

## OLYMPIE

Music by Gasparo Spontini

Libretto by Michel Dieulafoy & C. Brifaut [Briggault & Bujac]

First Performance: Opéra, Paris, December 22, 1819

As the opera begins, Alexander has been dead for 15 years, murdered. Both Cassander and Antigonus are suspected. Both had the same motive: they wanted the crown and the kingdom, as well as Alexander's daughter Olympia, whom they both profess to love. Hate and armed encounters have marked the years preceding the action of the opera. The opening chorus acclaim the holy city of Ephesus and Diana, the goddess of peace. It is her will that there be no more sorrow or bloodshed among her people in the future. Cassander and Antigonus meet before Diana's temple and vow their eternal friendship. From this day on are the people of Macedonia and Asia to enjoy a holy peace forever. The gods have decreed that Antigonus shall rule over the kingdom while Cassander plans to marry Olympia, who has been living under the name of Aménais as one of Cassander's slaves since he saved her life 15 years ago. But Antigonus becomes suspicious as Cassander begins to speak of Alexander's death, justifying himself and wondering who really killed him. Cassander too becomes wary of his new friend as Antigonus explains that Olympia may no longer be alive, there is Aménais...Cassander is troubled. Aménais/Olympia appears and sings of her joy to be able to marry her beloved Cassander soon. A duet seals the pact of love.

Statira, Olympia's mother and Alexander's widow, lives incognito in Diana's temple as a priestess under the assumed name of Azana. The Hierophant, or high priest, appoints her to bless the marriage before the gods. As the couple proceeds toward the altar, Antigonus recognizes in Aménais Alexander's daughter Olympia. He incites his soldiers to vengeance. Statira, upon realizing that she is to bless Cassander, her husband's murderer, forgets her role as officiating priestess and calls the gods to avenge her. Cassander pleads for pity. Olympia takes refuge with the Hierophant, who is like a father to her. In the meantime, the priestess continues decorating the altar, the chorus of priests praises the gods who have given them peace and this celebration, whereas Antigonus' soldiers announce that they will trample the temple under their feet.

**Act II.** The chorus of priests and priestesses pray to the goddess Diana to have mercy on Azana/Statira, whose violent accusation of Cassander as murderer at the foot of the holy altar had transformed the sacred chants of celebration into hymns of anger and hate, thus desecrating the place of worship. The Hierophant demands an explanation for her unworthy behavior. Statira tells that she had hoped to forget her sorrow by serving as priestess in Diana's holy grove. Now, however, she is forced to bless the assassin of her husband. She disagrees with the gods, who have forgiven Alexander's murderer and even honored and crowned him. Her only wish is to find her daughter Olympia again after all these years of woe. In the following duet Olympia-Statira, Aménais reveals her true identity. She reports how Cassander saved her life 15 years ago, during the dreadful night of Alexander's assassination.

The next scene unites Statira, Olympia and Cassander in a trio. Olympia now learns that Cassander slew her father. Cassander admits that he, without his knowledge was the executor of the evil plan. But in that horrible night of carnage, he did nonetheless manage to save the life of mother and daughter. Statira remains irreconcilable. In the distance one hears Statira, Queen and wife of Alexander, being praised in songs of joy led by Antigonus. Together with his soldiers, he places himself at the disposal of the new Queen to avenge her and to combat Cassander. Statira orders her daughter to break all ties with Cassander. At Antigonus' sign, the soldiers enter from

all sides. Whereas Cassander vows to revenge himself for Antifonus' treason, the priests try in vain to pacify the opponents.

**Act III.** Olympia hears that Cassander's men have armed for their battle against Statira's warriors. She deploras her contradictory feelings towards Cassander, whom she still loves but whom she must hate for reasons of state. Statira promises Antigonus Olympia's hand. But Antigonus also demands Cassander's death. Cassander emerges as victor from the battle and asks Olympia to follow him. She hesitates. Once again one hears the hate choruses of Antigonus' warriors who promise Cassander sure death. Mortally wounded, Antigonus totters to the steps of the altar. At that very moment, Diana's shirne becomes shrouded in darkness. antigonus is struck by thunder and lightning. Divine justice condemns Antigonus as evildoer. Dying, he appeals to the Furies of Hades to vanquish the goddess Diana and slay Cassander. To the horror of all, he reveals to the spirits of Hell that in reality he, Antigonus, was responsible for the assassination of Alexander, whose spirit now appears admonishingly.

In the finale, all exult in songs of joy. there is nothing more to prevent the union of Cassander and Olympia. Statira herself brings the couple together. The chorus of priests and priestesses praises the happy outcome as an act of divine providence.