Education & Outreach proudly presents
The Study Guide for Georges Bizet’s Carmen

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ACT I: A Square in Seville

Townspeople and soldiers relax in the sun. As the noon bell rings, girls from the cigarette factory come out to smoke. Carmen airs her philosophy of life—love is a wild bird that cannot be tamed—and tosses a flower to Don José as the work bell rings. Micaëla gives José news of his mother, who has sent him a kiss, which she shyly delivers. A disturbance is heard in the factory. Carmen has been involved in a fight and the girls run out, arguing over who started it. Lieutenant Zuniga orders José to arrest Carmen. Her wrists bound, she is left alone with him, singing to herself about “a certain officer” who has taken her fancy. José lets her escape in exchange for a promised rendezvous and is arrested for his negligence.

ACT II: Lillas Pastia’s Tavern

Carmen regales the customers with a gypsy song. Escamillo arrives and is immediately attracted to Carmen. The smugglers Le Dancaïre and Le Remendado try to convince Carmen and her gypsy companions Frasquita and Mercédès to join their next excursion, but Carmen refuses, saying she is in love with José and is awaiting his release from prison. The others depart laughing as José arrives. Carmen sings and dances for him, but when a bugle sounds, he says he must return to the barracks. Carmen mocks him, claiming he doesn’t love her, but he protests, showing her that he has kept the flower she threw at him. Zuniga appears and José attacks him. Now an outlaw, he has no choice but to join Carmen and her compatriots.

ACT III: The Smugglers’ Hideout

The smugglers celebrate their successful commerce, but José is unhappy. Carmen tells their fortunes in the cards, but foresees only death for herself. The smugglers depart, leaving José as a lookout, and Micaëla enters, frightened but determined to find him. She hides when José fires a warning shot at Escamillo, who has come looking for Carmen. The two men start to fight, but are separated by the smuggler. Escamillo invites them all to his next bullfight and departs. El Remendado discovers Micaëla, who begs José to return home to his ailing mother. Carmen dismisses him willingly, but José, convinced she now loves Escamillo, vows to return.

ACT IV: Outside the Bullring

The crowd gathers for the bullfight, hailing Escamillo. He and Carmen declare their love and he enters the arena. José begs Carmen to return to him but she replies that everything is over between them, as the crowd cheers the triumphant Escamillo. When Carmen tries to run past José into the arena, he stabs her to death.
An audience’s understanding of (and empathy for) Carmen is a societal Rorschach test. As originally conceived by Prosper Mérimée upon whose novella the opera is based, Carmen is the problem at the heart of the story. It is she who behaves reprehensibly, seducing, provoking, misleading, and eventually driving Don José to madness and destruction. She is a beautiful, fascinating, immoral *femme fatale* who devours men for her own nefarious purposes. In this view, her murder is justifiable. As society’s attitudes towards women evolved, Carmen remained beautiful and sensuous, but her role in José’s downfall became muddied. She became a victim of José’s violence. In this interpretation, it is José who is the problem. It is José who cannot accept her for what she is. She never lies to José. She always lives keeps her promises to him. She warns her suitors that it is dangerous to love her—that she is not to be possessed. She tells José that she will meet him at Lillas Pastia’s tavern if he frees her and she does. She tells him she wishes freedom above all else, and she remains consistent in that. José loses his mind when he cannot convince her to love him.

It is Bizet who allows us to truly empathize with Carmen, not Mérimée. While the libretto puts Mérimée’s words into Carmen’s mouth, it is Bizet’s music that gives us much of the joy.
laughter, sexiness, vulnerability, charm, cleverness, and wit most of us see in her. Both Mérimée and Bizet give her a strange moral intensity, unique to herself. She is willing to compromise all else but her personal integrity. “Free I was born and free I shall die,” she says in the opera. In the novella, she tells José, “You are my rom, and as such you have the right to kill your romi; but Carmen will always be free. Calli she was born, and calli she will die.” Carmen dies for her conviction.

Mérimée and Bizet have delivered us such a compelling and enduring character that Carmen can weather all of society’s changing mores and provide excellent fodder for her myriad interpreters. The woman who created the role was the first of the great Carmen’s. Fearless, bold, and a dedicated actress unconcerned about the moral ambiguity of the character, Celestine Galli-Marié, emphasized her sexuality, her ability to bewitch with her sensuous energy. At one point in Galli-Marié’s performance, she rolled a cigar for José. On her bare inner thigh. Her entire performance rocked audiences to their core. They were scandalized.

According to Morris Springer in his article The Woman Hater, “no two singers have ever portrayed [Carmen] the same way. Calvé and Jeritza, we are told, emphasized the slattern in her; Garden, Bourskaya and Stevens brought out her sensuousness; Supervia’s Carmen was the most authentically Spanish, while Grace Bumbry has been quoted as seeing the passion for freedom as the gypsy’s primary trait.” Contemporary singers still bring a piece of themselves to the role. In the role of Carmen, Elina Garanca is described by New York Times critic Justin Davidson as “a guerrilla in the gender wars, a martyr to personal freedom, a narcissistic virago, or just a self-destructive vamp.” The fact that Garanca can be such a complicated and human Carmen, so full of delicious contradictions, is a testament to the timelessness of Bizet’s characterization and the evolution of our understanding of women in society. Garanca can be three dimensional because society can now allow Carmen to be three dimensional.

When Georges Bizet was living and composing, he found himself at a crossroads of French music. Opera had been set upon a new road by Charles Gounod, but Gounod never fulfilled the ultimate promise of the journey he began, leaving Bizet to struggle under two conflicting notions of opera: the antiquated form of the Paris Opéra and the decidedly un-French sensibility of Wagner’s “New Music.” He spent much of his career torn between these old forms and his own modern voice. He only reached maturity as an artist and dramatist with Carmen—two months before his death.

When Bizet chose to set Prosper Mérimée’s Spanish potboiler to music, he was a well-known musician and opera composer, with a very few moderate operatic successes. His notoriety was among other musicians, where his precocious talents as a pianist, orchestrator and operatic coach were universally respected and admired. His charm had won him many
friends, and his passionate opinions won him as many enemies. Despite his box office failures—many of them in spite of Bizet’s remarkable music and critical praise—the Opéra Comique continued to contract him to write operas for them, and after a critical success with his one-act comedy, *Djamileh*, they signed him to compose a three-act opera on a libretto to be written by Ludovic Halévy and Henri Meilhac. What a breath of fresh air for Bizet after myriad silly librettos and false starts to finally be offered a libretto with some true dramatic drive! *Carmen* excited Bizet’s remarkable talent for musical evocations of time and space, as well as memorable, tuneful melodies.

Mérimée’s novel was a raw, naturalistic look at humanity’s baser qualities—lust, sex, jealousy, violence and death. He drew inspiration from exotic locales that lent a certain comfortable distance to his murderous tales, and Spain was a tantalizingly close, culturally exciting setting, made all the more interesting by the mysterious (to most middle class Europeans) Roma (or Gypsies). Mérimée’s world view was embittered and fatalistic and, in sharp contrast with an earlier era, he believed that humanity’s barbarism was its ultimate quality. For *verismo* writer Mérimée, sexual desires and death are inextricably entwined.

As for Bizet, he threw himself wholly into *Carmen*. Mérimée’s novella spoke to him on a visceral level, and Bizet began writing what was to become his masterpiece. His librettists, too, brought their best to the project, creating a taut, exciting narrative which sizzled off the page and took flight with Bizet’s music. But the impresarios of the Opéra Comique, de Leuven and Du Locle, were in financial trouble and gravely concerned about the content. They were anxious that its graphic nature and rather unconventional heroine were entirely unsuitable for the family-friendly Opéra Comique. Never in the history of the Opéra Comique had there been a death on stage, let alone a murder. Never had a woman been portrayed with such blatant sexuality.
Audiences, de Leuven insisted with some justification, would be shocked and scandalized. He was so appalled by the plot that he sold his share of the Opéra Comique before *Carmen* opened rather than compromise his vision for his company.

Meanwhile, *Carmen*’s artistic team was having problems of its own. Because of the Opéra Comique’s financial difficulties, they could not afford to pay the customary A-list salary, and the subject matter of the opera did not recommend itself to leading ladies. Finally, they managed to secure the darkly beautiful Celestine Galli-Marié, an earthy singer and a brilliant actress. Rehearsals were sporadic and often cancelled for lack of funds. Then Du Locle, the sole remaining proprietor of the Opéra Comique began to get cold feet about the project, ineffectually demanding that the ending be changed to a happy one. But both principals were firmly in Bizet’s court and little had to be changed in the end. Bizet had to contend with the outraged chorus too. The chorus was horrified that they were expected to “act,” rather than enter as a block, sing and leave. Not to be out done in the “horrified” camp, the orchestra was rattled by what Du Locle called, “Cochin-Chinese” music. Complaints were leaked to the press, which started to print comments about whether or not the Opéra Comique could be considered a family theater if they were planning to mount such scabrous stuff. All of this before the show even opened!

On opening night, the glitterati of the Parisian music scene gathered at the theater—Gounod, Offenbach, Thomas, Delibes, and Massenet arrived to see what Bizet had created. Despite an uneven performance by the singers and orchestra, audience reaction was not overtly hostile at first. Nor was it enthusiastic. By the final curtain, Bizet had completely lost them. What was left of the house remained stubbornly silent and the night was a monumental failure. Critics universally panned the opera for immorality, for a lack of musicality, for Wagnerism, for practically anything at all. Some musicologists argue that *Carmen*’s opening was not an utter fiasco; after all, it had 48 performances before it closed, but many of those houses were papered and profits never materialized. Audiences which did attend came for the whiff of *scandale* surrounding the production. The tragic irony is that a handful of years later—not so very long after Bizet’s premature death—these same critics wrote universally of the opera’s brilliance. What made the difference?

Some of it had to do with the nature of Parisians themselves. While certainly not fussy prigs in their private lives, not above carrying on obvious affairs and taking a bribe here and there, it was evidently in poor taste to tell a story about such things. The fact that Bizet
used thematic musical material in his opera—universally loathed in Parisian theaters, all the more so after the Franco-Prussian war from which the French still smarted. Wagnerians in turn loathed Bizet because he did not succumb to Wagner’s strict school of thought about the use of thematic material (although, for once, Wagner seemed unperturbed and even admiring of Bizet’s work). But the most cynical explanation of all for Carmen’s initial failure was that Du Locle simply hadn’t bribed the critics sufficiently.

The rest of the world shook their heads at Parisian prudery, embracing Carmen enthusiastically. Vienna produced the first runaway success the opera was to have in an adaptation, which became the standard performance version for years. This score includes recitative written after Bizet’s death by Ernest Guiraud. In modern interpretations it is generally preferred that it be performed as it was written by Bizet, in its opera comique form with spoken dialogue. Today, Carmen is arguably the most beloved opera performed. It certainly is the most filmed and adapted opera in the history of the genre. Its passion and immediacy, fascinating heroine, timeless story and riveting music combine in a completely satisfying and believable evening of theater.
Meet the Composer
Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

“The artist has no name; no nationality; his is inspired or he is not inspired; he has, or has not, genious and talent; if he have, we are bound to adopt, love and acclaim him; if he have not, it is our duty to respect, pity and forget him. Name whom you will—Rossini, Auber, Gounod, Wagner, Berlioz, David or Pitanchu, what matters? Make me laugh or weep, picture for me love, hate, fanaticism, crime; charm me; transport me with delight, and I certainly will not be such a fool as to class you and label you like a specimen in a museum.”

~~Georges Bizet~~

Bizet’s parents certainly seem to have expected greatness from him. They christened their innocent baby Alexander Cèsar Leopold Bizet. No pressure. Fortunately, his more practical godfather insisted upon calling him Georges—and persisted until it stuck. Georges was destined for greatness however, and lived up to his given name despite dying unaware of that his masterpiece would become one of the most enduring and popular works on the operatic stage. His was not a meteoric rise and a brief, bright burning of success, but a frustrating series of disappointments, culminating in the explosive, blindingly brilliant opera, Carmen, which promised other riches never to be realized.

Bizet wrote ten performed operas, a handful of operatic false starts, nine orchestral works, many songs, and countless piano transcriptions of operas. To keep food on the table, he took on a number of different jobs, some more and less odious to him. He taught. He acted as rehearsal pianist. He arranged other fellows’ music. All of which took time from composing.

Bizet was a brilliant musician, concert level pianist, and a child prodigy. He also had quite a literary bent, and wrote lucid, lilting prose of which the public enjoyed too little. Bizet’s letters show him to be strong-willed, passionate, opinionated and egotistic in his youth, and thoughtful, intellectually honest, opinionated, kind, and strong-willed in middle age. A loving husband and a dutiful son and son-in-law, Bizet took his responsibilities seriously, including his responsibilities to his country. Bizet served in
the French National Guard during the Franco-Prussian War and had much to say about the behavior of his fellow citizens during the occupation of Paris. At one point, in a letter to his mother-in-law he observed, “The poor Marseillaise was shouted out in strange tonalities which proved that alcohol was one of the dominant causes of this ill-timed patriotism.” He only considered leaving the city to preserve the physical and mental health of his beautiful but fragile wife, Geneviève.

His childhood was a happy one. Music was as important as breathing in the Bizet household, and the boy learned the musical alphabet with his letters. His father always intended him to be a musician. Adolphe Armand Bizet started his working life as a hairdresser and wig maker, but chose music as is raison d’etre shortly before the birth of his son. He supported his family as a voice teacher. Georges mother, Aimeé, was a gifted pianist whose brother had been a well–known and respected singer. It is little wonder that Georges developed into such an extraordinary pianist and possessed such a firm grasp of the human voice and its expressive capacity. And if natural inclination and careful cultivation were not enough to insure Georges’ pursuit of a musical career, his parents would. When their son exhibited to ardent interest in literature, they hid his books.

When Georges was nine, his father felt that his son had learned all he could at home and that he must continue his education at the Paris Conservatoire. Unfortunately, Georges was too young for admittance. Undaunted, Bizet père brought the boy round to Monsieur Meifred, director of admissions. Skeptical, Meifred balked at enrolling a child so young, but when Georges was able, upon a single hearing, to name any chord played on the piano that Meifred could devise (no matter how bizarre), also supplying all of the chord’s notes in ascending order, he was admitted.

During his years at the Conservatoire, in addition to showing his prodigious talents as a pianist, he began to distinguish himself as a composer. Of particular interest was the Symphony in C, written in 1855 when Bizet was only seventeen, but not performed publicly until 1935. In this work, one can see the seeds of some of his future works, Les pêcheurs de perles, L’arlésienne, and Carmen. In 1856, he won second prize in the coveted Prix de Rome (which provided the winner two years to study and compose in Rome, one in Germany and two in Paris, all on a living wage) for his cantata David. Interestingly, no first prize was awarded that year. Determined to win first prize the following year, Bizet concentrated his energies on his cantata Clovis et Clotilde, however, a unique opportunity presented itself and Bizet could not pass it up.

In 1857, Jacques Offenbach, fully established in his composing career, was also the impresario of the Bouffes Parisian. He announced that the Bouffes was sponsoring an operetta competition and would award a prize to the best operetta setting of the libretto Doctor Miracle. The winning operetta was to be produced at the Bouffes Parisian. Bizet received the libretto and began his work with a will. Both he and Charles Lecocq (a classmate and friend from the Conservatoire) were awarded first prize and saw their one acts performed. Both were well-pleased with the results and felt that their careers were off to a
good start. (Lecocq had found his métier, going on to have a successful career in comic opera and living to the ripe age of eighty-five.)

Meanwhile, Bizet’s *Clovis et Clotilde* had secured him the *Prix de Rome*. He was off to Italy!

In Rome, he conceived and sketched many projects, but completed a mere handful, among which only *Don Procopio*, *Te Deum*, and *Vasco de Gama* still survive. Bizet earned considerable notoriety for submitting his comic work, *Don Procopio*, for his first year *Prix de Rome* “qualification.” (Winners of the *Prix de Rome* were required to submit works annually, based upon specifications set by the awards committee.) The requirement was for a religious work, but Bizet despised religious music and was an avowed atheist who felt that he would be committing the ultimate act of hypocrisy by writing a mass. His opera was very good—“It might have been a minor work by one of the better Italian composers,” notes Ellen Bleiler—and earned him public praise by the adjudicating committee but a sound private scolding for not conforming to the rules. The next year, he conscientiously completed *Vasco de Gama*, which did fulfill the official requirement, but is generally considered the inferior work.

Now his time in Italy was officially winding down. The normal progression of *Prix* winners after two years in Paris was to head off to Germany for a year. While he loved and had a deep respect for the German masters, Italy had just as much access to their works as Germany, and he loved the soft climate and beautiful surroundings of Italy. He felt nothing could be gained by living in Germany that could not in Italy, besides, perhaps, a cold. Over his mentor Charles Gounod’s strong objections, Bizet requested that the committee allow him to remain in Rome. This request was granted and he soaked up more of the lush Italian art scene. Finally, however, in 1861, it was time to return to France.

On the return trip, he arrived in Venice, where a letter awaited him. His mother was deathly ill. If he was to see her again, he would have to hurry. Racing home, he found his mother on her deathbed, and lost her a few days later. A loving son, the young man was devastated and lost himself a bit. He fathered an illegitimate child with his parents’ maid, which may later have factored into the Halévy family’s reluctance to have him wed Geneviève. He then refused a teaching job at the Conservatoire and decided against becoming a concert pianist although he very clearly played brilliantly.

At one point, the year he returned from Rome, he was attending a dinner party at the Halévy home, and among the guests was Franz Liszt, who had just composed a new piece full of astonishing technical demands. He played for everyone after dinner. Complemented on its
originality and the brilliance of his performance and skill, Liszt replied, “Yes, it is difficult, horribly difficult; and I know in Europe only two pianists who can play it as it is written and at the required speed—Hans von Bülow and myself.” Later in the evening as Halévy and Bizet were discussing some particularly intriguing passage, Bizet sat down at the piano, and from memory, played the section flawlessly.

From across the room Liszt bounded over. “Wait, young man, I have the manuscript! That will aid your memory.” Obligingly, Bizet played the score again. Liszt, astounded and gratified, exclaimed, “My young friend, I believed that there were only two men capable of struggling against the difficulties of that piece. But I was deceived. We are three, and I am bound in justice to add that the youngest of the three is, perhaps the most audacious and most brilliant.”

Had Bizet wished it, he could have been a very successful, possibly very wealthy, concert pianist. But Bizet did not want to be seen as “merely” a performer; he wanted to be viewed as a composer first. Unfortunately, he felt that if he were “type-cast” as a pianist, the public would limit him to that instrument, and nothing else he wrote would be taken seriously. He had watched his friends Saint-Saëns and Liszt struggle upstream against this prejudice and wanted nothing to do with it. Besides, Bizet didn’t really enjoy public life.

In 1863, Bizet wrote Les pêcheurs de perles for the director of the Théâtre-Lyrique and it premiered in September. Generally considered an uneven work, most remarkable for its evocative settings of exotic themes, Les pêcheurs de perles was received indifferently. This was not entirely his fault. The libretto itself was a shameless potboiler, full of dramaturgical holes and inconsistencies. According to Bleiler, the librettists later “admitted that if they had been aware of his talent they would have done a better, more responsible job.” Bizet himself later hated the piece, recognizing its musical flaws with embarrassment. That it is still performed is telling—as it contains echoes of his later, more masterful works, and is still a work of seemingly effortless lovely melody. Of course, the French public decried it for its originality, which offended them. Berlioz, another composer whose originality and style offended, assessed the opera at the time with the most vision and understanding:

The score of this opera has won a real success; it contains a considerable number of beautiful and expressive pieces, full of fire and rich coloring... The work does the greatest honor to M. Bizet, who will have to be accepted as a composer, notwithstanding his rare talent as a pianist.

His next completed attempt, La jolie fille de Perth (December 1867), was interrupted by the necessity of having to make a living. Before La Jolie, Bizet, enamored at this time by Verdi’s operas, had begun writing a mammoth opera on the grand scale of Meyerbeer, based on Ivan the Terrible. Fortunately, Léon Carvalho, his friend and tireless advocate, commissioned La Jolie from him. As Bizet hammered away on that, he had to write a series of “little” pieces to
keep food on the table. In a letter he describes this time to his friend:

Be assured that it is aggravating to interrupt my cherished work for two days to write solos for the cornet à pistons. One must live. But I have my revenge...The piston utters the yells of a low drinking shop, the ophicleide and the big drum agreeably mark the first beat with the bass trombone, the celli and the double-basses, while the second and third beats are made by the horns, violas, second violins, the first two trombones and the side drum. Yes, the side drum. If you could see the viola part! There are unhappy people who pass their lives performing such things. Horrible!

In this brief passage, one can see Bizet’s sense of humor, his understanding of music and his ability to laugh at himself. Also, his frustration with such trifling music as he was forced to write to support himself.

La jolie fille de Perth, when it opened had a somewhat better reception than Les pêcheurs de perles, but closed after only 18 performances.

1868 was a year of crisis for Bizet. There followed another string of aborted projects, renewed health issues and a profound change in his attitude toward music and composition. In addition, he suffered great anxiety surrounding his engagement to Geneviève Halévy. He was deeply in love with her, as we can see from another letter he wrote during rehearsals of La jolie fille de Perth,

“No more parties! No more sprees! No more mistresses! I mean it seriously. I have met an adorable girl whom I adore! In two years she will be my wife!”

But then another letter later in the month indicates, “I have had a crushing blow. My expectations have been shattered. The family have resumed their rights. I am very unhappy…”

There is no indication in either Bizet’s correspondence or Geneviève’s as to the problem. Many of Bizet’s letters were edited to protect his memory from scandal. It may have been either his past or his present. As has been mentioned, he had an illegitimate child. But at the time he was also living next door to Céleste Mogador, the beautiful, infamous courtesan and adventuress. They were close friends. Though Mogador makes clear in her memoirs that their relationship was innocent, it may not have appeared so to the Halévy family.
Nevertheless, eventually the young couple prevailed and on June 3, 1869, the two were married. While there’s was not a marriage without challenges, they did share an extraordinary understanding of and faith in one another, which, despite circumstances Geneviève describes as “six years of complete happiness.”

For the next two years, Bizet found little time to compose because of the Franco-Prussian war, which closed the opera houses and had him serving in the French National Guard. Still, he managed to write a one-act opera, Djamileh and incidental music for Daudet’s play L’arlésienne. Unfortunately, both failed at the box office for reasons other than the music.

In 1875, Bizet’s greatest work, Carmen, premiered at the Opéra Comique. Although beloved today, audiences of the time were confused by its construction. It satisfied neither the traditionalist expectations of the Opéra Comique’s usual fare nor Wagnerian hopes for the fully integrated music drama. Its poor reception and the disdain of the critics disheartened and angered Bizet, as did the inevitable accusation of being “Wagnerian.” One biographer wrote:

I will not try to explain this incomprehensible behavior of the Parisian public—the great public of ‘first nights’; the artist-Paris which directs opinion and makes success. It is, indeed, inexplicable. About the fifteenth representation the work revived somewhat, but the unjust verdict of the opening evening, in great part confirmed by the press, could not be lived down. The receipts rose, but the public went to the Opéra Comique to see that which had been described as an immoral piece, so much discussed and so little admired... To comprehend such an attitude so obviously unjust,
Did you know...

- That the word “Toreador” doesn’t exist in bullfighting—or even Spanish? Bizet made the word up, presumably as a combination of the words matador and torero, the correct terms for bullfighters.

- That in 2002, singer Beyoncé starred in an adaptation of the opera Carmen called Carmen: A Hip Hopera?

- Bizet’s Carmen was also adapted and reset by Oscar Hammerstein for his musical, Carmen Jones in 1943?

- Carmen is the most filmed opera?

- Bizet father two children—one with his wife...the other with his maid?

- Seville is the setting for at least 7 major operas?

Bizet withdrew from Paris after another bout of quinsy and died on June 3, 1875 from the second of two heart attacks. He was never to know that by the 100th anniversary of his death, Carmen had been performed over 2700 times at the Opéra Comique, or that it would become the most popular, most filmed, most adapted opera of all time. What he did know was that he had succeeded in creating something new. He had completed the work of transforming French opera begun, but not finished by Gounod. Understanding that the scandal fueling the audiences at the Opéra Comique would only garner more attention for his work, he felt himself at last on his way to artistic and financial triumphs of which he had only dreamed. His shocking and untimely death derailed all of that. We can only speculate what wonders Bizet would have written had he not died at the tragically early age of 37.
Gypsy...Zigeuner...Gitan...Traveller...Black Dutch...all these and more are terms used to describe the unique, diverse Roma people. None of these are terms with which the Roma describe themselves, but rather terms used by the dominant cultures in the areas where the Roma are found.

“Gypsy” is a term derived from the erroneous belief that the Roma trace their origins to Egypt, and “zigeuner” is a German word which comes from “untouchable”, perhaps in reference to the original Roma position in the Hindu caste system. With each term there are varying levels of accuracy and derision. While there are at least 5 main groups or tribes, based on region and dialect, the Romani people trace their ancestry back almost 1000 years to the Punjab and Rajasthan regions of India. They are linked by a common language and can be found all over the world, including North America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The hows and whys of the mass migrations of Romani people are not well understood, but it is thought that the Roma were defeated by Muslim soldiers between 1000 and 1050 AD, and that they and their family were forced to relocate into the Byzantine Empire. As the Ottoman Empire expanded, so did the range of the Romani.

Traditionally, the Roma lived in closed societies characterized by a strict adherence to “purity laws”, which were adapted to the religions the Roma adopted from the surrounding dominant culture. This insulated community, which conforms only to its own cultural laws has often faced tensions with its neighbors. While there is no clear defining culture including every group of Roma, who tend to absorb some of the characteristics and traditions of the dominant community, some attributes are shared among them: familial loyalty—including a large extended family—belief in God and Satan, belief in fate and predestination, and a certain adaptability to changing situations. Like Jewish communities throughout history, countries have sought to purge their territories of the Roma, sometimes by outlawing their very way of life—limiting who can own a horse and cart or land use limitations, for example—sometimes by more
heavy-handed tactics. Other countries sought to assimilate the Roma, by outlawing their language, their music, traditional dress and forcibly removing their children to state-run orphanages. During World War II, the Reich murdered over 500,000 Romani men, women and children in the death counts and myriad more were shot on sight. All of these actions were justified by imagined stereotypical gypsy characteristics: shiftlessness, larceny, deceitfulness, dishonesty, filthiness, itinerancy.

Even as late as the 1990’s, controversy has percolated over the treatment of the Romani Travellers (as opposed to the Irish and Scottish Travellers) in Great Britain—whether land use laws are designed to persecute the caravanning communities, what the responsibilities of the outside communities are to the Romani people and how to accommodate their culture.

As some Romani leave their closed societies and join the culture at large, they melt into the fabric of society and disappear. More recently, organizations have sprouted up attempting to save the language, music, and social structure of the Roma, by promoting more just social policies, strengthening Roma political participation and reinforcing their cultural identity, but no one cohesive approach has been found to address all of the issues the Roma face.

The Roma contribution to music, art and literature is vast—both with regard to their native contribution and that of inspiring non-Romani artists with the color, originality and magic of their culture. Romani music had influenced many of Europe’s greatest composers, including Béla Bartók, Franz Liszt, Zoltán Kodály and George Bizet. Music owes the Roma a great deal, as does dance—the flamenco originated with the Roma and still retains a distinctive Romani spirit.
Context: Who are the Basques?

Don José, in the novella Carmen by Prosper Mérimée, identifies himself as “Don José Lizzarrabengoa, and you know enough of Spain, sir, to know at once by my name, that I come of an old Christian and Basque stock. I call myself Don, because I have a right to it, and if I were at Elizondo I could show you my parchment genealogy.” He came from a region called Navarre in the Basque Provinces. The Basque region is on the Iberian Peninsula and was first mentioned in the history of the first century Roman invasions. The Basque had their own language, their own distinct culture and their own political system. By the 10th century, the Basques had converted to Catholicism but had maintained their own language which is unlike any other language in Europe. It may be the original language of the Iberian Peninsula dating back to the Neolithic Era! Basque and Castile formed a trading alliance and when Castile exerted its influence over all of Spain, the Basque formed an alliance with the Castilian government to maintain its autonomy. However when Napoleon invaded the Iberian Peninsula, it upset this balance and caused civil wars in 1830 and 1870.

Today more than 2.5 million people live in the Basque region. Half are culturally Basque and maintain the fight for Basque independence. In 1959, the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA—Basque for “Basque Homeland and Liberty) began demanding that the Basque Country be allowed to secede from Spain and form an independent state that would include the Basque regions of Navarre and France.

ETA (pronounced eh-tah) is classified as a terrorist organization by the European Union and has claimed responsibility for 900 murders and many kidnappings. Basque separatists and ETA have been in the news in the years since September 11, 2001 and they were initially accused of the March 11, 2004 train bombings in Spain, though it became clear quite quickly that Islamic extremists were responsible instead. After September 11, 2001, Basque
opinion polls showed that while many Basques still support independence from Spain, very few support the terrorist tactics of ETA, which in turn, has led to the declaration of a permanent ceasefire in March of 2006. However, violence again erupted in September, 2006 with the declaration that ETA would not relinquish arms until the Basque was an independent socialist state. As of this writing, ETA is still active in Spain and to a lesser extent France.

Historically, the Basque had a distinct influence throughout the American West. Their presence in the region dates from the California Gold Rush of 1849. When finding a fortune in gold proved more difficult that first anticipated, some Basque turned their attention to livestock. Many high desert areas in the West had open range for sheep to graze and shepherding was a business opportunity for the Basque. The territory from the Cascade Mountains on the west to the Rockies on the east, the Sierra Nevadas on the south and the Columbia Plateau on the north defined their grazing range. The high desert landowners threatened the practice of free range shepherding and by the 1970s there were fewer than 100 Basque shepherds left in the American West.

Eastern Oregon and Idaho were settled by primarily Spanish Vizcayan Basques, while two other groups, the French Basques and the Spanish Navarrese, settled in California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. Because there were so many dialects throughout Basque lands, the language was modified and unified in the 1950s. The language is officially Euskaltzaindia. This common language was created to preserve Basque culture through education in a centralized language. To find out more about the Basques of the West, you can contact the High Desert Museum in Bend at www.highdesertmuseum.org, visit the first Basque Museum in the United States in Boise, Idaho, or try www.naboinc.com, the official Federation of North American Basque Organizations.
Half of all murdered women are killed by their husbands, ex-husbands, boyfriends or ex-boyfriends.

In Bizet’s *Carmen*, the title character becomes involved with a young soldier, Don José, ends the relationship and is ultimately killed by him in a crime of passion. The relationship between José and Carmen can be viewed as abusive on both sides—emotional and sexual manipulation, with Carmen as abuser, and physical with José as the abuser—with tragic consequences. The relationship between Carmen and José is toxic for both—with a different man, Carmen probably would not have found herself so coercive with regard to both her seduction of José or her rejection of him, and with a different woman, José might not have found himself her murderer. Carmen remains consistent in her relationship with José, explaining her need for freedom on all levels, however José is refuses to hear to her. In many ways he fits the psychological profile of an abuser.

José is possessive, controlling, jealous, but apologetic after incidences of this behavior, all the while, trying to justify his actions. His need to possess Carmen stems much less from his fear of losing her than his fear of embarrassment. He projects his own guilt over rejecting Micaela and disappointing his mother onto Carmen—imagining his own short comings to be her fault. The greater his guilt, the more he tries to control; the more he tries to control her, the more Carmen tries to escape—ending ultimately in her death, and the reality that, with this murder, José has solved none of his problems.

Signs of an abusive relationship include:

**Your feelings and thoughts:**

- fear your partner a large percentage of the time?
- avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?
- feel that you can’t do anything right for your partner?
- ever think you deserve to be physically hurt or mistreated?
- sometimes wonder if you are the one who is crazy?
- feel afraid that your partner may try to hurt or kill you?
- feel afraid that your partner will try to take your children away?
- feel emotionally numb or helpless?
- think that domestic violence seems normal to you?

**Your partner’s behavior:**

Has your partner ever

- had a bad and unpredictable temper?
- hurt you, or threatened to hurt or kill you?
- threatened to take your children away, especially if you try to leave?
- threatened to commit suicide, especially as a way of keeping you from leaving?
- forced you to have sex when you didn’t want to?
destroyed your belongings or household objects?

Does your partner ever

- try to keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- make you embarrassed to invite friends or family over to your house?
- limit your access to money, the telephone, or the car?
- act excessively jealous and possessive?
- try to stop you from going where you want to go or doing what you want to do?
- check up on you, including where you've been or who you've been with?

These are only some characteristics of abuse—if you are afraid that you or someone you know may be the victim of domestic violence, please contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY) to get help.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #2: Get your community educated! A good start to eradicating Domestic Violence from your community or neighborhood is to start educating as many people as possible about Domestic Violence, its impact and how to intervene safely. This can be done in collaboration with your local Domestic Violence shelter or women’s organization or police community outreach officers who can work with the community, local schools and local companies to organize and implement talks, townhall meetings and other group sessions to talk about this issue.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #3: Get your community organized! There is safety and influence in numbers when intervening to stop an abuser or making your community a place where Domestic Violence will not be tolerated. So just as many neighborhoods have neighborhood watch to stop crime, start organizing a network of folks who will commit to intervene in Domestic Violence situations,
Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #4: Boost your community support network with technology! If you have a smart phone and the victim has a smart phone, consider downloading a safety app for women, many of which have been designed to automatically alert your support network if you are in danger. If the victim does not have a smart phone, consider pooling money with a few friends and neighbours to get her one and pre-load it with a safety app that is connected to all your phones so you can become a de facto support net for her. Free safety apps currently available include the award-winning Circle of 6 and the iAMDEFENDER app.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #5: Stopping the violence is good for business. Domestic Violence has cost economies and companies millions of dollars in lost time, medical care, productivity etc. In the U.S., the cost of Domestic Violence to the economy is estimated at $8.3 billion a year. If you are a business owner or a senior member of a company (e.g. a director, board member, senior manager), be pro-active in getting educated about how to intervene if you suspect or know that your employee or staff member is facing Domestic Violence because it will have a knock-on effect on your company. Implement HR policies that makes provisions for the potential impact of Domestic Violence. For example, the National Bank of Australia is currently offering paid Domestic Violence leave because the economic freedom from remaining in paid work is regarded as vital in helping victims escape violent relationships.

For Individuals:

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #6: Ring the bell. If you are the neighbor of a family experiencing Domestic Violence, please take the time to ring their bell when you hear a violent situation happening. You could use the old neighborly approach of asking to borrow a cup of sugar or some milk as an excuse. If you feel that it could get dangerous, bring another person with you so there will be more than one witness.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #7: Bring a back-up. Intervening with Domestic Violence situations can be dangerous especially if the abuser has a weapon (e.g. a gun) and is intoxicated by drink or drugs. If you are unable to get help from the local shelter or police, make sure to bring another friend or family member along with you when you respond to the victim/survivor’s call in person.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #8: BE the back-up. If your neighbor, friend, co-worker, classmate, mother, sister, daughter, daughter-in-law, niece or cousin is facing Domestic Violence at home, let them know that you will be willing to be a witness or to intervene on their behalf while you are around. Also let them know that they are welcome to take refuge in your home should they need somewhere to go.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #9: Make the call, NOW. If the situation is beyond simple neighborly intervention (e.g. the abuser has a gun and uses it during the abuse), call the police.
or your local emergency services (such as 911 in the U.S.) IMMEDIATELY. Provide critical information, such as location, names, contact number, and whether or not you wish to remain anonymous. Do NOT intervene personally in this scenario as it will be too dangerous to do so.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #10: Listen to empower. If a victim of domestic violence reaches out to you, listen. Let her/him know that you believe her/him and do not judge her/his choices. Victims often feel completely isolated and are often belittled by their partner; it is important to enable her/him to feel safe when confiding in you because eventually, s/he may well be able to gather enough courage to tell you exactly what is happening and to ask for help. This intervention tip may be particularly useful for hairdressers, nurses, human resource department personnel and anyone working in professions that involve having to listen to clients, customers and co-workers as part of the job.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #11: Be on standby. If you suspect your friend, co-worker, staff, or family member of suffering from Domestic Violence, offer to be on standby for her text or call for emergencies. Have your phone on and fully charged at all times and keep it on you. If you have a car and need to intervene immediately, make sure that the gas tank is full so you can get in and drive to get the victim/survivor immediately if need be.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #12: Have an intervention plan. Work out a plan to get an intervention operation in action – have the following numbers on standby for your use:
- The national Domestic Violence helpline
- The local Domestic Violence shelter helpline wherever the victim/survivor is located.
- The local police wherever the victim/survivor is located.

Make sure to contact all of these agencies immediately should you receive an urgent SOS from the victim/survivor or if you hear or witness the violence begin and escalate (and in many cases, it may escalate incredibly quickly).

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #13: Provide some relief. If you know a Domestic Violence victim/survivor who is being kept at home without relief, do a random act of kindness for her: Offer to babysit the children for a few hours while the abuser is out so she can have a breather; Offer to pick up groceries for her on your grocery run. Every small gesture helps provide relieve and also build the victim’s confidence in eventually reaching out to you for help (or accepting your help).

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #14: Check in regularly. If you fear for your friend, co-worker, classmate, or family member’s life, call or text her once a day at a random time to see if she is all right. If it’s your neighbor, keep an eye out on the house and your ears pricked for any signs or sounds of violence.
Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #15: Be a resource. Help her find the assistance she needs, whether it is legal information, local domestic violence programs, or finding a safe place through a battered women’s shelter. The greatest danger women face in these situations is often the actual process of leaving, so finding a safe place may be key. Knowing this information beforehand may be helpful, but assisting her in the research and even making phone calls for her will also help speed things up.

Domestic Violence Intervention Tip #16: Document! Document! Document! Document any incidents that you witness. Take note of dates, times, injuries, and any other observations. Your ongoing documentation can help bolster a victim’s courage and credibility when they are finally willing to pursue legal action against their partner.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!!!

Around the world in 1875.

- Hans Christian Andersen died.
- Mark Twain published *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
- Gilbert & Sullivan opened their first operetta, *Trial by Jury*.
- First roller skating rink opened in London.
- London Medical School for Women founded.
## Some opera vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aria</strong></td>
<td>(ah-ree-ah) a solo song. In opera, arias are often used to tell the audience what the character is thinking or feeling—like a monologue in plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recitative</strong></td>
<td>(reh-chih-tah-teev) literally, “to recite.” Lines that are sung rather than spoken, and forward the action of the story. They are often followed by arias or ensembles which tell how the characters feel about the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensemble</strong></td>
<td>Group singing, or the group itself. An ensemble can be a chorus of 50 or a duet—it just has to have more than one singer singing at the same time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duet</strong></td>
<td>Two people singing together</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trio</strong></td>
<td>Three people singing together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quartet</strong></td>
<td>Four people singing together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opera</strong></td>
<td>The plural form of the Latin word, opus, which literally translated means “work.” A play that is sung, usually with orchestral accompaniment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Soprano</strong></td>
<td>The highest female voice. Micaela is a soprano.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mezzo soprano</strong></td>
<td>The middle female voice—in a choir, a second soprano or first alto. Carmen is a mezzo soprano.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contralto</strong></td>
<td>The lowest female voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenor</strong></td>
<td>The highest male voice. Don José is a tenor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baritone</strong></td>
<td>The middle male voice. Escamillo is a baritone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bass</strong></td>
<td>The lowest male voice. Zuniga is a bass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trouser or pants role</strong></td>
<td>In some operas, a mezzo soprano plays a young man or a boy whose voice hasn’t changed yet. This is a very old operatic convention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set</strong></td>
<td>Short for “setting.” The scenery the singers/actors work on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conductor</strong></td>
<td>The leader of the orchestra and singers. Just like on a train, the conductor keeps everything on track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Props</strong></td>
<td>Short for “properties.” Anything onstage that is not part of the set or the costumes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To Find Out More

Selected bibliography

Dover Opera Guide and Libretto Series, Carmen by Georges Bizet, translation and forward by Ellen H. Beiler, 1970


The New Grove Dictionary of Opera edited by Stanely Sadie, Volume one


aesthetics & art criticism

♪ After preparing with the Study Guide and attending the Student Dress Rehearsal of Carmen, have students write a review of the opera, noting how the music directly affects the emotional interpretation of the listener.

♪ An opéra comique has both spoken dialogue and sung dialogue (recitative) and songs, duets, trios, choruses, etc. How does music affect your understanding of the plot/character/emotion of the scene vary as the performers go from spoken dialogue, to sung dialogue to song?

♪ Bizet’s opera, Carmen, is based on Prosper Mérimée’s novella of the same name. After attending the Student Dress Rehearsal for Carmen, have your students read the novella. How does the character of Carmen change from the novella to the opera? How does the music affect your perception of her? How does the story change? Does it change your opinion of Don José to have him the narrator of the story? Why or why not?

♪ Carmen is one of the most adapted operas the world over. After attending the Student Dress Rehearsal for Carmen, have students watch Carmen Jones or Carmen: A Hip Hopera. How do the different time periods and styles of music affect the story? What is the effect on the audience?

english, reading & writing

♪ After seeing the Student Dress Rehearsal of Carmen, have students write a journal entry or review of the show as a reflection.

♪ Write a sequel to Carmen about what happens to the surviving characters 5 years after the action of the opera.

♪ Using persuasive writing styles, create a new ending for the opera utilizing known character information to produce absolute change within one or more of the characters.

♪ Most operas are not original stories, but are based on plays or novels. Have students choose a favorite story and write an opera libretto. Remind them that they may have to streamline and/or simplify their story—it takes a lot longer to sing something than to say it. Also remind them that their libretto will consist almost exclusively of dialogue. After they have written their
libretto, have them reflect on what they had to do to take a written story and make it work as a dramatic or musical one. They can use poetry or not, as they wish.

social science

♪ When *Carmen* was written attitudes about domestic violence and women were very different. Do a little research about the historical roles of men and women. Do traditional gender roles encourage violence against women and children? Why or why not? What are some of the characteristics of an abusive relationship? Explore some of the ways that you can prevent domestic abuse and report back to the class on what you found out.

science

♪ The voice is a combination of a wind instrument and a string instrument...air passing through the vocal cords creates a vacuum, pulling the vocal cords closed. The cords then vibrate together and create sound. Pitch is determined by the tension of the vocal cords—just like a violin or a guitar. You can demonstrate this with a rubber band: Wrap a rubber band around your fingers. Pluck it a few times. Can you see and feel the vibrations? The harder you pluck the rubber band, the more it will vibrate, creating a louder sound. If you stretch the rubber band, making it longer and thinner, what do you hear? (It will be a higher pitch.) Have your students place their hands on their throats while speaking or singing at different pitches—have them feel the vibrations in their throats and their chests. Explore sound waves.

♪ There are some amazing opera deaths in opera. Carmen is stabbed by Don José. Do a little research into the autonomic and pulmonary systems of the body. What would happen to Carmen after she had been stabbed? Would she still be able to sing?

create, present, perform

♪ Have students break into groups and write their own “opera” using popular songs and stringing them together with dialogue. Perform for the class.

♪ Sets and costumes play an ENORMOUS role in opera. Design sets and costumes for an updated or reimagined version of *Carmen*. Costumes are rendered in color on paper and set designers often make dioramas of their set designs. Keep in mind the symbolism possible in color and texture. Remind students that drawings on paper would have to be translated into three dimensions and made practical. How does that affect their designs? Have them present their sets and costumes to the class pointing out their challenges and the possible symbolism of their choices.
Hungry for more?

Join us for some of these exciting, informative events! Your opera experience doesn’t have to begin with the downbeat or end with the curtain call!

**Bob’s Opera Overture**

One hour prior to every regular performance, join Portland Opera’s resident music historian, Bob Kingston, for an illuminating inside look at that evening’s (or afternoon’s!) performance! This is a free event. Just show up at the theater an hour prior to the performance and head on up to the first balcony.

**Backtalk**

Directly following each of our performances, join General Director Christopher Mattaliano for a conversation about the performance—ask questions, give feedback—it’s an opportunity to decompress after a riveting performance and make a magical evening all the more memorable.

**Opera on the Couch**

Join Education and Outreach Manager Alexis Hamilton and members of the Oregon Psychoanalytic Institute for a unique look at some of our operas—it is opera on the couch! Each of our discussions are at Portland Piano Company, at the Tiffany Center, 1410 SW Morrison.

Carmen  
February 13, 2015  
Dr. Nancy Winters

Show Boat  
May 8, 2015  
Dr. David Turner

The Rake’s Progress  
June 10, 2015  
Dr. Ralph Beaumont

**Opera Previews**

Join our Portland Opera Resident Artists for a delightful concert/lecture about each of our operatic gems. All previews are held at the Central Library, downtown at 2:00 pm.

Carmen  
February 1, 2015

Show Boat  
April 26, 2015

The Rake’s Progress  
June 7, 2015

The Elixir of Love  
July 12, 2015

**Opera In-Depth**

Want to go explore the depths of one of our operas this season? Join Education and Outreach Manager Alexis Hamilton and Portland Opera’s resident music historian Bob Kingston for a deeper look at each of our operas this season. These classes will explore the social/historical context of the opera, its background and its music, which will enliven and enrich your experience at the performance. This is a ticketed event and participants must register at portlandopera.org All classes are held at the Hampton Opera Center from 7:00 to 8:30 pm.

Carmen  
January 26, 2015

Show Boat  
April 12, 2015

The Rake’s Progress  
June 2, 2015

The Elixir of Love  
July 13, 2015

**Introduce a kid you love to the art form you love!**

Fall in love with opera all over again when you share it with the young people in your life! Each year Portland Opera To Go offers a 50-minute, English-language adaptation of a famous opera to children of all ages, and this year we are proud to present Rossini’s classic charmer *The Barber of Seville* in a brand new, beautiful bilingual (English/Spanish) production here at the Hampton Opera Center. Tickets are $5 for children under twelve, $10 for everyone else, and $20 for a family of four. *The Barber of Seville* is perfect for all ages!

For tickets please call the Portland Opera Box Office 503-241-1802.
Portland Opera To Go *The Barber of Seville*, March 6, 2015 at 7:00 pm and March 7, 2015 at 1:00 pm