NAXOS Historical

Great Opera Recordings

ADD

8.110238-39

2 CDs

BIZET

Carmen

Solange Michel • Raoul Jobin • Martha Angelici • Michel Dens

Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra-Comique, Paris

André Cluytens

(Recorded in 1950)

Great Opera Recordings

Georges
BIZET
(1838-1875)

Carmen

Opéra Comique in Four Acts
Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy
After the story by Prosper Mérimée

Solange Michel . . . . . Carmen
Raoul Jobin . . . . . Don José
Michel Dens . . . . . Escamillo
Martha Angelici . . . . . Micaëla
Germaine Chellet . . . . . Frasquita
Raymonde Notti . . . . . Mercédès
Xavier Smati . . . . . Zuniga
Julien Thirache . . . . . Moralès
Jean Vieuille . . . . . El Dancairo
Frédéric Leprin . . . . . El Remendado
Arschodt . . . . . Lillias Pastia

Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra-Comique, Paris
Henri Janin, Chorus Master
André Cluytens, Conductor
Recorded 6th -9th September 1950 at the Champs-Élysée Theatre, Paris
First issued on Columbia 33 FCX 101 through 103

CD 1 — 78:17

Act I — 41:19

1 *Prélude* — 3:35
(Orchestra)

2 *Sur la place, chacun passe* — 5:48
(Soldiers, Moralès, Micaëla)

3 *Avec la garde montante* — 3:50
(Street Boys, Moralès, Don José, Zuniga)

4 *La cloche a sonné …* — 3:09
Dans l'air, nous suivons des yeux
(Young Men, Cigarette Girls)

5 *Mais nous ne voyons pas la Carmencita!* — 1:05
(Soldiers, Carmen)

6 *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle* (Habanera) — 3:38
(Carmen)

7 *Carmen! sur tes pas nous nous pressons tous!* — 1:33
(Young Men, Carmen, Don José, Cigarette Girls, Micaëla)

8 *Parle-moi de ma mère!* — 7:48
(Don José, Micaëla)

9 *Au secours! au secours!* — 3:24
(Cigarette Girls, Zuniga, Soldiers, Don José)

10 *Tra la la la la la la la* — 1:58
(Carmen, Zuniga, Don José)

11 *Près des remparts de Séville* (Séguidille) — 3:34
(Carmen, Don José)

12 *Voici l'ordre* — 1:58
(Zuniga, Carmen)

Act II — 36:58

13 *Entr'acte* — 1:38
(Orchestra)

14 *Les tringles des sistres tintaient* — 4:56
(Danse bohémienne)
(Carmen, Frasquita, Mercédès, Lillas Pastia, Zuniga)

15 *Vivat, vivat le torero!* — 1:08
(Escamillo's Friends, Mercédès, Zuniga, Frasquita, Lillas Pastia)

16 *Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre* — 6:27
(Escamillo, Carmen, Frasquita, Mercédès, Zuniga, Officers, Escamillo's Friends, Lillas Pastia)

17 *Nous avons en tête une affaire!* — 4:57
(Dancairo, Frasquita, Mercédès, Remendado, Carmen)

18 *Halte-là! Qui va là? Dragon d'Alcala!* — 2:15
(Don José, Mercédès, Frasquita, Dancairo, Lillas, Pastia)

19 *Je vais danser en votre honneur* — 2:31
(Carmen, Don José)

20 *Au quartier! Pour l'appel!* — 2:00
(Carmen, Don José)

21 *La fleur que tu m'avais jetée* — 3:16
(Don José)

22 *Non! tu ne m'aimes pas!* — 2:21
(Carmen, Don José)

23 *Non! je ne veux plus l'écouter!* 2:13
(Don José, Carmen, Zuniga)

24 *Bel officier* 3:17
(Carmen, Remendado, Dancairo, Gypsies, Don José, Frasquita, Mercédès)

CD 2 51:46

Act III 32:33

1 *Entr'acte* 2:13
(Orchestra)

2 *Écoute, écoute, compagnon, écoute!* 4:23
(Smugglers, Frasquita, Mercédès, Carmen, Don José, Dancairo, Remendado)

3 *Mêlons! Coupons!* 3:53
(Frasquita, Mercédès, Carmen)

4 *En vain, pour éviter les réponses amères* 3:19
(Carmen, Frasquita, Mercédès, Dancairo, Remendado, Don José)

5 *Quant au douanier, c'est notre affaire!* 2:50
(Frasquita, Mercédès, Carmen, Dancairo, Remendado, Smugglers)

6 *C'est des contrabandiers le refuge ordinaire … Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante* 5:35
(Micaëla, Don José, Escamillo)

7 *Je suis Escamillo* 5:22
(Escamillo, Don José, Carmen, Dancairo, Smugglers)

8 *Halte! quelqu'un est là* 4:57
(Remendado, Carmen, Dancairo, Don José, Micaela, Frasquita, Mercédès, Gypsies, Escamillo)

Act IV 19:13

9 *Entr'acte* 2:14
(Orchestra)

10 *A deux cuartos!* 2:12
(Street Sellers, Zuniga, Orange Sellers, a Gypsy, Frasquita, Mercédès)

11 *Les voici, les voici* 3:41
(Boys, Street Sellers, Gypsies)

12 *Si tu m'aimes, Carmen* 2:58
(Escamillo, Carmen, Alguazils, Frasquita, Mercédès)

13 *C'est toi! C'est moi!* 3:07
(Carmen, Don José)

14 *Tu ne m'aimes donc plus?* 5:03
(Don José, Carmen, the Crowd)

Georges BIZET (1838-1875)
Carmen

Among the great composers, perhaps only Borodin contributed as little to the active repertoire as Georges Bizet, and yet this talented but short-lived Frenchman will never be forgotten. His *Carmen* is the most popular of all operas, challenged only by Puccini's *La bohème*. It is in the repertoire of every opera house and has been recorded innumerable times – it was one of the first operas to be recorded complete. Among the many films that have been made of it is one of the black Broadway version *Carmen Jones* with English lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II. The irony is that Bizet himself did not live to see the success of his masterpiece and when he went to his grave, even his friends and supporters must have despaired of his reputation. One or two of his other operas, notably *The Pearl Fishers*, still have a slight hold on our attention, as do a handful of orchestral pieces, but to all intents and purposes he is a one-work composer.

The idea of adapting Prosper Mérimée's novella into an opera came from Bizet himself. He had the services of the notable librettists Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy – he was related to the latter by marriage – and they did a superb job. In some ways they expanded the original story, inventing the character Micaëla as a counterpart to Carmen and beefing up the toreador's rôle; in other directions they contracted it, making the hero Don José's downfall into a crime less degrading. Bizet himself made some contributions to the libretto and in writing the music he surpassed himself, with dazzling solo numbers, deftly tailored ensembles, ranging from the lofty style of the duet of Micaëla and Don José to the almost operetta mode of the famous quintet, and characterful choruses. At other points, for instance the Card Scene and the final confrontation between Carmen and the desperate Don José, he produced his most dramatic music.

The opera ran into trouble even during the rehearsals at the Opéra-Comique in Paris, with the chorus, required to act with previously unheard-of naturalism, going on strike at one point. The première on 3rd March 1875 was not well received and while it is easy to see that the subject matter must have appalled bourgeois opera-goers, who did not mind reading about such things but did not want to see them staged, it is strange to find that even the music did not please at first. The management, which had been courageous enough in putting the work on, stood by it and gave it 35 performances; but poor Bizet was dead before the end of the run. Another thirteen performances followed in the next season, and although the Opéra-Comique then dropped the work until 1883, it was soon wildly popular elsewhere. Even at the Opéra-Comique it passed its thousandth performance in 1905. The first singer of Carmen was Galli-Marié and other famous exponents have been Calvé, Farrar, Vallin, Supervia, de los Angeles and Berganza.

Outside France the opera was usually heard not with its spoken dialogue but with rather heavy recitatives composed by Bizet's friend Ernest Guiraud, whose well-intentioned work on the composer's behalf also helped to make orchestral works such as the *L'Arlésienne* incidental music popular. The recitatives were used in most of the early recordings of *Carmen*. In due course the dialogue began to be reinstated but in 1964 a new edition of the opera insisted on second-guessing Bizet by restoring music that he, an excellent man of the theatre, had cut during rehearsals. Somehow *Carmen* survived all these assaults, but it is salutary to hear it in its proper form, performed by an authentic French cast under a great conductor. French singing has sadly declined over the past century but in 1950, when this recording was made, the style was still intact. The cast is not quite perfect, although Solange Michel is a wonderfully lively Carmen and Martha Angelici is exactly right as Micaëla. Raoul Jobin never really knew how to sing softly; all the same, his ringing tones,

excellent diction and wholehearted commitment are welcome. Michel Dens, the great French baritone of the era, is not the bass-baritone required for the rôle of Escamillo but in other respects is ideal, and the supporting parts are taken by well-routined artists, so that the ensembles go with a swing. The singers themselves speak their dialogue, as they would on stage, which is another reason to be thankful for an all-Francophone cast. The direction of André Cluytens avoids the heaviness that has all too often been visited on this score. With each movement of his baton he seems to sweep away another encrustation of booming contraltos, blasting tenors and bellowing baritones, and his orchestra has the authentic French timbre that has all but vanished today.

Son of an opera conductor, **André Cluytens** (1905-67) was born in Antwerp and attended the Conservatory there from 1914 to 1922, emerging with a clutch of first prizes. For a decade he worked under his father Alphonse at the Théâtre Royal in his home town, as a répétiteur and then a conductor. He then made his career in France, rising through posts in Toulouse, Lyons and Bordeaux to head the Paris Opéra from 1944 and the Opéra-Comique from 1947 and becoming a French citizen. He was the first Franco-Belgian maestro to appear at Bayreuth (1955). He also had an important international career as an orchestral conductor. Although his last years were clouded by illness and he died when he was at his peak, he left many recordings, including a number of complete operas.

Solange Michel was born Solange Boulesteix in Paris in 1912 and after studies at the Paris Conservatoire began her career as a concert and radio soloist. Only in 1942 did she make her stage début, in *Werther* at Dijon. In 1945 she became a member of the Opéra-Comique company and soon was also taking major rôles at the Opéra, where she had earlier sung small parts. Her career lasted until the late 1970s. She was regarded as the finest contralto of her era in France and sang the rôle of Carmen more than seven hundred times, being acclaimed for her acting as well as her singing. She also appeared at Covent Garden, La Scala and various other European houses and took part in several complete opera recordings, as well as making a recital disc.

Martha Angelici (1907-73) was a Corsican; she was born at Cergèse and died at Ajaccio. After studies in Brussels she followed the same route to fame as Michel, singing in concert and on the radio throughout the Benelux countries. In 1936 she made her operatic début in Marseille as Mimì. From 1938 she sang at the Opéra-Comique and from 1953 also at the Opéra, making guest appearances in Brussels and Monte Carlo. She was acclaimed in the rôle of Micaëla, which she sang at La Scala with Karajan, and commanded a wide range of repertoire in concert. She made many recordings.

Raoul Jobin (1906-74), the leading French Canadian tenor of the 1930s and 1940s, studied in his native Quebec and then at the Paris Conservatoire, making both his concert and Paris Opéra débuts in 1930. After a spell back in Canada, he returned to the Opéra in 1934 and was a valued member of the company thereafter. He made his Covent Garden début in 1937 and from 1940 to 1950 was regularly engaged at the Metropolitan in New York, also singing with other companies in North and South America. He sang at the Opéra-Comique from 1946. Although he was best known in the French repertoire, Jobin also appeared with success in Italian rôles and the lighter Wagnerian parts. He taught singing in Montreal from 1957 and made his final stage appearance the following year. His exciting voice can be heard on many recordings.

Michel Dens (1911-2000) ranks with Robert Merrill and Pavel Lisitsian as one of the great lyric baritones of the period after the Second World War. Born in Roubaix, he studied the violin as a boy and planned to go into the textile business, but was urged to

take his singing seriously, studied at the local Conservatoire and made his début in 1934 at Lille as Wagner in *Faust*. After learning his craft in such cities as Bordeaux, Grenoble, Toulouse, Marseille and Monte Carlo, he arrived in 1947 at both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique in Paris. As a guest artist he sang at many opera houses in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada and North Africa. Gifted with a high-lying voice of great beauty and flexibility, he was equally at home in the French repertoire and in such Italian rôles as Rigoletto and Figaro. He was also a wonderful singer of both French and Viennese operetta, and could even handle Tauber's rôles in Lehár's works convincingly. Dens had a long career and was still singing well at the age of eighty. Fortunately he made a vast quantity of recordings.

Tully Potter

Synopsis

The story of Carmen is essentially a simple one. The gypsy factory-girl Carmen, the centre of male attention, flirts with the Dragoons Corporal Don José, who is attracted to her, in spite of his long-standing love for Micaëla, a girl from his own village. When Carmen is arrested for starting a brawl in the factory, Don José allows her to escape. She later induces him to desert and join her and her criminal companions, smugglers, at their mountain hide-away. Meanwhile Carmen has fallen in love with the toreador Escamillo. At a final scene outside the bull-ring in Seville Don José, frantic with jealousy, draws his knife and kills her.

CD 1

Act I

1 The prelude to the opera includes music associated with the toreador Escamillo, immediately followed by the sinister Fate theme. 2 The first act opens with a group of soldiers, lounging in the square in front of the tobacco-factory where Carmen works. They discuss the girls and are joined by Micaëla, who is looking for Don José but does not wait with the soldiers. 3 The guard changes and Don José takes over, with his men. He is told that a girl is looking for him, Micaëla, as he rightly supposes. 4 The factory-bell sounds, a signal for the girls in the factory to stop work, the moment the men outside have been waiting for. 5 They are eager to see Carmen, who now appears. 6 She is the centre of their attention, and sings her famous *Habanera*, recounting the dangers of love and the danger of flouting her, if she is in love with anyone. 7 As she leaves to return to work, she looks round and throws a flower at the feet of Don José, leaving him to a gradual realisation of her power over him. 8 The act continues with a scene between Don José and Micaëla, the latter with a message from his mother. This does something to restore his equanimity. 9 There is a fracas in the factory and Carmen, who has drawn a knife on one of the other girls, is arrested. 10 She treats the situation with nonchalance, 11 fascinating Don José with her *Seguidilla*. 12 As he escorts her to prison, she persuades him to allow her to escape.

Act II

13 The second act is set in the tavern of Lillas Pastia, introduced by an entr'acte that recalls the soldier's song of Don José and the world he now seems about to leave for the gypsy life of Carmen. 14 She and her friends Frasquita and Mercédès are found in the tavern with a group of officers and Lieutenant Zuniga tells Carmen of Don José's arrest for dereliction of duty, his release and his demotion. 15 The toreador Escamillo comes in, welcomed by the company. 16 He proposes a toast to

the officers, with whom he has fellow feeling as a warrior in the bull-ring. He then concentrates his attention on Carmen, who rejects his advances. 17 When Escamillo and the officers have gone, Lillas Pastia calls in two smugglers, planning to bring contraband into Spain from Gibraltar. Carmen at first refuses to join the enterprise, since she is in love with Don José. 18 The smugglers try to persaude her to enrol Don José in their enterprise. 19 She dances for him, 20 and persuades him to ignore the call back to barracks. 21 He tells her of his love for her, recalling the flower that she had thrown him. 22 She reproaches him for not loving her, trying to persuade him to join her and the smugglers 23 but he refuses, vowing to leave her, until the voice of Zuniga is heard, calling for Carmen. 24 When Don José is ordered back to barracks, he draws his sword against the officer, inevitably throwing in his lot with the brigands, who overpower and disarm Zuniga.

CD 2

Act III

1 The entr'acte depicts the tranquil serenity of the country, where the third act is set. It is night at the smuggler's mountain hide-away, where bales of contraband are being moved. 2 The smugglers urge one another to caution, singing of the dangers of their trade and its rewards. Don José has regrets at the step he has taken, thinking of his mother, while Carmen, with growing impatience, bids him be gone. 3 He moves away and sits apart, while Carmen and her friends wile away the time by telling each other's fortunes. 4 The fate of Carmen and then of her lover is to be death, as the cards inexorably decree. 5 As the task of the smugglers continues, Carmen and her friends declare their willingness to deal with the customs officer, using their feminine charms. 6 Micaëla comes in search of her beloved Don José, summoning up all her courage in this dangerous place and calling on Heaven to protect her. 7 The voice of Escamillo is heard, exciting his rival's jealousy, when he tells Don José of his love for Carmen. They fight and Escamillo slips and falls, but their quarrel is interrupted by the appearance of Carmen and the smugglers. 8 Micaëla approaches, challenged by one of the smugglers. She tells Don José of his mother's mortal illness and her desire to see him before she dies. Carmen, supported by Escamillo, tells Don José to go away with her, which he does, hesitating as he goes.

Act IV

9 The entr'acte that precedes the fourth act of the opera is based on an Andalusian melody and leads to a scene set in a square in Seville, in front of the bull-ring. 10 An excited crowd awaits the appearance of its hero. 11 The toreador Escamillo comes in, with Carmen at his side, greeted by the people. 12 Turning to her, he tells her that if she loves him she will have cause to be proud of him, and she assures him of her love. The Mayor and his guards enter the amphitheatre, followed by the rest of the procession, and her friends warn Carmen not to stay, for fear of Don José, who has been lurking in the crowd. 13 Now they are left alone together and Carmen tells Don José that she has been warned to be careful. He urges her to return to him, but she is adamant in her refusal, whatever it may bring. The sound of the crowd applauding Escamillo's success is heard, exciting Carmen's admiration and provoking Don José's jealousy still more. 14 She attempts to leave him, but he holds her back, although once more she tells him that she does not love him. The crowd is heard again from the arena, and Don José takes his final revenge, stabbing her to the heart, as the crowd repeats the words of the toreador's song, promising love as the reward of victory.

Keith Anderson

8.110238-39

COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

2 CDs

Georges BIZET
(1838-1875)

Carmen

ADD

Playing Time 2:10:03

Solange Michel	Carmen
Raoul Jobin	Don José
Michel Dens	Escamillo
Martha Angelici	Micaëla
Germaine Chellet	Frasquita
Raymonde Notti	Mercédès
Xavier Smati	Zuniga
Julien Thirache	Moralès
Jean Vieuille	El Dancairo
Frédéric Leprin	El Remendado
Arschodt	Lillias Pastia

Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra-Comique, Paris

Henri Janin, Chorus Master • André Cluytens, Conductor

Recorded 6th -9th September 1950 at the Champs-Élysées Theatre

First issued on Columbia 33 FCX 101 through 103

As one of the most popular operas of all time, *Carmen* has been recorded innumerable times. Unlike most early recordings, this *Carmen* does not use recitatives by Ernest Guiraud, but the restored dialogues. Described by *Opera on Record* as "living theatre caught on record... an extraordinary recording", this 1950 *Carmen* features a Francophone cast under the great Belgian conductor André Cluytens. The title rôle is taken by Solange Michel who was considered to be the finest contralto of her era and acclaimed for her acting as well as her singing. She is matched by Raoul Jobin's ringing tone, excellent diction and wholehearted commitment as Don José.

CD 1	78:17	CD 2	51:46
1-12 Act I	41:19	1-8 Act III	32:33
13-24 Act II	36:58	9-14 Act IV	19:13

Archivist & Restoration Producer: Mark Obert-Thorn

www.naxos.com

A detailed track list can be found in the booklet
Cover Image: Stage design for Carmen, Act I by Ludwig Sievert, Frankfurt Opera House, 1936 (Private Collection)

ALL RIGHTS IN THIS SOUND RECORDING, ARTWORK, TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THIS COMPACT DISC PROHIBITED.
℗ 2002 HNH International Ltd. © 2002 HNH International Ltd.

MADE IN E.C.

IC 05537

NAXOS Historical

6 36943 12382 9

8.110238-39 BIZET: Carmen NAXOS Historical

NAXOS Historical BIZET: Carmen 8.110238-39