

Listening Guide

Bizet: *Carmen*, Act I, Scenes 4 and 5

DATE OF WORK: 1875, Paris

LIBRETTISTS: Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy

BASIS: Short story by Prosper Mérimée

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS: Carmen, seductive cigarette girl (mezzo-soprano)
Don José, a corporal obsessed with Carmen (tenor)
Escamillo, vain bullfighter who wins Carmen's love (bass-baritone)
Micaela, childhood sweetheart of Don José (soprano)
Lieutenant Zuniga, Don José's superior officer, who also desires Carmen (bass)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Powerful and exotic music depicting strong emotions—love, hate, desire.
Men's and women's choruses sung in unison.
Swirling melodic lines symbolizing the cigarette factory workers.
Seductive, chromatic melody against hypnotic dance rhythm in Carmen's aria.

Scene 4

(The square fills up with young men who have come to wait for the cigarette girls to exit the factory. The soldiers come out of the post. Don Jos , indifferent to the crowd, sits and repairs the chain of his saber.)

Orchestral introduction builds to crescendo; excitement grows when the factory bell rings.

CHORUS OF MEN (Tenors)

La cloche a sonn , nous,
des ouvrières nous venons
ici guetter le retour;
et nous vous suivrons,
brunes cigarières,
en vous murmurant
des propos d'amour!

The bell has rung, and we
are on the look-out here
for the factory girls' return.
And we shall follow you
dusky cigarette girls
murmuring protestations of love,
and making loving proposals.

(Basses, as cigarette girls enter)

Voyez-les! Regards impudents,
mine coquettes!
fumant toutes, du bout des dents
la cigarette.

Just look at them! Impudent glances
and flirtatious airs,
each with a cigarette dangling
from her lips.

Cigarette girls sing arched, lyrical lines (divided into Sopranos I and II):

p

Dans l'air nous sui - vons des yeux La fu - m - e,
Smoke rings make their la - zy way, Soft - ly curl - ing,

p

Dans l'air nous sui - vons des yeux La fu - m - e,
Smoke rings make their la - zy way, Soft - ly curl - ing,

CIGARETTE GIRLS (Sopranos I and II)

Dans l'air nous suivons des yeux
la fum e, qui vers les cieux
monte, monte parfum e.
Cela monte gentiment à la t te
tout doucement,
Cela vous met l' me en f te!
Le doux parler des amants
c'est fum e!
Leurs transports et leurs serments
c'est fum e! etc.
Oui, c'est fum e, c'est fum e!
Dans l'air nous suivons des yeux,

In the air we follow with our eyes
the fragrant smoke as it
rises to the skies.
Sweetly it rises to our heads,
gently, imperceptibly,
it makes you feel good!
Lovers' pretty speeches
are smoke!
Their transports and their vows
are smoke! etc.
Yes, it's smoke, so much smoke!
In the air we follow with our eyes,

dans l'air nous suivons la fumée
qui monte en tournant vers les cieux!
La fumée, la fumée!

In the air, we watch the smoke,
which rises in spirals to the skies!
The smoke! The smoke!

CHORUS OF YOUNG MEN

Mais nous ne voyons pas
la Carmencita!
La voilà! La voilà!

But we don't see
Carmencita!
Ah! there she is! Here she comes!

ALL (Carmen enters)

La voilà! Voilà la Carmencita!

There she is! Here's Carmencita!

CHORUS OF YOUNG MEN (to Carmen)

Carmen! sur tes pas nous nous pressons tous!
Carmen! sois gentille,
au moins réponds-nous
et dis-nous quel jour
tu nous aimeras!

Carmen, we all crowd around you.
Carmen, be kind,
at least answer us
and say when you will
love us!

CARMEN

(having cast a swift glance in the direction of the oblivious Jos)

Quand je vous aimerai?
Ma foi, je ne sais pas!
Peut-être jamais, peut-être demain!
Mais pas aujourd'hui, c'est certain.

When I shall love you?
Upon my word, I don't know!
Perhaps never, perhaps tomorrow!
But not today, that's certain.

Scene 5

Opening of Carmen's *Habanera*, with dancelike rhythmic ostinato in bass:

Carmen

p

Cellos

pp possible

L'amour est un oiseau rebelle que nul ne
peut ap-pri-vo-i-ser. et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'ap-pelle, s'il lui con-vient de re-fu-ser.

etc.

Habanera:

L'amour est un oiseau rebelle
que nul ne peut apprivoiser,
et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle
s'il lui convient de refuser.
Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière,
l'un parle bien, l'autre se tait;
et c'est l'autre que je préfère;
il n'a rien dit, mais il me plaît.

Love is a rebellious bird
that nobody can tame,
and it's simply no good calling it
if it suits it to refuse;
neither threat nor prayer will prevail.
One of them talks, the other holds his peace.
and I prefer the other one!
He hasn't said a word, but I like him!

CHORUS

L'amour est un oiseau . . .

Love is a rebellious bird . . .

CARMEN

L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!

Love! Love! Love!

L'amour est enfant de Bohème,

Love is a Gypsy,

il n'a jamais connu de loi,

it has never been subject to any law.

si tu m'aimes pas, je t'aime;

If you do not love me, I love you;

si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!

if I love you, take care!

CHORUS

Prends garde à toi . . .

Take care! . . .

CARMEN

L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre

The bird you thought to surprise

battit de l'aile et s'envola;

has spread its wings and flown;

l'amour est loin, tu peux l'attendre;

love is far away, you may wait for it;

tu ne l'attends plus, il est là!

when you've given up waiting, it is there!

Tout autour de toi vite, vite,

All around you, quickly, quickly

il vient, s'en va, puis il revient;

it comes, goes, and comes again.

Tu crois le tenir, il t'échappe;

You think you've caught it, it escapes you;

Tu crois l'échapper, tu te prends!

you think to escape it, you are caught!

CHORUS

Tout autour de toi . . .

All around you . . .

CARMEN

L'amour! L'amour! . . .

Love! Love! . . .

CHORUS OF GIRLS

L'amour est enfant de Bohème . . .

Love is a Gypsy . . .

(The factory bell rings a second time. Chattering noisily, the girls enter the premises, while the townsfolk disperse and the soldiers, all save José, enter the guard house.)