

## **TANCREDI**

Composer: Gioachino Rossini (1792 - 1868)

Libretto: Gaetano Rossi

Premiere: Teatro La Fenice, Venice, February 6, 1813

Around the year 1000, Sicily is the scene of power struggles between Saracen and Byzantine forces. Although Saracens are particularly dreaded, city-states such as Syracuse seek to preserve their independence from both. Syracuse, however, is also threatened by internal dissension between the noble families of Argirio and Orbazzano. When Orbazzano's faction triumphs, Argirio sends his wife and daughter, Amenaide, to the Byzantine court.

Amenaide encounters another Syracusan exile, Tancredi, at the Byzantine court. The son of a Norman, Tancredi was driven from Syracuse by local nobles suspicious of foreigners and jealous of his fortune. Wooed by two men, Amenaide rejects Solamir and falls in love with Tancredi. At her mother's deathbed, she is betrothed to him.

As the plight of Syracuse worsens, Argirio has become its ruler. To unify the nobles, he agrees to wed Amenaide, now returned from Byzantium, to Orbazzano. This is also an act of defiance towards the Saracens' commander, the very Solamir who wooed Amenaide in Byzantium and now offers peace in return for her hand. At the same time, Tancredi has been sentenced to death in absentia, with his family's wealth awarded to Orbazzano.

As the opera begins, Amenaide, learning that Tancredi is in Sicily, writes a letter imploring him to return, but she avoids using his name, since he is a condemned man. Intercepted near Solamir's camp, the letter is believed to be written to Solamir, and Amenaide is sentenced to death for communicating with the enemy. Tancredi, who has returned to Syracuse incognito, acts as Amenaide's champion, killing Orbazzano and winning her freedom. But he spurns her, for he too believes her guilty.

Still incognito, Tancredi leads the Syracusans into battle. In the Venetian version, Tancredi conquers the Saracens and slays Solamir, who, dying, assures Tancredi of Amenaide's innocence. In the Ferrara revision, Tancredi is mortally wounded. When he is carried on stage, Amenaide explains the truth. Having revenged his beloved and his country, Tancredi dies loved and mourned by both.