

Carmen Fantasy (1998)

A Fantasy for four guitars on themes from Bizet's Carmen

- 1 Torero
- 2 Habanera
- 3 Aragonaise
- 4 Seguidilla
- 5 Gypsy Song

This *Carmen Fantasy* draws not only on the music of Georges Bizet, but also makes references to the various other Carmen Fantasies which have been written. I have concentrated on the Adalusian music in the opera, the music of Escamillo the Toreador from Grenada and the music of Carmen herself.

The opening movement, *Torero*, is based on Escamillo's well-known Act 2 aria *The Toreador's Song*, which has been cut, pasted and spliced with some of the music from the final scene in Act 4. The *Habanera* is a montage of Habaneras by various different composers, the most prominent and recognisable being two piano pieces by Debussy: *Soirée dans Grenade* from *Estampes* (1903) and *La puerta del Vino* from the *Second Book of Preludes*. This *Habanera* has a sultry, three-in-the-morning atmosphere, imbued with a dark sensuality.

The *Aragonaise* violently and abruptly breaks the spell of the *Habanera* with a battery of percussion effects and the superimposed hemiola rhythms of the *Bulerias*. After a cadenza the music climaxes in an orgy of rasgado strumming before subsiding and transforming into Carmen's coquettish *Tra la la la* aria from Act 1. This, in turn, slithers its way into the *Seguidilla*. This *Seguidilla* is stripped of the suave, sophisticated, operatic grandeur of Bizet's setting and given a more earthy treatment with driving rhythms and grimy chords - seduction with dirty fingernails.

After this fiery dance wanes, the sublime music from Carmen's moving Act 3 aria *Carreau, pique...la mort!* floats above repeated pizzicato chords. No matter how Carmen shuffles the cards, each time she lays them out in front of her, the cards spell death. This music melts into a sinister, pianissimo coda built on the fate motive, a recurring theme which haunts the entire score of *Carmen* - D, C#, Bb, C#, A.

The finale is a virtuoso tour de force for all four guitarists based on the *Gypsy Song* from the beginning of Act 2. It also pays homage to Horowitz's *Carmen Variations* and uses the soiled harmonic language of the other movements of this *Carmen Fantasy*. The mood and character flit quixotically from one extreme to another, never settling until a quiet calm falls over the piece about three quarters of the way through. This is followed by a free flowing cadenza before the whole work is propelled forwards to its triumphant climax in a breathtaking coda taken at breakneck speed.