

IDOMENEO, RE DI CRETA

libretto by Gianbattista Varesco, music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), premiere 29th January 1781 at the Hoftheater in Munich.

The protagonists:

Idomeneo (tenor), King of Crete; Idamante (mezzo-soprano or tenor), his son; Ilia (soprano), prisoner on Crete, daughter of King Priam of Troy; Elettra (soprano), refugee on Crete, daughter of Agamemnon; Arbace (tenor), the King's confidant; the High Priest of Neptune (tenor); Neptune's oracle (bass)

introduction

The Trojan war has come to an end. The victorious Greeks, among them Idomeneo, King of Crete, are on their way home after many years in battle. Before Idomeneo's fleet reaches the safety of the Cretan shore, the ships are destroyed in a terrible storm. Idomeneo strikes a fateful bargain with Neptune, the god of the sea: in return for his own life he will sacrifice the first human being he encounters on the shore....

Act I

Crete: a dungeon in the royal palace

Ilia, daughter of the defeated King Priam of Troy, is among the Trojan prisoners that are held captive on Crete. She is torn between her hatred of the Cretan enemy and her budding love for Idamante, son of the absent Idomeneo, but fears that his heart belongs to Elettra, daughter of Agamemnon, who has taken refuge on Crete (Aria: Padre, germani, addio!). Idamante releases Ilia and the other prisoners from their chains and confesses his love to her (Aria: Non ho colpa), but she hides her own feelings towards him. Arbace arrives with news of Idomeneo's death at sea. Elettra, who had hoped that Idomeneo would marry her to Idamante, is desperate, especially so after observing the tender bond between Ilia and Idamante (Aria: Tutte nel cor vi sento).
On the sea shore

Idomeneo has made it to the safety of the beach (Recitativo ed Aria: Eccoci salvi alfin... Vedrommi intorno). Idamante, looking for the body of his father among the shipwrecked, encounters him, but neither recognizes the other. Idomeneo knows only that, in accordance with his vow, this young man must be the sacrifice promised to Neptune. The truth on each others' identity gradually dawns on them, and Idomeneo pushes his son away and rushes off in desperation, leaving behind a totally bewildered and unhappy Idamante (Aria: Il padre adorato).

Act II

The royal palace

Idomeneo tells Arbace of his vow to Neptune and both ponder on what to do. Arbace advises the king to dispatch both Idamante and Elettra to her homeland Argos. With Idamante out of the way, they will find another way to placate the angry Neptune.

Ilia inquires of Idomeneo whether he approves of his son's action in freeing the Trojan prisoners (Aria: Se il padre perdei). His reassurances calm her fears. The desperate king, however, realizing that Idamante and Ilia are in love with each other, begins to suspect that Neptune's wrath is fanned by this love, and by the release of the captives, and laments the fact that now there are three victims, not one: Idamante, struck down by the sacred axe, himself, and Ilia driven to death by grief (Recitativo ed Aria: Qual mi conturba i sensi... Fuor del mar).

An open place

Elettra bids farewell to Crete, secure in her feelings that, once away from Ilia, she will win Idamante's love for herself (Aria: *Idol mio, se ritroso*). But before their ship can sail (Terzetto: *Pria di partir, oh Dio*), a violent storm breaks out, the earth splits open and a gigantic monster rises up from the boiling sea. The Cretans are terrified at what they interpret as the renewed anger of Neptune, and they wonder at the cause of it. Idomeneo admits to his people that he is himself to blame, but still does not tell of his shocking vow (Recitativo: *Eccoti in me, barbaro Nume*). The crowd flees in horror.

Act III

The royal palace

Idamante bids farewell to Ilia: he is determined to fight the sea monster and does not expect to return from this quest. At last Ilia confesses her love for him (Duet: *S'io non moro a questi accenti*). The happy couple's duet is disturbed by the arrival of Elettra and Idomeneo, and the king once more orders his son to depart from Crete immediately, without revealing to him the reason for his apparently unloving and cruel behavior (Quartet: *Andrò ramingo e solo*).

Arbace brings news of the Cretans' uprising - led by the High Priest, they are storming the palace, demanding to see the king. The High Priest tells of the sea monster devastating the island, of streets running with blood and littered with the dead and dying (Recitativo: *Volgi intorno lo sguardo*), and Idomeneo can no longer evade the revelation of the victim's name. On hearing that it is his son Idamante himself, the crowd is horrified and disconsolate (*Oh voto tremendo*).

An open place

As the sacrificial ceremony is being prepared (Cavatina con coro: *Accogli, oh re del mar*), distant sounds of rejoicing tell of Idamante's conquest of the sea monster. The young man, realizing now that all along his father had acted out of love and not out of hatred, and had been trying to shield him from the fate that he knew awaited him, enters and offers himself up gladly in order to fulfill Idomeneo's vow (Recitativo: *Padre, mio caro padre - Oh figlio! oh caro figlio!*). The sacred axe in the unhappy king's hands is about to come down on Idamante when Ilia can no longer contain herself and rushes up to receive the fatal blow herself (*Ferma, oh sire, che fai?*). At this, a great noise fills the air and the booming voice of the oracle declares that 'love has triumphed' (*Ha vinto Amor*) - Idomeneo must give up the throne now and install Idamante as the new ruler, with Ilia at his side. At this clement solution to the problem everyone rejoices. Everyone rejoices except Elettra, that is, who, upon seeing that all her hopes of marrying Idamante are forever dashed, flies into a dreadful rage (Recitativo ed Aria: *Oh smania! oh furie!... D'Oreste, d'Aiace*). Idomeneo turns to the crowd for his final speech as their ruler (Recitativo: *Popoli, a voi l'ultima legge*):

'My people! Idomeneo gives you his last command as king. I announce peace. The sacrifice is completed, my vow redeemed. Neptune and all the gods smile upon this kingdom. One thing remains: that Idomeneo now obey their demand. O mighty gods, how I welcome your command! Here is another king for you, my other self. To Idamante my son, my dear son, I relinquish the throne of Crete together with all sovereign power. Respect his commands and follow them obediently, as you have followed and respected mine, for which I am grateful to you! This I now order. Here is the royal bride. Behold in this handsome pair a gift bestowed on you by heaven. You have so much to hope for! O fortunate Crete! What happiness I feel!'

The people of Crete sing and dance the praises of the new royal couple.