Idomeneo: Synopsis

ACT I
Troy has been defeated by the forces of the King of Crete, Idomeneo and his Greek allies. In his absence, Idomeneo has left his son Idamante as ruler. Elettra, the Greek Princess of Argos, is in love with Idamante, whose heart belongs to Ilia, a Trojan princess who is held captive on the island of Crete. Ilia struggles with feeling of betrayal of her country but also fears that Idamante favours Elettra. In an attempt to win Ilia over, Idamante announces the release of all Trojan prisoners in honour of his father’s return. The celebration is cut short when Idomeneo’s aide, Arbace, enters to announce that Idomeneo’s ship has been sunk and all on board are drowned. Princess Elettra is particularly distraught. She is jealous of Ilia and fearful that nothing will now stand in the way of the lovers’ union.

While returning home, Idomeneo is miraculously saved from the storm at sea by Neptune, the god of the sea, in exchange for a vow that he must sacrifice the first person he meets on shore. That person is his son, Idamante. Initially Idamante does not recognize his father having been separated for so long. Horrified by the prospect of what he must do, Idomeneo does not immediately identify himself and, when he does, harshly orders his son from his presence. As the people rejoice at the return of their King, Idamante laments his father’s apparent coldness towards him.

ACT II
Arbace advises Idomeneo to send Idamante away in order to escape the wrath of Neptune. They agree to banish Idamante by having him escort Elettra back to Argos. Elettra is overjoyed that Idamante will be accompanying her to Greece and hopes to win his heart on the voyage.

As they prepare to leave, Neptune summons a hideous sea serpent. Idomeneo confesses that he is to blame for the God’s displeasure since he has broken his vow to sacrifice Idamante. Instead, Idomeneo offers himself as a sacrifice to Neptune. Terrified, the crowd flees.
ACT III

Idamante declares that he will fight the sea monster provoking Ilia to finally admit her love to him directly. Idomeneo and Elettra enter and interrupt the lovers. Idomeneo, still unable to reveal the exact cause of his actions, orders Idamante to leave Crete. Idamante agrees. Arbace reports that the people are demanding that the king consult with Neptune’s High Priest to avoid further disaster.

As preparations are being made for the coming sacrifice, Arbace announces that Idamante has slain the sea monster. Idamante is resigned to his fate, knowing that it is the price to be paid for peace. Ilia demands to be sacrificed in Idamante’s place. Moved by her selfless actions, Neptune proclaims that Idomeneo can be released from his vow if he agrees to renounce the throne in favour of his son.

Peace is restored as Idomeneo presents Idamante to the people as their new ruler.