

# afterWARDs

A new chamber opera by David Paul, based on the opera *Idomeneo*, with music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and libretto by Giambattista Varesco

## Study Guide to the Opera



From an ancient story set in Crete after the Trojan War, to the world of today, with an unprecedented number of refugees and victims of war, *afterWARDs* is powerfully relevant.

## The story of refugees continues . . .

**David Paul**, a German-American, award-winning director of opera, theater, and film, conceived of a reorganized and distilled 80-minute format of Mozart’s *Idomeneo* to explore the emotional battles that continue to rage after “war” is long over. Paul shifted the focus of the opera toward its four protagonists and their “timeless—and timely—struggles for love and peace in a world full of carnage and destruction.” *Idomeneo* is perhaps Mozart’s most radical, modern opera, so a retelling that highlights displaced refugees and the traumatic effects of war is apropos. The story is told through the words and music of Mozart’s opera, slightly adjusted and reordered. Though *afterWARDs* includes intense themes, Paul chose music and libretto sections to create an opera about “love, healing, and the resilience of the human spirit.”



David Paul

In essence, *afterWARDs* tells the story of four characters: two refugees who land on a Greek island, a father returning home after a long time away at war, and a son who has grown up without a father. Woven into the stories of these four characters are emotions and actions that ring true to opera: love, mistaken identity, conflict, heartbreak, and hope for the future.

Why an opera in one act in only 80 minutes? David Paul explains that opera performances are “the longest spectacles in any western art form, and in an era of YouTube and ever-shortening attention spans, opera needs to accept the realities of modern entertainment: a focus on succinct, dramatically explosive materials, presented compellingly and directly.” Paul used Mozart’s music, but eliminated the chorus, sections of the recitative, and several arias. Instead of the nine characters in *Idomeneo*, the reduced cast of *afterWARDs* includes the four leading characters; there is no Arbace, High Priest of Neptune, Voice of Oracle, Cretan Girls, or Trojans. And, there is no sea monster! But, as in all wars, there are refugees.

# afterWARDs Plot

## Action told throughout the overture in a combination of live action and video

After years of bloodshed, the Trojan War is over and the fighters begin the difficult journey home. **Idomeneo**, King of Crete and commander of its depleted forces, is sailing home with the remainder of his men. Also on board is **Ilia**, Princess of Troy, now a refugee who watched her family murdered before her eyes. The overture begins with a massive storm that overturns Idomeneo's ship. **Idamante**, son of Idomeneo, braves the storm to rescue whomever he can reach. He rescues Ilia in his boat and returns to shore. Idomeneo and his men are outraged at the apparent betrayal by the unknown boatsman. As he watches his men drown around him, Idomeneo vows to himself and his men, if he survives, to kill the unknown young man as a last service to his men.

## Opera in one act

Back on Crete, the opera begins with Ilia in a refugee shelter. As her family's sole survivor, she is tortured by survivor's guilt and feelings of betrayal (**Padre, germani**). Yet much more pressingly, she is racked by her newest torment: a secret, inappropriate, and impossible love for Idamante, the young man—and former enemy—who just saved her life.

Idomeneo lands on the shore, having survived the storm. Weary from years of war and destruction, he is tortured by the thought of having to kill yet another person. Meanwhile, Idamante, believing his father to have been killed in the storm, comes to the same shore to mourn him. Father and son meet but don't recognize each other—though Idomeneo knows that this is the man he has sworn to kill (**Vedrommi intorno**). When he discovers their true relationship, Idomeneo runs away, horrified; Idamante is left behind, confused and pained (**Il padre adorato**).

We next meet another inhabitant of the refugee shelter: **Elettra**, a survivor from an infamous family. With the war finally over, Elettra fantasizes, for the first time in her life, about a positive future—with Idamante, the object of her desire, at her side (**Idol mio**).

Idamante, meanwhile, confesses his own illicit feelings to Ilia. Caught completely by surprise, she rejects him—just as Idomeneo arrives. He senses that his son might have fallen for the enemy refugee, while Elettra panics that Idamante and her imagined future are slipping from her grasp. Idomeneo refuses to speak to Idamante, and seeing no other way to avoid having to kill his own son, banishes him. Idamante is crushed, not understanding his father's reasons.



## Characters

**Idomeneo** *tenor*  
King of Crete

**Idamante** *mezzo-soprano or tenor*  
Idomeneo's son

**Ilia** *soprano*  
Princess of Troy, daughter of Priam, and a refugee

**Elettra** (*Electra*) *soprano*  
A princess who is the daughter of Agamemnon, King of Argos. She is a refugee from Mycenae.

The chorus and all remaining characters of *Idomeneo* have been eliminated.

## Refugee Hot Spots

There are currently more than 13 million people who have been internally displaced or fled their home countries in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster in Africa, Central and South America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.



Locate these "hot spot" countries: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Northern Iraq, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Uganda, Venezuela

Idomeneo has organized a ship to take Idamante and Elettra back to her homeland. Elettra, relieved to hear the sounds of the water, says a happy farewell to Crete (**Andrò, ramingo e solo**).

Idomeneo, meanwhile, is tortured by the vow he made and his inability to tell his son the truth. The torment he feels is overwhelming and he contemplates killing himself. Idamante and Elettra arrive and Idomeneo sends them off (**Soavi zeffri**).

Suddenly, a giant storm whips up, leaving everyone scrambling for safety. Idomeneo, in complete emotional disarray, reads it as a sign from the gods. He screams at the heavens, demanding they take him, instead (**Fuor del mar**).

The storm subsides and Idamante seeks out Iliia to say his final farewell to her before committing suicide. Iliia makes a tortured confession of her own feelings. Both are overwhelmed, basking in this unexpected moment of bliss (**S'io non moro**).

Iliia seeks out Idomeneo to try to build a bridge between father and son. In a difficult moment of personal struggle, she explains to him that she is ready to accept him as a friend and father-figure, in spite of her family's past suffering at his hands (**Se il padre perdei**).

Idamante arrives. He has learned the true reason for his father's coldness: his father was trying to shield him from the awful truth of promising to kill him. He is ready to accept his death at Idomeneo's hands, serene in the knowledge that his father loves him after all. Idomeneo is overwhelmed with emotion when Iliia suddenly volunteers herself in Idamante's place. Suddenly, Idamante's gun goes off. Elettra, seeing her future dreams dismantled before her eyes, suffers a nervous breakdown (**D'oreste, d'ajace**).

Idomeneo, mortally wounded and deeply moved by the love of his son, makes his most courageous decision: to break his vow and allow Idamante to live, regardless of the consequences. All four sing a chorus of love and peace, looking ahead to an uncertain future (**Scenda amor**).

Courtesy of David Paul

## Meet the creators

by Sarah Powell

### Composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

wrote operas, concertos, symphonies, and sonatas that profoundly shaped classical music. He started publicly performing at six. Mozart aligned himself with many European venues and patrons, composing hundreds of works marked by vivid emotion and sophisticated textures. His operas display uncanny psychological insight.



### Librettist

**Giambattista Varesco (1735–1805)** was a Salzburg cleric and poet who adapted *Idomeneo's* libretto from Antoine Danchet's 1712 French text. Though, in Mozart's words, Varesco had "not the slightest knowledge or experience of the theatre," the poet completed librettos for *Idomeneo* and Mozart's abandoned project, *L'oca del Cairo*.

### Adapter

**David Paul (1982– )** is an award-winning director of opera, theater, and film. Credits include LA Opera and



the Metropolitan Opera/Juilliard. Paul assistant directed the Broadway revival of *Master Class* and wrote/directed the film *Dichterliebe: POETLOVE*. He is on faculty at the Juilliard School and the Metropolitan Opera's Young Artist Development Program. Paul studied acting and directing at Columbia University. In 2017, Paul stage directed the Pittsburgh Opera production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.

## Historical Context for *afterWARDs*

### Trojan War (c. 1299–1100 BCE)

A mythical 10-year conflict, the Trojan War began when Paris, a prince of Troy, kidnapped Helen, Queen of Sparta.



*The Burning of Troy, 1759-1762,*  
oil painting by Johann Georg Trautmann

Greek forces laid siege to Troy and found victory with use of the infamous Trojan Horse. One of the most important events in Greek mythology, the story was narrated by Homer, in the *Iliad*, and later by Roman poets Virgil and Ovid.

### Significant Story Changes from *Idomeneo*

- Neptune is not involved; Idomeneo promises his subjects that he will kill an unknown man (Idamante) who has rescued the prisoner Ilia.
- Idomeneo prepares to send off Idamante and Elettra, but a big storm disrupts their departure. But no sea monsters or gods are involved.
- After the storm has passed, Idamante offers to proceed with the execution, and Ilia offers to take his place. Elettra has a nervous breakdown. Idomeneo decides to break his promise to his subjects, and allow Idamante to live.
- All sing a chorus of love and peace, but Idomeneo remains king as they face an uncertain future.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

A mental health problem that some develop after experiencing/witnessing a threatening event, PTSD symptoms include nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance of people or situations, negative changes in feelings toward oneself and others, and a state of hyper-arousal that often includes a feeling of imminent danger. Historians now explore PTSD's impact on soldiers from the American Civil War to ancient Assyria.

### Production History

*Idomeneo* premiered in Munich at Court Theatre (now Cuvilliés Theater) in January 1781. Bare Opera produced a workshop of *afterWARDs* in New York City in October 2017.

Researched by Sarah Powell and Alan Shadgett

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