

# CLÉOPÂTRE

Jules Massenet

## Act I

In his camp in Tarsus, Marcus Antonius accepts the praise and tribute of representatives from all of Asia. A slave, Spakos, announces the arrival of Cleopatre, whom Antonius mockingly describes as a 'courtesan with a crown.' When she arrives, however, he is captivated. He orders the crowd to leave the two of them alone, and the two embrace. They are interrupted by Ennius, bearing a message from the Senate: Antonius has been called back to Rome, where he will be wed to Octavia, the sister of his fellow triumvir Octavian. Instead, he agrees to return to Egypt with Cleopatra; as the act ends, the two of them sail off together in her barge.

## Act II

Antonius has returned to Rome for his marriage with Octavia. At Antonius' house, Ennius discusses the triumvir's six-month liaison with Cleopatra to the other servants. The wedding procession arrives, and Antonius sends Octavia to her chamber. On learning that Ennius has been stationed in Egypt, he asks about Cleopatra and is enraged to learn that she seems to have forgotten him. Ignoring Octavia's pleadings, he resolves to return to Egypt.

In Amnhes' tavern in Egypt, a disguised Cleopatra and Spakos, her new lover, watch the performance of a young dancer, Adamos. Consumed by jealousy, Spakos tries to strangle Adamos. The other customers are about to attack the two strangers when Cleopatra reveals herself. Her maid, Charmion, then enters, telling her Marcus-Antonius has returned. Spakos tries to stop her, but she goes to meet the Roman anyway.

## Act III

At Cleopatra's palace, the lovers are entertained by dancers from various regions of the ancient world. Cleopatra poisons a goblet of wine and offers a kiss to any slave who will drink it; only Marcus-Antonius stops a slave from drinking the cup. Octavia enters and pleads for Marcus-Antonius to return to Rome, but even the pleadings of Cleopatra herself cannot convince him to leave. Instead, he goes out to rally his armies against Rome. Spakos leads Octavia away as Cleopatra and her women review Antonius' armies.

## Act IV

Cleopatra, in her tomb, has spread the word that she is dead, but has sent messengers to Marcus-Antonius, whose armies have been defeated by Octavian, to come to her. To Spakos' questioning she replies that she does love Marcus-Antonius; spitefully, he tells her he instructed her messenger to confirm her death to the Roman so that he will not return to her. Cleopatra stabs Spakos with her dagger; as he collapses, a slave announces that Marcus-Antonius has come. He is carried in by his soldiers, covered with blood; he tells her that he stabbed himself rather than outlive her. He dies, and Cleopatra allows the asp she had sent for to bite her. Octavius and his soldiers enter as the curtain falls.