



COMING SOON: *Carmen*

A Timeless Tale of Love and Betrayal

By Anna Amini

Something big is coming to Charlotte Ballet, and we hope you'll join us for the exciting, edgy, fully re-imagined production of *Carmen*, told by award-winning choreographer, Andrea Schermoly.

Recently Andrea Schermoly was in our studios to embark on creating this new full-length production with our dancers. Artistic Director, Alejandro Cerrudo, held an intimate interview with her, regaling stories of their time dancing together in Holland and sharing a glimpse of the inspiration for her new production of *Carmen* to be presented by Charlotte Ballet in May 2025.

One of the **most popular operas** of all time, the iconic music of *Carmen* has been heard in many pop culture movies and shows, from *The Bad News Bears* to *The Simpsons* and *Sesame Street*. When the curtain goes up, you'll recognize the familiar score played by **Charlotte Symphony Orchestra**.

What you might not recognize, is the story in its new form. It will be a modern retelling of the classic love triangle. The original involved smugglers and cigarette girls working at a tobacco factory in Seville, Spain in 1875, and *Carmen* volleyed her interest between a soldier and a bullfighter. In Schermoly's contemporary telling, the vibrant characters will include **showgirls, mafia, nightclub patrons, and card dealers** setting the scene in **1973 Las Vegas**.

The title character is a showgirl who lives life by her own rules. Her love interests include Don Jose, the deputy sheriff, and Escamillo, a character resembling Elvis, complete with the jumpsuit and cape. While the characters' identities have morphed to the modern world, their personas and desires remain unchanged.

***Carmen* is one of the original femme fatale.** She uses her wiles to her advantage, but moves on easily when her interest wanes. She is persecuted for living life by her own rules, while

the men in her world equally take part in the seedy setting of gambling and seduction with little rebuke. Meanwhile, her love interests go through their own emotional arcs, spurred by this strong-willed woman. But when *Carmen* wants more for herself and isn't afraid to take it any way she can, the consequences are unfair and final. There is something frighteningly seductive about such a self-assured woman.

So what inspired Schermoly to tell such a bold story? It's a story about a woman told by a female choreographer. The retelling will be from the perspective of *Carmen* instead of Don Jose.

ABOUT THE CHOREOGRAPHER

South African choreographer Andrea Schermoly was trained as a dancer at National School for the Arts in Johannesburg, South Africa and was on the South African Olympic Rhythmic Gymnastics Team. She trained at Royal Ballet School in London before she danced professionally with Boston Ballet and Netherland's Dance Theater (NDT and NDT2), and she is Louisville Ballet's first female resident choreographer.

She comes from a **family of dancers**. Her grandmother was a dancer with Paris Opera Ballet, and her mother was in a contemporary company. Schermoly's early exposure led her to love dance. Curiosity took her to acting school when she became interested in directing.

Her brother, Joe Schermoly, is a set designer and has collaborated with her on five of her choreographed works, including *Carmen*. The ***Carmen* production team** also includes Tom Visser, a lighting designer who worked with Cerrudo and Schermoly in their NDT2 days.

Cerrudo and Schermoly reminisced about the camaraderie of being on stage as dancers, but when pressed if she missed dancing, she said she enjoyed the adrenaline, endorphins, and

joy of working in the studios the most. She's now happy to be crafting on the other side. Schermoly said, "It's an honor to work with Alejandro again." They danced together nearly 20 years ago, and their peers from NDT2 are now directors and acclaimed choreographers. Schermoly said that they came from a "madhouse of creative genius."

HER INFLUENCES

Influenced by Scorcese and Tarantino films as much as dance and acting, you may find Schermoly's *Carmen* to be closer to classic film noir rather than upbeat Broadway hits or classical ballet. Despite the showgirls' feathered fans and the cape of Escamillo, you shouldn't expect the same razzle dazzle of a Broadway performance. The tone will be more seedy underbelly- the cross section of a mafia movie.

Schermoly says, "**We make art but also entertainment. Expect an action movie on stage but with the beauty of movement and the dancers' physicality that only this art form can provide.**"

STORYTELLING THROUGH CONTEMPORARY DANCE

According to Schermoly, "**Ballet has to look perfect. You have to perform through what doesn't feel natural but needs to look natural. In contemporary dance you can embrace the struggle and physicality. You're not afraid to look physical on stage, whereas ballet has to look flawless.**"

Schermoly is no stranger to telling a good story. She's choreographed a classical *Romeo and Juliet* for Royal New Zealand Ballet. For *Carmen*, she is stepping away from classical ballet. There is a brutal physicality that contemporary dance allows access to unlike any other. There is more

range for the character development, and you can follow less of a formula for storytelling.

WHY SHOULD AUDIENCES SEE IT?

Audiences can expect to be "**wowed by the artistry of the dancers. Carmen will be new, innovative...It's gritty, exciting, and feels modern.**"

THE MUSIC

The music is iconic, originally by Georges Bizet, this score by Shchedrin was created in the 1960s. It is more percussive, resembling the heels of the showgirls. This less classical version of the music allows more range for the movement to take shape. **Shchedrin's score is fast paced, entertaining, and a modern retelling of Georges Bizet's opera. Andrea Schermoly's *Carmen* promises to be the same.**

Look forward to it in May 2025, tickets available now. **Viva Las Vegas!**

CARMEN

A Word Premiere
by Andrea Schermoly
May 2-11, 2025 | Knight Theater

charlotteballet.org





Photos by Quinn Wharton and Dana Patrick.