

## **L'ITALIANA IN ALGERI**

Music by Gioachino Rossini

Libretto by Angelo Anelli

First performed on May 22, 1813 in Venice

### **Characters**

Mustafà (bass), Bey of Algiers

Elvira (soprano), his wife

Zulma (mezzo-soprano), personal slave of Elvira

Haly (bass-baritone), captain of the Algerian pirates

Lindoro (tenor), a young Italian, favorite slave of Mustafà

Isabella (contralto), Italian lady

Taddeo (basso-buffo), companion of Isabella

### **Act I**

The Bey's wife, Elvira, is complaining to her confidant Zulma, that her husband no longer loves her. Mustafà himself enters and further insults her by boasting about his contempt for women in general. After she leaves, Mustafà confirms to Haly that he indeed cannot stand his wife any longer and that he is going to marry her off to his young slave Lindoro. Haly is ordered (under the threat of impalement) to capture a live Italian girl to arouse his jaded amatory interests.

Lindoro laments his three month captivity and service as a slave. His only consolation is the thought of his faithful lover left behind in Italy "Languir per una bella" (How sad it is to languish).

Mustafà interrupts and insists he marry Elvira, a wife with all the qualities he could desire and will listen to none of Lindoro's increasingly frantic objections.

A storm has driven a ship onto the rocks and it is being pillaged by Haly and his pirates. Among the stranded passengers is Isabella who is travelling in search of her lover -- Lindoro. After briefly mourning her fate "Cruda sorte!" (Cruel fortune), she realizes that her captors are only men and men can be easily manipulated by a woman's power. Taddeo, her traveling companion and barely tolerated admirer has also been captured and Isabella quickly passes themselves off as uncle and niece. When they admit they are from Italy, Haly is overjoyed, announcing that she will be the jewel in the Bey's harem. Taddeo is instantly jealous which irritates the ever-resilient Isabella. When he worries about their uncertain future, she responds "che sera, sera."

Mustafà is preparing to send Elvira and Lindoro off to Italy when Haly announces the capture of the Italian girl. Mustafà thrills to the delicious prospect of this exotic conquest. Haly presents Isabella to Mustafà. He is in awe of her beauty; she can hardly contain her contemptuous amusement at the sight of him. She charms Mustafà by pretending to be a weak, helpless woman. Taddeo pushes his way in and causes an uproar when he sees the Bey with Isabella. To save him from impalement, Isabella once again claims he is her uncle. Lindoro, Elvira and Zulma come to say goodbye to Mustafà. Astonished, Isabella and Lindoro recognize each other. When Isabella asks who Elvira is, Mustafà explains that she is his wife, but that he has given her to the slave to marry. Isabella, to everyone's amazement, instantly tells Mustafà that he must not cast off his wife and furthermore demands that he give Lindoro to her as her personal slave. The startled but infatuated Bey is forced to agree and the act ends in a splendid state of confusion.

### **Act II**

Haly, Zulma and Elvira comment on the sudden change in Mustafà brought on by his obsession with Isabella. The Bey arrives and wishing to be alone with Isabella sends Elvira and Zulma to tell her that he will join her for coffee in a half hour. Isabella and Lindoro are alone for the first time,

and after he allays her suspicions (Lindoro protests that he agreed only to escort Elvira to Italy, not marry her), Isabella begins to conceive of a plan for their escape.

Mustafà and Taddeo enter -- the Bey has decided that rather than impale Taddeo, he will honor Isabella by making her "uncle" a Grand Kaimakan -- a lieutenant in his elite bodyguard. The ceremony proceeds much to Taddeo's nervous discomfort.

Isabella is dressing when Elvira arrives with Mustafà's invitation to coffee. She upbraids Elvira for her submissive behavior and tells her it is up to wives to properly train their husbands. Isabella, knowing she is being secretly watched by Mustafà, Taddeo and Lindoro, sings a yearning love song "Per lui che adoro" (Love, I implore you) and each man in turn believes it is directed at him. Mustafà introduces Taddeo in his new guise as Kaimakan -- Taddeo has been instructed to leave the couple alone when the Bey signals by sneezing, but when the moment comes, he pretends not to have heard. Coffee is brought and Isabella, much to Mustafà's intense anger and confusion, invites Elvira to join them.

Haly is delighted that Isabella has gotten the better of Mustafà ("Con tutta la sua boria questa" -- In spite of his bravado) and comments on the talents of Italian girls in obtaining exactly what they want. Taddeo reveals to Lindoro that he loves Isabella and believes that his only rival, a man he has never met named Lindoro, is no longer a threat to him ("Ti giuro, amico" -- I can assure you). Mustafà joins them, still angry over the scene in Isabella's room, but Lindoro reassures him that Isabella is madly in love with him. In fact, she is planning to honor Mustafà with the illustrious rank of Pappataci -- a title given only to men who have great power over women. Mustafà, totally duped, is thrilled and listens attentively as he is told the duties of a Pappataci: eat, drink, and go to sleep.

Lindoro explains the plan for the evening to Taddeo -- as Mustafà is being initiated Pappataci, all of the Italians will leave for their homeland. Isabella rallies the captured Italian sailors with an appeal to their patriotic valor and enlists their help with the plot to escape ("Pensa alla patria" -- Never be frightened). The initiation ceremony into the order of the Pappataci begins. Mustafa solemnly swears "see nothing, hear nothing and eat in silence." Isabella, having totally succeeded in fooling Mustafà, prepares to leave with Lindoro to join the others for their return to Italy. Taddeo is outraged when he sees them leave together, but realizes he can do nothing about it and follows. Elvira, Zulma and Haly arrive and try to make the Bey aware of what is happening, but he is too consumed by his duties as a Pappataci to notice. When he finally realizes what has happened, it is too late.