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**CREATING CARMEN**

**23-24 July 2021**

**Bridport Arts Centre (Dorset) Ilminster Arts Centre (Somerset)**

**Crewkerne Dance House (Somerset)**

*Creating Carmen* is the latest in a series of concert/plays created by the writer Clare Norburn and director Nicholas Renton. The production engaged live music arranged and performed by the Andrews Massey Duo with Francisco Correa. The performances, promoted by Concerts in the West, took place at Bridport and Ilminster Arts Centres and Crewkerne Dance House between 23-24 July.

Naturally, one associates the name Carmen as depicted by the composer Bizet in his opera of 1875. However, Carmen had started her life rather earlier in a novella written by the French writer, Prosper Mérimée, in 1845. Mérimée’s fascination for the gypsy character and the Romani people drew heavily upon George Borrow’s book *The Zicali* (1841). The printed novella appeared with a provocative preface from the ancient Greek poet Palladas translating into English as *Every* *woman turns sour/Twice she has her hour/ One is in bed/The other is dead.*

Clare Norburn’s *Creating Carmen* takes us through the emotional and psychological tensions that Mérimée experienced in writing his novella. During his life Mérimée had led a somewhat notorious and often ambiguous existence in his relationships with women. He was an experienced traveller, competent in several languages and displayed respected abilities as an organiser and adviser to the State and Royalty. In his writing Mérimée was normally a planner and much in control of how a novella story would progress and end. In *Creating Carmen* Norburn explores the writer at odds and somewhat out of control with his leading character who suddenly turns up in his study in a ‘phantom’ existence and reacts badly to the nasty ending that Mérimée has planned for her.

Alice Imelda proved to be a very suitable young gypsy woman with a dark-smoky accent and conveying an aura for lethal duplicity. Niall Ashdown’s Mérimée engendered an initial sense of bemusement followed by an increasing exasperation with his mental apparition until, recognising her “for the devil she was!”, he ‘murders’ his creation. The ending parallels the novella’s conclusion but there, Carmen is killed by José, mad with jealousy. However, the script throws an unexpected twist into the highly charged situation with the sudden resurrection of Carmen. Author and his infamous creation proceed to kill each other!

Clare Norburn’s *Creating Carmen* proved to be an evening rich in fantasy, drama, comedy and music. It was proper that the music drew heavily on Bizet’s music although the repertoire included Spanish and Spanish-inspired music of other composers. David Massey, Francisco Correa and Emily Andrews gave us some imaginative and cleverly conceived arrangements. The guitar playing was masterly and Emily Andrews showed huge versatility as a flautist, an engaging singer, dancer and actor.

Andrew Maddocks – July 2021