

The libretto in brief

Traduzione di Chris Owen

Act One

The action takes place in a “delightful village”. Orontea, the queen of Egypt, sings an air reaffirming her decision never to fall in love. Her tutor, Creonte, unsuccessfully attempts to convince her to take a husband. Meanwhile, Orontea’s attention is captured by the cries of Tibrino, a page who has just rescued a handsome young painter called Alidoro from an ambush. The young man, accompanied by Aristeia, his ageing mother, enters the presence of the queen who immediately feels an attraction towards him.

Enter Gelone, an old drunkard: he is the comic servant, a figure present in any mid-seventeenth-century opera. After singing the praises of good wine, he enters into conversation with two lovers: Silandra, a lady in waiting, and Corindo, a knight. Orontea meets Alidoro again and in their encounter, the young man realises how the queen feels towards him. Even so, his good looks have struck the frivolous Silandra, who turns her attention towards him. The act closes with a nonsensical dialogue between the still drunk Gelone and Tibrino.

Act Two

Orontea muses on her love for Alidoro, in a complete turnaround compared to the beginning of Act One. A new character appears on the scene: Giacinta, dressed as a man and bearing the name of Ismero. She confesses to the queen that it was she who had made the attempt on Alidoro’s life. On hearing this, Orontea’s indignation makes her feelings plain. Matters are further complicated when Aristeia, Alidoro’s old mother, takes a liking to Giacinta, believing her to be a man and giving rise to new comic scenes. It was common in seventeenth-century opera for an older woman to desire a younger man, but here the situation becomes even more bizarre because Ismero is in fact a woman and the character of Aristeia is played by a tenor. Meanwhile, Silandra carelessly abandons Corindo, and Alidoro cannot choose between the two women. While concentrating on painting Silandra’s portrait, he is assaulted by the furious Orontea and, overcome, he faints, which gives Orontea the courage to confess her love for him in a letter. The confession of love to someone who cannot hear is another topos of the time, deriving principally from contemporary Spanish theatre. When he regains consciousness, the faithless Alidoro finds the queen’s letter and is glad of his fortune.

Act Three

In the last act, the game of couples becomes even livelier. Alidoro renounces Silandra and boasts of his royal lover. The result is uproar in the court and Orontea’s anger. The young man finds himself driven out by both one and the other of his lovers and he laments the inconstancy of women. Tibrino and Gelone pity all those in love with the former declaring his preference for war and the latter his attachment to wine. Silandra sends the servant to seek reconciliation with Corindo, who forgives her but again promises to kill his rival. In the meantime, Giacinta has also fallen in love with Alidoro, but she is the target of the attentions of Aristeia, who gives her a precious medal. The young girl gives it to Alidoro in the hope of capturing his favour. However, Gelone, who witnesses the scene, believes that Alidoro has stolen an identical medal belonging to Orontea and he accuses him. It is the medal itself that leads to the happy ending. The medal is proof that Alidoro is in fact prince Floridano, captured as a baby by pirates. Alidoro can now marry Orontea, and Corindo can take Silandra as his wife.