

**BIF**  
Buxton  
International  
Festival

**N** Norwich  
Theatre



## LA TRAGÉDIE DE CARMEN

Peter Brook's adaptation of the opera *Carmen* by  
Georges Bizet (1893 – 1951)

Script adaptation by Jean-Claude Carrière  
Score adaptation by Marius Constant

A Buxton International Festival and Norwich Theatre  
Production, with the Northern Chamber Orchestra

Sung in French with English side-titles

First performed in 1981 in the Théâtre des Bouffes  
du Nord, Paris

### DATES & TIMES

Friday 5 July	7.15pm
Tuesday 9 July	7.15pm
Saturday 13 July	7.15pm
Tuesday 16 July	7.15pm

### VENUE

Buxton Opera House

### DURATION

1 hour and 30 minutes

  
**Colwinston**  
CHARITABLE TRUST

THE  
MICHAEL BISHOP  
FOUNDATION

### CREATIVES

Conductor  
Director  
Designer  
Lighting Designer  
Répétiteur

Iwan Davies  
Katharina Kastening  
Bettina John  
DM Wood  
Florent Mourier

### CAST

Carmen  
Don José  
Escamillo  
Micaëla  
Active Narrator,  
Lillas Pastia, Zuniga,  
Garcia

Niamh O'Sullivan  
Elgan Llŷr Thomas  
Steffan Lloyd Owen  
Erin Gwyn Rossington  
Cameron Cook

### ORCHESTRA

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Double Bass  
Clarinet  
Flute/Piccolo  
Oboe/Cor Anglais  
Bassoon  
French Horn  
Trumpet  
Trombone  
Percussion  
Harp  
Piano  
Concert Manager  
Fixing

Winona Fifield  
Paula Smart  
Mike Dale  
Tim Smedley  
Tom Betts  
Daniel Bayley  
Conrad Marshall  
Will Oinn  
Helen Peller  
Naomi Atherton  
Pete Mainwaring  
Tim Chatterton  
John Melbourne  
Angharad Huw  
Tom Pieczora  
Tim Chatterton  
Simon Gilks



## SYNOPSIS

*Seville.* Micaëla, a naive young woman from the provinces, arrives in Seville in search of her childhood sweetheart, José, with a letter from his mother urging him to return home. Just as José is close to being persuaded, he hears Carmen's voice, ultimately tempting him to stay. An argument breaks out between Carmen and Micaëla, which escalates swiftly. Zuniga, José's superior officer, arrives, sees Micaëla wounded and orders José to take Carmen to prison. On their way, Carmen attempts to charm José into letting her escape by promising to meet him at her friend Lillas Pastia's bar. Carmen tricks him and José ends up in the prison cell, whilst she escapes. Zuniga finds José there, mocks, demotes, and then releases him.

*Lillas Pastia's bar.* The barkeeper Lillas Pastia, waiting for his accomplice Carmen, muses on his upbringing and the state of his customers. Carmen arrives with stolen goods, which Lillas Pastia and Carmen begin to sort. Zuniga, who has come to watch Carmen perform at the bar, interrupts them. A disgruntled José arrives, and Zuniga, who at this point is partially clothed, is forced to hide. Carmen performs for José to calm him. José is called back to work, but Carmen persuades him to stay. Zuniga escapes his hiding place, and a fight breaks out between him and José. In a fit of rage, José kills Zuniga. While Carmen and José hastily attempt to hide the body, Escamillo, a well-known bullfighter, enters the bar looking for some fun. Escamillo is immediately taken with Carmen, who enjoys his flattery. José, hot-headed and jealous, starts a fight with Escamillo. Carmen separates them. Before leaving, Escamillo invites Carmen to his next performance.

*Carmen's home.* José, having killed 'for Carmen', now feels she owes him and that he has a right to her. Carmen, feeling guilty and trapped, partakes in a special ceremony to unite them. After the ceremony, Garcia, Carmen's husband – whose existence was unknown to José – appears. The two men challenge each other. Garcia dies at the hands of José. Carmen turns to card reading in a desperate attempt to understand her fate. Micaëla returns in search of José but finds only Carmen. This time the two women take comfort in each other and bond. José reappears, distraught after having killed twice now. He knows he must flee. Carmen rejects him and chooses to be with Escamillo.

*Outside the arena.* José intercepts Carmen at Escamillo's fight. He tries to persuade her to start a new life with him. She refuses, although she is aware that by rejecting him, she is putting her life in danger. Even after Escamillo dies post-bullfight, Carmen rejects José's offer again, knowing that this time her refusal will have fatal consequences.



## FEMME FATALE



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Peter Brook's reimagining of Bizet's popular opera *Carmen* condenses the grandeur of the original into an intimate theatrical experience. Bizet's score has been cut, the orchestra reduced to 14 pieces, and only four singing roles remain: Carmen (a 'seductress'), Don José (a corporal), Escamillo (a toreador) and Micaëla (José's childhood sweetheart). There are also three speaking roles: Zuniga (José's superior officer), Lillas Pastia (a barkeeper) and Garcia (Carmen's husband). In Bizet's opera, Lillas Pastia is merely mentioned, and Garcia does not exist. Brook incorporated Garcia from the original story – Mérimée's novella *Carmen*.

As Brook uses Bizet's music, one cannot help but compare the two. It is important to note, however, that *La Tragédie de Carmen* should not be seen as a substitute for Bizet's opera. Just as *La Bohème* and *Rent* or *Manon* and *Manon Lescaut* respectively tell the same story, each version offers different perspectives and insights.

This production focuses on the exploration of Carmen's behaviour and the reasons that ultimately lead to femicide. Using Brechtian techniques and deliberate stereotyping – demonstrating how Carmen's position in society, seen through the pervasive male gaze, compels her to adjust her behaviour as a form of survival – we subvert the typical 'femme fatale' narrative usually associated with this character. The 'active narrator', who observes and initiates action on stage, serves as a physicalisation of our investigation into the 'femme fatale' stereotype.

What exactly is a 'femme fatale'? Where does this overly sexualised, one-dimensional ideal come from? Its origin lies in 19<sup>th</sup>-century French literature, but the diabolical-yet-desirable female archetype can be found in literature throughout history (e.g. Circe from Homer's *Odyssey* and Eve the 'source of original sin'). Carmen is often depicted as the quintessential 'femme fatale' – a 'g\*psy temptress', 'seductress', and 'siren' whose main aim it is to wreak havoc upon society and ruin righteous men. Mérimée's *Carmen* belongs to a genre of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century French literature I call 'cautionary tales for promising young men'. Another prominent work in this vein is Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*. In both, once hopeful young men now in ruins, recount their ordeals with a 'femme fatale'. The protagonists' survival is intricately linked to the seductress' downfall. The life that is 'lost' is that of the young man, despite it being the woman who forcibly meets her end. These stories mask themes of violence against women as tales of young men's redemption through an act of self-defence. The blame for the murder is thus shifted onto the female victim – portrayed as guilty for not returning affection. Notably, before José murders Carmen in Mérimée's novella, he tells her that her death is her own fault because '[c]'est tui qui m'as perdu' (it is you who has ruined me).

It is José's fixation on Carmen and the choices he makes as a result of this obsession that ultimately lead to his downfall. Carmen is not simply a shallow woman who disregards all around her. Her story is darker and much more complex. Meet a Carmen you may not have seen before, and try to understand her behaviour from a new perspective.

**Katharina Kastening**



**IWAN DAVIES**  
*Conductor*

Iwan Davies trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the National Opera Studio in London. He was a staff conductor at the Salzburger Landestheater, where he conducted performances of *La Gazzetta* (Rossini), *The Trial* (Glass), *Wiener Blut* (Strauss) and *My Fair Lady* (Lerner/Loewe). Most recently he conducted *The Land of Might-Have-Been* (Ivor Novello) and *Viva la Diva* (Donizetti) at the Buxton International Festival, *La Bohème* and *The Golden Cockerel* (Rimsky-Korsakov) for the English Touring Opera, and a recording of Gareth Glyn's Welsh-language opera *Un Nos Ola Leuad*, with the orchestra of Welsh National Opera. A champion of Welsh music, he has commissioned and performed new works from Claire Victoria Roberts, Pwyll ap Siôn, Gareth Olubunmi Hughes, David Roche, Sarah-Lianne Lewis and Mared Emlyn. Future plans include a new work by Conor Mitchell for Music Theatre Wales.



**KATHARINA KASTENING**  
*Director*

Katharina Kastening is a multi-award-winning German opera and theatre director. She was recently awarded the 2022/2023 'Grand Prix' – best production of the year – by Le Syndicat de la Critique, for her production of *Manru* at Opera National de Lorraine and the 2022 'FAUST Perspektivpreis' for her production of *Manru* at Oper Halle. Further directing credits include *Der Karneval der Tiere* (Oper Frankfurt), *Der Goldene Drache* (Oper Halle), *Brontë* (Grimeborn Opera Festival), *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Theater an der Wien), *Kluge/Zar* (Oper Frankfurt), *Daphnis et Chloë* (Opera Northern Ireland) and *Rodrigo for Children* (Händel Festspiele Göttingen). Kastening holds a BA in Drama and Theatre Studies from Royal Holloway, University of London and an MA in Text and Performance, specialising in directing, from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and Birkbeck, University of London, with a focus on racism, BAME art, and culture and identity in the performing arts.



**BETTINA JOHN**  
*Designer*

Bettina John is an award-winning, international freelance set and costume designer. She studied fashion design and photography in Germany and later Image and Communication at Goldsmiths University of London. Her first design experience was in the field of contemporary dance and for several years she collaborated with dance artists from the vibrant London scene, such as Arthur Pita, Ben Duke, Tony Adigun and Avant-garde Dance. After completing a Masters Degree in Theatre Design at Wimbledon College, London, she worked predominantly in musical theatre, specifically opera. The production of *Rape of Lucretia* (2018, Arcola's Grimeborn Festival London) won the team an Off-West-End Award for best opera production. Since then, she has worked on opera productions in the UK, Germany, South Africa and Russia.





## DM WOOD

### Lighting Designer

Works include designs for the Royal Opera House, Garsington Opera, Santa Fe Opera, The Norwegian National Opera, Grand Théâtre de Genève, the Stuttgart Ballet, Bayerische Staatsoper, The Royal Danish Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Opera Di

Firenze, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Greek National Opera, Northern Ireland Opera, Opéra National de Lorraine, Opéra Orchestre National Montpellier, Opéra National du Rhin and The Bolshoi. Ms Wood received the UK's 2012 Knight of Illumination Opera Award for her design of *Suor Angelica* (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden).



## FLORENT MOURIER

### Répétiteur

French pianist Florent Mourier is based in London. He specialises in vocal repertoire (art song and opera) and is in demand as a recitalist and a vocal coach. Florent has played at the Wigmore Hall, the Barbican Hall, Milton Court, St John's Smith Square in

London, the Holywell Music Room at the Oxford Lieder Festival, Festival d'Aix and Fondation Royaumont in France, Brussels' La Monnaie, Classix Festival (Romania), Utrecht's Tivoli Vredenburg and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw in the Netherlands. Florent regularly works for the Guildhall School of Music, the National Opera Studio and the Jette Parker Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.



## NIAMH O'SULLIVAN

### Carmen

Irish mezzo-soprano Niamh O'Sullivan, praised for her 'bewitchingly beautiful, dark vibrant voice' (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*), studied at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin under Veronica Dunne. Following her studies, she joined the Opera Studio at

the Bayerische Staatsoper from 2016 to 2018. In the 2023/2024 season Niamh sings Wellgunde in the new Barrie Kosky's production of *Das Rheingold* at the Royal Opera House, and Wellgunde in both *Götterdämmerung* and *Das Rheingold*, and Mercédès *Carmen* at Opernhaus Zürich. For 2023-2025, Niamh has been named a BBC New Generation Artist, during which time she will have opportunities to debut at major recital venues, including the Wigmore Hall, and partake in several recording projects.



## ELGAN LLŷR THOMAS

### Don José

Elgan Thomas is a former English National Opera Harewood Artist and a former Scottish Opera Emerging Artist. His engagements include First Noble of Brabant *Lohengrin* (Royal Opera, London), Dr Richardson *Breaking the Waves* (Opéra Comique),

Lysander A *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Nemorino *L'Elisir d'amore* and Rinuccio *Gianni Schicchi* (Scottish Opera), Count Almaviva *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Opéra National de Bordeaux and Théâtre des Champs-Élysées), Duke of Mantua *Rigoletto* (Opera Holland

Park) and both Cassio *Otello* and Steuermann *Der Fliegende Holländer* (Grange Park Opera). Current engagements include Gérard *Lakmé* (Chelsea Opera Group), Count Almaviva *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Opera Holland Park), Prunier *La Rondine* (Opera North) and Tom Rakewell *The Rake's Progress* (Swedish Chamber Orchestra). His recordings include *Unveiled* with Iain Burnside and Craig Ogden on Delphian.



## STEFFAN LLOYD OWEN

### Escamillo

Steffan Lloyd Owen studied at the Royal Northern College of Music and Drama, Manchester. His prizes include the W. Towyn Roberts Scholarship 2018 and Blue Riband Osborne Roberts Memorial Prize 2016. Operatic roles include Sciarone /Jailer

*Tosca* (Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod), Brundibar *Brundibar* (Welsh National Youth Opera), Lord Hate-Good *Pilgrim's Progress*, Ser Amantio Di Nicolao *Gianni Schicchi* and George Jones *Street Scene* (RNCM), Y Brenin *Cyfrinach y Brenin*, Guglielmo *Così Fan Tutte*, Zaretsky *Eugene Onegin* and El Dancaïro *Carmen* (Opra Cymru). Recent concerts include Mozart *Requiem* in Rennes conducted by Grant Llewellyn (L'Orchestre National de Bretagne). Next Season Steffan joins the International Opera Studio at Zurich Opera.



## ERIN GWYN ROSSINGTON

### Micaëla

Welsh soprano, Erin Gwyn Rossington recently made her debut as soloist for Play Opera Live with Welsh National Opera. A regular on the competition platform, she won International Voice of the Future at Llangollen Eisteddfod, the Elizabeth Harwood Memorial

Prize at the RNCM, the Towyn Roberts Scholarship at the Eisteddfod and was finalist for the Vinceró competition in Verona. Erin sang La Feé in Viardot's *Cendrillon* (Buxton International Festival) and Fiordiligi *Così Fan Tutte* with Opra Cymru. She performed 'Cân y galon' at the Gower Festival with the Carducci Quartet. She made her debut as Ina in *TIDE* for Aldeburgh Festival and performed Lady Billows *Albert Herring* (Clonter Opera) in 2022.



## CAMERON COOK

### Active Narrator, Lillas Pastia, Zuniga, Garcia

Cameron Cook is an actor and writer, having staged his own work at Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Soho Theatre. More recently, he made his television debut in Guy Ritchie's *The Gentlemen* on Netflix.