

## **PARTENOPE**

Music by George Frideric Handel

Libretto by Silvio Stampiglia

Premiere: King's Theatre, London, 24 February 1730

### **Characters**

Partenope (soprano)

Rosmira (mezzo-soprano)

Arsace (countertenor)

Armindo (countertenor)

Emilio (tenor)

Ormonte (baritone)

Soldiers.

### **Act I**

As Queen Partenope entertains two of her princely suitors, Arsace and Armindo, the young princes notice another young man nearby. (This "young man" is actually Rosmira, the woman formerly betrothed to Arsace, who has followed him here, disguised as one "Eurimene.") "Eurimene" explains that he was cast ashore when his ship was wrecked in a storm. Partenope offers him a place at her court, and "Eurimene" accepts gratefully.

Ormonte, Partenope's advisor and counselor, arrives with the unexpected news that the hostile Emilio is approaching. He has requested to meet with Partenope. When she hesitates, Arsace, Armindo, and "Eurimene" all reaffirm their loyalty to her. She vows to confront Emilio. Left alone, Arsace notes that he is disturbed by "Eurimene's" resemblance to Rosmira.

Armindo reveals to "Eurimene" his passion for Partenope. When asked whether this love is requited, Armindo explains that Partenope does not know of his feelings. Besides, she has already sworn herself to Arsace, and he to her. This declaration confirms Arsace's infidelity to Rosmira, which infuriates "Eurimene." "He" then encourages Armindo to express his feelings to Partenope, telling him that, if he keeps silent, he has no chance. He resolves to follow this advice, despite his misgivings.

Arsace continues to feel confused by his feelings for "Eurimene." Finally, Rosmira identifies herself and confronts Arsace about his betrayal. He tries to explain that he truly loves her and begs her forgiveness, but Rosmira angrily rejects him, although she does make him promise to conceal her true identity.

Partenope is preparing for battle. Ormonte assures her that all are ready to come to her aid against Emilio. She responds that if Emilio is determined to fight, she will defy him. Armindo arrives, ready to reveal his love to Partenope. She notices that he seems bothered by something, and when she asks him what is wrong, his misgivings overtake him and he cannot confess his feelings. She insists that it is his duty to disclose his secret. He does reveal that Arsace is his rival, and then Partenope realizes that he is in love with her. She confronts him, but he bids her farewell without replying. When Arsace enters, Partenope reveals her affection for Armindo, but tells Arsace that she loves only him.

"Eurimene" interrupts, asking Partenope and Arsace if they are sworn to each other. When Partenope answers affirmatively, "Eurimene" turns to leave, cursing her fate. Arsace is afraid that his infidelity has been discovered, but is surprised (and somewhat relieved) to find that

"Eurimene" has come to profess his adoration for Partenope. The Queen is flattered by the young prince's affection, but reaffirms her love for Arsace, and departs. Rosmira rages at Arsace for his faithlessness and, ignoring his pleas, storms out. Left alone, Arsace, torn between Partenope and Rosmira, expresses his bewilderment and anguish.

Partenope awaits her meeting with Emilio. When he arrives, Partenope is ready for a fight, but is taken aback when Emilio instead offers his whole kingdom in exchange for Partenope's heart. She suggests that he has not chosen the best way to show his feelings of adoration. She refuses his advances, claiming she will never offer her heart to purchase peace. Instead of waging war, Emilio lays down his sword and again professes his undying love. She admonishes him for betraying his people and tells him to prepare for combat. As he leaves, Emilio vows to show himself worthy of Partenope's love, even if it means defeating her in battle.

Partenope consults with her princes. She appoints Arsace general and leader. This results in an altercation, in which "Eurimene" openly questions Arsace's honor. Finally, Partenope tells them that she herself will lead them, and appeals to their loyalty for strength and support. Arsace tries to stop "Eurimene" from going to battle, but "he" explains that, having professed love to the Queen, he must fight. Overhearing this, Armindo becomes jealous at the thought that his confidant has now joined the ranks of his rivals. He confronts "Eurimene" about this apparent betrayal, but "he" assures him there is nothing to worry about - his affections truly lie elsewhere.

## **Act II**

Partenope and Emilio are engaged in combat. When Armindo rescues Partenope, she declares undying gratitude. "Eurimene" is then attacked, but Arsace saves "him" and takes Emilio prisoner. Partenope claims victory, but when she asks who was responsible for capturing Emilio, both Arsace and "Eurimene" take credit. Emilio is led away, and Partenope's triumph is celebrated. Emilio, now imprisoned, tries in vain to appeal to Partenope's affections. "Eurimene" approaches Partenope and once again claims credit for capturing Emilio, despite the prisoner's acknowledgment that it was Arsace. Finally, "Eurimene" challenges Arsace to a duel. Partenope loses patience, arrests "Eurimene", and once again asserts her love for Arsace.

Arsace arrives to plead with "Eurimene" to stop this madness, but is greeted with disdain and leaves. Arsace then goes to appeal to Partenope for "Eurimene's" release. Confused by Arsace's defense of "Eurimene," Partenope nonetheless agrees to release the prisoner, under the condition that he leaves the court, never to return. Armindo arrives and finally admits his undying passion for Partenope. She gently tells him that she is true to Arsace, and sends him away. Armindo encounters "Eurimene," who inquires whether Armindo has confessed his love to Partenope. "Eurimene" tells Armindo what happened, and claims he has a secret to disclose that will surely turn Partenope's heart away from Arsace. Meanwhile, Arsace tries to renew his vows to Rosmira, but once again, he is rejected.

## **Act III**

Armindo goes to Partenope, asking permission on behalf of "Eurimene" to reveal his secret. Curious, the Queen acquiesces to the request. "Eurimene" approaches and tells Partenope that he challenged Arsace in the interest of the young Princess Rosmira. He further explains that Rosmira was betrayed by Arsace, in spite of his vow of undying devotion. Arsace can say nothing. Partenope is outraged, and releases him to his former love, making herself available for Armindo.

The time for the duel between Arsace and "Eurimene" is set. The two adversaries are handed their weapons, and just as they are about to begin their combat, Arsace declares that he will fight bare-chested; this means that his opponent must do the same. Finding herself in an impossible situation, Rosmira finally reveals her identity. She explains that she disguised herself in order to test Arsace's fidelity. Partenope and Armindo at last acknowledge their passion. Rosmira and Arsace are reunited and the opera ends in a celebration of love.