



Georges BIZET

Carmen Suites

Georges Bizet (25 October 1838 – 3 June 1875), was a French, romantic era composer. Although his name is now popular in the opera world, Bizet achieved few successes before his final work, *Carmen*. He excelled as a student during his time at the Conservatoire de Paris, being recognized as an outstanding pianist and winning the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1857. Bizet chose not to pursue a career as a pianist, and was faced with rejection as an opera composer, as the Parisian opera houses preferred the classical repertoire over new works. During the 1860s, Bizet earned his living largely by arranging and transcribing the music of others as his two operas which reached the stage during this time — *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1863) and *La jolie fille de Perth* (1867) — were both not immediately successful. After serving in the National Guard during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, Bizet had finally found some success through an orchestral suite derived from his incidental music to Alphonse Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne* (1872). Bizet's final opera, *Carmen*, premiered in 1875 after delayed production due to fears that its themes of betrayal and murder would offend audiences. Sadly, Bizet died of a heart attack only three months later, convinced that the work was a failure, and unable to witness his own rise to stardom as the work entered the operatic canon as an all-time favourite among audiences worldwide. After a career cut short by an early death, Bizet's contribution to music, other than his composition of *Carmen*, was neglected for years. His manuscripts were undervalued, his published works were often revised and adapted, and he did not found a school or have well-known students. However, as the 20th century progressed, his works began to be performed more frequently, and the world of music now acknowledges Bizet as a composer of brilliance and originality whose premature death potentially robbed the opera repertoire of many classic pieces.

The **Carmen Suites** are two suites of orchestral music drawn from the music of Georges Bizet's 1875 opera *Carmen* and compiled posthumously by his friend Ernest Guiraud. They adhere very closely to Bizet's orchestration. Guiraud also wrote the recitatives for *Carmen*, and compiled the second of the two suites from Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* incidental music. Each of the *Carmen Suites* contains six numbers. Both suites have been performed and recorded many times.

Carmen Suite No. 1

- Prélude – Act I, prelude (fate motive)
- Aragonaise – Interlude (entr'acte) before act 4
- Intermezzo – Interlude (entr'acte) before act 3
- Séguedille – Act 1, *Carmen*: "Près des remparts de Séville"
- Les Dragons d'Alcala – Interlude (entr'acte) before act 2
- Les Toréadors – Theme from prelude to act 1 and Procession of the Toreadors from act 4: "Les voici! voici la quadrille des Toreros!"

The *Aragonaise* was also used by Pablo de Sarasate in his *Carmen Fantasy* for violin and orchestra and by Franz Waxman in his own *Carmen Fantasie*.

Carmen Suite No. 2

- Marche des Contrebandiers – Act 3, chorus: "Écoute, écoute, compagnon!"
- Habanera: Act 1, aria (*Carmen*) – "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle"
- Nocturne: Act 3, aria (*Micaëla*) – "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante"
- Chanson du Toréador – Act 2, introduction and aria (*Escamillo*): "Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre"
- La Garde Montante – Act 1: "Avec la garde montante, nous arrivons, nous voilà!"
- Danse Bohème – Act 2, Gypsy Dance: "Les tringles des sistres tintaient"