

VOX IMAGO

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
IDOMENEO

DANIEL HARDING
TEATRO ALLA SCALA



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IDOMENEO

IDOMENEO: LISTENING GUIDE Philip Gossett

During the years between the performance of *La finta giardiniera* (Munich, Salvatortheater, 13 January 1775) and the premiere of *Idomeneo* (Munich, Residenztheater, 29 January 1781), Mozart composed no complete opera, but the form was never far from his mind. As he wrote his father, Leopold, from Mannheim on 4 February 1778: “Non dimentichi il mio desiderio di scrivere opere. Quando sento o leggo un’aria vorrei davvero piangere dal dispetto. Ma in italiano, non in tedesco, seria, non buffa”.

These were years of enormous intellectual and musical growth for the young musician from Salzburg (born on 27 January 1756). Between September 1777 and January 1779 he traveled through Germany to Paris, accompanied at first by his mother. While he failed in his principal aim, to find a permanent position with a reasonable income, he came into contact with many musical styles, which he would integrate into the language he had developed in Salzburg and through his voyages to Vienna and Italy.

His most important German stops were in Munich and Mannheim. The latter was famous for its highly developed orchestral style, associated earlier with the name of Johann Stamitz, but by 1778 a tradition continued by Christian Cannabich. In Paris it was French opera that particularly fascinated him, the genre introduced and perfected by Lully and Rameau, then “reformed” by Gluck in a series of works in French produced between 1774 and 1779, many of which Mozart experienced directly in the theater. French *tragédie-lyrique* approached a dramatic text differently from Italian *opera seria*: there were fewer arias, less emphasis on display, and more expressive recitative accompanied by the orchestra; composers and librettists aimed for continuity, both in dramatic and musical terms; *divertissements*, with ballet and choruses, played a key role, often integrated into the dramatic fabric. Most of all, French opera sought to maintain the tone of opera on a serious level throughout, and Gluck’s French works followed this path, imposing an even more noble approach to the form. Paris was also an important site for instrumental music: the first of his mature symphonies, K. 297, was prepared for the *Concerts spirituels*. But Paris was also a place of personal sadness, for his mother took ill and died there on 3 July 1778. That too contributed to Mozart’s maturation.

The commission to write *Idomeneo* came from the elector of Mannheim, Carl Theodor, whose court had moved to Munich by the end of 1778. While the choice of subject probably fell to Carl Theodor and his entourage, Mozart was pleased at the prospect of a libretto with roots in French opera (the source libretto, *Idoménée* by Antonie Danchet, was set to music by André Campra and first performed in Paris on 12 January 1812), but transformed into an Italian opera—with strong French elements—by a Salzburg cleric, Giovanni Battista Varesco. Although Mozart was not always satisfied with Varesco’s work, as we learn from the letters he wrote from Munich to his father in Salzburg (Leopold served as an intermediary between his son and the librettist), he accomplished his task with sensitivity to the mixture of Italian and French elements.

Idomeneo is one of the many stories that recount the fate of participants in the Trojan war. Idomeneo, King of Crete, fought alongside the Greeks, but on the way home Neptune conjured a storm that threatened to destroy Idomeneo’s fleet. In desperation, he vowed to sacrifice to Neptune the first person he saw on his return. That person turned out to be his son, Idamante, a child when his father had departed for war. There is a group of Trojan prisoners on the island, including Iliia, a daughter of the dead King Priam, who loves and is loved by Idamante. Present is also Electra, who took refuge in Crete after the death of her brother, Orestes, who—with Electra’s help—murdered their mother, Clytemnestra, and her husband, Egisthus, both of whom were responsible for the death of the father of Orestes and Electra, King Agammenon, after his return from Troy.

The following “guida all’ascolto” for *Idomeneo* is based on the performance choices made by Daniel Harding and his team for the Teatro alla Scala performances of December 2005 (Because of the complex textual history of *Idomeneo*, such choices confront all artists who perform the opera). The most important elements are the following:

- a) They use a soprano Idamante (Mozart originally wrote the part for a castrato), rather than a tenor (the substitution he made for a revival in Vienna in 1786): thus this performance adopts the original vocal scoring and does not insert the two pieces written for a tenor Idamante in 1786 (an aria and a duet).
- b) They omit the *divertissements* (mostly dance movements) at the end of acts I and III. While thoroughly in character and quite beautiful, they add nothing to the dramatic action. Their removal does, however, somewhat mask the French tradition from which the libretto is derived.
- c) They make some cuts in secco recitative; cut a dramatically leaden aria for Arbace in Act II and drastically shorten his Act III aria; they reinsert the Elettra aria in Act III, cut by Mozart during rehearsals, but omit the final aria for Idomeneo, snipped out of the score at the same time.

Overture

Although the exposition of the overture is quite standard in its basic layout (a first group of themes in the tonic, a brief transition, a second group of themes in the dominant), Mozart's choice of material anticipates the pathos of the opera. He immediately contrasts a simple, loud opening theme (in *D major*) with a soft, chromatic continuation. After having moved in his transition to the dominant, *A major*, the first theme in the second group is presented in the parallel minor (*A minor*, with a brief diversion to *C major*), before the exposition closes in *A major*. The recapitulation begins regularly in the tonic, but the second group is never heard again. Instead Mozart introduces several expressive, chromatic themes, some of which will recur in the opera, and closes the overture in a way that connects to the opening recitative. The overture, then, highlights the emotional situation rather than respecting formal regularity.

Act I

In the first act of *Idomeneo*, we are introduced to the four principal characters, and the basic elements of the story are established.

N. 1. Aria di Ilia

The opera opens with recitative for Ilia, accompanied by strings. In beautifully sculpted lines, she sings of her tormented fate, a prisoner on Crete, but in love with her captor, Idamante. She hints, too, of her rival, Electra, who also loves Idamante. Mozart allows Ilia's voice free play, but also uses the orchestra to underscore her lament. On some occasions the texture seems almost aria-like (at "Ah qual contrasto, oh Dio!"). Her aria follows without pause, the concluding chords of the recitative functioning as the beginning of the aria: such overlapping of units is characteristic of Mozart's musical technique in *Idomeneo*, and he will do it again at the end of Ilia's aria, as concerted music gives way to secco recitative.

The poetry presents two quatrains. The first consists of snatches of text, which Mozart sets to fragmentary phrases: Ilia addresses her father, her brothers, all of whom she has lost, then blames Greece for her agony. Yet she loves a Greek. The music begins in the tonic minor, then modulates to the relative major; having arrived at the new key, she sings a more lyrical passage for the second quatrain, as she contemplates her love for Idamante. Typically, Mozart now goes through the text a second time, but instead of modulating to the relative major, he remains in the tonic for the second quatrain. An aria constructed in this fashion is called a bipartite aria.

There are many touching details. Although the two quatrains are set differently, the syncopated figure in the strings at the beginning of each quatrain draws the parts together. That is the kind of thing Mozart means when, in response to his father's advice of 11 December 1780 ("Ti consiglio, mentre componi, di non considerare soltanto il pubblico musicale, ma anche quello non-musicale. Devi ricordare che per ogni dieci *connoisseurs* vi sono cento *ignoramus*"), to which Mozart responds on 16 December: "Quanto a quello che viene chiamato il gusto popolare, non essere inquieto: nella mia opera c'è musica per ogni tipo di persone, ma non per quelle dalle orecchie lunghe [donkeys]".

N. 2. Aria di Idamante

In a secco recitative, Idamante expresses his love for Ilia and agrees to free all Trojan prisoners: he alone will be a prisoner to her beauty. When Ilia invokes the history that separates them, Idamante's aria calls down blame on the gods and asks for death at Ilia's hand if she cannot reciprocate his feeling. She won't commit herself. The form of the poetry and music are similar to Ilia's aria (although each strophe has five verses, not four). Mozart begins by introducing a contrast within the first strophe (an initial Adagio maestoso, then an Allegro con spirito, but with striking chromatic passages), corresponding to the divisions in Idamante's soul. Within the second strophe (in the dominant) the basic tempo remains quick, but again and again Mozart slows it to a Larghetto to emphasize Idamante's suffering. Although he avoids the division of tempo within the reprise of the first strophe, by the time he has done a reprise of the

second strophe in the tonic the stopping and starting seem excessive (Maestro Harding cuts ten measures of this reprise). At the conclusion, Mozart offers his singer the opportunity to introduce a cadenza, a device that returns in several other arias. These cadenzas, *not* by Mozart, have been developed by the performers.

N. 3. Coro

Idamante sets the Trojans free and Trojans and Creteans together celebrate a day of peace and love. The piece is full of energy, with two parallel passages as contrasts to the choral rejoicing, first for two Cretean women (in the dominant), then for two Trojan men (in the tonic).

N. 4. Aria di Elettra

The mood of jubilation is broken by two entrances: first the jealous Electra, then Arbace, the confidant of King Idomeneo, who announces that the angry god of the waters, Neptune, rose up against Idomeneo and his fleet, drowning the King. Idamante and Arbace rush to the shore, and a sad Ilia departs, leaving the stage to Electra. Capable only of selfish feelings, she is furious at a trick of fate that allows Idamante to follow his heart, giving her no chance against the “schiavo,” Ilia. This is all told in flexible recitative, alternating passages with string accompaniment for more intense emotions (Idamante’s reaction to his father’s death, Electra’s rage) and secco recitative for the rest, an unusual approach that Mozart makes his own in *Idomeneo*.

Electra’s aria crystallizes her fury in an intense presentation of passionate figurations. Another bipartite aria with two strophes of text, it begins in *D minor*, but the second strophe is presented in a mixture of the relative major (*F major*) and its parallel minor, so that the tension never abates. The most unusual element of the form is the reprise, which avoids a return to the tonic for the first strophe, but instead goes a tone lower, to *C minor*. Not only does this further intensify the emotion, it anticipates the following Coro.

N. 5. Coro

We are on the shore where a double male chorus (part on the shore, part offstage on the wave-tossed ships) ask the Gods for pity. The music follows directly Electra’s aria, so that her inward rage seems to transform itself into the anger of nature, just as Mozart chooses the unexpected key of her reprise (*C minor*) for this chorus. In a brief orchestral “Pantomima,” again continuous with the previous music, Neptune orders the winds to be calm, and Idomeneo appears, safe at last.

N. 6. Aria di Idomeneo

Safe at a terrible price. As we learn in his recitative, partly accompanied, partly secco, Idomeneo has made a terrible oath: to sacrifice to Neptune the first living soul he encounters on shore. Mozart abbreviated this recitative significantly during rehearsals (as he would the next recitative), because (as he wrote his father on 19 December): “Raaff [Idomeneo] e Dal Prato [Idamante] eseguono il recitativo assolutamente senza *spirito* né *fuoco* e con monotonia, e sono i due più miserabili attori che abbiano mai calcato le scene”. But the cutting was too extreme: Maestro Harding restores some recitative, so that Idomeneo’s oath is clearly recounted.

Raaff was pleased with his first aria, but Mozart was not. As he told his father on 27 November: “Raaff è la persona migliore e più onesta del mondo, ma è così legato a una *routine* di vecchio stampo che essa esclude “carne e sangue.” Di conseguenza, è molto difficile comporre per lui, ma molto facile se si sceglie di comporre arie banali, come per esempio, la prima «Vedrommi intorno». Se tu lo sentirai, dirai che è buono e bello - ma se io avessi scritto per [Giovanni Battista] Zonca, avrei seguito molto meglio le parole”. It is an accurate judgment: much is lovely about this two-tempo aria (an initial *Andantino sostenuto*, in which Idomeneo sings of his sadness, and a concluding *Allegro di molto*, where the text turns darker), but it does not define the character well.

N. 7. Aria di Idamante

Without coming to a full cadence, Idomeneo’s aria leads directly into secco recitative, as Idamante appears. At first the two do not recognize each other. During an extended dialogue, though, their identity becomes clear and Idomeneo is horrified to find that the first person he has seen is his own son. Strings and winds accompany the remainder of the recitative, where Idomeneo begs his son to keep away and then abandons Idamante.

Idamante cannot understand his father’s actions, and, as in his first aria, the vocal line stops and starts to underline his confusion, alternating between major and minor. The structure is Mozart’s standard bipartite design. The musical setting of the second strophe is particularly affecting, with a sweet sadness

that characterizes much of Idamante's music. Indeed the tone of the concluding measures ("m'uccide il dolor") anticipates the solo conclusion for Idamante in the quartetto in the third act. On this melancholy note the first act concludes.

Act II

In the second act, Idomeneo tries to evade his oath by having Idamante accompany Electra back to her homeland in Mycena, but Neptune - who will not be assuage - sends a sea monster to wreak havoc on Crete.

[N. 10. Aria di Arbace]

Although a rather old-fashioned figure, Arbace plays a role in the drama by suggesting to Idomeneo that he might escape his vow by sending Idamante away. Idomeneo decides to have his son accompany Electra back to her homeland. [An aria for Arbace, in which he sings of his allegiance to the King, is cut in this version.]

N. 11. Aria di Ilia

Ilia expresses her gratitude toward Idomeneo for his kindness, and he promises her his friendship. Her aria, one of the most beautiful in the opera, is designed to include (in Mozart's words to his father of 8 November): "quattro strumenti a fiato obbligati, cioè un flauto, un oboe, un corno e un fagotto." While a standard bipartite construction, with two five-verse strophes, Mozart's handling of the obbligati instruments (this is the only piece in *Idomeneo* to include such a group) raises its profile. The composer is equally adept at having the obbligato group drop out - leaving only strings - at the text "Or più non rammento l'angoscie, gli affanni"), where the music momentarily becomes very chromatic. Thus, even within a highly formalized piece, Mozart is attentive to giving expressive valence to each phrase.

N. 12. Aria Idomeneo

By the warmth of Ilia's expression, the King understands that she loves his son. Mozart makes the connection palpable by quoting fragments from Ilia's aria during this accompanied recitative. Mozart was very pleased with this aria, which he described to his father on 27 December: "L'aria è molto bene adatta alle parole. Potete sentire il mare e il mare funesto e i passaggi musicali si adattano a minacciar, poiché essi esprimono completamente il minacciar. Nell'insieme è l'aria più superba dell'opera e ha quindi riscosso universale approvazione". The piece exists in two versions: the more florid is included here; Mozart prepared a simpler version, too, because "il nostro uomo è vecchio e non può ben figurare in un'aria come quella dell'atto II" (letter to his father of 15 November). The aria is expansive: not only does it have a principal section with a full reprise, as in bipartite arias, but it has an extended middle section.

N. 13. Aria di Electra

N. 14. Marcia

Using secco recitative Mozart cut in Munich, then reintegrated before the first performance, Electra thanks Idomeneo for his willingness to allow her to return home with Idamante. After the latter departs, she muses in accompanied recitative about the opportunity to be with the man she loves. In her aria, accompanied by strings alone, she shows another aspect of her character: the music is very simple and melodious, using the standard bipartite model. Mozart allows Electra a short florid passage at the end of each half, but even this is quiet and lovely: the over-all impression of the aria is very different from the harridan portrayed in Electra's other two arias.

The aria continues directly into an orchestral march (Mozart was insistent that horns and trumpets had to use mutes), as Electra exits and the scene changes to the port, from whence the ship for Mycena will depart.

N. 15. Coro

Electra and her countrymen are at the port. In a lovely barcarolle (in 6/8) they comment on how placid the sea is, as they prepare their departure. Electra sings a contrasting section, continuing the amorous tone of her aria, and the opening chorus is repeated. Apparently Electra originally had another strophe, so that the structure would have been ABACA, but Mozart (in a letter to his father of 24 November) insisted that it be shortened to ABA. The music continues directly into the following secco recitative.

N. 16. Terzetto

Idomeneo arrives to bid farewell to his son and Electra. In their trio, an Andante followed by an Allegro con brio, each first expresses a different emotion: Electra thinks of her love for Idamante; Idamante of his departure from his beloved Ilia; Idomeneo his wishes for both of them; and father and son comment on

the terrible destiny that drives them. In the Allegro the three voices fuse, all hoping for a better fate. While an accomplished piece, the terzetto must be seen in the context of the third-act quartetto (see below), one of the finest ensembles in all of opera. In comparison, this terzetto seems generic in its presentation of the characters and inconsequential in musical terms.

N. 17. Coro

N. 18. Coro

There is nothing generic about the remainder of the act. A violent orchestral passage suggests thunder, waves, a storm; when the key turns to *C minor* the chorus enters with “Qual nuovo terrore!” As the scales, exclamations, and dissonant chords succeed one another, a sea monster appears and the chorus, observing the wrath of Neptune, asks what they have done? Who bears the guilt? Varesco had introduced here an aria for Idomeneo, but Mozart was contrary to that solution, as he wrote his father on 15 November: “Nell’ultima scena dell’atto Il Idomeneo ha un’aria o piuttosto una specie di cavatina fra i cori. Qui sarebbe meglio avere un semplice recitativo, ben sostenuto dagli strumenti. Poiché questa scena, che sarà la più bella dell’opera intera (per merito dell’azione e del movimento scenico...), si avrà molto rumore e molta confusione sulla scena, così che un’aria in questo punto particolare farebbe una ben misera figura - tanto più che ci sarà anche la tempesta con tuoni, che non può certo calmarsi durante l’aria di Herr Raaff, non è vero? Un recitativo fra i due cori farà perciò un effetto infinitamente migliore”. And it was an accompanied recitative (with full orchestra) that Mozart did indeed write. His instinct, of course, was right. An aria would have ruined the headlong quality of this scene. The final chorus, “Corriamo, fuggiamo quel mostro spietato,” is an Allegro assai, marked by alternating unison passages, imitative entries, highly dissonant chords, and a constant shift from *forte* to *piano*. To conclude the act with a diminuendo, as one part of the chorus after another flees, is pure genius.

Act III

In the third act, Idomeneo again tries to send Idamante away, but he returns - having killed the sea monster - finally aware of his father’s oath. After scenes of great grief, Idomeneo determines to fulfill his pledge, when Neptune relents. Idomeneo is condemned to turn his throne over to his son, who will marry Ilia. Through this *deus ex machina* resolution, peace is restored to Crete. Mozart knew that this act was his finest work, as he told his father on 3 January 1781: “La mia testa è così piena dell’atto III che non sarebbe uno stupore s’io mi fossi trasformato in un terzo atto. Questo atto mi è costato più tormento di un’opera intera, perché è difficile trovarci una scena che non sia di estremo interesse”.

N. 19. Aria di Ilia

In the royal gardens, Ilia confides to the loving winds her feelings for Idamante. Her aria - with its Metastasian sensibility - is gentle and sweet. Mozart again uses a text in two quatrains, but the first quatrain here serves for the entire principal section, the passages in both the tonic and the dominant. The second quatrain is used for a contrasting middle section, much more chromatic and emotionally troubled, after which the principal section is repeated, all in the tonic. Instead of differentiating the two passages in the principal section, Mozart uses similar musical ideas in both, a compositional strategy that gives the entire piece a feeling of unity. His lovely use of winds, furthermore, conjures up an Arcadian quality. While the piece does nothing to advance the action or the feelings of the character, its sheer beauty captures our attention.

N. 20. Duetto di Ilia e Idamante

Ilia’s aria leads directly into a recitative accompanied by strings, as she sees Idamante approach. At his entrance the recitative becomes secco again. He is determined to slay the sea monster. Faced with his peril, she finally admits her love, at which point the recitative again becomes accompanied, and her Larghetto, beginning with the words “t’amo, t’adoro,” is the loveliest arioso in the opera. In their duet they express their wonder at their mutual love in a slow first section, followed by an Allegretto in 3/8 that expresses their joy. The latter is very pretty, a moment of respite from the intense emotions that are about to overwhelm them both.

N. 21. Quartetto

In a brief accompanied recitative, Idomeneo and Elettra enter: they have seen the tender scene between the lovers and now understand their feelings. As the recitative becomes secco, Idomeneo orders his son to leave in order to escape Neptune’s wrath, but still does not reveal his oath to the sea god. Idamante agrees to leave in a brief passage of accompanied recitative and Ilia expresses her desire to follow him. No, he responds, I will depart alone.

The following quartet is one of the finest ensembles in the history of opera, a piece of breathtaking beauty and deep emotions, in which every musical detail is telling. Mozart knew what he had accomplished and told his father on 27 December: “Quanto più penso a questo quartetto, quando verrà eseguito sulla scena, tanto più efficace lo considero; ed è piaciuto a tutti quelli che l’hanno sentito eseguire al pianoforte”. Only Raaff was unhappy, because he felt it did not sufficiently show off his talents. Here is Mozart’s response (formulated to his father): “[S]’io sapessi di una sola nota che possa essere cambiata in questo quartetto, la cambierei all’istante. Ma non c’è niente nella mia opera di cui io sia così soddisfatto come di questo quartetto; e quando l’avrete sentito cantare una sola volta in concerto, parlerete diversamente. Ho fatto una gran fatica a servirvi bene con le vostre due arie... Ma per quanto riguarda terzetti e quartetti, il compositore deve avere la mano libera”.

Mozart differentiates the four characters perfectly in the beginning, then brings them together when they express their hope that the angry heavens will be calmed. He continues to use the bipartite form we have been following, a passage in the tonic, modulating to the dominant, followed by a passage in the dominant; then a “repeat” of everything we have heard, now in the tonic. Here the “repeat” of the first part is actually an intensification of each musical idea, presented in a more leisurely fashion at first, now overlapping to build tension. In the “repeat” of “Più fiera sorte, pena maggiore nissun provò,” initially heard at the end of the first part, every gesture is intensified, the music moves in a wild chromatic sequence, and then Mozart uses the same words for an imitative passage that makes the tension almost unbearable. The masterstroke is the ending: the four voices pause on a dissonant chord, and Idamante alone closes the quartet, repeating his opening phrase, but breaking off in mid-phrase on a dissonance. He departs, leaving the final cadences to the orchestra alone. It is a heart-breaking conclusion.

N. 22. Aria di Arbace

Nothing of substance could follow this piece, so Mozart provides a short accompanied recitative and aria for Arbace, in which he laments the fate of Crete. It is an attractive composition, written well and with feeling, but it seems utterly superfluous to *Idomeneo*. In this performance, the accompanied recitative is preserved, but the aria itself is heavily abbreviated.

N. 23. Recitativo

N. 24. Coro

N. 25. Marcia

N. 26. Cavatina di Idomeneo con coro

In a strong recitative accompanied by the entire orchestra, the Gran Sacerdote—in a public square—describes to Idomeneo the fate of his people, decimated by the sea monster. Neptune demands a victim, but who must it be? Idomeneo finally admits that the victim must be his own son, Idamante, and makes his way to the temple. The people are stunned, and their chorus in *C minor*, with a contrasting section for the Gran Sacerdote (ABA) is a massive Adagio, very much in the choral style of French *tragédie-lyrique*, as seen through the eyes of Gluck. At the end the orchestra provides a transition to the scene in the temple, where an orchestral march accompanies the arrival of Idomeneo and the people. All is prepared for the sacrifice.

Instead of a full aria, Mozart writes what he calls a cavatina con coro: there are two passages, each with a solo for Idomeneo followed by the same choral response for the Sacerdoti. Most striking about this piece is its orchestration, with pizzicato figuration in the violins and the primary melodic interest in the winds.

N. 27. Recitativo

N. 28. “La voce”

The people announce a “stupenda vittoria.” In secco recitative we learn that Idamante has killed the sea monster. Now he appears, dressed in white with a flower garland on his head, prepared to be the sacrificial victim. He has finally understood that his father’s oath requires his death. In a lengthy, sensitively rendered accompanied recitative, he and his father come to terms with their fate. (Mozart wrote an aria for Idamante in this scene, but cut it before the first performance, because he considered the scene too long: it is not restored in this edition.) As Idomeneo prepares to kill his son, Ilia runs in and begs him to kill her instead. Elettra, too, appears. To the sound of three trombones and two horns a mysterious voice is heard from the statue of Neptune. Mozart rewrote this scene four times, three times with three trombones and two horns, once with a setting for two clarinets, two bassoons, and two horns. There was considerable disagreement in Munich about how long the scene with the subterranean voice should be (Mozart on 29 November wrote to his father: “Se il discorso dello Spettro in *Amleto* non fosse così lungo, sarebbe ben più efficace.”) Maestro Harding has chosen one of moderate length, using three

trombones and two horns, a scoring that recalls many similar otherworldly pronouncements, particularly in French *tragédie-lyrique*.

N. 29a. Aria di Elettra

Only Elettra reacts with horror to the pronouncement of the mysterious voice. She has lost all hope of winning Idamante. Mozart originally wrote a recitative accompanied by the entire orchestra and an aria for her, then shortened the recitative and omitted the aria before the first performance. The present version restores his original music, and one understands why. The recitative follows each of Electra's thoughts, including her evocation of the dead Orestes, whom she promises to rejoin in Hades. Then she breaks into an aria of fury and hate that outdistances even her first-act aria. The string orchestra in the initial part (*C minor*) sounds like infuriated wasps, with piquant turn and trill figures in the violins. As the music arrives at the relative major, she calls on serpents and snakes to attack her breast and end her sorrow. The energy of the piece never flags, and—in the final cadences—she breaks into a powerful, florid phrase that ascends to a high *c*, followed by descending staccato notes that sound like a fiendish laugh, before rushing off the stage.

N. 30. Recitativo

N. 31. Coro

With Electra gone, all that remains is the summing up, and that is left to Idomeneo in a stately recitative, with an orchestral accompaniment of such importance that the beginning sounds as if were going to be the ritornello of an aria. Mozart *did* write an aria for Idomeneo here, but then decided to eliminate it before the first performance, a wise choice: the dramatic flow of the opera should not be stopped again. In and of itself, however, the aria is very beautiful, but as Mozart wrote his father on 18 January: “L'omissione dell'ultima aria di Raaff è forse anche più rimpianata [than the omission of Elettra's aria], ma dobbiamo fare di necessità virtù”.

In the recitative, Idomeneo brings Ilia and Idamante together, instructs his people to follow their new king, and gracefully steps aside.

A lovely festive chorus in *D major* (the key of the overture) brings the opera to a close. Such terminal choruses were, of course, very typical of French *tragédie-lyrique*. Here the chorus welcomes love and hymen to celebrate the union of Ilia and Idamante.