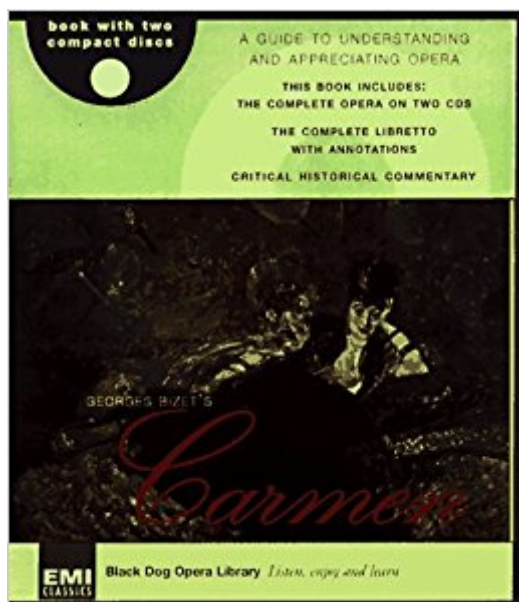


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Carmen (The Black Dog Opera Library)



Synopsis

The Black Dog Opera Library is the best, easiest and most informative and budget-friendly way to enjoy four of the greatest operas of all time. Finally available again, and packaged with gorgeous new covers, each book in the library includes the complete opera on 2 CDs, featuring world-class performances and orchestras; the complete libretto, plus its English translation; an exciting history of the opera; a biography of the composer; a synopsis of the story, broken down by act and scene; and dozens of photographs and drawings depicting performances, singers, sets, costumes, and more. Carmen features Grace Bumbry, Jon Vickers, Mirella Freni, and Kostas Paskalis, with Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos conducting the Orchestre National de l'Opéra. Also available: La Bohème featuring Nicolai Gedda and Mirella Freni, with Thomas Schippers conducting the Orchestra e Coro del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma; La Traviata featuring Beverly Sills, Nicolai Gedda, and Rolando Panerai, with Aldo Ceccato conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; The Marriage of Figaro featuring Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Heather Harper, Judith Blegen, Geraint Evans, Teresa Berganza, and Birgit Finnilä, with Daniel Barenboim conducting the English Chamber Orchestra. Listen. Enjoy. Learn.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The story of Carmen, the fatalistic gypsy, and Don José, her murderous soldier lover, is a perennial favorite of an overwhelming majority of opera lovers. Carmen has it all: vivid characters,

wonderful tunes, stirring crowd scenes, and a setting that's just exotic enough without becoming outlandish. The Black Dog Opera Library has issued a fine introduction to this classic tragedy. This hardcover book (small enough to tuck into a handbag and take along to the opera) includes an essay that explores the opera's origins and performance history; a plot synopsis; a libretto in French and English, with a running commentary on the action; and, on two compact discs, a complete recording of the opera itself. It's a very attractive package for the price. The recording, made in 1969-70, stars mezzo-soprano Grace Bumbry as the eponymous gypsy; an incredibly intense Jon Vickers as Don José; soprano Mirella Freni, in melting voice, as his would-be wife; and Kostas Paskalis as a dark-voiced Escamillo. Rafael Fruehbeck de Burgos conducts his soloists, the chorus, and the orchestra of the Theatre National de l'Opera in idiosyncratic fashion.

Georges Bizet was a French composer, mainly of operas. In a career cut short by his early death, he achieved few successes before his final work, *Carmen*, became one of the most popular and frequently performed works in the entire opera repertory.

Carmen is undoubtedly one of the most recognizable operas in the world. There have been many fine recordings in the 20th century and even in the 19th century. Maria Callas (considered by many to be the greatest soprano ever sang the role), Teresa Berganza has sang the role, Tatiana Troyanos, Jessie Norman and various other sopranos who are drawn to the terrific role. Georges Bizet is remembered for this masterpiece, which he intended to be an opera-comique. It was not meant to be a comedy, for the intensity of the fatal tragedy of Prosper Merimee's short novel is superbly captured. Rather, it was meant to be taken as a form of drama, with spoken dialogue, song and dance, and no recitatives. Today, the leading opera houses accomodate this original intended version but many still keep the recitatives that later revisers added, making *Carmen* more in lines with Italian grand opera. Nevertheless, this fine recording is the best and the original *Carmen*. Grace Bumbry (mezzo-soprano), whose debut as Venus in the Salzburg Festival presentation of Wagner's *Tannhauser* made headlines, is the ultimate *Carmen*. Her voice is rich, dark, powerful, lyric and intense. She is *Carmen*, and I can think of no other singer who can better fit the role. John Vickers sings Don Jose with passion, elegance and intense emotions, although many will argue that Placido Domingo sings the role better. Vickers still pulls a superb performance. Kostas Paskalis, a Greek baritone, is a terrific bullfighter Escamillo. The conductor Raphael Burgos is wondrous in his orchestration of the score, intense in the fatalism of the fate theme, the dynamic overture, the tender moments between Don Jose and Micaela (Mirella Freni who does a passable performance). the

choruses, and the Gypsy/Spanish folk melodies, among them Habanera and Seguidilla. This is a must have for avid Carmen lovers. The story will stay with us always. A seductive Gypsy in 19th century Spain seduces a gentleman soldier Don Jose, engaged to marry the good-hearted Micaela, but he abandons her, his regiment, and follows Carmen and her merry band of smugglers. Soon, Carmen tires of Don Jose and sets her eyes on the dashing bullfighter champion, Escamillo. At the bullfight, Carmen and Don Jose confront for a final scene, in which, against the background of the bullfight and a swirling score, Carmen declares her independence and tells Don Jose she wants nothing with him. The obsessed and mad Don Jose stabs her, appropriately enough when the bull in the arena is slaughtered. The opera comes to an end and we the audience are left with the first verisimo and realistic opera of intense tragedy, loving the music and worshipping the grandeur of the whole thing. Five Stars For this Black Dog Opera Library Recording. Also to be recommended in the series are La Boheme, Aida, The Flying Dutchman, The Magic Flute and La Traviata.

The Black Dog Opera Library series are beautifully packaged and way underpriced. They each contain 2 CDs of the complete opera in the inside covers of a compact hardcover book which contains photos and commentary, as well as an annotated libretto in the original language and English translation, referenced to the CD, and notes and photos of the main performers and conductor. The performances are usually classic ones and though not necessarily recorded in the digital age they all sound gorgeous. I have only been able to find 4 (Magic Flute, Aida, La Boheme, and Carmen) and wish there were more. The only flaws in my opinion are that there is no information regarding the date or location of the performances nor is there a complete cast listing. This Carmen features legendary opera star Grace Bumbry in the title role

I have said it before and I will say it again. The Black Dog Opera Library series contains quality opera recordings, top-notch singers and orchestras, and as a bonus, liner notes and commentary on the opera, providing background information on the composer and the time period. In this remarkable book, we are treated to the greatest recording of Bizet's opera, Carmen. It was recorded 1969-70, and stars Jon Vickers, Grace Bumbry and Kostas Paskalis. The opera is timeless and has retained its popularity for more than a century. MTV has produced its own version, calling it a hip-hop-opera, there is talk of doing a musical-style rendition, and in the 50's, Carmen Jones with an all black cast did an incredible job of translating the songs into English with the help of Rogers and Hammestein. Carmen is based on the French writer Prosper Merimé's dark novella. It tells the story of a Spanish Gypsy woman who works undercover as a cigarette maker in Seville. In reality,

she works for contraband smugglers who are constantly on the road. Don Jose is the soldier whose regiment is stationed by the factory. After arresting Carmen for a catfight, she seduces him and he falls madly in love with her, a love that later becomes consumed with obsession. Carmen convinces Don Jose to join her fellow smugglers and they travel across Spain. For love of her, Don Jose has abandoned his regiment and his fiancée, Micaela, the polar opposite of Carmen- she is a Christian-bred, homely woman. When Carmen tires of Don Jose, she abandons him for the more attractive champion bullfighter Escamillo. During a bullfight, Carmen confronts Don Jose and makes it clear she no longer loves him. In a jealous crime of passion, Don Jose stabs Carmen to death.

Rafael Burgos conducts a supremely effective orchestra who truly brings out the originality, drama, melody and intensity of Bizet's score. From the Overture, which concludes with its fatalistic theme, to each of the Spanish-style dances, among them Habanera, Seguidilla and Gypsy Song (all arias for Carmen), the soft melody of the Prelude to the final act and the concluding final scene, are all magnificent interpretation. The singers, individually, are fine actor/singers. Tenor Jon Vickers, who has a vast repertoire, including Wagner, brings a more realistic approach to Don Jose. He is passionate, he is obsessed and determined to have Carmen come what may. His Wagnerian intensity are self-evident in his arguments with Carmen and in the final scene of her murder, especially striking in his "Ainsi, le salut de mon ame" "And so I am to lose my heart". His Flower Song "La Fleur" is a fresh new rendition, not ending with a high, strong note as typical tenors do, but a soft high, B-flat, effectively producing the effect that he is genuinely in love, but obsessed and haunted by, Carmen.

Grace Bumbry's Carmen is her best role. She is assertive, she is seductive, flirtatious and dangerous. She is the original femme fatale. But it's clear that Bizet intended for Carmen to bring about her own fate. Her signature aria, "Habanera" compares her to a rebellious bird of freedom, a lawless Gypsy child and boasts that her love belongs to no one man. Her Gypsy Song is full of fire and mischief. But aside from these playful arias, Carmen has serious moments in the opera. Among them is the scene in which she reads the death card. "Toujours, Le Morte" (Always death) is the refrain and the lush lyricism and seriousness of her aria equals to any soprano aria that was in vogue even during Bizet's time. Her final scene, in which she is stabbed by the angry Don Jose, is her best moment. She confronts him with dignity and strength. If she is to die, she will die because she has willed it, in fact, she states it so expressively in the lines "Je sais bien que tu me tueras, mas que je vive ou que je muere, non, non, je ne tu cedarai pas ! (I know that you are going to kill me, but whether I live or I die, no, no, I will never give in to you!) Note her dramatic high register on the words "non, non,". She again asserts her free will when she says to Don Jose "Jamais Carmen ne cedera! Libre elle est nee et libre elle mourra ! (Never will Carmen yield! She

was born free and she will die free!). Kostas Paskalis, a Greek baritone, was overlooked as a fine singer during his time, for he was shadowed by baritones such as Sherril Milnes; but Paskalis is a fine interpreter of Escamillo, full of bravado and masculine energy. His crowning moment is not in "Toreador" but in the duel with Don Jose in the last act. This opera has it all. And I recommend this particular product to those interested in opera for the first time. For opera buffs this is also a treat.

This is a terrific value. Gives you a complete understanding of the opera, libretto and music.

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