACT IV:** Among the excited crowd cheering the bullfighters are Frasquita and Mercédès. Carmen enters on Escamillo's arm ("Si tu m'aimes"). Frasquita and Mercédès warn Carmen that José has been seen in the crowd. She says that she is not afraid. José enters. He implores her to forget the past and start a new life with him. She tells him calmly that everything between them is over. She will never give in: she was born free and free she will die. While the crowd is heard cheering Escamillo, José tries to prevent Carmen from joining her new lover. Carmen finally loses her temper, takes from her finger the ring that José once gave her, and throws it at his feet. José stabs her, and then confesses to the murder of the woman he loved.

## CARMEN IN LIGHT AND DARKNESS by Mary Jane Phillips-Matz

More than perhaps any other opera, *Carmen* is about contrasts, those vivid contrasts that affect every aspect of it, from the settings to the characters to the action. This means that in its four acts this drama moves from the normal world of everyday people to the ragged life of a gypsy camp and a dark smugglers' hideout where destructive emotions rule and crimes - even murder - are committed.

Don José, a callow, young soldier, betrays Micaëla, the peasant girl he loves; and destroys hope for the future because of his passion for Carmen, a beautiful and charismatic gypsy. Because of her, José abandons the world of law and order and becomes a partner in crime.

As for Carmen, she is a wild creature living only for self-gratification, so she cares nothing for him and is indifferent to the havoc she causes. In the end, she drives Don José mad with jealousy and leads him to kill her.

## The Perfect Spanish Setting

Contrasts are evident in the settings of the opera, for when the curtain goes up, the audience is magically taken to a large square in Seville. The music sounds Spanish and evokes Spain; the blistering Mediterranean sunlight floods the stage, and the action unfolds between a cigarette factory and a military barracks.

Carmen is the center of action, and Don José is her prey, just as surely as if she were a wild animal on the hunt. Soon an evil-versus-good contrast is introduced because Micaëla, an innocent country girl, comes looking for Don José, her fiancé. He is like a perfect soldier. He stands guard, but he has no defense against Carmen and falls into the web she weaves.

By Act II “contrast” is again the key word, for the action has left the streets of Seville and moved into Carmen’s world, into a grungy tavern that she and her outlaw-smugglers use as their headquarters. This crowded place is owned by Lillas Pastia, who lets the gypsies drink there, carouse, make love and stash their stolen goods. Carmen reigns as a gypsy queen; crime is the order of the day, and Don José becomes part of that lawless world.

In Act III the action takes place at night in a remote, rocky gorge in the mountains, where Carmen, the smugglers and Don José have set up camp and hidden their loot. Into this dangerous place come two people from the “civilized” outside world. The first is the debonair bullfighter Escamillo, who is looking for Carmen. He is now her lover, so he and Don José, his rival, draw their knives. At that point, however, the smugglers prevent bloodshed, and Escamillo leaves.

Another character who comes to this dark place is Micaëla; she is looking for Don José. His mother is ill, she says, and she convinces him to come home with her, but not before he threatens to kill Carmen if she continues her affair with Escamillo. He is now Carmen’s lover, and another contrast is evident between his bright world and her menacing gang of thieving gypsies.

The fatal drama of Act IV unfolds in the Plaza de Toros in Seville, the square outside the bull ring. Sunlight again floods the area, but it casts harsh light on the grim tragedy that follows. Don José waits for Carmen with his knife drawn as she enters to watch the bullfight, but he stops her. If he cannot have her, no one will, so he stabs her to death and huddles over her body. No longer the innocent, young man from the country, he is now a murderer.

## Georges Bizet: The Composer and His World

This marvelously wrought opera was written by Georges Bizet, one of the most important composers in the history of music. Rarely can one person transform a whole art form, but that is just what Bizet did when he wrote *Carmen*. It is a work of astounding originality, a work that influenced other composers for decades after its premiere and opened the door to the entire operatic movement called Realism.

Bizet was born in Paris in 1838; he died in 1875. He died soon after the world premiere of *Carmen*, but lived long enough to see how successful his opera was. In fact, it had 37 performances in that first season at the Opéra Comique; and it achieved that in an era when other operas sometimes got only 14 or 17 performances. So Bizet’s opera did very, very well.

Its success is all the more remarkable because people were genuinely shocked by *Carmen*. Its realism absolutely outraged middle-class audiences all over Europe, and it even shocked critics who called it a masterpiece. Still, the real theme of this opera is DANGER, and the libretto has words of warning: “Watch out!” As Carmen plainly says, “If I love you and you don’t love me, I will make trouble, so watch out!”

That is what she really means, and people in Europe at that time knew they had to be careful when gypsies were near. In the summer, the gypsies were always begging in the street, and their actions were sure to get everyone's attention. For example, the women would buy yard-goods in the markets and "make a dress" while they were standing in plain view.

With bright colors and the big, showy designs, the gypsy women showed off, and they were always laughing and offering to tell the fortune of anyone who passed by. The gypsy children, tiny children and bigger boys and girls, also went begging in the street; and sometimes they stole. It is easy to see from moments like these why the gypsies were Europe's most despised minority.

### **The Source of the Opera**

Bizet's main source for *Carmen* was Prosper Mérimée's short novel of the same name, a first-hand account of Spanish gypsies. Mérimée, a French critic and historian, actually visited Spain and flirted briefly with a gypsy girl, whom he described as "a savage." It is easy to see that this savage gypsy girl was the model for his *Carmen*.

Another principal source of information on the gypsies was the Englishman George Borrow, who went to Spain and made a careful study of them and their ways. In his book *The Gypsies of Spain*, Borrow called them "wild" and a "strange, mysterious people." He also said that the gypsies despised Christians. In his down-to-earth characterization of a gypsy woman, he said, "She is addicted to and is famous for fortune-telling." She is the one woman in the world who "deserves the title of sorceress. Mention to me some devilry with which that woman is not acquainted, for [she is] a prophetess and a procuress and a singer of obscene songs. She is tenacious about the few things she possesses, and she will steal your purse and shoplift whenever she likes."

### **Bizet and His Strange Opera**

With the world premiere of *Carmen* in 1875, Bizet forced Realism on the audience as no earlier composer had dared to do. In fact, many people considered his opera an outrage against good taste and morals, and he was particularly under attack for producing it at the Opéra-Comique, a theatre that was considered a "safe" family theatre and "a place where a man can take his wife and daughters."

As for the reviews, the world premiere brought the critics' mixed views, with some attacking Bizet and others praising him. One critic said he had "no doubt" about the composer's future, while another hailed the "huge talent in this musical score."

One critic discussed the characters and said that Don José and Carmen were "two odious beings." Don José was despised as a deserter, and Carmen was "a cynical harlot, trivial and brutal." One highly respected translator and librettist described her as coming from "the sewers of society, a veritable prostitute of the gutter and street-corner." With her, "Danger comes alive," said another writer, calling her a woman contemptuous of the laws of God and man and outrageous with her "violent" sexuality.

All that may be true, but *Carmen* is so perfect that you would not change anything in it; and it is an icon and revolutionary work that actually transformed the opera world.

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## ABOUT THE PERFORMING ARTS SERIES

The 2008-09 Performing Arts Series is a presentation of Appalachian State University's Office of Arts and Cultural Programs. The mission of the series is to support the teaching mission of Appalachian State University by presenting a diverse array of music, dance and theatre events designed to enrich the cultural landscape of the campus and surrounding region.

By creating memorable performance experiences and related educational and outreach activities, the series promotes the power and excitement of the live performance experience, provides a "window on the world" through the artistry of nationally and internationally renowned artists and showcases some of the finest artists of our campus community and our region.