

The libretto in brief

Traduzione di Chris Owen

Act One

At the home of the impresario Fallito, the poet Delirio and the composer Sospiro are complimenting each other on their opera that is supposed to debut that evening. Their host puts something of a damper on their enthusiasm insisting that they need to cut some lines, recitatives and arias from the opera, as it is too long, while eliminating once and for all the usual contradictions. Delirio and Sospiro are indignant. Then, as if that were not enough, when Stonatrilla, the prima donna, arrives, she immediately becomes furious considering the cool reception she receives as too undignified for a woman of her rank. To cap it all, she still has to try on her costume and her arias are definitely far from perfect... Her nerves are further tested when she meets Porporina, who is her inferior in the role of the terza donna, her junior in years and yet anything but submissive. After putting her in her place, an annoyed Stonatrilla leaves, followed by Fallito, who rushes after her to calm her down.

In the meantime, Porporina flirts with Sospiro, who has written an aria expressly for her. Then the seconda donna, Smorfiosa, arrives. She is very delicate and has had to put up with the stench of tobacco of the dressmakers who have come to fit her costume. Luckily, the man of her dreams makes his entrance: Ritornello, a castrato with superb manners. Porporina leaves them alone to their wooing.

In the vestibule, Fallito is being pestered by Passagallo, the ballet

composer, who wishes to introduce him to two pairs of dancers whom he believes should be engaged. When the singers hear there is to be a dance recital, they come to watch. However, the gathering soon degenerates: someone complains about someone else's train being longer than their own; another person complains of someone's feathers being more impressive; and another grumbles about the lack of prominence of their name in the libretto. In short, no one is happy and it is enough to make anyone go crazy.

Act Two

In the Gallery of the Impresario's apartment, everything is ready for the rehearsal. Delirio and Sospiro are already savouring the success of their opera, but once again, along comes Fallito to spoil things: Ritornello wants changes to one of his arias. Delirio wants changes to the music causing Sospiro to demand new lines. The two of them almost come to blows, throwing the Impresario into despair. Fallito convinces Delirio to quickly write new lines, which Ritornello can hardly read: the poet finds his blunders hilarious. Once Delirio leaves, Sospiro convinces the singer to fish out one of his successful arias – even though the words and musical genre are totally different – and apply Delirio's new lines to it. Now the danger of writing a new aria has been avoided, Sospiro can spend some time with his beloved Porporina, and teach her what he has written for her.

The whole company arrives for the rehearsal of the third and final act of the new opera. They decide to go over only the more difficult parts: the accompanied recitatives and the arias. The rehearsal begins and proceeds at a good pace, despite a few errors to be corrected or some ridiculous misunderstandings to be cleared up. The main problems, however, are caused by the bickering between the poet and the composer, and the exchanges become very heated when Delirio realises that Sospiro has adapted old music of a different kind to his new aria for Ritornello. The situation further degenerates when

some singers begin to gossip about one of the ballerinas, who answers back unintimidated. Fallito sends for the guards who arrive causing the over-sensitive female singers to faint. Now the stage is clear, the corps de ballet can begin its rehearsals.

Act Three

Delirio and Sospiro's opera, L'Oranzebe, final opens. It is set in India at the time of the Mogul empire, ruled over by Oranzebe. The first act begins with the triumph of general Nasercano, played by Ritornello: among his prizes is the Indian queen Saebe (Smorfiosa). Porporina plays the role of a high officer in the Mogul's army, while Stonatrilla plays Oranzebe's sister, princess Rossanara. Nasercano is susceptible to the charms of Saebe, and Rossanara begins to be jealous. The public, however, is not satisfied with the opera and begins to grumble, demanding that the ballet begin. In the wings, Passagallo, Ritornello and Delirio discuss the opera's lack of success, and complain about the public that is so hard to please. The singers remove their costumes, aided by their respective mothers, who are not happy to be treated like servants. They want to know about the reactions of the public, whose discontent is attributed to the poet and the composer. Very soon, the mothers of the "virtuose" begin to squabble with each one boasting the merits of their respective daughter and highlighting the others' mishaps in one theatre or another. At first, Ritornello, Delirio and Passagallo find it all highly amusing, but then they try to restore calm among the women. Meanwhile, news arrives of Fallito having run away, leaving them all without a penny. After a moment of bewilderment, the artistes decide to go and look for work elsewhere,

hoping to find a friendlier audience. But furious, they firstly swear everlasting loathing for impresarios everywhere, and promise to always make life difficult for them and to constantly work to ensure their failure.