



Carmen

USA 1915

The audience present at the premiere of Georges Bizet's new opera CARMEN in 1875 was rather taken aback by the female lead who, even by Parisian standards, was deemed too modern and unconventional. Thirty years earlier, the author of the Carmen novella, Prosper Mérimée, had not fared much better, with critics referring to his book as a scandal.

Today, both Mérimée's novella and Bizet's opera rank among the outstanding works of western cultural history, and the story has spawned numerous retellings and film versions. In the 1910s, both in Europe and the USA, a number of filmmakers adapted the theme, among them Raoul Walsh (1915), Charlie Chaplin (1915) and Ernst Lubitsch (1918). The film version by Cecil B. DeMille (1915) stands out as an early testimony the merging of two genres: music theatre and film.

The mutual influence and interpenetration of the young film medium and traditional music theatre is illustrated by the fact that the music is based on individual songs. Georges Bizet's original music as adapted by Hugo Riesenfeld is set to the film in the tradition of 'Kinotheckenmusik' (music collections for silent film orchestras, broken down according to subject), thus distinguishing itself from the through-composed film music that was prevalent in the 1920s. The small orchestra line-up also pays tribute to the film accompaniment typical of the 1910s. In contrast to the popular operetta films of the time, Hugo Riesenfeld intentionally adapted the opera without vocals and arranged the respective songs as instrumental pieces.

Cecil B. DeMille's film version of CARMEN led to a greater appreciation of the operetta film medium, particularly in the United States. The success of the cinema production benefited from DeMille's exploitation of the star appeal of Geraldine Farrar, one of the best-known opera singers of the time, who starred in the leading role as Carmen. Geraldine Farrar's realistic performance on the opera stage also had a perceptible influence on many future interpretations of Carmen.

Cecil B. DeMille presents a progressive, modern woman ahead of her times, adding an ironic twist to perceptions of female roles at the turn of the century. Geraldine Farrar's performance displays a confident and seductive woman with provocative sex appeal. The film is approximately one hour long, presenting the story in a concise series of images. With the film music working in close harmony with the visual action, the resulting narrative style stands out for its great clarity.



Director: DeMille, Cecil B.
Music: Bizet, Georges arr. Rothapfel, S.L. & Riesenfeld, Hugo
Cast: Geraldine Farrar, Wallace Reid, Pedro de Cordoba, ...

Compositions:

Georges Bizet, arr. S.L. Rothapfel & Hugo Riesenfeld 1915 Reconstructed by Marco Jovic, adapted by Frank Strobel
small orchestra

stafflist

1.0.2.0 – 0.2.1.0 – timp.2perc – pno – strings

Duration

65

sync fps

18