Together Intertwined: Carmen’s Final Number

Abstract

The musical construction of the final number in Bizet’s Carmen serves to intensify the dramatic climax of the opera through formal instability, expressive tonality, and denial of tonal closure. I divide the number into four stages, each initiated by a *recitative* that is followed by closed forms in Stages 1 and 2 but in Stages 3 and 4 gives way to fragmentary and tonally unstable passages. Voice-leading diagrams of the closed forms within Stages 1 and 2 provide us with evidence of both their traditional features and the subtle dramatic clues found in their deviations from the norm.

Linear analysis of the fourth stage and conclusion provides an explanation for the musical organization of this section, which resists categorization into tonal and formal prototypes. An ascending linear structure from C to F# in the vocal line invokes the ideas of *sonorità* and *expressive tonality*. The tonal trajectory of the number travels through a looser version of the same stepwise ascent, culminating in a key which fails to close the opera, the act, and the number. In these ways, Bizet carefully creates dramatic tension in this scene by slowly unraveling the structural stability of the music.