



Idomeneo Listening Guide

The tracks listed below correspond to the complimentary Listening Guide CD provided to school group bookings only.

Not coming to the opera but looking to explore *Idomeneo* in the classroom? The excerpts below can be found on the recording on the Archiv label, with John Eliot Gardiner conducting the English Baroque Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir with Anthony Rolfe Johnson as Idomeneo and Anne Sofie von Otter as Idamante.

| Track # | Musical excerpt | Connection to the story | Musical elements and significance | Strategies for Listening |
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| 1 | Overture | The overture provides clues to what the audience can expect the opera to be about. Even before we know anything about the plot and characters, Mozart sets the mood through his choice of instruments and tempo (speed of music). | The overture begins in a grandiose manner, suggesting this opera is going to deal with people of status and extravagant themes. The mood changes as the confident music of the opening becomes more chromatic, creating a feeling of uncertainty [1:15]. This suggests that not all will be easy for the characters as the story progresses. The overture ends with a quiet coda (literally, tail!) which perfectly blends into the melancholy mood of the first scene [3:59]. | Based just on listening to the overture, do you think this story will end happily or sadly, and why? |
| 2 | Aria: "Non ho colpa, e mi condanni" ("The fault is not mine, and you condemn me") | Idamante, son of Idomeneo, King of Crete, loves the Trojan Princess, Iliia even though she is his enemy. She sees no future for their relationship since they come from opposite sides. In this aria Idamante argues he had nothing | Mozart composed two versions of the role of Idamante, one for tenor, and one for mezzo-soprano. If sung by a mezzo, it is referred to as a "pants role" which means a female singer plays a male part. It was felt that the sound of this female voice type could well represent an adolescent male. This aria is in typical "ABA" form, which originated in the Baroque era, but was still used here by Mozart in the Classical period. It opens with an initial musical theme, which is called the "A" section, followed by contrasting themes in | Can you think of any other operas, plays, movies or books in which women play men, or men play women? |

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| | | to do with the political differences that might understandably keep them apart and blames the gods for their painful situation. | the “B” section [at 4:27] and concludes with a repeat of the initial themes heard in the “A” section [at 5:58]. | |
| 3 | Aria: “Tutto nel cor vi sento” (“In my heart I feel you all”) | Elettra, Princess of Argos, is also in love with Idamante but fears he will marry Ilia, preventing her from becoming Queen of Crete. She expresses her torment in this aria. | The opening instrumental introduction is agitated, expressing Elettra’s mood even before she sings. Further into the aria, the music becomes detached on the words “vendetta e crudelta” (“cruel revenge” at 7:41), giving the impression Elettra is almost choking on her fury. | How do contemporary musicians and song writers express strong feelings through the voice and the musical line? |
| 4 | Chorus: “Nettuno s’onori” (“Let Neptune be honoured!”) | The Cretans celebrate the return of their king, Idomeneo, who they had thought was dead. | In <i>Idomeneo</i> , the chorus expresses the feelings of the people. In this excerpt, Mozart alternates passages for full chorus with sections for soloists who represent individual Cretans. The text alerts us to the ancient Greek setting as we hear the people praise the sea god Neptune for saving their king. Whenever the full chorus sings, they are accompanied by brass instruments which make their music sound even more celebratory. | What other forms of music can you think of that are used to celebrate and give thanks? Do they involve lots of people making music together or are they more personal and intimate? |
| 5 | Aria: “Se il padre perdei” (“If I have lost my father”) | Despite losing father and country, Ilia tells Idomeneo that her love for Idamante has brought her to view the king as a father figure, and Crete as her home. | The music for Ilia in this aria is sweet and gentle. The muted strings and the four wind instruments which accompany her are likewise delicately expressive. There is an underlying feeling of sadness to this melody which indicates her losses are still painful to her, despite the fact she is in love. | Based on this music, what kind of character do you think Ilia is? |
| 6 | Aria: “Fuor del mar ho in mar in seno” (“Saved from the sea, I have | Having promised Neptune he will sacrifice the first person he comes across in exchange | The first singer to perform Idomeneo, Anton Raaf, was famous for his ability to sing coloratura which is an ornamental type of vocal music where several notes are sung for each syllable of the text. | Name some different styles of singing and tell how each is used to express feelings. |

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| | a raging sea more fearsome than before within my bosom” | for saving his life, Idomeneo expresses torment that the sacrificial victim has turned out to be his own son, Idamante. | “Fuor del mar” would have exploited Raaf’s capabilities to the full. The opening section of the aria (repeated again at the end after a less agitated middle section) contains long runs in which the many notes must be sung in quick succession. Also, trumpets and drums are used to signify that Idomeneo is defiant, and will not accept the god’s requirement to kill his son. | The words “Fuor del mar” mean “raging of the sea.” How does Mozart musically represent raging emotions? |
| 7 | Trio: “Pria di partir, o Dio!” (“Before leaving, allow me, O gods”) | Idomeneo decides to send Idamante away with Elettra in an effort to avoid sacrificing his son to Neptune. | Ensembles like this trio allow us to eavesdrop on each character as they simultaneously reveal their conflicting emotions: Idamante bids a resigned good-bye to his father; Elettra makes a more ornate farewell, satisfied that she has finally won Idamante for herself; while Idomeneo reluctantly takes leave of the son with whom he has only just been reunited. Listen to how Mozart uses the orchestra to mark Idomeneo’s agitation as he says goodbye to Idamante. | The three characters are sharing three very different emotions when saying their good-byes. How would you express an emotional farewell if you were leaving behind someone you loved? |
| 8 | Acompanied recitative: “Sventurata Sidon” (“Unhappy Sidon”) | Arbace, Idomeneo’s confidant, paints a picture of the devastation brought upon Crete by the king’s refusal to fulfil his promise to sacrifice Idamante. | This passage is an example of accompanied recitative. Recitative is a type of singing in which words are sung in a manner that imitates speech. It has no recognizable melody and is meant to carry the action forward rather than express the emotions of the character. In recitative <i>secco</i> (dry recitative), the singer is accompanied just by a keyboard, and bass. In contrast, examples of recitativo <i>accompagnato</i> (accompanied recitative) such as this one are accompanied by the orchestra, making them more song-like and dramatic. | Recitative is the compositional technique which helps to differentiate opera from most musical theatre. Try to imagine the text being spoken instead of sung. Would it enhance the story being told or does the musicality of the line add more emotion? |
| 9 | Aria: “D’Oreste, d’Aiace ho in seno i tormenti” (“Within my breast I feel the torments of Orestes and of Ajax”) | Elettra vents her fury upon learning that Idamante will reign over Crete with Ilia as his queen. | The musical line of this aria is agitated, often breaking into small fragments, revealing Elettra’s torment and heartbreak. In its finale, she sings a series of rising and falling, staccato (detached) notes, further enforcing her unhinged, slightly crazy mental state. | Remember a time when you were raging with anger – how did you handle it? If you had to express yourself musically instead of physically or with words, what would your rage sound like? |