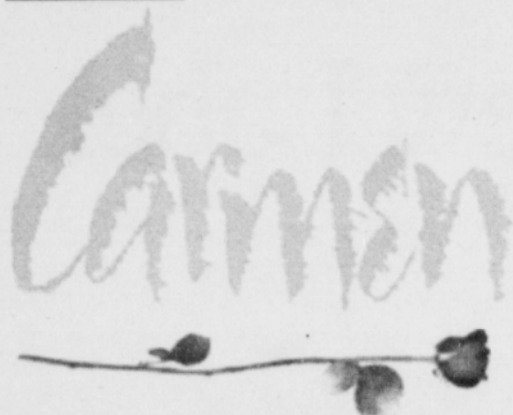


# The Focus



## Portland Opera Opens with Carmen

Portland Opera's 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season opens with a bang as *Carmen* — one of the most beloved and frequently performed operas of all time — ignites the stage. When Bizet's opera first appeared in 1875, it shocked audiences with its blatant sexuality and violence. Today, the story of the willful gypsy and her jealous lover still packs a punch.

"*Carmen* is one of those rare quintessential operas that has it all," says Portland Opera General Director Robert Bailey. "With memorable tunes, a fast moving story line, and imaginative sets by John Conklin who designed *The Cunning Little Vixen* last season. It's a piece that's perfect for both first-time opera-goers and seasoned fans."

*Carmen* is a riveting, tightly woven tale of passion, fate and betrayal. Above all, it is the story of an unforgettable heroine. In a restric-

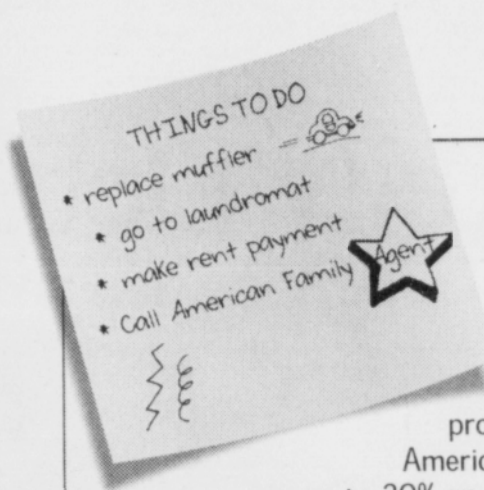
tive society, *Carmen* is a vibrant, defiant woman who makes her own rules. In one of her most famous arias, "The Habañera," she declares that "love is a wild bird that cannot be tamed." *Carmen* herself is a free spirit who would rather risk death than be caged by any man.

The action takes place in Seville in the 1820s. Don Jose, a soldier, is pledged to be married to young Micaela according to his mother's dying wish. Everything changes when he meets *Carmen*, a provocative gypsy who seduces him and leads him into a life of crime. When she discards him for a dashing bull-fighter, Don Jose's passion turns murderous.

*Carmen* combines a dramatic libretto, based on the novel by Prosper Mérimée, with a score written by Bizet at the height of his genius. Even those seeing *Carmen* for the

first time will instantly recognize such celebrated pieces as "The Toreador Song" and "The Habañera" from film and television soundtracks.

Because of the popularity of Bizet's music, his role as a musical innovator is often overlooked. "Bizet was a maverick," says Stage Director James McNamara. "He was willing to break with traditional operatic forms in order to heighten dramatic tension." Today we take Bizet's revolutionary vision for granted, but his unconventional approach put him ahead of his time.



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