

Maria Egiziaca

mystery-plan in three parts

music by Ottorino Respighi, libretto by Claudio Guastalla

First episode

At the port of Alexandria, eager to embark on a journey, Maria is chatting with a sailor who is about to set sail with a ship and crew. Near the ship she meets a pilgrim and asks him where he is going. The man declares his faith: he is going to the Holy Land. Impressed, the girl asks him if the sailors would be willing to let her come, too, and when the man suggests she offer the crew money, she says she is willing to offer her body instead. Appalled, the pilgrim walks away and goes aboard the ship. When they hear Maria's proposal, the sailors accept enthusiastically. When the time comes to set sail, the protagonist hears a mysterious voice that calls her to the land overseas.

Second episode

On the day of the Exaltation of the Cross, outside the temple in Jerusalem, a poor man and a leper are waiting to enter in order to kiss the Cross and be blessed. No sooner have they entered than Maria also arrives at the temple, accompanied by a blind woman. Before she can follow the faithful, the pilgrim stands in front of her and curses her again. After taking a few steps towards the door, Maria feels a mysterious force holding her back. Overcome with ecstatic rapture, the girl sees the Angel of God appear for a moment and falls pleadingly to the ground, confessing her sins and asking for forgiveness; she then enters the temple.

Third episode

Several years later, Abbot Zosimo is in Lenten retreat in a cave in the middle of the desert, outside of which he finds a pit dug by a lion. An indistinct figure approaches: it is Maria, now elderly, who after spending her life wandering through the desert in penance, by the will of God has reached Zosimo. The abbot is convinced that the grave was dug by the lion for him, but Maria tells him her story and reveals that the Angel of God guided her there, at the end of her life, so that the abbot could finally absolve her of her sins: the grave is for her. The couple gather in prayer, and as Maria bends over the grave, the Angels sing praise to the Lord.

