Bizet’s *Carmen*: Musical, Theatrical, and Social Perspectives Syllabus

**Instructor**  
Brian Oberlander

**Email**  
ober@uchicago.edu

**Modality**  
Remote learning

**Quarter**: Autumn 2023  
**Start – end date**: November 11, 2023  
**Session day/time**: Saturday, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm CT  
**Course Code and Section**: HUAS78081 23A1

**Course Overview**

This one-day course offers learners an interdisciplinary view of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* (1875), inviting them to consider the opera in its musical, theatrical, and social contexts. From the libretto’s complex relationship with Prosper Mérimée’s 1845 novella to the score’s irreverent borrowings from Afro-Cuban dance music, *Carmen* presents the curious spectator with invigorating questions of style and sources.

We start by placing *Carmen* alongside Mérimée’s novella, Bizet’s other stage works, the conventions of *opéra-comique* as a genre, and the Opéra Comique as a venue in late nineteenth-century Paris. Bizet and his librettists were also working with a fraught fund of clichés that derived from Carmen’s status as a Spanish Gypsy—a figure deeply implicated in Orientalizing visions of Romani communities, women, and Spain. In that light, we discuss *Carmen* as reflecting volatile perspectives on race, gender, and national identity that were circulating in Bizet’s Paris.

The course features moments of guided listening and viewing, including a final section devoted to interpreting key numbers from the opera via discussion of music, libretto, and staging in several iconic productions.

**Recommended Reading and Multimedia**


*Additional recommended multimedia, including video and libretto, provided by email or LMS

**Accessing remote courses**

Remote courses are taught through our Canvas platform. Approximately two weeks before your class begins, we will add you to your canvas site using the email address you provided at the time of registration. An invitation will then be sent to that email. Click the “Get Started” button in the email to begin the Canvas login process. For step-by-step instructions, please visit https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/academic-programs/online/learning-resources/liberal-arts. Once you’ve created your Canvas account, you can access any Graham School canvas course for which you are registered at: https://canvas.uchicago.edu.

**Accessibility information**

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class session at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.

**UChicago CARES Statement:**

The University and its faculty are committed to creating a safer and more inclusive learning environment for all students. At the University, all faculty, staff, graduate student instructors, and teaching assistants are considered “Individuals with Reporting Responsibilities” and are required to let the University’s Title IX Coordinator know about any disclosures they receive from students about experiences of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment). This includes disclosures of experiences that happened before their time at the University. This is to ensure that all students who have experienced sexual misconduct receive support, options, and information about their rights and resources. Students are not obligated to respond to this outreach, and this will not generate a report to law enforcement.

For more information, please see this handout for students as well as the University’s Policy on Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct and Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment. You can also reach out directly for services and support from the Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support by emailing titleix@uchicago.edu.

If you, or another student you know, wishes to speak to a confidential resource who does not have this reporting responsibility, please contact the Sexual Assault Dean on Call through the UChicago Safe App or at 773.834-HELP.

Questions? Contact Zoë Eisenman at zme1@uchicago.edu.