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## K. 366



**Idomeneo, rè di Creta**

**Idomeneus, King of Crete**

*An opera seria* in three acts



**Idamante watches as his father's fleet is destroyed by a storm in this illustration, a lithograph by G. Englemann that was used as the frontspiece to a vocal score printed in 1822.**

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**Origin:** Salzburg and Munich, Autumn 1780 to Jan. 1781

**Author:** Gianbattista Varesco, after Antoine Danchet

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Sometime during 1780 Mozart received a commission from Karl Theodor, Elector of Bavaria, to compose an opera for the 1780-81 carnival season in Munich.

Gianbattista Varesco, a priest in the court chapel at Salzburg, may have been chosen by Mozart to provide the text of *Idomeneo*. He was paid 90 gulden by the Munich court. We don't know what Mozart received for providing the music, but it probably was around 200 gulden. He considered himself underpaid, according to his father, who commented that for a "payment such as this one cannot leave one's score behind." Mozart didn't; he kept it with him in Vienna.

According to Rudolf Angermüller, musicologist at Salzburg University: "*Idomeneo* occupies a key position in Mozart's oeuvre and is a turning point in his operatic career. In it he bursts asunder the bonds of conventional opera seria and invests the genre with individual features, combining Baroque and newer "subjective" stylistic elements, making opera seria and its stereotyped characters less rigid, and

creating a scenically representative work of artistic freedom and boldness which embraces both dramatic and lyric extremes of expression."

### **Dramatis personae:**

- Idomeneo, King of Crete (tenor)
- Idamante, his son (soprano; later rewritten as tenor)
- Arbace, confidant of the King (tenor)
- Ilia, daughter of King Priam in Troy (soprano)
- Elettra, daughter of King Agamemnon of Argos (soprano)
- High Priest of Neptune (tenor)
- Voice of Neptune (bass)

### **Synopsis:**

*The action takes place in Sidon (now Khaniá), Crete, shortly after the end of the Trojan wars.*

### **Act I**

Ilia, the daughter of the King of Troy, is unhappy. Her father is dead, Troy has been sacked and she has been left to the mercy of her enemies on Crete. Idamante, son of the King of Crete, seeks to comfort her with the news that the war is over. His father's fleet has been sighted on the horizon and soon will be safely home. Out of generosity, and also because he is falling in love with Ilia, Idamante frees all of the Trojan prisoners. He is not the least bothered by Elettra, who takes him to task for doing this. But he is stunned by the news suddenly delivered by Arbace: A terrible storm has destroyed his father's fleet and it appears that Idomeneo has been lost at sea.

Indeed, Idomeneo has nearly succumbed to the wrath of Neptune, but avoids a final reckoning by making a terrible vow: He will sacrifice the first man he meets if Neptune will spare him. Idomeneo is cast ashore and, as it turns out, the first man he meets is Idamante. Overcome with horror, Idomeneo pushes his son away and rushes off.

### **Act II**

Hoping to appease Neptune and avoid carrying out his vow, Idomeneo decides that Idamante will accompany Elettra to her home in Argos. Elettra, who has designs on Idamante, is thrilled; Ilia, since she is losing Idamante, is not. As they prepare to depart, however, a violent storm springs up and a monster,



**Anton Raaff, pictured in a heroic role in this contemporary sketch, was Idomeneo in the original production of Mozart's opera.**



### Playbill from the premiere of *Idomeneo*.

Idamante bids farewell to Ilia, because he has decided to take on the sea monster in a fight to the finish. Meanwhile, Idomeneo reveals his terrible promise to Neptune's High Priest. He vows to carry out his son's sacrifice in order to end the suffering of his people, who are being eaten in great numbers by the sea monster. But as preparations are being made for the sacrifice a great cry is heard in the distance: Idamante has slain the monster!

Though the immediate threat is gone, Idamante offers himself for the sacrifice so his father may make peace with Neptune. Idamante is prepared to die for the good of his people. Idomeneo raises his weapon for the killing blow, but Ilia intervenes and offers herself in Idamante's place.

Now Neptune himself intervenes, in the form of a deep and solemn voice that comes from beneath the ground. Love has triumphed, it says: Idomeneo shall no longer rule; Idamante shall be king, and Ilia queen.

Elettra, who had been briefly encouraged by the prospect of Ilia's sacrifice, is furious over losing Idamante. She vents her anger and storms off. No one else takes any notice; Idomeneo steps down from the throne and, with a rousing final chorus, the people of Crete acknowledge their new king and queen.

### Recommended recordings:

- *Mozart: Idomeneo*, Archiv 431 674-2
- *Mozart: Idomeneo*, Deutsche Grammophon 447 737-2
- *Mozart: Idomeneo*, Philips 422537-2

### References:

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