

Georges Bizet – Carmen (Karajan) [1971]

Written by bluesever

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A1 Act I (Part 1) B1 Act I (Conclusion) C1 Act II (Part 1) D1 Act II (Conclusion)
D2 Act III (Part 1) E1 Act III (Conclusion) E2 Act IV Leontyne Price – soprano
Franco Corelli – tenor Mirella Freni – soprano Robert Merrill – baritone Monique Linval –
soprano Genevieve Macaux – mezzo-soprano Jean-Christophe Benoit - baritone Maurice
Besancon – tenor Bernard Demigny - baritone Frank Schooten - bass Vienna Boys' Choir
Vienna State Opera Chorus Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra Herbert von Karajan - conductor
Date of Recording: 1963

This studio recording could almost pass for the soundtrack to a film version of the opera Carmen. It is treated as grand opera in the Italian manner. Karajan conducts his Vienna forces, Leontyne Price is Carmen, Franco Corelli is Don Jose, Robert Merrill is Escamillo and Mirella Freni is Micaela. Detractors constantly bash tenor Franco Corelli's sloppy French diction and inadequacy as Don Jose, but I find his performance sexy, masculine, passionate and dark. His Don Jose is a man driven to jealousy and obsession and it SHOWS in every note Corelli sings. Fans of Franco Corelli will definitely enjoy this performance. He had previously recorded Don Jose with Giuletta Simionato as Carmen. Corelli is a fine Don Jose so stop bashing him please. I find his performance nuanced and well-characterized dramatically even if vocally he may lose to the likes of Mario Del Monaco, Placido Domingo and Jon Vicker's Don Jose.

Leontyne Price is in terrific vocal shape and she oozes sensuality and sexiness in every line. Her voice is husky and borderline alto. If I didn't know that Leontyne was a soprano I would have first bought her as a mezzo soprano, the proper vocal range for Carmen. From the Habanera, through the dramatic scenes involving contrabandiers, and her final scene with Don Jose, she is Carmen all the way, and she takes her place with all the famous Carmens of the past- Rosa Ponselle (who was also a soprano) Rise Stevens, Giuletta Simionato, Fedora Barbieri, Marilyn Horne, Grace Bumbry, Shirley Verrett, Tatiana Troyanos and even Maria Callas (soprano too!). Later on soprano Jessye Norman would most resemble Leontyne Price when singing Carmen.

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Baritone Robert Merrill is a masterful and hot Escamillo. The detractor/critic bashing him by saying he sounds too "American" doesn't know what he's saying. What does that mean ? The most illustrious opera singers have turned out to be Americans- Leontyne Price, Marilyn Horne, Shirley Verrett, Beverly Sills, Carol Vaness, Debora Voight and Renee Fleming. In the male side, Sherill Milnes, Richard Tucker, and Samuel Ramey have achieved stardom as American opera singers. Robert Merrill is doing a terrific job as Escamillo, providing the role with machismo and bravura appropriate to the character and moreover, providing the role with rich lyric timbre. Don't hesitate to own this recording. It is a priceless recording and even if you don't care for the technique and style of singing and conducting of the score, purchase it for love of the brilliant principal singers- Leontyne Price as a HOT Carmen, Franco Corelli as an equally hot Don Jose, Robert Merrill as Escamillo and a radiant Mirella Freni as the innocent but passionate Micaela. ---Rudy Avila, amazon.com

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