



IDOMENEO

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Study Guide



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Welcome to Pacific Opera Victoria!

This Study Guide has been created primarily to assist teachers in preparing students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that teachers will be able to add this to the existing curriculum in order to expand students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts.

Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is not enough time to discuss in class. The opera experience can be made more meaningful and enjoyable when students have the opportunity to learn about the opera before they attend the performance.

For more information about the history of opera, including a glossary of opera terms, please see other Study Guides on the Pacific Opera Victoria web site at http://www.pov.bc.ca/involve_education.html.

Teachers: Your comments and suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire at the end of this study guide.

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their voice for opening night.

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IDOMENEIO

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Dress Rehearsal October 9, 2007
Performances October 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 2007
Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC

Idomeneo, Rè di Creta
Dramma per musica in three acts, K. 366
Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Libretto by Giambattista Varesco
First Performance January 29, 1781, Cuvillies Theatre of the Residenz in Munich

Sung in Italian with English surtitles
The performance is approximately three hours, with two intermissions

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Cast in order of vocal appearance

Ilia	Emmanuelle Coutu
Idamante	Mia Lennox-Williams
Cretan Women	Allison Ward & Hannah Mitchell
Trojan Men	Stephen Barradell & Andrew Snyder
Elettra	Joslin Romphf
Arbace / High Priest	Blaine Hendsbee
Idomeneo	David Pomeroy
Voice of the Oracle	Andrew Greenwood
Conductor	Mario Bernardi
Director	Ann Hodges
Set Designer	Alison Green
Costume Designer	Christine Reimer
Lighting Designer	Robert Thomson
Resident Stage Manager	Jackie Adamthwaite
Assistant Stage Managers	Steve Barker
	Connie Hosie
Chorus Master and Répétiteur	Michael Drislane

With the Victoria Symphony and the Pacific Opera Victoria Chorus

Cast and programme are subject to change.

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Synopsis

Director Ann Hodges has framed this production of Idomeneo through the perspective of a boy on a beach. Finding a conch shell, he holds it to his ear – and discovers a world where kings, gods, princesses, warriors, and sea monsters are real and full of possibility ...

The Trojan war has ended after ten years with the defeat of Troy by the forces of Greece and its allies, including Crete. Among the Trojan prisoners who have been sent to Crete by King Idomeneo is Princess Ilia, daughter of King Priam of Troy. Her father and most of her brothers have been killed in the war. During the voyage Ilia was saved from a shipwreck by Idomeneo's son Idamante. She is now torn between love for her rescuer and grief for her family and homeland.

Idamante tells Ilia he loves her and releases the Trojan prisoners, a gesture that scandalizes the Greek princess Elettra, who wants Idamante for herself. News that a storm has destroyed Idomeneo's fleet and that the king is dead sends Idamante rushing to the shore.

Meanwhile Idomeneo has rashly promised the god Neptune that he will sacrifice the first person he meets if his own life is spared. He lands safely, but is horrified to encounter his own son on the beach. As Idomeneo flees Idamante, the young man is baffled and heartbroken by his father's coldness.

Intermission

Act 2

On the advice of the high priest Arbace, Idomeneo tries to evade his oath by sending his son out of reach: Idamante is to take Elettra back to her home in Argos. When Ilia tells Idomeneo that she now sees him as a father and Crete as her new home, he realizes that Ilia and his son are in love and that all three of them will be victims of his vow – one destroyed by the knife, two by grief.

Elettra happily looks forward to having Idamante to herself on the trip to Argos. But before they can embark, a violent storm and a ravenous sea monster threaten the city as punishment for Idomeneo's crime.

Intermission

Act 3

Idamante has resolved to battle the monster. As he prepares to leave, Ilia tells him she loves him. Idomeneo and Elettra find them together. Idomeneo expresses his dismay, Elettra her jealousy, and Idamante implores his father to explain what he has done to offend him. All four sing of their profound grief. Idamante departs, expecting and welcoming death.

The people and the high priest demand that Idomeneo deliver them from the monster, which has been devastating the kingdom. Idomeneo confesses that it is Idamante who must die and sadly prepares to fulfill his vow.

Having killed the monster, Idamante returns in triumph. Understanding now the reason for Idomeneo's coldness, Idamante declares that he is ready to be sacrificed to save his people. Ilia insists on taking his place.

The voice of an Oracle proclaims that love has triumphed and that the gods will be satisfied if Idomeneo yields the throne to Idamante and Ilia. The thwarted Elettra rages in mad fury. Everyone else rejoices and sings in praise of peace and love.

Opera in the 18th century and the Music of *Idomeneo*

Idomeneo was written in 1781, a time when composers of opera were searching for a new voice. Earlier in the century, the great poet and librettist **Pietro Metastasio** set forth a series of ideals that “reformed” opera. In an attempt to create a greater dramatic unity within a single work, Metastasio codified *opera seria* as musical drama featuring classical characters from antiquity (gods, nobles, heroes), struggling with conflicts between love, honour and duty. Opera seria eliminated plot devices designed solely to enable new stage technology, removed irrelevant comic episodes, and focused on the beauty of lyric poetry written to reveal noble character. Key to the compositional style was the da capo aria, a three part form that includes the statement of theme, a statement of the contrasting theme, and the return to the original theme, embellished at the will of the performer. **George Friedrich Handel** marks a high point in this style of writing with operas such as *Giulio Cesare*, *Alcina*, and *Ariodante*, and oratorios such as *Messiah* and *Semele*. These works explore the colours of human emotion, and the words, music and singers’ dexterity combine to create moments of great beauty, passionate vigour and emotional catharsis.

Christoph Willibald Gluck further reformed opera with librettist **Ranieri di Calzibigi**, an Italian poet greatly influenced by French theatre. In their work, the libretti were focused on creating a more natural drama, with more straightforward language, more direct storytelling, and accordingly, simpler melodic lines, free from embellishment for the sake of vocal pyrotechnics. Gluck’s masterpiece *Iphigenie en Tauride* will be presented by Seattle Opera in October 2007. Opera of this time explores progression of character through difficult situations, and often focuses on the belief that an individual can control his own fate, and that the gods reward those people who rely on their own power of reason to solve life’s challenges.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart went even further, discovering his own voice. In Mozart’s musical language, musical progression becomes key, as themes are stated, developed, and transformed. While working in the same musical idiom as Gluck, Mozart’s music is even more dramatic. His work marks the culmination of the reformed opera seria, and in works such as *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Die Zauberflöte*, ultimately advances to a new classical style that is natural, human, and so real that his operas transcend time. **In *Idomeneo*, the listener will hear elements of the late Baroque and Classical styles, such as:**

- **Recitativo secco (Dry recitative)** - Passages of music that imitate the rhythm and stress of spoken language. These passages generally advance the plot, rather than reflect on the emotions of the characters. In our production, these sections will be accompanied by harpsichord and cello.
- **Recitativo accompagnato (Accompanied recitative)** – Like secco recitative, but accompanied by the full orchestra. These passages are generally reserved for moments of high drama, and are less freely declaimed than the secco recitative.
- **Aria** – A self-contained musical section that uses melody to illustrate an emotional state. *Idomeneo* has many differing kinds of arias, ranging from moments of contemplation to key moments of decision to the voice of vengeance.
- **Choral style** – The chorus in *Idomeneo* plays an important role. Dramatically, the chorus gives voice to “society”, and shows the impact of the decision of the leading characters. Musically, it elevates the story to one of epic proportions, with great similarity to Mozart’s liturgical music.

Selected Musical highlights

Act 1

Ilia's aria "Padre, germani, addio" ("Father, brothers, farewell!")

In the recitative preceding the aria, Ilia recalls the war that destroyed so many members of her family, including her father Priam and many of her brothers. But she is in love with one of the enemy, Idamante, who has rescued her from the storm. "I owe vengeance to him who gave me life, gratitude to him who restored it ... This opening aria is preceded by an extended recitativo accompagnato. Note the great changes in emotion as Ilia explores her tragic situation. Passages of quiet solemnity alternate with musical outbursts of pain, finally leading to the aria where she explores her heart wrenching decision - "Will I choose love or country"? The aria captures the driving energy of her internal conflict.

Elettra's aria "Tutte nel cor vi sento" ("In my heart I feel you, Furies of bitter Hades")

While Ilia's aria is an exploration of impassioned reason, Elettra's aria is an explosion of blind fury. At the news of Idomeneo's death, having observed the attraction between Idamante and Ilia, Elettra is enraged at the thought that Idamante would choose a Trojan slave over a princess. Her volatile nature is mirrored in the adventurous harmonies of the aria. The key is d minor, but vigorous harmonic progressions express the depth of her anger. When she returns to the original melodic statement for a second time, we are in the distantly related key of c minor, moving colourfully back to d minor for the aria's fiery conclusion. By setting her first aria in this way, the composer is revealing madness only just beneath the surface.

Act 2

Idomeneo's aria "Fuor del mar" ("Saved from the sea")

There are two versions of the aria, the ornately embellished original version, and a more concise version which Mozart wrote for the 1786 Vienna concert performance (the version used in this production). Idomeneo now realizes that Ilia and Idamante are in love. Although he was saved from the physical storm by Neptune, a far more fearsome storm is raging in his soul. The first version was written specifically for Anton Raaff, a singer of advanced age who maintained great flexibility despite limitations of range. The revised aria is more appropriate to the weight of voice of the tenor assigned to the role - a robust lyric tenor with a strong lower register.

Chorus "Placido è il mar" ("The sea is calm")

A moment of joy and tranquillity as Elettra prepares to set sail for her home; she and the chorus anticipate calm seas, good fortune, and peace. This choral passage is gentle and tender, in contrast to the epic dramatic passages of Act 3.

Act 3

Quartet "Andrò rammingo, e solo" ("I will go on my wanderings alone")

To our characters, the answer seems clear: Idamante must flee Crete, never to see his loved ones again. Idamante, Ilia, Idomeneo, Elettra sing together of their conflicting emotions, and Mozart begins his discovery of musical storytelling through ensemble singing. Time is suspended as the four characters explore their individual perspectives, mixing into a powerful expression of their shared emotional position.

Elettra's mad scene "D'Oreste, d'AJace" ("Of Orestes and of Ajax")

Originally cut from the premiere, this aria comes from a tradition of "vengeance arias", highly coloured expressions of madness often present in Baroque opera, a tradition that gives forth to the extended mad scenes of the Romantic era, such as those in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *I Puritani*. David Cairns called this aria "one of the greatest explosions of psychotic fury in all music".

Background of the Story

The Trojan War

Most people are familiar with two pivotal elements of the Trojan War. The first is the spark that caused the war: Helen of Troy (famously described by the 16th century English poet Christopher Marlowe as *the face that launch'd a thousand ships*). The second is the Trojan horse, which led to Troy's final defeat. These are the bookends of the Trojan War which, according to legend, took place sometime around 1200 BC and lasted for ten years.

The war was triggered when Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, went to live in Troy with the Trojan prince Paris. (It is never clear whether Helen eloped with Paris or was abducted). Helen's husband Menelaus, the king of Sparta, went to war to win her back, along with allies from all over Greece and the islands of the Mediterranean. Before Menelaus was selected as Helen's husband, many men had wanted to marry her; all her suitors had agreed to avenge any wrong done to the winner. Thus when Menelaus lost his wife to another man, Helen's suitors kept their promises and assembled a huge fleet to support Menelaus in the war against Troy.

However, as with most wars and most myths, the reason for the Trojan War goes back further. Some time before, all the gods except one had been invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (who would be the parents of Achilles, one of the fiercest warriors on the Greek side in the Trojan war). Eris, the goddess of discord, was excluded from the wedding, probably for the very good reason that she instigated trouble wherever she went. Furious, she sent a gift anyway: a golden apple bearing the inscription "for the fairest one". Instead of graciously awarding the apple to the bride, three goddesses quarreled over the prize: Hera (Juno), the wife of Zeus (Jupiter), the king of the gods; Athena (Minerva), goddess of war and wisdom; and Aphrodite (Venus), goddess of love. Zeus was asked to judge, but knew better than to get involved: as his wife was one of the contestants, he not only faced a huge conflict of interest, but was sure to be in trouble no matter what he decided.

Instead, he asked the handsome young Trojan prince, Paris, to make the choice. All three goddesses tried to bribe Paris. Hera offered him wealth and power; Athena offered wisdom and glory in war; Aphrodite offered him the love of the world's most beautiful woman. When Paris gave the prize to Aphrodite, she rewarded him with the love of Helen, caring not at all that Helen was already married. Helen left her husband in Sparta and went to live with Paris in Troy. During the ensuing war, Hera and Athena continued to hold grudges against Paris and so took the side of the Greeks.

The first nine years of the war were rather uneventful as the Greeks surrounded Troy and lay siege to the city without being able to win a decisive victory. Finally, one of the cleverest of the Greeks, Ulysses (Odysseus) came up with a strategy to trick the Trojans. Pretending to give up, the Greeks moved their ships away out of sight. They then constructed an immense wooden horse, ostensibly an offering to Minerva, and left it behind for the Trojans to find. The Trojans were thrilled at their apparent victory and were of course very curious about the huge wooden horse.

Laocoon, a priest of Neptune warned them not to trust it, saying, *I fear the Greeks even when they offer gifts* (the origin of a saying that has come down to our times: *Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.*) . Another Trojan who warned the people not to trust the horse was Cassandra, the beautiful daughter of King Priam and sister of Paris. After the sun god Apollo had fallen in love with Cassandra and been rejected by her, he had given her the power of prophecy – along with the curse of never being believed. She had predicted that her brother Paris would cause the destruction of Troy. She now predicted that the wooden horse would cause nothing but disaster. But as always, everyone who heard her simply thought she was crazy.

Ignoring the warnings of Laocoon and Cassandra, the Trojans dragged the great horse into the city and celebrated their victory with drinking and partying. During the night, while the Trojans were sleeping off the effects of their celebration, Greek warriors emerged from the horse, opened the gates of the city to the waiting Greek army and slaughtered the Trojans.

The main source for the story of the Trojan War is *The Iliad* (from *Ilium*, another name for Troy), a long epic poem by Homer, who lived around the 8th to 7th century BC, some half a millennium after the fall of Troy. The *Iliad* tells of a few events during the tenth year of the war; much of it is a catalogue of ships and armies and accounts of who killed whom and how. The *Iliad* finishes before the end of the war. The story of the wooden horse is told in Homer's other great epic, the *Odyssey*, which recounts the journey of the Greek warrior Ulysses (Odysseus), who spent ten years trying to get home after the war. Another source for the story of the horse is Virgil's *Aeneid*, written between 29 and 19 BC; The *Aeneid* tells the story of one of the few Trojan survivors of the war, Aeneas, who escaped and traveled in search of a new homeland, which would eventually become Rome. The *Posthomerica*, probably written in the 4th century AD by the Greek poet Quintus Smyrnaeus, picks up the story of the Trojan War where the *Iliad* leaves off and also includes the story of the Trojan horse.

Characters in the Opera and in Myth

Idomeneo (Idomeneus), the King of Crete was the grandson of King Minos of Crete, who required the people of Athens to send seven young men and seven young women every year to be devoured by the Minotaur, a half-man-half-bull monster that Minos had shut up in a labyrinth. Idomeneus was one of the many suitors of Helen of Troy. He therefore joined the Trojan War as an ally of Menelaus and was one of the warriors that hid inside the Trojan horse.

In the *Iliad*, Idomeneus is one of the most important and respected generals fighting on the Greek side. He was a great spearman, *fierce as a wild boar*; wearing his armour and carrying two spears, he is described as looking like a lightning bolt that Zeus hurls down from Mount Olympus.

The story about Idomeneus promising to sacrifice the first person he sees after his rescue from a storm does not appear in any of the ancient sources. It first shows up in a commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* written about 400 AD by Maurus Servius Honoratus, an Italian grammarian. Virgil says only that Idomeneus arrived safely in Crete but then fled into exile. It is Servius who fills in some of the blanks, telling of Idomeneus' vow to Neptune to sacrifice the first person he meets after landing safely in Crete. Servius does not specify whether Idomeneus actually carried out the sacrifice.

Idamante does not appear by name in ancient sources, and, as noted above, there is no existing record of the story of his father's ill-fated vow until Servius' Commentary, written some 1500 years after the event supposedly took place. Even then the son of Idomeneus remains nameless.

In 1699, François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, more commonly known as François Fénelon, included the story of Idomeneus' vow as a minor episode in his book *Les aventures de Télémaque* (*The Adventures of Telemachus*). Mozart read this book, which was one of the sources for the opera *Idoménée* by Danchet and Campra on which Mozart based *Idomeneo*. In Fénelon's work we see the storm, the imprudent vow, and Idomeneus' horror on meeting his son; the son declares his willingness to be sacrificed, but Idomeneus is overcome by the Furies, and violently plunges his sword into his son's heart, then tries to kill himself.

The name Idamante first appears in 1705 in *Idoménée*, a play by Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, which features Idomeneus and his ill-fated vow, plus a love triangle in which father and son love the same woman. In this version, Idamante kills himself.

In 1712, composer André Campra and librettist Antoine Danchet wrote their opera *Idoménée*, based on Crébillon's play; however, this time, Idamante and Idomeneus are rivals for the love of Ilione, Priam's daughter, and Idomeneus, driven mad by the goddess Nemesis, kills his son in a rage; when his sanity returns, he repents, but is told by Ilione that his punishment will be to live.

Idamante's fate changes yet again in Mozart's opera, which, though based closely on the Campra/Danchet work, does away with the father-son rivalry for the same woman and allows Idamante to live.

Ilia does not specifically appear in ancient mythology. However, *Ilium* is another name for Troy; the *Iliad* is the story of Troy; the name *Ilia* comes from the same root, meaning a Trojan woman, in this case a Trojan princess, daughter of the king of Troy. In the Campra/Danchet opera, she was called Ilione. Her father, King Priam of Troy, reputedly had some 50 children, most of whom were killed in the Trojan War. Priam too was killed at the end of the war, and his wife Hecuba taken as a slave. Among Ilia's most famous brothers and sisters are these:

Paris, the handsome prince whose love for Helen caused the war, was himself killed in the war.

Hector, perhaps the greatest Trojan warrior, was killed by Achilles; instead of returning Hector's body to his family, Achilles treated it with egregious disrespect, tying the body to his chariot and dragging it before the walls of Troy. Only after King Priam went to the Greek camp and pleaded with Achilles, offering a large ransom, did Achilles let him take away the body of his son.

Cassandra had the gift of prophecy but was never believed. She foresaw the fall of Troy and warned her people about the Trojan Horse, but everyone believed she was mad. After the war she was taken as a concubine by Agamemnon (Elettra's father) and murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover. Perhaps worst of all, she foresaw her own fate.

Elettra (Electra) comes from perhaps the most dysfunctional family in all of myth: the cursed House of Atreus, whose members were prone to adultery, murder, cannibalism, and madness. Electra grew up with a family at war with itself, its members killing one another in an endless cycle of vengeance.

The founder of the House of Atreus was Electra's great-great grandfather Tantalus, who offended the gods by feeding them the flesh of his son Pelops. The gods punished Tantalus by making him stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches. Whenever he reached for the fruit, the branches moved out of his reach, and whenever he tried to drink, the water receded.

Pelops was brought back to life by the gods, but his children were as nasty as his father had been. One son, Thyestes, had an affair with the wife of his brother Atreus. Atreus followed the example of his grandfather Tantalus, killed Thyestes' children, and cooked and served them to their father, waiting till after dinner to tell him what he had eaten. Thyestes had one more son, Aegisthus, who grew up to kill Atreus and then to carry on the betrayal and bloodshed to the next generation.

Atreus had two sons. Menelaus married Helen, and went to war against Troy to get her back. Menelaus' brother Agamemnon led the Greek forces in the war. Agamemnon had married Clytemnestra (after killing her first husband, another Tantalus). Among their tragically cursed children were daughters Iphigenia and Electra, and a son, Orestes.

Electra's sister Iphigenia was one of the first casualties of the Trojan War. On their way to Troy, Agamemnon's ships were becalmed because the goddess Artemis, angry with Agamemnon for killing a sacred deer, stopped the wind. To appease Artemis, Agamemnon tricked his wife Clytemnestra into sending Iphigenia to him so that he could sacrifice her. The enraged and grieving Clytemnestra then began an affair with her husband's cousin Aegisthus. When Agamemnon returned from the war, he brought with him as a concubine the prophetess Cassandra. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon and Cassandra. Later Orestes, aided by his sister Electra, killed Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and was driven mad by the Furies. Electra's fate is uncertain, although Mozart allows her to descend into madness like her brother.

Electra isn't even a part of the original story of Idomeneus. She first wandered into the story during Danchet and Campra's 1712 opera *Idomenée* – one of countless instances in which authors have played fast and loose with stories from mythology. In Danchet's libretto, Electra plays a more major role in the plot, calling on Venus to avenge her unrequited love. Idomeneus, about to abdicate in favour of his son, instead is struck with madness and kills Idamante.

Introduction to Enlightenment Concepts

Living as he did from 1756 to 1791, Mozart was a product of and an influence on what is called The Enlightenment, a period of intellectual ferment and scientific advancement that spanned the late 17th and the 18th century.

The Enlightenment was by no means a simple, monolithic movement but a web of philosophers, scientists, artists, writers, and statesmen throughout Europe and America, who began to think in new ways, having a profound effect on the social, political, moral, philosophical and religious climate of the 18th century.

The central precept of enlightenment thinkers was that knowledge should be based on logic, observation, and reason, rather than tradition, guessing, or the laws of an absolute authority. They believed that people should think for themselves rather than submit blindly to an absolute authority (god, king, church) or accept unreasonable laws. Rather than succumb to their destiny, humans could change it, by relying on reason and natural human feeling.

Enlightenment thought found its way into every branch of human endeavour: economics, politics, morality, science, and the arts.

Money and economics drive the way people live their lives and can affect how they think about life. Changes in how people made their living during this time had profound effects. The old feudal system with its authoritarian pattern of lords and serfs who kept their positions for life was morphing into capitalism. More and more, power derived from money rather than status. With a rising bourgeois or middle class made up of artisans and merchants, travel and trade increased. Self-reliance and individualism became more and more important.

Adam Smith's influential book *The Wealth of Nations* explored these new economic principles, pointing out that economic progress depends upon the division of labor, freedom of trade, and the individual's pursuit of his own self interest.

Mozart himself is an example of these changing economic realities. His father Leopold was violinist in the court orchestra of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, a position he held for 44 years under five successive prince-archbishops. Mozart worked for a while for Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg, but he chafed under the Archbishop's autocratic management. Colloredo saw musicians as mere servants and treated Mozart with enormous disdain. Mozart also longed for a wider world with a more vibrant musical culture than Salzburg offered. Eventually, he quit his position. Instead of working for one employer in a secure job-for-life, Mozart was on the road for a third of his life, looking for work, living from commission to commission, and never succeeding in finding a permanent position with a patron, the ideal situation for a composer under the old system.

In politics, the belief in the divine right of kings – a god-given right to rule – changed into the concept of the enlightened monarch, an administrator of the natural law, and the loving father of his people. There are hints of this in *Idomeneo* where the king is forced to consider the good of his people: to be prepared to make a personal sacrifice to save his people and ultimately to abdicate in favour of a new generation with new modes of thought based on love and on making peace with former enemies.

Scientific thought too developed with an approach based on rigorous observation and experiment. The Royal Society, founded in England in 1660, was dedicated to the free flow of information and encouraged communication among scientists. Its motto, *Nullius in Verba* (Latin: *On the words of no one*), clearly shows the Society's commitment to basing accepted truth, not on any authority, but on individual experiment and observation. Scientists now began to report their experiments so that others could replicate them. Among the many brilliant scientists of the time were the physicist, mathematician, and astronomer Sir Isaac Newton, the astronomers William and Caroline Herschel, the mathematician and philosopher William Leibniz, the mathematician and physicist Emilie du Chatelet, and Carl Linnaeus, the great botanist and zoologist who established the system for scientific naming of animals and plants.

Enlightenment writers and philosophers such as Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Kant, Swift, and Fielding spoke out eloquently on behalf of thought, reason, and the need for people to question old beliefs and authorities and to be responsible for their own actions and moral decisions. The old structures of aristocracy and class division, the old religious and racial prejudices needed to give way to a new sense of tolerance and equality.

Again, *Idomeneo* expresses some of the most basic enlightenment concepts.

At the beginning of the opera Ilia feels a conflict between her sense of loyalty to her people and family and her growing love for Idamante. But she is able to put aside old hatreds and move forward, looking to the future rather than the past. She observes Idamante's generosity in freeing the Trojan slaves and sees that he too is capable of freeing himself from the prejudices of the past.

Elettra, however, is trapped in the past, caught in her emotions of vengeance and rage, which eventually leave her insane and without hope. From the beginning, Elettra represents the conservative forces that will keep old enmities alive; she condemns Idamante's decision to free the Trojan slaves. She cannot even bring herself to call Ilia by name, but refers to her as a *Trojan slave*,

All the old versions of the story were tragedies in which Idamante died, either by his own hand or that of his father. Mozart's *Idomeneo* changes the ending, beautifully aligning the story and characters with the Enlightenment ideals of reason and humanity.

Submission to the absolute authority of deities, kings, and preordained destiny is replaced by the power of human thought and feeling; people need no longer be enslaved by history and the urge to avenge the past. Rather than succumb to destiny, they can change it – as the young protagonists of *Idomeneo* make peace with former enemies and look to a future built on hope and love.

Mozart and the Writing of *Idomeneo*

When the 24-year-old Mozart received a commission in 1780 from Karl Theodor, Elector of Bavaria, for an opera for a court carnival in Munich, the young composer traveled to Munich to compose the music and oversee rehearsals while the librettist, Giambattista Varesco, chaplain to the Archbishop of Salzburg, stayed behind in Salzburg.

Mozart communicated with Varesco through letters to his father Leopold, which provide a delightful insight into his joys and frustrations as he composed a work that he hoped (in vain) might lead to the elusive court appointment he'd been chasing for years.

Mozart wrote his music to suit the performers at hand. His letters reveal a complex juggling act as he tried to compose to suit the performers' abilities, cater to their wishes, keep his librettist from open rebellion – and create a work that was musically and dramatically effective. The letters show Mozart as confident in his abilities, exuberant about writing this opera and about hobnobbing with musicians and court authorities in Munich, and surprisingly mature and tactful when it came to dealing with the performers.

The performers included the tenor Anton Raaff as Idomeneo – 66, past his prime, and not much of an actor. However, Mozart treated Raaff with enormous respect and considered him a good friend. Raaff's influence probably helped Mozart get the commission to write *Idomeneo*.

On one occasion, commenting on a change Raaff recommended in one of his arias, Mozart wrote, *He is right, and even were he not, some courtesy ought to be shown to his gray hairs.* Another time, Mozart asked that Varesco make some changes to one of Raaff's arias, saying, *The other day he was much annoyed by some words in his last aria – rin vigorir and ringiovenir, and especially vienmi a rin vigorir – five i's! It is true, this is very disagreeable at the close of an air.*

But Mozart held his own when he considered it important. One of the finest moments in the opera is the great quartet in Act 3, in which Idomeneo, Idamante, Iliia, and Elettra are both united and separated by their profound grief and heartbreak as Idamante prepares to leave. Raaff did not think much of the quartet; Mozart tactfully but firmly refused to change it:

The more I think of the quartet as it will be on the stage, the more effective I consider it, and it has pleased all those who have heard it on the piano. Raaff alone maintains that it will not be successful. He said to me confidentially, "There is no opportunity to expand the voice; it is too confined." As if in a quartet the words should not far rather be spoken, as it were, than sung! He does not at all understand such things. I only replied, "My dear friend, if I were aware of one single note in this quartet which ought to be altered, I would change it at once; but there is no single thing in my opera with which I am so pleased as with this quartet, and when you have once heard it sung in concert you will speak very differently. I took every possible pains to conform to your taste in your two arias, and intend to do the same with the third, so I hope to be successful; but with regard to trios and quartets, they should be left to the composer's own discretion." On which he said that he was quite satisfied.

Later, after a rehearsal of the quartet, Mozart was able to report, *Raaff was glad to find himself mistaken about the quartet, and no longer doubts its effect.*

Idamante was played by the castrato Vincenzo dal Prato, who was the same age as Mozart, newly appointed to the court in Munich, and still inexperienced. Mozart considered him a wooden actor and a weak singer and was frustrated by the need to coach him note by note for his part: *I must teach the whole opera myself to Del Prato [sic]. He is incapable of singing even the introduction to any air of importance, and his voice is so uneven! He is only engaged for a year, and at the end of that time (next September) Count Seeau will get another... I must sing to him, for I have to teach him his whole part like a child ...*

However, dal Prato must have improved somewhat; he stayed on at the Munich court for the rest of his long career.

Mozart was much happier with the other performers. His sopranos, both experienced and highly regarded singers, were sisters-in-law; Dorothea Wendling was the wife of the flute player Johann Baptist Wendling, whose violinist brother Franz was married to Elisabeth (Lisel) Wendling. Mozart was good friends with all the Wendlings and wrote the parts of Ilia for Dorothea and Elettra for Lisel.

The two sopranos clearly liked the music he gave them. He wrote to Leopold, *Madame Dorothea Wendling isarci-contentissima with her scena, and insisted on hearing it played three times in succession.* And again, later: *Lisel Wendling has also sung through her two arias half a dozen times, and is much pleased with them. I heard from a third person that the two Wendlings highly praised their arias.*

Mozart had the luxury of writing for the musicians of what was widely considered the finest orchestra in Europe, if not the world: the Mannheim orchestra, which had recently relocated to Munich and among whom Mozart counted many friends. These included the Wendling brothers, oboist Friedrich Ramm, and Christian Cannabich, a violinist, conductor, and composer whom Mozart had known since childhood.

The poet Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart wrote of this orchestra: *No orchestra in the world has ever played like the Mannheimers. Their forte is like thunder, their crescendo a cascade, their diminuendo a river of crystal flowing away into the distance, their piano a breath of spring.* The English music scholar Charles Burney called the Mannheimers *an army of generals, equally competent to plan a campaign and to fight it.*

In fact the Mannheim orchestra inspired nicknames for certain musical effects that it developed and perfected, including the famous Mannheim Crescendo, a stupendous whole-orchestra crescendo and diminuendo that ranged from pianissimo to fortissimo, as well as the Mannheim Rocket, the Mannheim Roller, the Mannheim Sigh, and the Mannheim Birds (an imitation of birds chirping in solo passages).

In *Idomeneo* Mozart took full advantage of having such a virtuoso orchestra at his service; the orchestration for the opera is particularly challenging, beautiful, and complex.

While Mozart was writing to suit the musicians and singers he had at hand, he never lost sight of the need for dramatically effective action. It was a complicated process, which required considerable negotiating skill on the composer's part. Although Mozart was prepared to sacrifice beautiful music on the altar of dramatic necessity, singers, librettist, and Leopold often disagreed.

On November 29, 1780, Mozart wrote to Leopold, *Don't you think that the speech of the subterranean voice is too long? Think it over, carefully. Imagine the scene on the stage. The voice must be terrifying--it must be impressive, one must believe it real. How can this be so if the speech is too long—for the longer it goes on, the more the audience will become aware that there's nothing real about it. If the speech of the Ghost in "Hamlet" were not so long it would be more effective.*

Idomeneo premiered at the Cuvilliés Theatre of the Residenz in Munich on January 29, 1781. Mozart continued to make last-minute cuts, and the performance did not match the printed score. On January 18 he wrote to Leopold: *The poetry is ... far too long, and of course the music likewise, which I always said. On this account the aria of Idamante, "No la morte io non pavento" is to be omitted ... The prediction of the oracle is still far too long, so I have shortened it; but Varesco need know nothing of this, because it will all be printed just as he wrote it.*

Among the last-minute cuts were three arias in Act 3, including the particularly ruthless removal of Elettra's aria "d'Oreste, d'Aiace." Mozart took it out for the sake of dramatic conciseness. Today, few modern directors can bear to do without it, and it is usually kept in productions of the opera.

After three performances in Munich, *Idomeneo* was not staged again during the composer's life. Mozart did make further revisions for a private concert performance in Vienna in 1786, rewriting the part of Idamante for a tenor rather than a castrato, simplifying some of the music, and adding and subtracting a few arias.

As a result there is no definitive version of *Idomeneo*, and no two productions or recordings are the same. It continues to be a work in progress.

Staging *Idomeneo*

Within the framework provided by the music, the words, and the dramatic events, directors and designers have the freedom to take an opera wherever they wish. They can be precisely faithful to the time and place in which a work is set, creating costumes, buildings, rooms, and landscapes that are as authentic as possible. They can move an opera into an entirely different time and place with often startling and provocatively original and inspired results. They can choose a timeless setting that sympathetically frames the drama. The possibilities are limited only by imagination and technical prowess.

Idomeneo, with its setting of seashore, temple, and palace, its storms and sea monster, its Greek heroes and princesses, raises all kinds of possibilities. How should a director deal with the sea monster, for instance?

Director Ann Hodges says of the production she is creating for Pacific Opera Victoria: *No papier mache monsters, sorry. Instead, I kept seeing an image of a young boy with a toy-sized ancient Greek ship – and thought about using him as a 'frame' to tell the story of the opera. At the very beginning, before the overture, we will see him, on a beach, with his boat. He spies a large conch shell, and as kids do with shells, holds it to his ear to hear the ocean inside. At that moment, the first notes of the overture are heard. This little fella is going to be present at various times throughout the opera, sometimes participating, sometimes simply watching ... I also really like the image of youth that he will bring to the opera, which is so much about youth and innocence.*

As we know, Mozart made quite a number of cuts to the opera, and there is no definitive version. Ann notes, *There have been a zillion different options in cutting it ... We've made a few other cuts that are going to simply sharpen the action and make this a darned exciting evening of opera ... For the audience who are completely new to the opera, they will see a really streamlined, exciting story with some of the most incredible music Mozart ever wrote.*

The director, set designer Alison Green, and costume designer Christine Reimer agreed that the costumes and set would suggest ancient Greece, without being 100% authentic. Ann adds, *At the same time, the costumes kind of feel modern and sexy too. I am allergic to togas...*

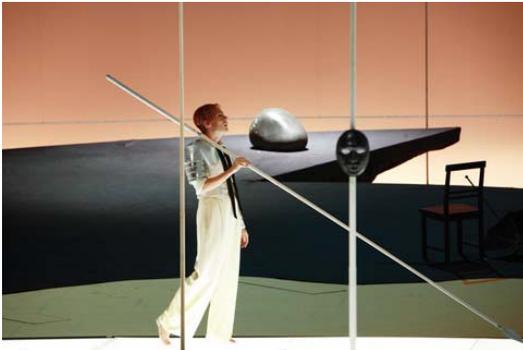
Other productions have been very different.

The opera made headlines in September, 2006, when Berlin's Deutsche Opera decided to cancel upcoming performances of *Idomeneo* because of fears that a scene interpolated by director Hans Neuenfels might cause a security risk. In the scene in question *Idomeneo* removed from a bloody sack the severed heads of the prophet Muhammad, Jesus Christ, the Buddha and the Greek sea god Poseidon; Poseidon (Neptune) is of course the only one of the four religious figures who is actually in the opera's plot. After considerable uproar and argument over censorship and security, the production did go ahead.

However many reviewers thought the Berlin production was not worth the furor. One reviewer said, *I am pleased to be able to defend freedom of speech, even when, as in this case, it puts me in the unenviable position of having also to defend bad art.* Another caustically described some of the other scenes in the Berlin production: *In the first half, the chorus wore stylized mock Baroque, coordinated to match their hot pink, lime green, and fluorescent orange bouffant wigs. In the second half, Electra crawled into a tiny model of the Parthenon and had a kind of epileptic seizure ... One of the sets featured a series of black doors, which King *Idomeneo*, dressed in the garb of an Italian playboy, opened and closed as he sang ... At one point, Poseidon—sporting waist-length dreadlocks and green body paint—did a back flip.*

A different modern take on *Idomeneo* was the striking 2006 presentation by the Salzburg Festival, which is available on DVD. With the stage extended to wrap around the orchestra, an abstract, minimalist set, a red ball gown for Elettra, and Neptune prowling round the edges of the action in a green business suit with seaweed in his hair and a breastplate of seashells, this is certainly a memorable production. On the next page are some images from the Salzburg Festival production, with stage and costume design by Karl Ernst Herrmann.

Photos of the 2006 Salzburg Festival production. Designs by Karl Ernst Herrmann.



Top Left: Act 1, Ilia, Idamante, the Trojan prisoners
 Above: Idamante is about to leave to fight the monster
 Below: Idamante has returned from killing the monster.

Top Right: Cretan chorus frightened by the storm and sea monster
 Above: Neptune
 Left: Elettra
 Below: Arbace and Idomeneo



Pacific Opera Victoria Production Design

Here are some sketches and models for the sets and costumes for Pacific Opera Victoria's October 2007 production of *Idomeneo*. Set design is by Alison Green, costume design by Christine Reimer.



Pacific Opera Victoria Set Models
 Above Left: the harbour of Sidon
 Above Right: the gardens of the royal palace
 Right: the Temple where the sacrifice is to take place



Pacific Opera Victoria Costume Sketches

Idomeneo, above left
 Elettra, above right
 Ilia, right
 Idamante, far right



Resources

<http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/adg7991/index.html>
score of Idomeneo

http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libmozido_e.htm
English libretto of Idomeneo

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/5307>
Some of Mozart's letters

http://www.amazon.com/Mozart-Idomeneo-Re-Creta-366/dp/samples/B000064691#disc_1
Brief track samples from the opera.

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=idomeneo&search=Search
YouTube: some performances of music from *Idomeneo*. Sound and quality vary.

http://www.salzburgfestival.at/popup_fotoservice.php?lang=en&id=148
More photos of the Salzburg Festival production of *Idomeneo*

<http://www.mozartproject.org/index.html>
The Mozart Project: biography of Mozart, lists of his compositions, and more.

Robert Spaethling. *Mozart's Letters, Mozart's Life: Selected Letters*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.
A collection of Mozart's letters, with commentaries that put the letters into the context of Mozart's life.

Nicholas Till. *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas*. Faber And Faber Ltd. 1994

Mythology and Ancient Sources

<http://www.sdopera.org/mktg05.nsf/3d9d34cbebec8008882569de00162c21/935fcae960ed7d0e88256a1800790a89!OpenDocument>
An excellent overview of the ancient sources for *Idomeneo* by San Diego Opera

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/blfn10.txt>
Bullfinch's Mythology: a 19th century retelling by Thomas Bullfinch of many ancient myths,

<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/homer/odysseytofc.htm>
Ian Johnston's translation of Homer's *Odyssey*

http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/homer/iliad_title.htm
Ian Johnston's translation of Homer's *Illiad*

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/aeneid.htm>
Summary of Virgil's *Aeneid* with links to a prose translation with annotations.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/658>
English translation of Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*, also known as *The Fall of Troy*

Topics for Discussion and Further Learning

1. Character analysis

Read the synopsis of *Idomeneo* or a translation of the libretto (see Resources section).

Create a character sketch for one of the main characters (for example, Ilia, Idamante, Elettra). Consider the following questions:

- What can be assumed about this person?
- What is the character's relationship with the other characters?
- Why does the character make the choices he or she does?
- Include evidence from the opera to support your claims.

Include information about the following:

- Character's Name
- Physical Characteristics (style and physical attributes)
- Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how does he/she think?)
- Emotional Characteristics (is he/she generally cheerful, sad, snobbish, "off-balance" etc.?)
- Family background
- How the Trojan War affected the character
- Other interesting facts

After seeing the opera, look at your character sketch again. Does any aspect of the performance or the music you heard change your view of the character you have profiled? Why?

Do the emotions conveyed through the music fit the character sketch?

Create a journal or blog from the point of view of your character

Choose a point of conflict for the character you chose for your character sketch, and write a journal or blog of those events from the character's point of view, using the character profile for assistance. Take on the persona of that character and refer to the character in the first person. Remember to express only information that your character would know.

2. Etymology

The word Etymology comes from the Greek words meaning "true sense of a word." Etymology is the study of the history of words to learn how words got their meaning and how their meaning changed over time.

The following words and phrases all come from ancient mythological sources, some from the stories on which *Idomeneo* is based, some from other stories. What is the original story behind each word or phrase? What meanings do they have today and why?

Trojan Horse	Achilles heel	Electra complex
tantalize	Cassandra	labyrinth
narcissistic	echo	herculean
titanic	mercurial	Midas touch
nemesis	odyssey	Oedipus complex
protean	siren	

3. Design a production of *Idomeneo*

Look at the design examples from the Salzburg Festival and from Pacific Opera Victoria's production. Consider the setting (time, place, style) that you would choose for a production of *Idomeneo*. Prepare some sketches of scenes. Design and sketch costumes for each character to suit the setting.

Be ready to explain your concept.

4. Internet Research: Geography

Did you know that Troy was a real city? Find out what you can about the real city of Troy, where it was, and what country it is in today. Try to find photos and satellite pictures of the site of Troy.

The opera *Idomeneo* is set in the city of Sidon (Kydonia / Cydonia), now called Khania, in Crete. Find a map, photos, and information about this city.

Explore Mozart's home town of Salzburg and Munich, the city in which he wrote *Idomeneo*. Find maps and photos of both cities. Find photos and information about the Cuvilliés Theatre in Munich where *Idomeneo* had its first performance and about the Royal Theatre in Victoria, where *Idomeneo* is being performed in October 2007.

5. A Review of the Opera

Before you see the opera, you might read a few examples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper, or have a look at some online reviews of opera. Here are a few examples of reviews of *Idomeneo* from the Internet:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/stage/2003/12/idomeneo_review.shtml

(Simon Tavener reviews a production by Glyndebourne Opera)

http://www.sfcv.org/arts_revs/idomeneo_11_16_99.php

(Heather Hadlock reviews a production by San Francisco Opera)

<http://www.benheppner.com/Reviews/Reviews46.html>

(Four different reviews of a 2006 production by the Metropolitan Opera, featuring Canadian tenor Ben Heppner playing *Idomeneo*)

After seeing *Idomeneo*, **make some notes in point form**, answering the following questions:

What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?

What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?

What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Would you have done something differently? Why?

What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?

Discuss your reactions with your fellow students. Feel free to go beyond the questions listed above.

Then begin to **outline your review**. Keep in mind that a review should contain the following:

A clearly stated purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

A brief plot synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

A coherent series of paragraphs comparing and contrasting things you liked or didn't like

A summary / closing paragraph

Your review should capture the interest of the reader.

Once your outline has been completed, write your **rough draft**.

Exchange reviews with other students to critique and edit. Focus on effective and logical expression of ideas and correct grammar and punctuation.

Edit and revise your review until you have a polished final version.

Students might submit their writing for publication such as a school newspaper. Students are also welcome to send the reviews to Pacific Opera. We would love to hear your thoughts!

Teacher's Comments

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: _____ School: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Fax: _____ Grade(s) you teach: _____

Email: _____ Subjects: _____

Have you attended other arts events with your students in the past year? Yes No

If yes, what were they? _____

Were you able to use the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities before attending the opera?
 Yes No

If not, please elaborate: _____

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide? _____

What would you add/delete?

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?
 Yes No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals? Yes No

How would you like to receive information? Fax Email Letters Other _____

Further comments and suggestions _____

Please return this form to:

Pacific Opera, 1815 Blanshard Street, Suite 500, Victoria, BC V8T 5A4 Fax: 250.382.4944