



Georges BIZET

Symphony in C

Georges Bizet (25 October 1838 – 3 June 1875) was a French composer of the Romantic era. Best known for his operas in a career cut short by his early death, Bizet achieved few successes before his final work, *Carmen*, which has become one of the most popular and frequently performed works in the entire opera repertoire. During a brilliant student career at the Conservatoire de Paris, Bizet won many prizes, including the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1857. He was recognised as an outstanding pianist, though he chose not to capitalise on this skill and rarely performed in public. Returning to Paris after almost three years in Italy, he found that the main Parisian opera theatres preferred the established classical repertoire to the works of newcomers. His keyboard and orchestral compositions were likewise largely ignored; as a result, his career stalled, and he earned his living mainly by arranging and transcribing the music of others. Restless for success, he began many theatrical projects during the 1860s, most of which were abandoned. Neither of his two operas that reached the stage in this time—*Les pêcheurs de perles* and *La jolie fille de Perth*—were immediately successful. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, during which Bizet served in the National Guard, he had little success with his one-act opera *Djamileh*, though an orchestral suite derived from his incidental music to Alphonse Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne* was instantly popular. The production of his final opera, *Carmen*, was delayed because of fears that its themes of betrayal and murder would offend audiences. After its premiere on 3 March 1875, Bizet was convinced that the work was a failure; he died of a heart attack three months later, unaware that it would prove a spectacular and enduring success. Bizet's marriage to Geneviève Halévy was intermittently happy and produced one son. After his death, his work, apart from *Carmen*, was generally neglected. Manuscripts were given away or lost, and published versions of his works were frequently revised and adapted by other hands. He founded no school and had no obvious disciples or successors. After years of neglect, his works began to be performed more frequently in the 20th century. Later commentators have acclaimed him as a composer of brilliance and originality whose premature death was a significant loss to French musical theatre.

Bizet's **Symphony in C** is an early work by the French composer Georges Bizet. According to Grove's Dictionary, the symphony "reveals an extraordinarily accomplished talent for a 17-year-old student, in melodic invention, thematic handling and orchestration." Bizet started work on the symphony on 29 October 1855, four days after turning 17, and finished it roughly a month later. It was written while he was studying at the Paris Conservatoire under the composer Charles Gounod, and was evidently a student assignment. Bizet showed no apparent interest in having it performed or published, and the piece was never played in his lifetime. He used certain material from the symphony in later works, however. There is no mention of the work in Bizet's letters, and it was unknown to his earlier biographers. His widow, Geneviève Halévy (1849–1926), gave the manuscript to Reynaldo Hahn, who passed it along with other papers to the archives of the conservatory library, where it was found in 1933 by Jean Chantavoine. Soon thereafter, Bizet's first British biographer Douglas Charles Parker (1885–1970) showed the manuscript to the conductor Felix Weingartner, who led the first performance in Basel, Switzerland, on 26 February 1935. The symphony was immediately hailed as a youthful masterpiece on a par with Felix Mendelssohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written at about the same age, and quickly became part of the standard Romantic repertoire. It received its first recording in 1937, by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Walter Goehr. (*Form*) Written for a standard orchestra (without trombones), the work closely follows the classical symphonic form in four movements. The first and the last movement are in sonata form. *Allegro vivo*; *Andante*. *Adagio*; *Allegro vivace*; *Finale*. *Allegro vivace*.