

## Il Bajazet

Il Tamerlano RV 703

tragedia per musica in tre atti

music by Antonio Vivaldi, libretto by Agostino Piovene

**Act One.** *The tale takes place in the city of Bursa, capital of Bitinia in 1403.*

The Turkish Sultan Bajazet is being held prisoner in his palace by the victorious Tartar army, led by Tamerlano. Asteria, Bajazet's daughter is with him and both Tamerlano and the young Greek prince Andronico, an ally of the Tartars, are in love with her. Tamerlano, who is unaware of Andronico's feelings, asks him to ask the girl's father for her hand on his behalf, promising in exchange the Byzantine throne and the hand in marriage of Irene (princess of Trebisonda, who had already been promised to the Tartar emperor himself ).

While Andronico is trying to fulfil this mission with Bajazet, despite his conflicting feelings of love for Asteria and loyalty towards Tamerlano, the Tartar does not waste a minute and declares his love to Asteria. Both are refused. Bajazet is so full of resentment towards the invaders that he would refuse anything, even if it were to cost him his life. Nevertheless, when Asteria is alone with the young man, she pretends to accept the wedding plans. However, her true aim is to punish Andronico for wanting to betray her so he can fulfil his political ambitions. Andronico denies both Asteria's accusations and the Machiavellian insinuations of his advisor Idaspe, who is trying to convince him to accept Irene's hand in marriage, or at least not to refuse her openly, if this is the price to have the throne Tamerlano promised him.

In the meantime Irene arrives at the palace. When she has been warned by Andronico and Idaspe by Tamerlano's change in plans, she decides to present herself as Princess Trebisonda's messenger (that is, her own messenger). Although he is considerably attracted to Irene, Andronico repeats his love for Asteria.

**Act Two.** *The scene moves to Tamerlano's camp, outside the city walls.*

Resolute in her determination to follow her disrespectful strategy, Asteria is now officially engaged to Tamerlano and mocks Andronico's desperate protests. She also sends a message to Irene via her impostor messenger, telling her not to despair because she will not steal her beloved and will be able to make him change his mind. In the meanwhile Andronico informs Bajazet of what has happened. He explodes in fury and disowns his daughter.

Before the entire Tartar army, Tamerlano begins to celebrate the wedding with Asteria. The princess wants to kill the tyrant, but Bajazet arrives and interrupts the ceremony with bitter reprimands. The situation comes to a head and Asteria reveals the dagger she had hidden to kill Tamerlano, thus receiving her father's forgiveness and revealing her courage to everyone. Irene, still in disguise, demands that Tamerlano keep his word. Ignoring the general protests, Tamerlano orders the arrest and execution of both father and daughter.



**Act Three.** *A garden along the banks of the Euphrates.*

Asteria and Bajazet are awaiting Tamerlano's revenge. Before taking his leave, the father gives his daughter some poison. The Tartar then unexpectedly declares he is willing to take Asteria back, but this time it is Andronico who intervenes, declaring his love for her and which she reciprocates. Tamerlano is furious again, and orders Bajazet be beheaded immediately and Asteria marry the lowliest slave. Bajazet himself arrives and finds his daughter at Tamerlano's feet and the latter orders they both be taken to his rooms. Once again Andronico says that he prefers love to any throne.

The scene moves to the banquet hall. In the presence of Bajazet, Andronico and the entire army, Asteria is to wait on them like a slave. The young woman pours the poison Bajazet gave her into Tamerlano's goblet but she is discovered by Irene who reveals her true identity. Faced with the dilemma whether to make the father or the lover taste the goblet in question, Asteria decides to drink it herself, but is stopped by Andronico. The Tartar then orders that Bajazet, who has been taken away in chains, is to witness his daughter's shame, thrown to the mercy of the slaves. He then offers Irene his hand, which she accepts without hesitation. At that very moment Idaspe arrives bearing the news that Bajazet has committed suicide. Asteria curses the tyrant and leaves in despair but Tamerlano, who is now much calmer, allows Andronico to lead the bride to the Byzantine throne. With this unexpected act of clemency, which the onlookers welcome by joining together in a hymn of praise, Tamerlano celebrates his new kingdom.

