

“L’amour est un oiseau rebelle” (Love’s a bird who obeys no master), the Habanera, CARMEN, Act I, 1875, music by Georges Bizet, libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, based on a novella of the same title by Prosper Mérimée.

SYNOPSIS: Carmen, a beautiful and independent gypsy, who works in a cigar factory in Seville, joins her fellow workers during a break, and tells the assembled men, who are flirting with her, what she thinks about love.

CARMEN

L’amour est un oiseau rebelle
que nul ne peut apprivoiser;
et c’est bien en vain qu’on l’appelle,
s’il lui convient de refuser.
Rien n’y fait, menace ou prière,
l’un parle bien, l’autre se tait;
et c’est l’autre que je préfère
il n’a rien dit, mais il me plaît.
L’amour! L’amour! L’amour! L’amour!

Love’s a bird who obeys no master,
a willful rebel that none can tame;
if you chase him, he’ll just fly faster
and go his way if you call his name.
When I’m ready to choose a lover,
one fellow’s charming, the other’s shy;
and the quiet one will discover
he stole my heart, but won’t know why.
Ah, love! Ah, love! Ah, love! Ah, love!

L’amour est enfant de Bohème;
Il n’a jamais, jamais connu de loi.
Si tu ne m’aimes pas, je t’aime,
si je t’aime, prends garde à toi.
Si tu ne m’aimes pas,
Si tu ne m’aimes pas, je t’aime!
Mais si je t’aime, si je t’aime,
prends garde à toi!

A gypsy child who’s wild and free,
love goes his way without a single care.
If you don’t want me, I’ll go after you,
and if I do, look out, beware!
If you don’t want my love,
if you don’t want my love, I’m yours!
But if I love you, if I love you,
look out, beware!

(CHORUS) L’amour est enfant de Bohème, etc.)

CARMEN

L’oiseau que tu croyais surprendre
battit de l’aile et s’envola;
l’amour est loin, tu peux l’attendre,
tu ne l’attends plus—il est là.
Tout autour de toi, vite, vite,
Il vient, s’en va, puis il revient.
Tu crois le tenir, il t’évite;
tu crois l’éviter, il te tient.
L’amour! L’amour! L’amour! L’amour!
*L’amour est enfant de Bohème, etc.

When you thought that at last you caught him,
he spread his wings and flew away;
you stop waiting, then fortune brought him,
you wait no longer—he’s here to stay.
Now he flies till your head is spinning,
he comes and goes, will it ever end?
When you think that at last you’re winning,
it’s only love that has won, my friend.
Ah, love! Ah, love! Ah, love! Ah, love!
*A gypsy child who’s wild and free, etc.

--From “The Eternal Appeal of CARMEN,” a course for Lifelong Learners
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