ROYAL BALLET & OPERA

CARMEN

A VISUAL STORY FOR THE RELAXED PERFORMANCE

RP



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Visual Stories are intended to be used by everyone to help with their enjoyment and understanding of a Relaxed Performance.

You can use this information for all performances of Carmen at the Royal Opera House, but some of the information will be more relevant to the Relaxed Performance, which takes place 8 November 2026 at 3pm.

Relaxed Performances are helpful if you are anxious about sitting in one place for a long time or need to access the bathrooms and exits quickly. Our usual House rules don't apply to Relaxed Performances, but this can mean they are noisy and busy.

Please note, Visual Stories contain spoilers. Please do not read if you do not wish to know what happens in Carmen.

Information about the performance

The story of Carmen is told through music, singing and acting. At points in the story some of the characters are upset, angry or scared. Some characters in Carmen are harmed violently. This is part of the performance and has been safely rehearsed.

Guidance:

This production contains a depiction of murder and themes of a sexual nature and violence. There are gunshots in Act I with blank shots fired. These are loud.

Running times:

The performance lasts approximately 3 hours and 5 minutes, including one interval, which occurs after Act II at 1 hour 35 minutes in. These timings are for the Relaxed Performance 8 November 2026 at 3pm.



Act 1 and 2 begins at 3pm.



There will be an interval at 4.35



Act 3 and 4 begins at 5pm



Act 4 ends at 6pm

Information about the stage



This performance takes place on the Main Stage in the Royal Opera House, which is a large, brightly-lit auditorium with red velvet seats and gold decorative details. There is a domed ceiling that is painted blue and gold.

For Relaxed Performances, the House lights will remain on, you should be able to see the faces of people sat around you. The lighting on stage has also been slightly adapted for the Relaxed Performance. For example, in Act 2, the neon pink nightclub lights and the headlights on the van will be dimmed. In Act 4, the grid lighting in the background will also be dimmed.

At the end of the performance all of the lights will come back on and people will begin to leave the theatre. It might feel busy but please take your time, there is no rush.

Information about the music

Carmen is an opera with music which will be performed by opera singers on stage, a chorus and the orchestra, who play from the pit in front of the stage.

You might not be able to see all the musicians from your seat but you will hear the music play. The music can be loud at points, with overlapping sounds.

For this Relaxed Performance, the sounds will be adapted so it is not as loud at other performances. For exmaple, the gunshots in Act 1 will be replaced with a ‘pop’ sound and the firecrackers set off by the children will make one loud bang.

Carmen is sung in French and the libretto – the words sung by the performers – will be translated from French into English and will be displayed on the surtitles screens, which are above the stage or near your seat.

The audience may cheer or clap throughout and this can be unpredictable. In Relaxed Performances there are no rules around being completely quiet so you might hear other people moving or talking around you.

You can wear ear defenders and Front of House staff can lend you some if you require them. They are sterilised between performances.

Before Carmen begins

A member of the cast or crew will come onto the stage to introduce themselves and tell you about the performance. They might talk about the different characters, any adaptions we have made to sound or lighting for this Relaxed Performance or information about the set.

About Carmen

In a remote Spanish town, the free-spirited Carmen declares that any man she loves should beware. But even she is unprepared for what happens when she decides to seduce police officer Don José. Though initially uninterested in Carmen, Don José – against the wishes of his mother and of Micaëla, the woman who loves him – soon abandons his respectable career for a life of danger with Carmen. But she grows weary of Don José's possessiveness, longing to return to a life of independence. When Carmen turns her attention to the celebrated toreador Escamillo, Don José's jealousy and despair threaten to violently erupt.

The main characters in Carmen

Carmen is performed by several opera singers, the chorus and actors. They all perform as characters, in the background, in groups or on their own. These characters might change their costumes in different scenes.

Sometimes a different performer will play the role if the original performer is ill or injured, but the characters will always be in the same costumes.

This is what the characters will look like:



Carmen A fiery, passionate and free woman



Don José A police officer who is in love with Carmen



Zuniga Don José's superior



Escamillo A toreador (bullfighter)



Micaëla Don José's girlfriend, whom his mother wants him to marry



Mercédès Carmen's friend



Frasquita Carmen's friend



Smugglers A group of people Carmen gets mixed up with. They are smuggling alcohol and weapons in the outskirts of the town.



Chorus Various performers who sing and act on stage as factory workers, smugglers and crowds.

Act 1



A group of children run onto the stage playing with toy guns, rifles and catapults. Some of the children start bullying the smaller ones and they run off screaming.



Zuniga, the police officer, comes onto the stage and points his prop gun into the air. He shoots a towards a can on the table and it falls. They are blank shots but are loud.



The children set a firework alight. It is a pyrotechnic effect created by stage crews for the performance, and is safely rehearsed.



Don José comes onto the stage and lights a prop cigarette. Other members of the chorus also smoke prop cigarettes.



A group of women come out of the factory for their afternoon break. Carmen is among them and she sings about love. She throws a flower to Don José and he acts as though he is attracted to her.



Micaëla arrives. He becomes distracted. It is revealed that his mother has asked Micaëla to bring him a message.



Two of the factory workers start to fight and Carmen finds herself involved. One of the workers gets hurt.



Carmen is arrested.



Carmen takes a prop gun from a police officer and shoots it twice into the air.



Carmen seduces Don José and he lets her free. Zuringa is furious that Don José lets Carmen get away.



There is a slow blackout and the curtains close marking the end of Act 1. Stage crews will briefly set the stage for Act 2 while the curtain is closed. The audience may cheer.

Act 2



The stage is set to appear as a vivid nightclub. It is a month after the brawl and Carmen's arrest.



A group of weapons smugglers want Carmen and her friends to help them on a job that evening, but Carmen refuses. Don José had been arrested for letting Carmen go and she knows that he has been released and will come to her.



Mercédès, Frasquita and Carmen are in the nightclub. They are drinking from bottles and dancing provocatively.



In the nightclub, Escamillo boasts about how exciting his life as a bullfighter is.



Carmen and Escamillo talk and act as though they are attracted to one another.



A van is driven onto the stage with its headlights pointing towards the audience. In it are the weapons smugglers. They convince Carmen to join them



Don José and Carmen dance intimately. She removes her clothes to her underwear.



They are interrupted by a call for Don José to return to headquarters and Carmen mocks him. Don José sings of his love for Carmen and how he kept the flower she gave him when they first met.



Zuniga arrives looking for Carmen and Don José attacks him in a jealous rage. They fight outside the nightclub.



The weapons smugglers break up the fight and take Zuniga as a hostage. Don José joins them with Carmen.



There is a slow blackout and the curtains will close. There will now be a 25 minute interval before Act 3.

Act 3



The stage opens with the smugglers' shed in centre stage. It is three weeks after Zuniga's kidnapping.



The van is driven onto the stage with its headlights on.



Don José smokes a cigarette and holds a prop gun. Mercédès and Frasquita enter the stage and pass a bottle to Carmen who drinks from it.



The smuggling container revolves on the stage platform, revealing bottles of alcohol being illegally stored. The chorus stack various prop guns and bottles into boxes.



Don José and Carmen are fighting. Carmen sings about losing her love for him and says he should return to his mother.



Carmen, Mercédès and Frasquita take out tarot cards for a reading. Carmen's card reveals death.



Micaëla, who has followed José to the smugglers' hideout, hides when José challenges an intruder. The intruder is Escamillo, looking for Carmen.



Don José and Escamillo fight. They are separated by the smugglers. Don José uses a prop knife in this fight, lunging towards Escamillo. This is part of the performance, is rehearsed and cast and crew are safe.



Escamillo invites Carmen to his next bullfight as he leaves.



Micaëla comes out from hiding and tells Don José that his mother is dying. He leaves with her.



There is a slow blackout for a moment and the curtains will close as crews set the stage for Act 4.

Act 4



The stage is set with lots of children cheering and screaming for Escamillo, who is preparing for his bullfight.



Carmen is with her friends and the smugglers.. Mercédès and Frasquita warn Carmen that Don José is waiting for her outside.



Carmen waits for Don José and tells him that their relationship is over. He begs her not to end their affair.



He expresses anger and jealousy.



He grabs Carmen and puts her into a headlock, dragging her to the ground.



He enacts strangling Carmen with his hands around her neck. Her body goes limp and she dies. This is part of the performance, has been rehearsed safely and no performers have been harmed.



There is a slow blackout. The lights in the auditorium will come on fully and the cast will take their bows. This can be noisy with people cheering and clapping.

Sensory Highlights

Sound:

There are gunshots in Act I. These are blank shots fired from a prop gun and are loud. These are adapted for the Relaxed Performance so only a ‘pop’ sound is made.

The music is performed by opera singers on stage, the chorus and the orchestra who play from the pit in front of the stage. Sometimes the music and singing is layered and can be loud.

Lighting:

In Act I, pyrotechnics are used to create fireworks, they are made by stage crews and are controlled.

In Act II, a van is driven onto the stage with its headlights facing the audience. This is adapted for the Relaxed Performance so it is not as bright.

Prop cigarettes are smoked throughout and the smoke is made by stage crews and is controlled.

Content:

This production contains a depiction of murder and themes of a sexual nature and violence.

Throughout the performance, there are scenes of fighting between different cast members, sometimes this is with weapons such as guns and knives.

There is a depiction of murder by strangling.

There are some scenes of a sexual nature where characters enact mild sexual acts.

Image Credits for Carmen

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