



Georges BIZET

Carmen suite No. 2

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.

Georges Bizet's ***Carmen Suite No. 2***, arranged by Ernest Guiraud, is a brilliant orchestral suite derived from Bizet's celebrated opera *Carmen*. Originally composed in 1875, *Carmen* was a groundbreaking work that combined elements of Spanish folk music with operatic drama, and although it was not fully appreciated in Bizet's lifetime, it has since become one of the most beloved operas in the classical repertoire. After Bizet's death, Guiraud, a close friend and admirer of Bizet, took on the task of creating orchestral suites from the opera's rich score. Suite No. 2, published in 1881, is a carefully curated selection of music that captures the essence of *Carmen* in a format suitable for concert performance.

The suite opens with the bold and dramatic Prelude, which sets the stage with its striking rhythms and evocative themes. This movement immediately immerses the listener in the passionate and vibrant world of *Carmen*. The Intermezzo follows, offering a lyrical and introspective contrast with its beautiful, flowing melodies that provide a moment of calm amidst the suite's energetic sections. The Aragonaise, a lively and rhythmically infectious dance, showcases Bizet's flair for incorporating Spanish musical elements into his work. This movement is particularly notable for its spirited rhythms and vibrant orchestration. Following the Aragonaise is the Seguidilla, one of the most famous and recognizable pieces from the opera. The Seguidilla is a sultry, flirtatious dance that highlights the character of *Carmen* and her seductive charm. Its rhythmic vitality and melodic allure make it a standout piece in the suite. The suite also includes *Les Dragons d'Alcala*, a movement characterized by its energetic and martial rhythms, which evoke the setting of the opera and the bustling atmosphere of Seville. The Habanera, perhaps the most iconic piece from *Carmen*, is featured prominently in the suite. This movement is renowned for its sensual and captivating melody, embodying the spirit of *Carmen*'s character and the opera's dramatic tension. Finally, the suite concludes with the *Danse Bohème*, a vibrant and exuberant piece that captures the bohemian spirit and energy of the opera. *Carmen Suite No. 2* is a testament to Bizet's exceptional talent and the enduring appeal of *Carmen*. It encapsulates the opera's dramatic and musical diversity, offering audiences a compelling and enjoyable concert experience that highlights the richness of Bizet's original work.