

LA CLEMENZA DI TITO – Story of the Opera

PLACE:

Rome

TIME:

81 A.D.

The opera will be performed with one intermission.

Before the opera begins

Tito's father usurped the imperial throne of Rome from Vitellius, the father of Vitellia. Marrying Tito would make Vitellia empress, a position she feels is rightfully hers. Tito, however, has no wish to marry her. Instead, he intends to choose the eastern queen Berenice as his bride.

ACT ONE

Scene 1. Vitellia toys with the affections of Sesto, who is in love with her and is ready to do anything she wishes. Sesto has won over the senator Lentulo, who is now Sesto's coconspirator in a plan to usurp the power of the throne. Knowing that the emperor wishes to marry Berenice, Vitellia wants only to see him dead (Duet: *Come ti piace, imponi*). Annio – who, like Tito, is Sesto's close friend – responds to Vitellia's sarcasm regarding Berenice by revealing that the senate has opposed Tito's choice of consort, and that the queen has already left Rome. Heartbroken, the emperor is now summoning Sesto to the palace.

Immediately Vitellia asks Sesto not to act yet. She adds that he mustn't weary her with his jealous suspicions (Aria: *Deh, se piacer mi vuoi*). Annio asks Sesto to use his influence with Tito to obtain the emperor's approval regarding the marriage of Annio and Servilia, Sesto's sister. The two young men affirm their friendship (Duet: *Deh, prendi un dolce amplesso*).

Scene 2. Publio, captain of the Praetorian Guard, is joined by senators and emissaries from Rome's conquered provinces in acclaiming Tito (Chorus: *Serbate, o dei custodi*). Once alone with Sesto and Annio, Tito reveals that if he cannot marry for love, he will marry for Rome and for friendship. Having chosen Servilia, whom he intends to wed that very day, the emperor asks Annio to deliver this news to her. Tito rejoices that the throne, which means everything to him, enables him to benefit the oppressed while also bestowing riches on those who deserve them (Aria: *Del più sublime soglio*). Annio resigns himself to

Tito's decision regarding Servilia. He lets her know that she is the emperor's chosen bride, but he cannot forget his love, which she returns (Duet: *Ah, perdona al primo affetto*).

Scene 3. Publio brings Tito a list of citizens who have offended the names of Rome's dead emperors, but Tito argues for tolerance. When Servilia appears, she confesses her love for Annio. Totally understanding her feelings, Tito wishes that all hearts could be as sincere as hers and releases her from any obligation to him (Aria: *Ah, se fosse intorno al trono*).

Vitellia greets Servilia as Tito's future wife, but she responds that this is not the case, hinting that the emperor's hand may soon belong to Vitellia herself. After Servilia leaves, Vitellia rages that she now feels both Servilia's scorn and Tito's cruelty. She orders Sesto to take action immediately against Tito. Promising to do as she desires (Aria: *Parto, parto*), he departs. She is exultant until Publio arrives to inform her that Tito has chosen her as his consort. As Vitellia, in an aside, expresses her horror at what she has ordered Sesto to do, Annio and Publio wonder why great happiness should so confuse her heart (Trio: *Vengo! Aspettate!*).

Scene 4. Sesto is terrified at the chaos he is about to unleash. He decides to put an end to the revolt, but sees that fire has already broken out in the Capitol (Finale: *Deh, conservate, o Dei*). When Annio appears, Sesto ignores him and rushes inside, sword drawn. Servilia appears, telling Annio she has heard that the fire may have been started intentionally. Sensing that a conspiracy is afoot in Rome, Publio fears for Tito's life. Vitellia, Annio, Servilia, and Publio all shudder upon hearing the crowd's cries in the distance. Sesto returns, looking for a place to hide. Believing that he has struck Tito down, he is about to confess when Vitellia silences him. The Romans are heard, lamenting this day of betrayal.

ACT TWO

Scene 1. Annio tells Sesto that Tito has, in fact, survived. Sesto is overjoyed, but plans to flee Rome. He reveals to Annio that he was the instigator of the rebellion. Although shocked, Annio urges him to stay and beg Tito for clemency (Aria: *Torna di Tito al lato*). Vitellia, however, implores Sesto to save himself by leaving the city. She is terrified that if he is found, her own secret will become known. Publio arrives with the Praetorian Guard, intending to arrest Sesto. The man he stabbed in the confusion was, in fact, Lentulo, who has survived and confessed. Sesto must now stand

trial before the Senate. Vitellia feels guilty that Sesto may be hastening to his death because of her (Trio: *Se a volto mai ti senti*).

Scene 2. Patricians, guards, and citizens – all grateful for Tito's survival – offer a prayer of thanksgiving (Chorus: *Ah, grazie si rendano*). Tito is anxious for news of the trial. The emperor cannot believe that Sesto can be guilty, but Publio informs him that Lentulo has implicated Sesto (Aria: *Tardi s'avvedea d'un tradimento*). Annio implores Tito to pardon his friend. Publio returns, announcing that Sesto has admitted his part in the plot and has been condemned to death – all that remains is for Tito to sign the order. He asks to be left alone. Annio leaves, but not before begging Tito to look to his own heart for guidance (Aria: *Tu fosti tradito*). Reflecting on Sesto's treachery, and horrified at the thought of signing away his friend's life, Tito asks to speak with him.

When Sesto is led in by Publio, he trembles at the sight of Tito (Trio: *Quello di Tito è il volto*). Once alone with the emperor, Sesto confesses that he has no way to defend his crime. He knows he must either betray Tito or accuse Vitellia. In frustration, Tito calls for his guards and commands that Sesto be taken away. Sesto begs Tito to remember the happier days of their friendship (Rondo: *Deh, per questo istante solo*). Tito seizes the warrant and signs it, but he immediately has a change of heart. Saying only that Sesto's fate has been decided – without elaborating further – the emperor orders Publio to have Sesto brought to the arena (Aria: *Se all'impero*).

When Annio and Servilia come to see Vitellia, they address her as "Empress" and ask her to intercede with Tito. She reminds them that the title is not yet hers. Servilia lets Vitellia know that simply weeping for Sesto will do no good (Aria: *S'altro che lacrime*). Guilt-ridden that Sesto will die for her as she becomes Tito's wife, Vitellia resolves to confess everything. Rather than the joys of marriage and public status, she anticipates death coming to claim her (Rondo: *Non più di fiori*).

Scene 3. The people acclaim Tito (Chorus: *Che del ciel*). He is about to pass judgment on Sesto when Vitellia rushes in, revealing that she perpetrated the plot out of revenge. Although he has been betrayed on all sides, Tito declares that everyone shall be forgiven. Vitellia, Annio, and Servilia praise Tito's generosity, while the people ask the gods to watch over their emperor.