



**BIZET**  
He died before his triumph

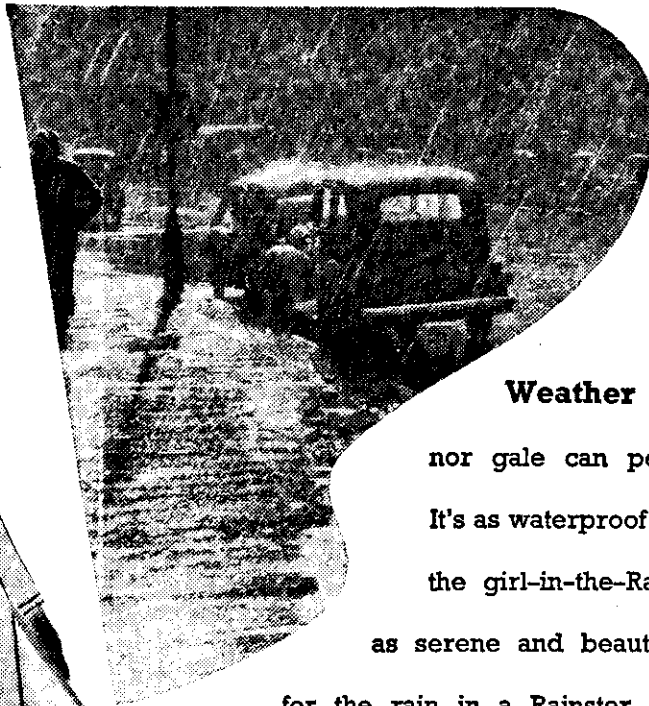
When Carmen throws the flower in his face, "I felt as if I had been struck by a cannon-ball." José is an innocent in exile, and Mérimée does not muddle the situation by giving him a Micaela. José, says an editor of Mérimée's story, throughout "maintains a certain standard of conduct unimpaired. He may become, under force of circumstances, and the stress of his consuming passion, a smuggler, robber, murderer, but he is never a cad."

It is easy to understand why the José and Carmen of the novel have more variety and subtlety. A novelist has much more room for elaboration, and Mérimée was very gifted. In the opera Carmen comes to her death-scene on the arm of her lover Escamillo, who goes into the bull-ring, where he is to be the chief hero of the day. In the book it is very different. The last scene is in a "lonely ravine." It is not so much Carmen's association with Lucas that brings her to her death—that has been a small thing and she says she no longer cares for him—as her refusal to love and live with José. Carmen is a fatalist. "You would kill me; I see it plainly," she says. "It is written. But you will not make me yield." Indeed as a gipsy she admits that José has a right to kill her. José remains an hour or more prostrated by the body before he buries it and rides to Gordova to give himself up. José's narrative is deeply tragic.

#### The Composer

Notwithstanding all this, it was an exceptional libretto that Meilhac and Halévy gave to Bizet. The composer was in his thirties, the traditional good boy of the academies. He pleased his teachers, took part in official competitions, and won distinctions. He was a figure in the musical world. He had many commissions: *Carmen* was one. But Bizet's earlier operas are rarely if ever performed. Newman says "he had written a quantity of beautiful or charming or expressive music without managing to make a good opera out of it all." He lives to-day by *Carmen*, and the music he wrote for Alphonse Daudet's three-act play *L'Arlésienne*. So the librettists must be given substantial credit for the success of *Carmen*. It was first performed on March 3, 1875,

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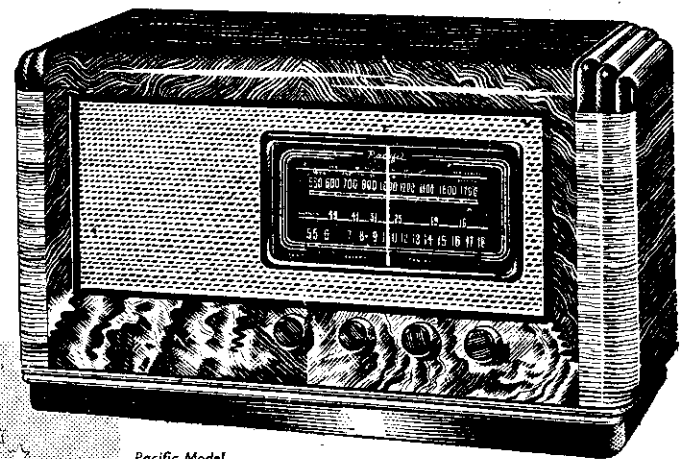
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