

Gioachino

ROSSINI

SEMIRAMIDE

An Opera in Two Acts
with Italian and English text
with German text

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INDEX.

	PAGE
OVERTURE	1
ACT I	
No. 1.—A. INTRODUZIONE	16
B. CORO	19
No. 2.—TERZETTO (<i>Idreno, Oroe, Assur</i>) ...	29
No. 3.—CORO	39
QUARTETTO (<i>Semiramide, Idreno, Oroe, e Assur</i>)	44
RECITATIVO	49
No. 4.—SCENA E CAVATINA (<i>Arsace</i>) ...	74
RECITATIVO (<i>Arsace</i>)	88
No. 5.—SCENA E DUETTO (<i>Arsace e Assur</i>)...	92
No. 6.—ARIA (<i>Idreno</i>)	110
No. 7.—CAVATINA CON CORO (<i>Semiramide</i>)..	120
RECITATIVO	138
No. 8.—DUETTO (<i>Semiramide ed Arsace</i>) ...	140
RECITATIVO	154
No. 9.—FINALE—CORO	158
RECITATIVO	169
No. 10.—QUINTETTO (<i>Semiramide, Arsace, Idreno, Oroe, ed Assur</i>)	170
STRETTA	215
ACT II	
RECITATIVO	237
RECITATIVO	239

SEMIRAMIDE.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SEMIRAMIDE (<i>Regina di Babilonia</i>) ...	...	...	...	...	<i>Soprano.</i>
ARSACE (<i>Generale dell' Armata</i>) ...	...	...	...	...	<i>Contralto.</i>
ASSUR (<i>Principe del sangue di Belo</i>)	...	...	...	...	<i>Basso.</i>
IDRENO (<i>Principe Indiano</i>) ...	...	...	...	...	<i>Tenore.</i>
AZEMA (<i>Principessa del sangue di Belo</i>)	...	...	...	...	<i>Soprano.</i>
OROE (<i>Gran Sacerdote di Belo</i>) ...	...	...	...	...	<i>Basso.</i>
MITRANE (<i>Capo delle Guardie</i>)	...	...	...	...	<i>Tenore.</i>
L'OMBRA DI NINO ...	...	...	...	...	<i>Basso.</i>
CORO— <i>Principi, Principesse, Satrapi, Magi, Sacerdoti, Guardie, Schiavi, e Popolo.</i>					

THE semi-mythical SEMIRAMIS, the mighty Queen of Assyria, slayer of her husband, NINUS, and slain by her own son, NINIAS, furnishes a subject in the treatment of which the dramatic poet is little shackled by the trammels of history; but the author of the present libretto has filled up the meagre outline of tradition with a fable, weaving felicitously supernatural incidents with the elements of natural and deeply moving human tragedy. The opera commences with the celebration of the warlike triumphs of Semiramis before the Temple of Belus by the Priests and Magi, headed by OROËS, their chief, and in the presence of the people, the army, and many strangers from the various nations subdued to the Babylonian yoke. ASSUR, one of the Queen's generals, and a descendant of the house of Belus, aspires to the kingly rank, counting on the favour of Semiramis for certain powerful reasons subsequently developed. His presumption is being questioned both by the High Priest and IDRENO, an Indian Prince, when Semiramis appears before her subjects, and at once betrays impatience at the absence of a personage whom she is not permitted to name before lightning and thunder burst forth, and the sacred fire on the altar expires, betokening the anger of Heaven. Oroës declares that certain hidden crimes must be expiated ere it can be appeased. Assur asks concerning the successor to the throne of Ninus, and is told that he will be named that day according to the Oracle but recently arrived from Memphis. Idrenus and Assur press their claims on the Queen, who appoints them to meet her in the Palace after she has received the Oracle at the hands of Oroës, and all retire from the scene. ARSACES, a young General in the service of Semiramis, now appears, having been sent for from the army, where he held command, by a royal message, and having been moreover enjoined to visit the Temple by his dying father. He is further impelled towards Babylon by his love for the Princess AZEMA. Arsaces is received at the door of the Temple by Oroës, from whom, after presenting him with a casket containing the sacred relics of Ninus received from his father, he hears that the late king was foully poisoned. The priest having retired, Assur appears, rebukes Arsaces for leaving the camp, and learning that he was sent for by Semiramis divines that Arsaces aspires

to the hand of Azema, whom he himself desires to marry, and overwhelms the young General with disdain for his presumption, both parting declared enemies and rivals. The interview of Arsaces with Semiramis follows, when the latter, having by that time received the sacred Oracle conveying in mysterious language that her woes will cease on the return of Arsaces and on the celebration of a certain approaching hymen, and being persuaded that the Gods favour her own passion for the youthful general, broadly hints that a high reward awaits one who has so bravely defended her realm, while Arsaces conceives these allusions to regard his union with Azema. Great is his consternation and surprise therefore when in the next scene, before the nobles and generals assembled around her throne, she declares her intention to raise him to the throne as her spouse, and disposes of the hand of his beloved Azema to Idrenus. Assur is no less confounded at this decision and menacingly appeals to the Queen's sense of their mutual position. At the same moment, from the Mausoleum of Ninus adjoining the state-room, mysterious sounds are heard, and, to the horror of all, the portals of the tomb open, and the shade of Ninus appears. The apparition declares that Arsaces shall reign, but not before certain crimes are atoned for, and he exhorts Arsaces to heed the counsels of Oroës, to think of his sire, and to render aid to his—the ghost's—son. Semiramis, who expresses herself ready to immolate herself that instant to his memory, is told to abide her time and live on till she is called. But unmindful of this warning the Queen pursues her intention of wedding Arsaces, and drives Assur from her palace. Arsaces has been told by the apparition to descend into the tomb of Ninus, which he has promised to do, and Assur determines to make away with him in the dark labyrinths of that abode of death. Previously to this adventure Oroës has informed the young general, on the authority of his supposed father's handwriting, that he is Ninias, the son of Ninus, that prince not being killed in battle as was believed, and that Semiramis is his mother, who in league with her paramour, Assur, had poisoned her royal consort. For this deed a victim is demanded at the hands of the son, who is to find it in the vaults of the royal sepulchre, and there with the sword of the departed monarch to slay it. Semiramis, anticipating Assur's murderous intention towards Arsaces, visits the tomb of Ninus to endeavour to shield her son, who has discovered himself to her. Arsaces meets her, and in the obscurity, mistaking her for Assur, smites her to the earth with the avenging sword of her own husband. Thus is the crime of the parent visited by the hand of her own offspring, and divine justice being satisfied Arsaces ascends the throne and shares it with Azema, the object of his faithful love.

The scene is laid in Babylon.