



Carmen: Synopsis

ACT I

A squadron of soldiers lounge around the guard house. Micaëla, a young country girl, enters the square in search of her friend, the Corporal Don José. The guards tease her and eventually tell her to return later when Don José is on duty. Micaëla leaves. Don José arrives as part of the new detachment when the guard changes. He and the other guards watch as the cigarette girls enter the square

for their break. The guards wonder where Carmen is and she enters. She sings an Habañera, a sensual song which warns the men who flock about her to beware falling in love with her. One man is not paying attention to her: Don José. Carmen taunts him and throws him a flower before returning to the factory. Don José is suddenly and fatally attracted to her.

Larisa Kostyuk as Carmen and Atilla B. Kiss as Don José in Carmen (COC, 2005). Photo: Michael Cooper



Micaëla returns to find Don José. She has for him a message from his mother, with a kiss, both of which she shyly delivers. The letter advises Don José to marry Micaëla, which he decides to do, despite his sudden attraction for Carmen.

Micaëla leaves and a fight breaks out in the factory. Carmen and another factory worker have come to blows. Don José is sent in to arrest her. Carmen is tied up to be taken away to prison, but she promises Don José that if he helps her escape she will take him as her new lover. He cannot resist Carmen's charms, and loosens her bonds, allowing her to knock him over and escape.

ACT II

The setting is Lillas Pastia's tavern, a couple of months later. Carmen and the other gypsy girls are dancing. Zuniga, Don José's senior officer, explains that Don José, who has been imprisoned for two months for allowing Carmen to escape, has just been released. The toreador Escamillo enters with his entourage, and in the revelry, he and Carmen take notice of each other. The tavern closes and two gypsy smugglers, Le Dancaïre and Le Remendado, ask Carmen and her two gypsy friends, Frasquita and Mercédès, to join them in the mountains, as they would be useful in distracting any guards they come across. Carmen refuses. She's waiting for Don José. The others leave and she is alone.

Don José enters and Carmen dances for him, seductively trying to persuade him to join her in a free life of smuggling in the mountains. He finds it hard to resist her, but knows that he must respond to the bugle call back to barracks. She angrily accuses him of not loving her enough. Suddenly Zuniga enters, in search of Carmen, and orders Don José back to barracks. Don José is consumed by jealousy and he strikes his superior officer. The other gypsies return and tie up Zuniga. Now Don José has no choice but to desert the army. He must join Carmen and the gypsies in the mountains.

ACT III

In the mountains the smugglers are busy at work. Carmen and Don José begin to quarrel. His regret for what he has lost irritates her. It is apparent that she is already tiring of Don José. Carmen, Frasquita and Mercédès read their futures, but all Carmen sees in her cards is death, for her and for Don José. The gypsies gather their contraband and leave Don José behind to guard camp.

Micaëla appears in search of Don José. She sees him in the distance taking aim at a target. She hides as Escamillo, the toreador, enters. He has come to find Carmen to take her away with him. Again, overpowered with jealousy, Don José fights with Escamillo. Having heard the gunshot, the gypsies return to break up the fight.



Atilla B. Kiss as Don José and Larissa Kostiuk in the title role of Carmen (COC, 2005). Photo: Michael Cooper.

Micaëla pleads with Don José to return with her to his mother. Carmen, wanting him out of her life, tells him he'll never fit into the gypsy way of life, and encourages him to leave with Micaëla. Don José stubbornly refuses, not wanting to leave Carmen with Escamillo, but is convinced to when he learns that his mother is dying. He and Micaëla leave.

ACT IV

It is the day of Escamillo's great bullfight and the parade to the arena ends with Carmen at his side. They declare their love for each other before separating. The other girls warn Carmen that Don José is looking for her but she refuses to run away from him. The crowd enters the arena and Carmen is left alone outside. Don José approaches her and begs her to return to him. Carmen refuses and exclaims that she no longer loves him, no matter what he may offer her. She proclaims her love for Escamillo, and tells Don José that she knows he will kill her. She still tries to evade him, but, enraged with jealousy, Don José charges at her and kills her with a dagger. The crowd inside the arena cheers the victorious Escamillo as he, in turn, kills the bull.