

LES TROYENS À CARTHAGE

Synopsis

In Acts 1 & 2 (*La prise de Troie*), after many years of war the city of Troy is finally destroyed by the Greeks.

Act 3. Dido's palace in Carthage. A rapturous chorus salutes Queen Dido. When her first husband, King Sychaeus of Tyre, was murdered, Dido led her people to North Africa, where they have since built the prosperous and beautiful city of Carthage. The people swear to protect Dido against a neighboring king, Iarbas, who has demanded her hand in marriage and now threatens to invade their territory.

Dido's sister Anna thinks Dido needs love in her life once more. But Dido, who fondly remembers the murdered Sychaeus, feels conflicted and intends to stay single.

A foreign fleet, battered by a storm, seeks refuge in the harbor. The Trojan march is heard; Ascagne, son of Aeneas, speaks on behalf of the refugees, who are fleeing the destruction of their city, Troy. Dido welcomes them. At that moment Narbal enters in distress: Iarbas' army has advanced into their territory and is threatening Carthage. Instantly Aeneas steps forward from among the Trojans and offers to repel Dido's enemies. Enthusiastically she accepts his help, and he marches out to defend Carthage.

Act 4. Royal Hunt and Storm. In a forest outside Carthage, a storm looms on the horizon. Returning from the hunt, Dido and Aeneas seek shelter in a cave as lightning splits the sky. The storm's fury ignites their passion, and they consummate their love, with nature bearing witness.

INTERMISSION

Dido's gardens by the sea. Narbal confides to Anna his fear that Dido, distracted by Aeneas, is neglecting affairs of state. Anna explains that Dido loves Aeneas. Anna hopes that love, the most powerful of all the gods, will bring Dido strength through a new partnership with Aeneas.

Iopas, the court poet, sings the praises of Ceres. Dido asks Aeneas to continue the story of the fate of Troy. What happened to Andromache? Aeneas explains that in the end Hector's widow married her captor Pyrrhus. Ascanus quietly removes Dido's wedding ring (from her first marriage). To Anna, the boy resembles Cupid—a reminder of love's irresistible power.

Dido and Aeneas, alone in the garden, sing the duet "Nuit d'ivresse et d'extase infinie." But despite their love for one another, the god Mercury reminds Aeneas his destiny is to move on from Carthage and found a mighty empire: "Italie!"

Act 5. The harbor at night. Trojan ships are lying at anchor. Panthée and the Trojan chiefs prepare the fleet's departure; every moment wasted brings closer the wrath of the gods.

Aeneas, torn between his love for Dido and his god-mandated duty to save his people and found the Roman empire, sings the aria "Inutiles regrets." Ghosts from Troy order him to follow his destiny. His mind made up, he orders the Trojans to their boats. Dido, her heart breaking, begs Aeneas to stay with her. But as the sound of the Trojan march is heard, Aeneas boards his ship.

In Dido's Palace. Dido tries to persuade Anna to go to the harbor to intercede for her. Anna says Aeneas still loves Dido, even though his responsibilities compel him to leave her. Dido says love would compel her to disobey Jove himself. As the ships set out to sea, Dido bursts out in fury, ordering the Carthaginians to pursue and destroy the traitorous Trojans. Only one thing is left to her: to raise an awful pyre to the gods of the underworld, and on it to burn everything that was ever connected with Aeneas. Left alone, Dido plans her own death. In the aria "Adieu, fière cité," she bids farewell to Carthage, a city born from her vision and labor, a city that will endure as a testament to her strength and spirit.

A terrace overlooking the sea. A funeral pyre is presided over by priests of Pluto. Anna and Narbal curse the Trojans. Dido mounts the pyre, takes Aeneas' sword,

prophesies that one day her people will produce a warrior, Hannibal, who will avenge Carthage on Rome. Then she plunges the sword into her breast. But in a vision, Dido sees Rome triumphant. She dies as the Carthaginians howl curses at the Trojans. But the Trojan March contradicts them, and a vision of Eternal Rome rises behind Dido's pyre.