



CARMEN

Georges Bizet

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Logos for this production: **Opernhaus Zürich + Clasart + Rising Alternative**

Opera in 4 acts (1875)

Sung in French

Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy based on the novella by Prosper Mérimée

Opernhaus Zürich

Recorded in 2008

Running Time: 02:42:54h

Running Time by Part: Part 1 - 01:40:30 | Part 2: 01:02:24

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor	Franz Welser-Möst
Director	Matthias Hartmann
Set designer	Volker Hintermeier
Costume designer	Su Bühler
Lighting designer	Martin Gebhardt
Video designer	Felix Breisach
Choral Director	Ernst Raffelsberger
Choreographer	Teresa Rotemberg

ARTISTIC TEAM

Carmen	Vesselina Kasarova
Don José	Jonas Kaufmann
Escamillo	Michele Pertusi
Micaëla	Isabel Rey
Frasquita	Sen Guo
Mercédès	Judith Schmid
Zuniga	Morgan Moody
Moralès	Krešimir Stražanac
Smuggler	Javier Camarena
Smuggler	Gabriel Bermúdez

PRESENTATION

“A typhoon of passion: frenetic applause for ‘Carmen’ in Zurich” — *Der Standard*

With this festival performance from the Zurich Opera, the great Vesselina Kasarova makes her long-awaited debut in one of the greatest mezzo roles in the operatic repertoire: Carmen.

From the moment she appears on stage to the close of the opera just after the heroine's death, Kasarova dominates the stage with her amazingly nuanced mezzo and her mesmerizing charisma. This is no brazen gypsy girl who turns men's heads with a toss of her black curls and a sway of the hips; this is a modern, self-confident woman who knows exactly what she wants. This Carmen doesn't need castanets to express her passion: it glows from within.

She has a partner of equal stature in Jonas Kaufmann's Don José, who, in Matthias Hartmann's production, believably undergoes a transformation from repressed mama's boy to passionate, jealousy-crazed hothead. With “the looks and nonchalance of a rock star” (*New York Magazine*), Kaufmann is being handled as “arguably the greatest tenor of the past 50 years” (*The Guardian*). The Zurich production is Kaufmann's second stage version of Don José, following his role debut in London, which was greeted with standing ovations.

In the orchestra pit, conductor Franz Welser-Möst highlights the crisp, French contours of Bizet's 1875 opera rather than its Mediterranean sensuality, weaving a transparent texture that is an ideal foil for the emotional density of the vocal parts. Caressing the soloists' voices, the orchestra of the Zurich Opera seems to respond almost improvisationally to the many subtle shadings of the protagonists, especially Kasarova's.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Around 1820 the tobacco factory is Seville main attraction. Under military guard, onlookers and visitors – especially men – are busy watching tobacco girls who work for the city's prosperity. Among them is Carmen, a seductress who chooses her lovers as she pleases. She is less interested in the men who gather around her than in Don José, a taciturn corporal busy straightening his uniform. She throws a flower at him before returning to the factory with her workmates. Impressed by her gesture, José greets a maiden from his native village who brings him a letter and blessing from his mother. Reminiscences of home comfort him and, on his mother's advice, he contemplates marrying Micaëla. But the tobacco girls coming out interrupt his reading. A fight breaks out between Carmen and another woman. Lieutenant Zuniga orders José to arrest Carmen and take her to jail. After evading his questions, she tries to wheedle José by pretending she is from Navarra like him. He knows she is a Gypsy but cannot resist her powerful charm. She dates him at Lillas Pastia's inn and, while transferring her to the prison, he lets her slip away.

ACT II

A month later, Carmen and her friends Frasquita and Mercédès are dancing at Lillas Pastia's, a smugglers' den outside the city. Zuniga and other officers are ready to prolong their evening but the women dismiss them: what the hell is going on after the inn closes? Yet closing time is delayed as torero Escamillo and his followers appear. The bullring hero is instantly attracted to Carmen who turns down his advances as she did with Zuniga. After they leave, the women welcome smugglers Dancaïre and Remendado, who come for a deal with them. Carmen refuses to follow them: she is waiting for José. After his release from jail, where he spent time for letting Carmen escape, José goes to her. She dances for him when the sound is heard calling the soldiers back to the barracks. Although demoted, José wants to return to quarters. His profession of love fails to relieve resentful Carmen who urges him to desertion. José is determined to carry out his duty when Zuniga bursts in, searching for Carmen. The smugglers stop the altercation between the two men and José is compelled to go along with them.

ACT III

The smugglers are back from Gibraltar and settle down at the gates of Seville. While waiting to smuggle the contraband, the women are reading the cards. Carmen, who is tired of José and has not managed to send him away, reads her tragic death in the cards. She and her friends try to cajole the customs officers while José, consumed with jealousy, guards the camp. Not far from there, Micaëla is looking for José and still hopes to bring him back to an honest life. But José arrests matador Escamillo among the rocks: he is searching for Carmen whom he loves. The two men start a knife fight. Carmen's arrival interrupts the duel and Escamillo invites the whole gang to a bullfight in Seville. While striking camp, the smugglers find Micaëla hiding. She convinces José to follow her and go back to his dying mother.

ACT IV

The entrance to the bullring of Seville is bustling with life as the cuadrilla procession appears. Escamillo arrives with Carmen on his arm. Both are in peril of death: Escamillo in the arena and Carmen whose life is menaced by José, who is back from his mother's and lurking among the crowd. Carmen is confronted by José during the bullfight. Rejecting his entreaties, promises and threats, Carmen throws back to José the ring he gave her. He kills her and gives himself up to the spectators coming out of the bullring