

La clemenza di Tito

Drama in two acts KV 621

libretto Caterino Mazzolà based on an earlier libretto by Pietro Metastasio

music Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

premiere

Prague, National Theatre, 6 September 1791

Act one

The action is set in Rome, in the year ad 80. Vitellia, the daughter of the late Emperor Vitellio, incites Sesto, who is in love with her, to murder the Emperor Tito, guilty of not having chosen her as Empress. Despite the fact that Sesto is Tito's friend, he is willing to carry out Vitellia's orders, because love is stronger than friendship. Annio enters, a friend of Sesto's, and announces that Tito will not marry the Queen Berenice. Vitellia asks Sesto to postpone the execution of her orders, as the news leads her to believe that she still may be chosen by Tito. When Sesto expresses his suspicion that she does not return his love, Vitellia answers that she is weary of his doubts. Annio asks Sesto for his sister Servilia's hand in marriage. Sesto replies to his friend that he will endeavour to obtain the Emperor's consent.

We are now in the Campidoglio: Tito enters and the people sing his praises. All the others have left and Tito remains with Sesto and Annio and announces to them that he has decided to marry Servilia. Annio speaks hastily in favour of the marriage. Tito sings of the joy he experiences by helping the oppressed and praising his friends and then he and Sesto leave together. Servilia enters and Annio informs her that she will be Empress. Servilia explains to Tito that she is in love with Annio, to which he replies that he appreciates her frankness and that he will not put himself between her and the man she loves. Vitellia, having been neglected by Tito in favour of Servilia, renews her order to Sesto to kill Tito and to set the Campidoglio on fire. He goes to execute her orders, but first implores her to love him. Sesto having departed, Publio and Annio enter to inform Vitellia that Tito has decided to make her his bride. Vitellia tries to call Sesto back, but it is too late.

The final scene in Act i is set in the square in front of the Campidoglio. Sesto and the other conspirators have set the Campidoglio on fire. But Sesto is anguished for having agreed to carry out a conspiracy against his friend the Emperor, but nevertheless goes to play his part in the plot. While in the distance we can hear shouts, Servilia, Annio, Publio and Vitellia arrive on the scene and ask one another what is happening. Sesto comes back and announces that Tito has been stabbed to death and Vitellia stops him just in



time from confessing that he is the murderer.

Act two

Sesto, discovering that Tito is not dead, confesses his betrayal to Annio, who advises him to confess openly to Tito. But Vitellia enters and asks him to flee from Rome to protect his life and her honour. Publio enters with some members of the guard and announces that the stabbed man was not Tito but Lentulo, who has survived and is accusing Sesto. He arrests Sesto and carries him off before the Senate.

In the great audience room, the people thank the Gods for having spared Tito's life. Tito sends Publio to get the Senate's sentence. He himself is still convinced of his friend Sesto's innocence. When Publio returns he confirms Sesto's guilt and Annio implores in favour of his friend. Tito cannot bring himself to sign the death sentence before having spoken to Sesto and gives orders for him to be brought before him. Tito tries to find a way of saving Sesto, but the latter cannot give any explanation without incriminating Vitellia. While he is being taken

away to die in the arena, Sesto asks Tito to remember, for a moment, their longstanding friendship. Tito goes out with Publio to go to the arena. At this point, Servilia and Annio enter and meet Vitellia, whom they ask to intercede for Sesto. Alone, Vitellia realizes that she cannot allow herself to become Empress and to see Sesto, whom she loves, put to death for a crime that she herself has incited him to commit.

In the final scene, Sesto is brought before Tito, who has decided to spare him. At this point, Vitellia enters and throwing herself at Tito's feet, confesses her part in the crime. Astonished by the number of people who seem to have wanted to betray him, the magnanimous Emperor nevertheless refuses to find comfort in cruelty. He pardons everyone and everyone praises Tito's clemency.

