

# Georges Bizet- Symphony in C Major

October 6 & 7, 2007

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*The miracle of Bizet's music lies in the fact that it appeals to the musically illiterate and to the most fastidious technicians. Such a thing is rare in our history.—Emil Vuillermoz.*

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Like so many operatic composers of the nineteenth century, Georges Bizet (1838-1875) occupies the list of Classical “one hit wonders.” In Bizet’s case, it’s not from a lack of talent. Completing projects would always prove difficult for him, and he seemed incapable of recognizing his successes while overly focused on his lesser works.

Bizet entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of nine, and proved himself a formidable pianist, organist, and composer. In 1857, the nineteen-year-old Bizet won the Prix de Rome, firmly establishing his reputation. His first opera, *Les Pêcheurs des Perles* (The Pearl Fishers), was premiered in 1863 and was widely regarded as musically excellent, despite the lackluster libretto thrust upon Bizet. What followed was a nine-year period of modest flops and unfinished attempts until, in 1872, Bizet discovered Merimée’s short novel *Carmen*. Bizet wrote almost obsessively for over two years and, on March 3, 1875, his *Carmen* received its premier. While *Carmen* was destined to become one of the most beloved operas of all time, Bizet described it as “a definite and hopeless flop.” He sank into a depression, took to his bed, and, four hours after the thirty-third performance of *Carmen*, died from a heart attack.

Bizet’s *Symphony in C Major* is his finest orchestral work. It was composed in 1855, when Bizet was only seventeen years old. It’s believed that the symphony was never performed in Bizet’s lifetime and had fallen entirely out of sight until, in 1933, it was discovered in the archives of the Paris Conservatoire by one of Bizet’s biographers. It was first performed in 1935. Strictly following Classical form, the symphony makes no claims to originality, but its energy and freshness have found it a permanent place in the concert repertoire. The melodies sing like a French Schubert, while the orchestration is reminiscent of the best works of Mendelssohn in his teenage years.