

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

*Idomeneo*

K. 366, with Ballet K. 367

Facsimile of the Autograph Score

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Biblioteka Jagiellońska Kraków

(*Mus. ms. autogr. W. A. Mozart 366, 367, 489 and 490*)

Introductory Essay by Hans Joachim Kreutzer

Musicological Introduction by Bruce Alan Brown

The Packard Humanities Institute

LOS ALTOS, CALIFORNIA

2006

# CONTENTS

Preface · Geleitwort · vii

Mozart's *Idomeneo*: The Rebirth of Myth in Music Drama · i

Hans Joachim Kreutzer

Musicological Introduction · 9

Bruce Alan Brown

Mozarts *Idomeneo*: Wiedergeburt des Mythos im Musikdrama · 21

Hans Joachim Kreutzer

Musikwissenschaftliche Einführung · 29

Bruce Alan Brown

The Librettos · 43

Libretto I (Munich 1781, early version) · 44

Libretto II (Munich 1781, second version) · 75

Illustrations · 91

Note on the Autograph and Watermarks · 97

Gathering Structure and Contents of the Autograph · 101

# MOZART'S *IDOMENEO*: THE REBIRTH OF MYTH IN MUSIC DRAMA

Hans Joachim Kreutzer

Posterity has conferred a collective term on the operas that Mozart composed in the final decade of his life: the master operas. There are seven of them, and today their membership in this category is unanimous and uncontested. They do not form an unbroken series, being interrupted by two fragments, *L'oca del Cairo* and *Lo sposo deluso* (both 1783), and by a comedy with music, *Der Schauspieldirektor* (1786). The ten-work series opens with *Idomeneo* (1780–81), or, to use the alternative title introduced with the first printed score of 1805, in deference to the taste of a new era, *Ilija ed Idamante*. The new title shifted the emphasis from the general and political toward the individual human being. Lest we distort our view of Mozart's operatic cosmos, we must bear in mind that *Idomeneo* was preceded by twelve operas, counting the fragmentary *Zaide* and two oratorios capable of performance on stage. In the year of his death, Mozart again received a commission—his fifth altogether—to compose an opera on a subject from antiquity: the coronation opera *La clemenza di Tito*. The path from *Idomeneo* to *Tito* takes us from the Trojan War to Rome, and from myth to history. Compared to *Idomeneo*, for which Mozart never found a definitive form consistent with his intentions, *La clemenza di Tito* takes on the air of a farewell gesture, not merely toward his own artistic goals, but toward an entire era.

The concept of “master opera” is not unproblematic. There can be little doubt that it divides Mozart's early works from his later ones in an evaluative sense. It tends to reflect the aesthetic outlook of the nineteenth century. For a long period of time, artists and savants took the world of artisanship as a frame of reference for their activities and self-assessment. In the Age of Absolutism, the complex, lavish, and expensive art forms, with opera at their head, were left to the responsibility of the courts, who commissioned new works of art and, in rough outline, laid down their forms in advance. The term “master” is at best vague when applied to the composer Wolfgang Amadé Mozart. Yet even he was beholden to the conditions of commissioned art, and he thought and composed in its terms to the end of his days. *Idomeneo* is entirely a child of the world of the court—its roles, its images, its symbols. This truth applies not only to its genesis but also to its ultimate shape

and historical impact. Whether the nineteenth century was fundamentally bourgeois may be open to debate, but we must concede that the age that followed upon Mozart's death offered little breathing space for a work of this complexion apart from an appreciation of its compositional workmanship. In comparison, *La clemenza di Tito*, with its underlying theme of friendship, had more favorable preconditions for attaining widespread prestige.

Even today, any attempt to stage *Idomeneo* falls under the heading of a revival. This may seem odd in view of the incontrovertible fact that Mozart himself was more attached to this musical drama—the tale of the return of the Cretan king Idomeneus and his vow—than to almost any of his other stage works. In the reality of his life and creative output, this opera took on exceptional significance. Rarely did he come so close to the life-goal that he considered supreme for himself as an artist: the “grand opera,” as he called *Idomeneo* in a letter of 6 December 1783 to his father. None of his major works was subjected to so much tinkering and revision over so many years. Usually it was Mozart's habit to finish a composition or to let it lie—the latter, incidentally, more often than is generally realized. Returning to a previous work, especially to revise or even reconceive it, was not his manner of doing things. It is not easy to see just what made a fable from the world and times of the Trojan War so fascinating to him.

One overriding problem lies in determining where the continuing significance of the fates of the heroes from the Trojan War actually resides. The fortunes of *Idomeneo* have been tied to this question from the very beginning. *The Magic Flute*, for example, had the good luck from the very outset that musicians could play its loveliest melodies for all the world to hear, whether in taverns or in the street, and that young ladies could use them to practice the piano. Only a few years after Mozart's death, Goethe could depict the hero of his short epic poem *Hermann und Dorothea* as wholly backward and unmusical simply by making him ignorant of Mozart's most popular work for the stage. This “Boeotian”—as the classical writers of Weimar would have described him in imitation of the ancient Athenians—did not even know *The Magic Flute*! Yet the extraordinary success of certain parts