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19 Flamenco and the 'Hispanicisation' of Bizet's *Carmen* in the Belle Époque

MICHAEL CHRISTOFORIDIS AND ELIZABETH KERTESZ

For over a century flamenco has been closely associated with productions of *Carmen* around the world, and it has become commonplace to perceive aspects of flamenco in Bizet's score. Yet this nexus developed only gradually during the first three decades of the opera's existence. During the Belle Époque the rise of flamenco and its global recognition occurred almost in tandem with *Carmen*'s establishment in the international operatic repertory.

Bizet's gypsy protagonist expresses herself through song and dance, and she is typically depicted as a flamenco performer, but flamenco as we recognise it today was largely unknown to the composer. None of the song and dance forms employed by Bizet can be classified as flamenco, an art form that was just coalescing in Spain when *Carmen* was created. The Parisian public had caught glimpses of this new style in some of the dance spectacles of the Second Empire – particularly in the evolving Orientalisation and gypsification of dance styles from the *escuela bolera* – and through the travel writings and images of Spain being disseminated in the 1860s and 1870s.

Seville, the setting for much of the opera, was also crucial to the development of modern flamenco. The rise of *cafés cantantes*, especially following the establishment of Silverio Franconetti's first café in 1870, were crucial to flamenco's professionalisation and dissemination. They provided a staged commercial setting for the integration and development of song (*cante*), dance (*baile*) and guitar playing/instrumentation (*toque*) and the evolution of flamenco's musical forms (*palos*). Leading flamenco historian José Blas Vega has categorised the 1880s and 1890s as the golden age of the *cafés cantantes* in Spain.[1] The tripartite structure of this chapter employs the conceit of offering different perspectives on the intersection of *Carmen* and flamenco in the Belle Époque, loosely framed around the basic elements of the art form: *toque y palos*, *baile* and *cante*.

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[1] José Blas Vega, *Los cafés cantantes de Sevilla* (Madrid: Cinterco, 1987).

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Toque y Palos: Bizet's Pre-Flamenco versus Madrid's *Flamenquismo*

In *Carmen*, Bizet alludes to a number of song styles that form part of the pre-flamenco era of the *género andaluz*, which in turn nourished and informed some of the flamenco *palos*. These *género andaluz* styles include the *polo* (and to a lesser extent the *seguidilla* and *habanera*). But, in a process that had parallels with the evolution of flamenco music and dance, Bizet dramatised and Orientalised elements that he had drawn from the *género andaluz* and other sources in his depiction of Spain.[2] The nexus between *Carmen* and flamenco would be further consolidated by 1900, with Bizet's stylisation of Spanish music being employed as a backdrop for flamenco dance performances, either within the opera or in danced adaptations.

Another musical parallel between the development of flamenco and Bizet's score might be found in the Andalusian cadence. One of the markers of the *género andaluz*, the Andalusian cadence is a stepwise descending chordal progression over a four-note figure or tetrachord,[3] which forms the harmonic basis of a number of *palos* as an ostinato or repeated chord progression. Adapted and transformed in *Carmen*, Bizet presented this progression clearly and dramatically in the midst of the Entr'acte to Act IV (bars 111 to 115), played fortissimo in the orchestra with the descending line emphatically enunciated by the trumpets and trombones. Along with presenting the Andalusian cadence in its original form, Bizet adapted it and placed it into a variety of musical contexts, harmonically in the 'Chanson bohème', and melodically transformed in a chromaticised form as the 'fate' motive.

The guitar or its evocation were also key elements of the *género andaluz*, and the evolution of the instrument and its playing styles would become central to the development of flamenco in the second half of the nineteenth century. Passages of Bizet's score, including the 'Chanson bohème', allude

[2] Locke has clearly demonstrated the Spanish sources drawn upon by Bizet, including *polos* by Manuel Garcia and *habaneras* by Sebastian Iradier. He also argues that Bizet may have referred to a transcription of another pre-flamenco form in the guise of the 'Malagueña' transcribed by P. Lacome in *Echos d'Espagne: chansons et danses populaires*. See Ralph P. Locke, 'Spanish local colour in Bizet's *Carmen*: unexplored borrowings and transformations', in Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist, eds., *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 316–60), p. 320.

[3] This paragraph and the next are based on Michael Christoforidis and Elizabeth Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain: Recasting Bizet's Opera in the Belle Epoque* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 20–3.

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to the guitar's tuning and idiosyncratic harmonic practices. Both the 'Chanson bohème' and the Entr'acte to Act IV also provide examples of Bizet emulating the sonority of the guitar in his refined orchestration, at times through the use of pizzicato strings and the harp. Likewise, the percussive sounds associated with flamenco are brought to the fore in the orchestration of the 'Chanson bohème'. The creativity with which Bizet alluded to aspects of the *género andaluz* was largely lost on Spanish critics, as they tried to come to terms with his score and the issues of Spanish identity that it raised, when it finally arrived in Madrid a dozen years after its Paris premiere.

Carmen made its debut in the Spanish capital during the 1887/88 season, by which time Madrid was in the midst of a wave of *Andalucismo*, with its associated themes of gypsies, bullfights, fiestas and flamenco, all of which are echoed in Bizet's opera. The city's rapid expansion in the latter half of the nineteenth century, combined with processes of industrialisation and modernisation, was accompanied by a reconfiguration of identity in which concepts and customs associated with the southern region of Andalusia became increasingly pronounced. The proliferation of flamenco *cafés cantantes* in 1880s Madrid meant that this art form was at the heart of redefining the character of the city.[4] Flamenco's associations with drinking, violence and an exoticising image of Spain led to the coining of the term *flamenquismo*, and from the late nineteenth century some writers used it as shorthand for Spain's social and moral ills.[5]

The performances of *Carmen* during the 1887/88 Madrid season therefore presented Spanish critics with a quandary as to how they should react to the opera and, more specifically, to Bizet's music. They encountered the opera in two forms: from 2 November 1887 *Carmen* was presented in a Spanish adaptation at the Teatro de la Zarzuela, and from 14 March 1888 the Teatro Real mounted a grand production, sung in Italian.[6] The exotic stereotypes of the libretto, and even the brave attempts of the Spanish adaptor Rafael María Liern to mitigate these for the production at the Teatro de la Zarzuela, were damned:

[4] José Blas Vega, *Los cafés cantantes de Madrid (1846–1936)* (Madrid: Ediciones Guillermo Blázquez, 2006).

[5] Samuel Llano, *Discordant Notes: Marginality and Social Control in Madrid, 1850–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 13–14.

[6] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, 85–117; Kertesz and Christoforidis, 'Confronting *Carmen* beyond the Pyrenees: Bizet's opera in Madrid, 1887–1888', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 20 (2008), 79–110.

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[S]uffice it to say that [*Carmen*] is based on Spanish topics and given the poor estimation of us by foreign writers, that says it all; soldiers, gypsies, *toreros*, tobacco workers, and other flamenco types are drawn into the story.[7]

Greater critical leeway was afforded to the 1888 Teatro Real production, with its Italian text ameliorating the more objectionable stereotypes of the libretto. From the outset, however, critics were more perplexed about how to react to the music.[8] Bizet's dramatic skill and his orchestration were widely acknowledged. More contested was his choice of musical sources to embody his 'Spanish' characters. The rise of flamenco in Spain and the musical representation of the character types found in *Carmen* on the Spanish stage – particularly in the national lyric genre of the *zarzuela* (in both its *grande* and *género chico* manifestations) – became stumbling blocks to broader appreciation of Bizet's score upon its premiere in Madrid. The issue at stake was the kind of music such characters should sing if they were truly Spanish, and the most common answer was folk- or flamenco-inspired musical numbers in line with the broader impact of *costumbrismo* (the realist representation of everyday life and folklore). Bizet's characterisation of the bullfighter was particularly denigrated, no doubt on account of the considerable corpus of contemporary musico-theatrical representations of the art of tauromachy with which it could be compared. One critic went so far as to declare that Bizet would have had to imbibe the climate and culture of Andalusia to successfully execute this characterisation, and that only a Spaniard could really do the topic justice, because 'in this land we all have something of the Andalusian in us. . .and we all hope desperately to be considered *flamenco*'.[9]

The reactions of two key Madrid critics, Antonio Peña y Goñi and Pascual Millán (who wrote under the nom de plume 'Allegro'), illustrate the different approaches to Bizet's score and Spanish identity. Both were also bullfighting *aficionados* who penned articles on the subject. Millán had misgivings about Bizet's musical depiction of Spanish local colour, particularly in Acts II and IV:

To what end has [Bizet] written inspired dances and marches for the bullfight procession, if they were to be performed here, where we have real *cante jondo* [flamenco song forms], *sevillanas* and *pasos dobles*. . . It is French music, very apt for those French

[7] '[*Carmen*] trata de asuntos de España, y dada la mala idea que de nosotros tienen los escritores extranjeros, esta dicho todo: soldados, toreros, gitanos, cigarreras y demás gente flamenco componen el asunto'. M. Corral, 'Espectáculos,' *La Provincia* 1, no. 5, 1887, p. 20.

[8] Mérimée did not receive the same degree of criticism, as his understanding of the Spanish landscape of the 1840s was generally acknowledged.

[9] '[P]orque en esta tierra todos tenemos algo de andaluces y todos nos pirramos. . .por darla de *flamencos*': 'Carmen', *La Opinión,* Madrid, 3 November 1887, p. 3.

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toreros and *demoiselles* tobacco workers painted by Meilhac. But would this music suit real *toreros* and tobacco workers, sung in Spanish and dressed as God decrees?[10]

This type of reaction highlights a curious disjunction in critical attitudes to anachronism. Although they were aware that the action of Mérimée's novella took place in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and therefore condemning the anachronisms in the costumes and set designs of the Teatro de la Zarzuela production, critics such as Millán still censured Bizet for not having made greater use of flamenco and popular forms that evolved only in the second half of the century.

Peña y Goñi, on the other hand, was an ardent defender of Bizet's score, accusing many critics and musicians of being 'accidental amateurs', for whom any 'work with a Spanish plot should consist of an inexhaustible collection of *polos*, *manchegas*, *vitos*, *boleros* and *peteneras*; a species of gypsy *Cosmorama* of 'ayyys', 'Oles' [and the like]'.[11] He also claimed that the Spanish public had no such demands when it came to enjoying other operatic masterpieces set in Spain, such as Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

By the time the opera was performed in Italian at the Teatro Real, in 1888, many of the critics, including Millán, were less dismissive, bowing to the public favour that the opera had secured (and would continue to enjoy). The excellent performance under the baton of Italian maestro Luigi Mancinelli meant that Millán could savour Bizet's orchestral writing, allowing him to revel in the Entr'acte to Act IV as perhaps the most flamenco moment of the opera.[12]

Baile: Generic *Gitane* versus Granadine *Gitana*

Carmen's character is introduced and defined through dance, both Spanish and gypsy in style, from Act I's 'Habanera' to the wild 'Chanson bohème'

[10] '¿De qué sirve que [Bizet] haya hecho bailables inspirados y marchas para el paseo de la cuadrilla, si habían de ejecutarse aquí, que tenemos el verdadero *cante jondo* y las *sevillanas* y pasos dobles. . .?

Es una música francesa, muy apropiada a aquellos toreros franceses y a las *demoiselles* cigarreras pintadas por Meilhac. Pero, ¿iría esa música con toreros y cigarreras de verdad, cantando español y vistiendo como Dios manda?' Allegro, 'En el teatro de la Zarzuela: Cármen', *El País*, Madrid, 3 November 1887, p. 3.

[11] 'No faltarán en Madrid músicos de bajo vuelo y aficionados *per accidens* que tachen á la *Carmen* de poco Española. Para estos señores, una obra de argumento español debería ser colección inagotable de polos, manchegas, vitos, boleros y peteneras; una especie de cosmorama gitano de *¡aaaaays! ¡olés! ¡gorpe!* y *¡venga de ala!*' Antonio Peña y Goñi, 'Teatro Real: Carmen', *La Época*, 15 March 1888, p. 2.

[12] Allegro, 'En el Teatro de la Opera: "Carmen"', *El País*, Madrid, 15 March 1888, p. 3.

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and private dance for Don José in Act II. The authenticity of this local colour was not emphasised in the work's premiere production in 1875, but it was via dance and the protagonist's embodied sensuality that flamenco gradually crept into *Carmen*, until it was synonymous with Bizet's wayward gypsy and projections of the opera's Spanishness. The Spanish song and dance styles that inspired *Carmen* had been disseminated internationally by dance troupes that toured continental Europe, the United Kingdom and the New World. Although the *baile flamenco* may have begun to reach Paris around the time of the 1878 Exposition universelle, it was the Spanish performers in Paris for the Exposition universelle of 1889 who sparked the next wave of the fashion, which would begin to draw *Carmen* closer to flamenco. Seville had long been the touchstone for the sunny image of Spain, and is indeed the setting of several acts of Bizet's opera, but a new sense of ethnographic authenticity was focusing attention on less urbanised gypsy communities, as exemplified by the troupe of gypsy performers from the cave dwellings around Granada who appeared at the Grand Théâtre de l'Exposition. They caused a sensation by recreating the practices of a flamenco *cuadro* in a Spanish tavern for a Parisian audience. Heel-stamping dancers wearing embroidered, fringed shawls (the *mantón de Manila*) were accompanied by guitarists, along with *cante*, *palmas* (hand clapping) and *jaleo* (calls of encouragement and praise). French critics found the dancers' bodies contorted, their movements animalistic, but the disturbing, almost mystical, power of this new style led flamenco to be indelibly associated with gypsies, especially those who hailed from Granada.[13]

At the same time a new generation of young Spanish dancers were gaining recognition in the music halls and *cafés-concerts* of Paris. They combined the charm and sensuality of more familiar forms of Spanish dance with some of the drama and costuming of the new flamenco styles, mediating their primitivising tendencies but still thrilling audiences with heel stamping, provocative back bends and abrupt turns. The Andalusian Carmencita (Carmen Dauset Moreno) and the great courtesan performer (Carolina) la Belle Otero became international stars with this new hybridisation of Spanish style, and they headlined the golden age of music hall in the 1890s, along with countless imitators, as the fashion for Spanish dance raged throughout the Belle Époque. La Belle Otero's many liaisons enabled her to construct a Carmenesque public biography, but Mérimée's gypsy character, made notorious by Bizet's opera, also provided a model for her

[13] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 143–8.

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onstage characters and plots, especially when she graduated to pantomime at the turn of the century. One of her first star vehicles was *Une fête à Séville*, staged at the Théâtre Marigny in October 1900, in a tale of a tragic love triangle set in a world of bullfighters and fortune-telling.[14] The opera itself was adapted for Otero's contemporary Rosario 'la Belle' Guerrero, who specialised in dramatic music hall sketches, often on Carmenesque themes. The dark intensity of Guerrero's mime, coupled with the ability to incorporate a flamenco aesthetic into her palette of Spanish dance, rendered her the ideal star of a ballet version of *Carmen* at London's Alhambra Theatre in 1903. The equally versatile Spanish dancer Maria la Bella took over the title role during the long run, and returned when the Alhambra revived its *Carmen* in 1912, but this time the Spanish authenticity was magnified by the inclusion of a troupe of dancers of the 'Andalusian Flamenco or Gipsy type', led by flamenco legends Antonio de Bilbao and La Malagueñita.[15] This bold move, which shocked some of the Alhambra's habitués, reflected the way flamenco had moved into the mainstream from around 1908, particularly via popular Parisian theatres and music hall spectacles.

Music hall provided a bridge between opera and flamenco as it increased in popularity outside Spain during the Belle Époque. With *Carmen* a fixture of the operatic repertory, companies had to refresh their productions in order to attract audiences season after season, and enlivening the local colour with Spanish dancers (rather than the resident corps de ballet) was a winning tactic. Even in Madrid, the opera's 1887 debut at the Teatro de la Zarzuela featured the renowned *bailaora* Fuensanta Moreno in the 'Chanson bohème', and Barcelona's Tivoli Theatre offered a gypsy dance (*baile de gitanas*) for its 1889 production.[16] Paris caught up in 1898 when Albert Carré's colourful new production at the Opéra-Comique showcased a flamenco troupe led by the noted *bailaora* Trinidad la Gata in Act II (as discussed in Chapter 4), publicised as direct from Granada. By the first decade of the twentieth century it was considered de rigueur to feature Spanish dancers in *Carmen*, and, paradoxically, the 'timeless' authenticity of gypsy culture played best when framed in the latest fashion of

[14] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 252–4; Geraldine Power, 'Projections of Spain in popular spectacle and chanson, Paris: 1889–1926', PhD dissertation (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2013), pp. 51–3.

[15] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 246–9; 'Mr Alfred Moul on the coming "Carmen"', *The Referee*, London, 21 January 1912, p. 4.

[16] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 125–30.

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Spanishness, a space now being invaded by gypsies, flamenco and their 'primitive' culture.

In Spain, even the renowned flamenco performer Pastora Imperio appeared in Act II of *Carmen* at Madrid's Teatro Real in 1918. At the height of her career her fame as a dancer was matched by her skill as a *cupletista*,[17] leading one critic to express the unfounded fear that she would interpolate popular songs from her music hall shows into Bizet's sacrosanct score. Dancing with her usual consummate artistry, she was called to repeat the number to enthusiastic applause and was considered one of the highlights of the production.[18]

But it was not just the dance scenes that carried the allure of the opera's local colour. Célestine Galli-Marié shocked Parisian audiences in 1875 with her mature, provocative sensuality and memorably hip-swaying gait. Possibly the first to realise that Carmen herself had to become a dancer, she took dance lessons in Barcelona during *Carmen*'s premiere Spanish season in summer 1881. The *maestro de ballet* at the Gran Teatre del Liceu is unlikely to have taught her flamenco stylings, but she also copied Spanish fashions by adopting a carnation (rather than rose) for her hair and the kiss curl that became the standard 'look' for Carmens (and stage gypsies) well into the twentieth century.

It was Emma Calvé who claimed authenticity as Carmen on the basis of her direct contact with gypsy culture. Before her 1892 Opéra-Comique debut in the role her study trip to Spain had taken her to Granada, where she took close note of the dress, gesture and customs of the local gypsies, receiving flamenco dance instruction from a certain Lola, especially the distinctive arm movements known as *brazear*. She updated Carmen's appearance by adopting the *mantón de Manila*, and abandoning castanets for a flamenco-inspired shawl dance in Act II.[19] During her season at Madrid's Teatro Real in 1895 (which she cut short rather than perform *Carmen* for a Spanish audience), she took some more flamenco lessons with the famed La Maccarona, who had achieved international stardom in 1889 dancing with the Granadine troupe at the Exposition.[20] As Michela Niccolai has already mentioned in Chapter 4, Georgette Leblanc worked

[17] A *cupletista* was a performer of *cuplé*, a popular style of Spanish theatre song, often risqué, prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century.

[18] J. Fesser, 'Revista de Música,' *El Sol*, 25 January 1918, p. 3; Floridor, 'Notas Teatrales. Real "Carmen"', *ABC*, 26 January 1918, p. 15; A. Barrado, 'Teatro Real. Carmen', *La Época*, 26 January 1918, p. 3.

[19] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 156–62.

[20] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 207–9.

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hard to achieve the same level of authenticity for Carré's new production in 1898, but, despite a dark wig with dramatic kiss curls (see Figure 4.4), extravagant shawls and a swaying walk, all based on personal research in Spain, she failed to convince, and must have suffered by comparison not only with Calvé but also with the Granadine dancers imported for Act II.

It was the transformation of the opera's protagonist into a flamenco *bailaora* on the Parisian stage that enabled La Belle Otero to sing the role at the Opéra-Comique in 1912. This achievement represented the conquest of the opera by a Spanish dancer, who was candid about her own hybridisation of Spanish dance traditions, stating that '[t]he good people [of Paris. . .] accept the flamenco that I think it right to give them'.[21] Otero brought this insouciant attitude to her interpretation of Carmen. Critics noted that she played the part with 'fury' and marked 'Spanish realism',[22] achieving a 'singular local colour'.[23] It was really only the Spanish-born Carmens of the early twentieth century who integrated the dress, movement and vocal inflections of flamenco more fully into the operatic role, recasting it for Hispanic and international audiences alike.

Cante: Flamenco via Verismo

With the proliferation of *Carmen* productions in Spain in the 1890s, a number of singers from the Iberian Peninsula tackled the title role in cities from Barcelona to Seville, but one in particular was recognised as the fin-de-siècle embodiment of flamenco and Carmen's Sevillian *gracia*. This was the soprano Elena Fons, born in Seville in 1873, who would shape the role of Carmen by asserting her authenticity as a birthright and through her engagement with evolving musical and theatrical projections of Andalusian identity. Fons enjoyed an international career in Italian opera, *zarzuela*, popular Spanish song and flamenco, and created a charming Carmen much beloved by Hispanic audiences.

Seville had a thriving musical life in the 1870s, particularly in the decade following the 1874 restoration of Alfonso XII, with a lively operatic

[21] 'The dancing girls of Spain: Otero has found a use for her wealth of jewels', *The Sun*, New York, 19 June 1910, p. 7.

[22] '"The Ring" successful in Paris: Otero as "Carmen"', *Musical America* 16, no. 10, 1912, p. 26. Otero performed Act I of Carmen at a matinee benefit for 'Trente ans de théâtre' at the Théâtre des Variétés in June 1912 and played the title role in a full benefit production at the Opéra-Comique on 21 January 1913.

[23] '[S]ingulière couleur locale': 'Mlle Otéro dans Carmen', *Comœdia,* Paris, 22 January 1913, p. 2.

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programme and a variety of popular styles.[24] These two important facets of Seville's music-making were influential in shaping the career of Elena Fons, and formed part of her earliest training under Enriqueta Ventura de Doménech, with whom she studied piano and voice from the age of ten.[25] Doménech, an *aficionada* of flamenco, imparted this love of flamenco to her pupil.[26]

Fons moved to Madrid and by late 1894 was singing Micaëla at the Teatro Real,[27] a role she was to have sung to Emma Calvé's Carmen in early 1895 (if Calvé had not cancelled). A few months later Fons would make her debut in the title role of *Carmen*, to a highly appreciative home audience at Seville's Teatro de San Fernando. By the early 1900s Fons was known for her Carmen throughout Spain, Portugal and Italy, around Latin America (Cuba, Mexico, Argentina) and even in far-off Saint Petersburg. She also gained a reputation in verismo repertoire, such as *Cavalleria rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*, and works such as Verdi's *Otello*.

As Spanish audiences of the 1890s (and some outside Spain) began to associate Bizet's *Carmen* with verismo, they were alert to the credibility of each new production's local colour, whether in sets, costumes or vocal and dramatic interpretation. In this context, Fons offered a persuasive Carmen for the opera-going public south of the Pyrenees, in sharp contrast to the strategies of contemporary Carmens who channelled the primitive associations of the *gitanas* from the Granada caves when selling their portrayals in northern Europe. Fons played up her status as a true Andalusian, exploiting her familiarity with regional popular song and dance styles born of a multifaceted career, in which she was celebrated for her performances of *zarzuela*, regional song and *cuplé*, and became one of the few opera singers to record as a flamenco artist (see Figure 19.1).[28] By bringing elements of these styles to her impersonation of Carmen, Fons was credited by Spanish and South American commentators as being an opera singer capable of projecting

[24] Andrés Moreno Mengíbar, *La ópera en Sevilla en el siglo XIX* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1998), p. 322. For further exploration of the reception of *Carmen* in Seville and Andalusia and its impact on debates regarding national and regional identities, see Chapter 20.

[25] Doménech was one of the first to publish piano arrangements of *palos* in her collection *Trozos flamencos* (1880), which retained some of the structures and harmonic idiosyncrasies of the flamenco forms. See Guillermo Castro Buendía, 'Las "seguidillas gitanas" y "del cambio" de Enriqueta Ventura de Doménech', *Sinfonía Virtual* 24 (2013), 1–26.

[26] For more information about Elena Fons, see Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 206–12.

[27] *La Crónica del Sport*, Madrid, 31 December 1894, p. 383.

[28] A 1922 advertisement for the recordings produced by the Spanish branch of His Master's Voice (Discos 'La voz de su amo') lists her singing flamenco song beside such stellar flamenco names as Niña de los Peines. '[Advertisement]', *ABC*, Madrid, 21 January 1922, p. 29.

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Figure 19.1 F. G. Fresno, 'Teatro Real. Elena Fons y Julián Biel', *ABC*, 10 March 1908.

the character of a genuine Andalusian woman. She played Carmen with animation and seductive charm, characterised by the peculiarly Sevillian quality of *gracia*, also an Andalusian and even flamenco trait, which inflected every aspect of her performance.

Her 1908 flamenco recordings, made at a time when Fons was still being hailed for the purity of her operatic Desdemona, demonstrate her ability to modulate her voice and style to the more animated, rhythmically dynamic, nasal and guttural sounds of flamenco, without losing her supple lyricism. Lénica Reyes Zuñiga characterises Fons's vocal technique in these recordings as approximating the qualities of popular or flamenco singers of the time, rather than echoing an operatic rendition of popular songs.[29] Fons is also likely to have performed in this flamenco style when singing *saetas* during the Easter processions of Seville in 1897, or *malagueñas* (accompanying herself at the piano) as encores to performances of *Carmen* in Spain.[30]

[29] Lénica Reyes Zúñiga, 'Las malagueñas del siglo xix en España y México: historia y sistema musical', PhD dissertation (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015), p. 337.

[30] Reyes Zúñiga, 'Las malagueñas del siglo xix', pp. 337, 185–6. Reyes Zuñiga refers to other instances of *Carmen* performances in Spain in which Escamillo inserted a *malagueña* after his aria.

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This versatility of style and vocal production is noted in many reviews, such as the following description of an 1898 concert Fons gave in Salamanca, in which she sang arias and duos from *La Gioconda*, by Amilcare Ponchielli, and *Cavalleria rusticana* to great acclaim:

> The echo of the applause had not been extinguished when the *soprano* transformed herself as if by magic into a delightful Andalusian *cantaora* [flamenco singer], with more wit and charm than that contained in all of Andalusia.
>
> The crowd became delirious, with thunderous applause, [shouting] '*Gitana!*'[31]

In her performances of Carmen, Fons applied aspects of these popular styles to performative numbers such as the 'Habanera' and the 'Séguedille', while projecting a heightened dramatic lyricism when required. Her movement and dance in these numbers and in the 'Chanson bohème' were likewise deemed authentic in their reflection of theatrical dance styles associated with Seville. Following Fons's 1899 marriage to Catalan tenor Jaume Bachs,[32] who often played Don José to her Carmen, she performed repeatedly in Barcelona to great acclaim, and her Carmen gained even greater vocal dramatic depth, no doubt mediated by the new wave of verismo performance styles.

The drama and emotion that had characterised verismo from its emergence had found a kind of prototype in Bizet's Carmen as created by Galli-Marié.[33] If the operatic inflection of lower classes in extremis in early verismo could be seen as an appropriation of the southern Italian 'folk', then perhaps flamenco – southern and marginal alike – had become its cultural equivalent in Spain. And it took Fons's contemporary, Barcelona-born Maria Gay, to realise this, sublimating both flamenco and verismo characteristics into an artistically integrated reading of Bizet's gypsy, which earned her accolades for the 'truth' and 'reality' of her interpretation, both within and beyond Spain.[34] Her thoughtful construction of the exoticised protagonist of Bizet's masterpiece drew on her own observation of Spanish-styled entertainment and assimilation of Hispanic dance traditions. Performing Carmen throughout Europe and even at home in Spain, critics

[31] 'No se habia extinguido el eco de los aplausos, cuando la *soprano* se transformó, como por ensalmo, en la salerosa *cantaora* andaluza, con más gracia y más sandunga que encierra toda Andalucia.

Aquello fué el delirio, estruendosos los aplausos, y de todos los labios salía un elogio, que condensamos en esta expresiva frase: ¡Gitana!' 'Teatro del Liceo. Primer concierto de moda', *El Adelanto*, Salamanca, 11 September 1898, p. 3.

[32] Catalan tenor Jaume Bachs performed under the stage name Angelo Angioletti (1862–1909).

[33] Giger, 'Verismo', pp. 301–2.

[34] See Christoforidis and Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain*, pp. 218–33.

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declared her to be Spanish from head to toe, as demonstrated by her costumes and gestures, playing the castanets 'with a virtuosity no other prima donna ever equalled', and, above all, her dance.[35] The eminent Spanish critic Miguel Salvador appreciated the modernity of Gay's reconception of Carmen, noting that, to interpret such a work, one not only 'has to take into account Spanish reality' but also, and perhaps more importantly, that the exotic imaginings of the opera accrue 'new elements that continue to evolve' (see Figure 19.2).[36]

Her understanding of Spanish dance forms is evident from the acute rhythmic sensibility and subtle use of rubato heard on her recordings, which gave momentum and lively energy to her interpretations of the 'Habanera' and the 'Chanson bohème'.[37] Commanding a remarkable vocal range, Gay was notable for the power of her chest voice, and these qualities gave her an expressive palette that allowed her to play with vocal timbre and employ non-sung sounds when the dramatic context demanded it. The 'burnt' sound of the flamenco voice distinguished it from the sweeter tone typical of folk or popular styles of Spanish song (expected of a *cupletista*), and this guttural effect formed part of Gay's stylised evocation of the flamenco voices of her era.

In the late nineteenth century, and in particular after the loss of empire in the wake of the Spanish–American War, the *desastre* of 1898, there was a rise in *antiflamenquismo* (in which *flamenquismo* was related to Spain's moral decline). One of the most noted *antiflamenquistas*, Eugenio Noel, characterised the flamenco voice in the following disparaging manner:

> To sing [flamenco] one needs a very special vocal quality, an exceptional mucous membrane in the throat and artistic taste that is so grotesquely exaggerated and absurd that it reflects. . .voluntary stupidity and tones produced or accompanied by mysterious convulsions.[38]

[35] 'Étranger: Genève,' *Le Monde artiste* 46, no. 7, 1906, p. 106; 'Opera notes from Europe', *The Sun*, New York, 30 December 1906, p. 5.

[36] '[H]ay que tener en cuenta. . .la propia realidad española'; 'sigue integrándose con nuevos elementos que aún se elaboran.' M[iguel]. Salvador, 'Notas del Real: Carmen [II]', *El Globo*, Madrid, 22 November 1909, p. 1.

[37] Maria Gay, *Carmen: Chanson boema* – 'Les tringles' (Bizet), recorded 9 November 1909, HMV, 2–063000; Maria Gay, *Carmen: Habanera; Air des cartes*, recorded 1 December 1910, Columbia, A-5279.

[38] 'Para cantarlas se necesita una calidad de voz especial, una excepcional membrana mucosa en la garganta y un gusto artístico tan grotescamente disparatado y absurdo que refleje. . .una como imbecilidad voluntaria y tonos producidos ó acompañados por misteriosos retortijones.' Eugenio Noel, *Señoritos chulos, fenómenos, gitanos y flamencos* (Madrid: Renacimiento, 1916), p. 264.

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THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, JULY 4, 1908.—11

HAVILAND'S THEATRICAL CELEBRITIES.—No. XVII.: A GREAT CARMEN.

DRAWN BY FRANK HAVILAND.

MARIA GAY.

Maria Gay was due to make her rentrée at Covent Garden on Thursday, July 2, when she was to repeat her magnificent impersonation of Carmen. No more splendid realisation of the passionate Sevillana has ever been seen on the operatic stage. Herself a Spaniard, Maria Gay is the ideal representative of the part.

Figure 19.2 Frank Burty Haviland, drawing of Maria Gay, 'Haviland's theatrical celebrities. No. XVII: a great Carmen', *Illustrated London News*, 4 July 1908. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.

Gay did not aim for verisimilitude in drawing from the vocal characteristics of flamenco, however, instead using her artistic intelligence to create a new blend with her operatic style. When it came to the heightened emotions of the Card

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aria and the Act IV finale, she refracted the visceral approach of the more serious flamenco *palos* (often known as *cante jondo*, or deep song) through the prism of verismo, 'dirtying' her tone and giving vent to sighs, gasps, sobs and even shrieks when sung tones failed her. She extended the heightened vocal drama and use of non-sung exclamations to the finale of Act IV, in which Gay often paired up with her second husband, the great verismo tenor Giovanni Zenatello, to create a devastating and histrionic end to *Carmen*.[39] Through the veristic sublimation of flamenco and a nuanced understanding of a globalised Spanish identity, Gay had created a modernist Carmen that garnered international acclaim in the early twentieth century.

Newspapers and Periodical Literature

London
The Referee

Madrid
ABC
La Crónica del Sport
La Época
El Globo
La Opinión
El País
La Provincia
El Sol

New York
Musical America
The Sun

Paris
Comœdia
Le Monde artiste

Salamanca
El Adelanto

[39] See Giovanni Zenatello, *Carmen: Sei tu?* Final duet part 1; *No, mai Carmen non cedera!* Final duet part 2, recorded 3 December 1930, Victor 7314.

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