

SYNOPSIS

Traduzione di Rodney Stringer

ACT I

A square in Seville.

Outside the cigarette factory, soldiers on guard duty watch the passers-by (Scena and Chorus: "Sur la place, chacun passe"). From a distance is heard a military march, followed by a band of urchins: it's the changing of the guard (Chorus: "Avec la garde montante"). The factory bell rings, and everybody presses forward to see the cigarette girls come out, and especially to court the most seductive of them all: the gypsy Carmen (Chorus: "La cloche a sonné"). Impudent and indifferent, the girl sings a song (Habanera: "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle") and throws a flower to Don José, a corporal in the Dragoons. He is perturbed by her gesture. The arrival of his fiancée Micaëla, who brings greetings from his distant mother, seems to take Don José's mind off Carmen (Duet: "Parle-moi de ma mère"). But then a furious outburst breaks out in the factory, started by the comely cigarette girl (Chorus: "Au secours! N'entendez-vous pas?"). She is promptly arrested and handed over to Don José. During the brief interrogation, conducted by lieutenant Zuniga, Carmen refuses to answer questions. Instead she cheekily hums to herself (Song: "Tra la la la la la la"). Then, alone with Don José, she strikes up another song to convince the corporal to let her escape: in exchange she promises him a rendezvous at Lillas Pastia's inn (Seguidilla and Duet: "Près des remparts de Séville"). Bewitched by the gypsy girl, Don José has himself thrown to the ground, thus enabling Carmen to take to her heels, amidst laughter from the cigarette girls (Finale: "Voici l'ordre, partez").

ACT II

At Lillas Pastia's inn.

Carmen sings and dances with two of her female friends (Frasquita and Mercédès) in Lillas Pastia's ill-reputed tavern (Song: "Les triangles des sœurs tintaient"). Also among the somewhat dubious people in the establishment is lieutenant Zuniga, who woos the gypsy girl. Later, with his retinue of admirers (Chorus: "Vivat! Vivat le toréro"), the toreador Escamillo enters, singing his famous couplets ("Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre"). Carmen resists his advances too, for she is in love with Don José and is waiting for him to be released from prison, into which he has been thrown for having let her get away. It is closing time. Everybody comes out except Lillas Pastia and the other members of the band of smugglers to which Carmen also belongs. They are preparing a robbery for that night and try to convince Carmen to join them (Quintet: "Nous avons en tête une affaire"). Meanwhile a song is heard off stage: it is sung by Don José who is gradually approaching ("Halte-là! Qui va là?"). The soldier and the gypsy remain alone, and she dances for him, accompanying herself on the castanets (Duet: "Je vais danser en votre honneur"). A stand-easy is heard from the streets, and Don José, who has been demoted to the rank of private, says he must now return to barracks. Carmen inveighs against him and makes fun of him. In the meantime lieutenant Zuniga returns and attempts to seduce the beautiful gypsy. Blind with jealousy, Don José flings himself at him, but the smugglers enter, separate them and lead Zuniga away (Finale: "Holà! Carmen, holà!").

ACT III

A wild and remote spot.

The scene opens in the smugglers' den. It is night (Sextet and Chorus: "Écoute, écoute, compagnon"). Don José, who has followed Carmen into the mountains, creeps about uneasily while thinking with remorse of his old mother. Carmen has already tired of him and, turning her back on him, she reads the cards with Frasquita and Mercédès (Trio: "Mélons! Coupons!"), but her fate is sealed: the cards indicate death for her and for Don José. The smugglers go off with the women to do their shady business (Ensemble: "Quant au douanier, c'est notre affaire"). Micaëla enters, accompanied by a guide: she is looking for Don José (Aria: "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante"). The latter, who still desperately loves the woman for whom he has ruined his life, clashes with Escamillo (Duet: "Je suis Escamillo") who has come up the mountains to see Carmen. The two men are fighting with knives when Carmen arrives, just in time to separate them. Escamillo invites the gypsy to the bullfight and goes out. Micaëla arrives to tell Don José that his mother is dying and beseeches him to follow her. Don José, stricken with sorrow and jealousy, and threatening Carmen who defies and taunts him mockingly, follows Micaëla out (Finale: "Holà! Holà, José").

ACT IV

A square in Seville near the Arena.

The square is filled by a many-coloured and noisy crowd (Chorus: "À deux quartos") awaiting the arrival of the torero to acclaim and cheer him. Escamillo enters, with Carmen (March and Chorus: "Les voici! Les voici!"). Frasquita and Mercédès warn their friend of Don José, whom they have seen lurking in the neighbourhood. They all go into the Arena except the two exlovers (Duet and Final chorus: "C'est toi? / C'est moi!"). In vain Don José implores Carmen to come back to him and to love him again. But the gypsy is adamant. She tosses away the ring which he had given her, while from the Arena are heard acclamations of the torero's victory. As Escamillo steps out of the Arena surrounded by the festive crowd, Don José stabs Carmen to death and falls sobbing over her corpse, calling out her name in despair.