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# Movies

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★ Our critics  
score recent  
flicks: P. 22

★ Screen times  
for Boston &  
suburbs: P. 24

## 'Carmen' sings with passion

By KATHY HUFFHINES

★★★★

'Carmen.' Directed by Francesco Rosi, from an opera by Georges Bizet. With Julia Migenes-Johnson and Plácido Domingo. Rated PG. At Copley Place.

LOOKING for Carmen, soldiers spy on Spanish cigarette factory girls, working half naked. They watch the swirl of bare feet and home-spun skirts when the women head for a nearby cantina. There, Carmen moves like a lioness. Shaking out her dark coiled hair, her hips swaying in arabesques, Carmen gets right to the point. "Love is a wild bird, a gypsy child that knows no law," she sings.

"Carmen," Francesco Rosi's exciting, politically interesting, beautifully conceived film of Bizet's opera gets right to the point too — thrusting the passion of Carmen (Julia Migenes-Johnson) into the orderly life of Navarre soldier Don Jose (Plácido Domingo).

Using the terraced Spanish town of Ronda as a background for the interplay between law-abiding soldiers and unruly peasant girls, Rosi bakes his characters in a landscape whose whiteness, bareness and heat intensifies the emotions suggested by his usual Italian settings.

From the beginning, it's clear that the adobe barracks built into the hills above Ronda offer little protection. Sweethearts slip inside looking for their lovers, and soldiers spill downhill into the cantina looking for girls. When Carmen sets her sights on Jose, she throws a rose at him challengingly, turning to her girlfriends with the slightly contemptuous smile that says "a penniless gypsy like me can have any man in this town."

She can, too.

When Don Jose arrests her for knifing another factory girl, she makes short work of him. At first, she undulates in the background. But within minutes, her body has seductively taken over the screen.

Conventional and slow-moving, Plácido's Don Jose is intentionally a lesser figure than Migenes-Johnson's fiery Carmen, though we believe in the sparks that fly between his solidity and longing and her willfulness and sultriness.

When they run away to a life of banditry in the mountains, we realize the town offered each a foundation and a pathway to each other. Lost against Rosi's enormous natural settings, each insists on his own way. Don Jose tries to sing Carmen into faithfulness, while she tries to sing her way towards freedom. Refusing to join, their faces are photographed as if they were the walls of opposing canyons.

Will he kill her to make her obey? Or she kill him to stay free? Rosi underlines the ironic point of Bizet's opera, most interestingly in the last scene, set at the Corrida in Seville.

Though Carmen believes in love as "a wild bird that can't be confined," she has thrown over Don Jose for Escamillo, a rich bull-fighter. Rosi shows him being fitted into a cramped red torreador outfit, while Carmen waits in the stands strapped into a red dress that makes her Escamillo's twin.

In the final showdown between her and Don Jose, Rosi picks up on the implicit similarities between his two central characters and blurs the lines that had divided them. Carmen's and Don Jose's fate becomes the tragedy of our own struggle with ourselves: Our fascination for civilized trappings forever fighting our longing to escape such things. It's Rosi's way of visualizing these tensions that superbly justifies his version of Carmen's story.



## New Yorker the toast of Europe

By KATHY HUFFHINES

THESE days "Carmen" seems to be every foreign film's first name. The newest woman in this procession of Spanish, French, and Italian "Carmens" is a Puerto Rican-Greek New Yorker.

Julia Migenes-Johnson, Francesco Rosi's "Carmen"

(opening today in Boston), grew up in a Manhattan tenement. At 3½, she had a small part in a production of "Madame Butterfly."

Turn to Page 18