

4 : The Heat of the Moment

A. Four Carmens

1. Class title 1 (*Carmen*)
2. Class menu

This class is all about desire: physical rather than romantic love. The topic can be found in all periods and media; hence my first section, a general survey, ranging widely. Then we get a section on verse, all from the 17th century. Then we look at ballet, in the 19th and 20th centuries. After the break, we look at musical examples, from classical to popular. Then we take a trip to Broadway, mostly in the mid-20th century. And we end more or less as we began, with opera—specifically Mozart whose mastery of 18th-century form enfolded an unusually acute understanding of seduction and desire.

3. Section title A
4. Bizet and *Carmen*

I'm sure you recognize the picture, and probably the music too, as coming from *Carmen*, the most famous opera of **Georges Bizet** (1838–75). He died a few weeks after its premiere in 1875, thinking his work had been an abject failure, by no means one of the two or three most popular operas in the world, the position it holds today. I gave a class on it just last week. But I am less interested in music history today, but starting with it because *Carmen* is such an iconic figure. I am going to play you four versions of the character: a song from a little-known musical, a song from Oscar Hammerstein's version of the opera, a clip from a movie of the opera itself, and the opening scene of a ballet. All leading to one question: what aspects of the female psyche do these examples represent, together or singly?

5. All four versions of the *Carmen* character

Steel Pier is a largely-forgotten musical by **John Kander** (1927–) and **Fred Ebb** (1928–2004) that had a limited Broadway run in 1997. The plot is unimportant, but when I heard the quotes from Bizet's *Carmen* in the introduction to the song "Everybody's Girl" sung by **Debra Monk** in the character of **Shelby Stevens**, I knew I had to include her in my *Carmen* gallery

6. Kander and Ebb: *Steel Pier*, "Everybody's Girl"
7. Migenes and Dandridge

My own introduction to opera came in 1954 when, to fill in time between getting off the Belfast boat in Liverpool and catching the train to my boarding school, I went into the only cinema showing a matinee that early in the day. The show was *Carmen Jones*, the adaptation of Bizet's opera by **Oscar Hammerstein II** (1895–1960) set in a military base in the US South. In the musical, as in the opera, *Carmen* has two arias in Act One, the *Habanera* and the *Seguidilla*. Both use popular hispanic dance

forms, but they have different purposes; I'll play them back-to-back to compare them. For the first, **Dorothy Dandridge** as *Carmen Jones* (sung by the then very young **Marilyn Horne**). For the second, I'll turn to the movie of the opera made by **Franco Rosi** in 1984. *Carmen* (**Julia Migenes-Johnson**) has been arrested for wounding another woman in a fight, and Don José (**Plácido Domingo**) is told to escort her to jail. But in this aria, she tries to persuade him to let her escape.

- 8. Bizet: *Carmen*, Habanera (*Carmen Jones*)
- 9. Bizet: *Carmen*, Seguidilla (Rosi film)
- 10. Poster for Carlos Acosta's *Carmen*

In 2015, the Cuban-British dancer **Carlos Acosta** (1973–), whom we saw last week in *La fille mal gardée*, made his farewell to the Royal Ballet, his home for 17 years, with the premiere of his ballet *Carmen*, in which he danced the leading male role—partnering **Marianela Nuñez**, again as in *La fille*. I'll put a clip on the web that features *him*, but just now I will focus on *her* to complete my gallery of Carmens by showing you the first two minutes of the ballet.

- 11. Acosta: *Carmen*, opening
- 12. *Carmen* gallery (repeat)

So now we can discuss. What aspects of the Carmen character did you see in these four clips? The sexual, for sure: the woman who knows she is desired, and knows how to play on that desire. But also I hope the woman claiming her personal freedom, loving on her own terms without regard for convention, not so much promiscuous as proclaiming herself free from ties. That, I think, is the main difference between the **Habanera** and the **Seguidilla**. In the one, she insists on her freedom, with just a hint that sex is part of that freedom. In the other, she is using sex in order to obtain freedom. The Seguidilla is seductive; I am not sure that the Habanera is.

B. Sex in the Seventeenth

- 13. Section title B (Sex in the Seventeenth)
- 14. Portraits of John Donne

We saw **John Donne** (1571–1631) in Class 1 as a religious writer; he was, after all, Dean of Saint Paul's. But he was also once a young man, and his erotic poetry is some of the finest in the language. I'll play just one of them, *To his mistress, going to bed*. Donne is the leading author of a group that Dr. Johnson named the Metaphysical Poets, a term I have never fully understood. But never mind the “meta”; this poem is so gloriously *physical*, full of both *doubles entendres* and graphic descriptions, as the poet (who is naked already himself) removes his mistress's clothes piece by piece. At 18, I found Donne's virtuoso use of prepositions in the couplet “Licence my roving hands, and let them go, Before, behind, between, above, below” unbelievably erotic; as an old man of 85, I still do. The reader is **Iain McGilchrist**.

15. Donne: *To His Mistress, Going to Bed*

16. Robert Herrick

Here's another one about the erotic potential of a woman's clothing. But in *Delight in Disorder*, **Robert Herrick** (1591–1674) is quite prepared to let the lady keep her clothing on (for now). Even a single detail like an untied ribbon is enough to get his imagination going. The reader is **Alan Rickman**.

17. Herrick: *Delight in Disorder*

18. Andrew Marvell

The third in my trio of 17th-century poets is **Andrew Marvell** (1621–78), born three decades after Herrick, who himself came two decades after Donne. His best known poem, *To His Coy Mistress*, might be seen as an expansion of Herrick's famous line, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may." Though less explicit than the Donne, its meaning is equally clear: "Stop putting me off, and let's go to bed." But what is so marvelous is how he frames it in a *lack* of insistence. The reader is **Sir Patrick Stewart**. Let's hear your thoughts on all three poems after this.

19. Marvell: *To his Coy Mistress*

C. Temptation on Tiptoe

20. Section title C (Temptation on Tiptoe)

21. — still from the above

As the music of **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840–93) surely suggests, this *pas-de-deux* from *Swan Lake* (1876) is no happy situation of true love. The villain of the piece, a magician called **Von Rothbart** (the guy in black with the cropped hair) makes a habit of turning princesses into swans. In Act Two, **Prince Siegfried** falls in love with one of them: **Odette**, otherwise known as the White Swan. We are now in Act Three, at the court ball where Siegfried must choose a bride. But Von Rothbart forestalls him by presenting his own daughter, **Odile**, made to look exactly like Odette (performed by the same dancer), only dressed all in black. Once more we have **Marianela Nuñez** of the Royal Ballet, with **Vadim Muntagirov** as Siegfried. I'll play two excerpts. The first is the opening of the *adagio* of their long *pas-de-deux*. A *pas-de-deux* is always a close physical interaction between two partners. As you watch this one, though, I want you to note the details that show how Odile controls of the situation, and how much is due to her manipulation of physical attraction. In short, to what extent is Odile a Carmen? You will note that the real **Odette** appears briefly at the window, but Siegfried is distracted and doesn't notice her.

22. Tchaikowsky: *Swan Lake*, Act III *pas-de-deux* adagio

So how does she maintain control? Principally by that trick known to every woman—when to say no. But also by not dancing as his partner, but calling the shots herself and returning to him only when she needs him. I pointed out before that because ballet is such an intensely physical medium anyway, it is

very difficult to make it clear when physical interaction—sex—is in fact the point. You do not see much in this section of Odile-as-Carmen. But ballet can provide a *metaphor* for sexual domination. It occurs in the final section of this long duet, when Odile comes in and executes the notorious series of **32 fouettés**, unsupported spins on one leg propelled by repeatedly kicking the other out like a whip. It makes no sense at all except as a technical feat, but in terms of Odile displaying her total mastery of her body it is psychologically essential. Mind you, Siegfried is no limp biscuit himself; his mastery of technique is a fine metaphor for sexual excitement. The duet ends soon after this, but keep your eyes peeled for one moment at the very end: Odile's look of triumph when she finally has him at her feet.

23. Tchaikowsky: *Swan Lake*, Act III *pas-de-deux* coda

24. MacMillan: *Mayerling*, DVD

To repeat my earlier point: classical ballet has a well-established language of male-female partnering techniques, including a variety of lifts that, in non-ballet contexts, would be extremely intimate. So if a choreographer needs to establish a more explicit sexual intimacy, or other kind of abnormal situation, he (or she) has to develop that language beyond the classical limits. In 1978, **Sir Kenneth MacMillan** (1929–92), the former Artistic Director of the Royal Ballet, presented a full-length ballet about the apparent murder-suicide in 1889 of **Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria** and his lover, **Baroness Mary Vetsera**, at the Imperial hunting lodge at *Mayerling*. I am going to play the bedroom *pas-de-deux* from near the end of the ballet. It requires such an escalation of language for two reasons: firstly because the relationship between the two (**Stephen McRae** and **Sarah Lamb**) is indeed physical; secondly because both partners know that this is the prelude to a suicide pact. What aspects can you note as going beyond classical convention to make these things clear?

25. MacMillan: *Mayerling*, bedroom *pas-de-deux*

26. — still from the above

What qualities did you note? I really don't need to ask that question; the answer is more than given by the still on your screen. Clearly, this is well beyond the classical vocabulary. I will post a rehearsal sequence on the web in which one person describes the characters as crawling over and through each other's bodies. That, and some of the facial expressions—and the way a real moment of physical intimacy, a kiss, is extended way beyond the time needed for a formal gesture.

27. Poster for *Le Parc*

We may need to cleanse the palate after that. So let me end the hour with a scene from a remarkable ballet, *Le parc*, created in 1994 by French-Albanian choreographer **Angélin Preljocaj** (1957–). Set to piano concerto movements by **Mozart**, it is a kind of *Liaisons Dangereuses* scenario, showing various aspects of love, set in a formal French garden. What begins as gavottes and minuets by figures in court costume gradually extends to something altogether more elemental and—surprise—purer. Here is part of the closing *pas-de-deux* with the dancers in period underwear and virtually timeless. I have only two comments: this is indeed a love-song-for-two, and it is without any overtones of manipulation.

28. Preljocaj: *Le parc*, *pas-de-deux*

29. Class title 2 (still from the above)

D. Goethe's Gretchen

30. Section title D (Faust and Gretchen)

31. Statue of Faust and Gretchen at the *Goethehaus* in Frankfurt

I had intended to do a bunch of songs, old and new, all women describing the pangs of love. But in the end, I confined myself to one: *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel), from *Faust* by **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749–1832), as set to music by **Franz Schubert** (1797–1828). It is sung by Gretchen, the young girl whom Mephistopheles arranges for the newly-rejuvenated Faust to seduce, as part of the bargain that will eventually lead to possession of his soul. Schubert beautifully captures the motion of the spinning-wheel, but Gretchen cannot find peace in its sound. “My peace is gone, my heart is heavy,” she sings. And in the first climax, which you just heard, she gives the reason—the sensations awakened in her by Faust: “The magic flow of his words, the touch of his hand, and ah, his kiss!” The spinning-wheel pianist is **Ammiel Bushakevitz**, and the singer is **Anna Lucia Richter**. She is a favorite of mine, though in this particular song I would have preferred a less prominent lipstick or none at all, but then this is a recording session, not a stage performance—even though the whole thing is a music drama in miniature.

32. Schubert: *Gretchen am Spinnrade*

33. Statue of Faust and Gretchen (repeat)

Question: is this in any sense true to life, or is it simply a man putting words into the mind of a woman?

E. Bedroom on Broadway

34. Section title E (“Bewitched, bothered, and bewildered”)

35. Ann Miller

I have lots of choice in illustrating the Songs-of-Desire theme from Broadway. I have decided to confine myself to classics that came out when we were kids, or even earlier. The earliest is the song *It*, written by **Sigmund Romberg** (1887–1951) around 1927. He inserted it into later performances of *The Desert Song* (192), but it has absolutely nothing to do with the plot of that show, so it is best to think of it as a standalone number. What it does have to do with, though, are the racy novels of British author **Elinor Glyn** (misspelled in the titles), who invented the concept of the **It Girl**, representing a huge step forward in female sexual autonomy. Very long words for such a breezy Charleston number, brilliantly sung and danced here by **Ann Miller**.

36. Romberg: “It”

37. Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett, *Cheek to Cheek*

In the first class, I played a song from **Lady Gaga's** recording with **Tony Bennett**, *Cheek to Cheek*. Although he hardly sings in this, I am turning to the same source once more for my second selection, "Bewitched, bothered, and bewildered" from the 1940 musical *Pal Joey* by **Richard Rodgers** (1902–79) and **Lorenz Hart** (1895–1943). Hart's lyrics call attention to their brilliant rhyming in a way that Goethe never did, but essentially the singer is expressing much the same sentiments as his Gretchen. The video seems to have been made a some kind of rehearsal.

38. Rodgers and Hart: *Pal Joey*, "Bewitched, bothered, and bewildered"

39. Amelia Adams-Pierce as Lois in the Welsh National Opera production of *Kiss Me Kate*

For my third example, I am back with the 1948 show *Kiss Me, Kate* by **Cole Porter** (1891–1964), which we sampled last week. But this time we shall meet a supporting character, the *ingenue* **Lois**, and in a different production, this one from the **Welsh National Opera**. Lois has sex-appeal galore and knows how to use it. Her song "I'll always be true to you, darling, in my fashion" is a declaration of a woman's right to be as promiscuous as she chooses. The video is a bit dark, but the performance by **Amelia Adams-Pierce** has all the wattage you could want.

40. Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, "In my fashion"

F. An Operatic Operator

41. Section title F (*Don Giovanni*)

42. Mozart's Da Ponte operas

For some reason, all the operas that **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–91) wrote with librettist **Lorenzo Da Ponte** (1749–1838) feature baritone seducers: the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* (1790), and the title character of *Don Giovanni* (1787), whose very name, "Don Juan," was being used as a synonym for the male libertine long before Mozart turned to the subject. During the course of the opera, we meet three of his victims: the *bourgeoise* **Donna Elvira**, last week's conquest and therefore representing his immediate past; aristocratic **Donna Anna**, from whose bedroom he emerges in the first scene, and therefore his present; and the peasant girl **Zerlina**, whom he tries to seduce in the middle of her wedding, thus representing his intended future. His seduction of Zerlina takes place in the famous duet, "La ci darem la mano," which is so smooth and so undeniably beautiful that, speaking for myself, I almost want him to succeed. Which in fact he does, until they are interrupted by a vengeful Donna Elvira, who rescues Zerlina at the last minute. The seduction actually begins in the previous recitative, after Giovanni has got rid of Zerlina's husband, Masetto, and now persuades Zerlina that she is too good for her. Here is **Rod Gilfry** and **Liliana Nikiteanu**. See if you can identify the stages by which he wins her.

43. Mozart: *Don Giovanni*, "La ci darem la mano" (w/recit)

44. — still from the above

Tell me, am I alone in half-wanting him to succeed? And what did you learn of his technique? Naturally, Masetto is pretty mad at Zerlina when they meet up again later at a party at Giovanni's house. She apologizes, sort of, by assuring him that nothing really happened, but she is unable to resist when the Don corners her in an alcove in the garden, nor again when he takes her offstage during his grand ball. Once alone with him, however, she screams, thus unleashing the showdown between Giovanni, his sidekick **Leporello**, and all the other characters. But Giovanni manages to escape and, disguising himself as Leporello, he fools Masetto into coming with him to kill the Don, only to get him alone and beat him with his own weapons. By this time, I think, we still admire Giovanni for his resourcefulness, but are no longer willing to give him the moral benefit of the doubt. And when Zerlina comes upon Masetto bruised and groaning, and realizes what he has done for her, she now truly apologizes. She does so in an **aria that is the epitome of sexual desire used to good ends**, as she tells her husband that her body will be all the medicine he needs, once she gets him home to bed. The Zurich production is just too dark for me to play this scene, so I am turning instead to one at the Royal Opera House, with **Miah Persson** as Zerlina and **Robert Gleadow** as Masetto.

45. Mozart: *Don Giovanni*, "Vedrai, carino" (w/recit)

46. Class title 3 (Dangerous Desires)