



Georges Bizet (25 October 1838 – 3 June 1875) was a French composer and pianist of the Romantic era, best known for the opera *Carmen*. Bizet's first symphony, the *Symphony in C*, was written in November 1855, when he was seventeen, evidently as a student assignment. It was unknown to the world until 1933, when it was discovered in the archives of the Paris Conservatory library. Upon its first performance in 1935, it was immediately hailed as a junior masterwork and a welcome addition to the early Romantic period repertoire. The symphony bears a stylistic resemblance to the first symphony of Gounod first played earlier in the same year, and which Bizet had arranged for two pianos although present-day listeners may discern a similarity to music of Franz Schubert. Bizet's work as a composer has overshadowed how fine a pianist he was. He could easily have had a career as a concert pianist had he so wished, but he hated the idea. In an 1867 letter, he wrote, I play the piano very

well and live on it very poorly as nothing in the world could make me play publicly. I find the profession of a pianist odious. He did occasionally play in public or at private soirées, but limited such appearances for fear of being considered a pianist rather than a composer. Bizet was also a magnificent sight-reader. On 26 May 1861, at a dinner party at the Halévys at which Franz Liszt was present, Bizet gave a faultless performance of an elaborate work of Liszt's, reading at sight from the unpublished manuscript. Liszt proclaimed that Bizet was one of the three finest pianists in Europe. Bizet's sight-reading skill was also praised by Hector Berlioz, his teacher Marmontel, and many others. Berlioz wrote in the "Journal des Débats" on 8 October 1863, "His talent as a pianist is so great that no difficulty can stop him when sight-reading orchestral scores. After Liszt and Mendelssohn one could see few sight-readers of his ability." Bizet died on his sixth wedding anniversary, exactly three months after *Carmen*'s first performance. His death came just when he had found his mature style. He was buried in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, alongside other greats like Chopin and Rossini.

Carmen is Bizet's best-known work and is based on a novella of the same title written in 1846 by the French writer Prosper Mérimée. It was substantially composed during the summer of 1873, but not finished until the end of 1874, during which time his marriage came under severe strain and he separated from his wife for two months. *Carmen* premiered on March 3, 1875, at the Opéra-Comique in Paris, and was not initially well-received, although it ran for 37 performances in the next three months, an average of three a week and it was Bizet's greatest success so far. Bizet had put every ounce of his genius into *Carmen*, and its lukewarm reception was a bitter disappointment. Praise for it eventually came from well-known contemporaries including Debussy, Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky. Brahms attended over twenty performances of it, and considered it the greatest opera produced in Europe since the Franco-Prussian War. The views of these composers proved to be prophetic, as *Carmen* has since become one of the most popular works in the entire operatic repertoire. *Carmen* contains two of Bizet's most famous songs, the "Habanera" and "The Toreador's Song", which compete for popularity with the tenor-baritone duet "Au fond du temple saint" ("In the depths of the temple") from *The Pearl Fishers*. However, Bizet did not live to see *Carmen*'s success. He died from heart failure at the age of 36 in Bougival (Yvelines), about 10 miles west of Paris. It has been suggested that Élie-Miriam Delaborde, who was believed to be the illegitimate son of Charles-Valentin Alkan, may have been indirectly responsible for Bizet's death, which followed a swimming competition between the two, as a result of which Bizet caught a chill. Murder or even suicide were suspected at the time, as what was described as a "gunshot wound" appeared to be on the left side of his neck. However, this was most likely a lymph node which swelled and perforated. He almost certainly died with a systemic streptococcal infection, consistent with his lifelong medical history.

L'amour est un oiseau rebelle (*Love is a rebellious bird*) is a famous aria, in the form of habanera, adapted from the habanera "El Arreglito" originally composed by the Spanish musician Sebastián Yradier. Bizet thought it to be a folk song; when others told him he had used something that had been written by a composer who had died only ten years earlier, he had to add a note to the vocal score of *Carmen*, acknowledging its source. The libretto was written by Henry Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy.

All lyrics in parentheses are sung by a choir.

French

(spoken intro) Quand je vous aimerai?
Ma foi, je ne sais pas,
Peut-être jamais, peut-être demain.
Mais pas aujourd'hui, c'est certain
(sung) L'amour est un oiseau rebelle
que nul ne peut apprivoiser,
et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle,
s'il lui convient de refuser.
Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière,
l'un parle bien, l'autre se tait:
Et c'est l'autre que je préfère,
Il n'a rien dit mais il me plaît.
L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!
Carmen: L'amour est enfant de Bohême,
il n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi;
si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
si je t'aime, prends garde à toi! (Prends garde à toi!)
Si tu ne m'aimes pas,
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime! (Prends garde à toi!)
Mais, si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!
Choir: L'amour est enfant de Bohême,
il n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi;
si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
si je t'aime, prends garde à toi! (Prends garde à toi!)
Carmen: Si tu ne m'aimes pas,
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime! (Prends garde à toi!)
Mais, si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!
L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre
battit de l'aile et s'envola ...
l'amour est loin, tu peux l'attendre;
tu ne l'attends plus, il est là!
Tout autour de toi, vite, vite,
il vient, s'en va, puis il revient ...
tu crois le tenir, il t'évite,
tu crois l'éviter, il te tient.
L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!
Carmen: L'amour est enfant de Bohême,
il n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi;
si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
si je t'aime, prends garde à toi! (Prends garde à toi!)
Si tu ne m'aimes pas,
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime! (Prends garde à toi!)
Mais, si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!
Choir: L'amour est enfant de Bohême,
il n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi;
si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
si je t'aime, prends garde à toi! (Prends garde à toi!)
Carmen: Si tu ne m'aimes pas,
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime! (Prends garde à toi!)
Mais, si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!

Translation in English

(spoken intro) When will I love you?
Good Lord, I don't know,
Maybe never, maybe tomorrow.
But not today, that's for sure.
(sung) Love is a rebellious bird
that nobody can tame,
and you can call him (although it is) quite in vain,
because it suits him not to come.
Nothing helps, neither threat nor prayer.
One man talks well, the other, silent;
but it's the other that I prefer.
He says nothing, but he pleases me.
Oh, love! Love! Love! Love!
Carmen: Love is a gypsy's child,
it has never known the law;
if you love me not, then I love you;
if I love you, you'd best beware! (You'd best beware!)
if you love me not,
if you love me not, then I love you (You'd best beware!)
but if I love you, if I love you, you'd best beware!
Choir: Love is a gypsy's child,
it has never known the law;
if you love me not, then I love you;
if I love you, you'd best beware! (You'd best beware!)
Carmen: if you love me not,
if you love me not, then I love you (You'd best beware!)
but if I love you, if I love you, you'd best beware!
The bird you hoped to catch
beat its wings and flew away ...
love stays away, you wait and wait;
when least expected, there it is!
All around you, swift, swift,
it comes, goes, then it returns ...
you think you hold it fast, it flees
you think you're free, it holds you fast.
Oh, love! Love! Love! Love!
Carmen: Love is a gypsy's child,
it has never known the law;
if you love me not, then I love you;
if I love you, you'd best beware! (You'd best beware!)
if you love me not,
if you love me not, then I love you (You'd best beware!)
but if I love you, if I love you, you'd best beware!
Choir: Love is a gypsy's child,
it has never known the law;
if you love me not, then I love you;
if I love you, you'd best beware! (You'd best beware!)
Carmen: if you love me not,
if you love me not, then I love you (You'd best beware!)
but if I love you, if I love you, you'd best beware!