

**The Broadway Symphony and Seattle Chamber Singers**  
George Shangrow, conductor

PRESENT

**George Frideric Handel's**

GRAND ORATORIO

**THEODORA**

October 20, 1989

Meany Theater

**soloists**

Felicia Dobbs - Theodora

Carolyn Maia - Didimus

Emily Lunde - Irene

Paul Karaitis - Septimius

Brian Box - Valens

# The Seattle Chamber Singers

George Shangrow, conductor

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## How to Listen to an Oratorio You Have Never Heard Before

For many music-lovers, listening to Handel's *Messiah* is like spending an evening by the fire with an old friend. Enjoyment is easy and relaxed. The charms of the friend are well-known and trusted and you happily anticipate the pleasures you have experienced before.

But listening to an oratorio you have never heard before is like going to a party where you don't know anyone. At first you do all right. You arrive at the place and there are things to see (someone hands you a program), and there are introductions to be made. You say hello to the musicians (applause), the orchestra shakes your hand (overture), you meet a soloist or two (what a wonderful dress the soprano is wearing!). Then the full chorus comes in (Wow! there are a lot of them!). Then...

Then you don't really know what to do: You feel a little awkward. You could go stand by the refreshment table and look busy choosing whether to eat carrot sticks or celery sticks (you glance through the program. How long is this going to be??!!) But if you are lucky, you might find yourself unexpectedly, but happily involved in an interesting and engaging conversation with someone you've never met before. The party turns out to be worthwhile, and you don't want to go home.

It is possible to have a good conversation with an Oratorio you've never met before. You can get caught up in it, engaged by the drama, and carried away by the music. How? One of the best ways, is to focus on the story. A Handel oratorio such as *Theodora* is not three-hours of abstract music. It is a dramatic story. While there are no costumes, no scenery, no action, a Handel oratorio is a colorful and intense dramatization which invites you to enter into the joys and sorrows of the human beings whose tale is told, to contemplate the connections between the people in the story and your own life experience, and to consider the insights into life the story seeks to convey.

A Handel oratorio is something like radio theater. You don't get to see any of what is going on. Instead, you hear everything. You hear the scenery. For example, part of Act II of *Theodora* takes place in a dungeon. The orchestra plays a *Sinfonia* that sets the scene. You can feel the darkness and loneliness of the place creeping over you, until you are in that dungeon yourself! Just before the dungeon scene, the music takes you to a *Bacchanalia*—you can see the faces bright with delight, the garlands of flowers, the dancing, the tables laden with food. The dark dungeon is really miserable in contrast.

In Handel's oratorios you also hear, rather than see, the action. At one point in *Theodora*, *Theodora* realizes *Didimus* is in danger, her concern is intense, and she makes a fast, decisive decision to rescue him. You can hear her taking off at a run, and you feel her mixture of excitement, fear, righteous outrage, and passionate hope. You run with her to the rescue! When the lover's embrace you feel the music wrap tenderly around you. When the oppressive, controlling governor barks his orders that no insolence will be tolerated, you feel him looming over you.

It is interesting to speculate on why Handel wrote oratorios when he had the opportunity to write and produce operas. His first oratorio, *Esther*, was presented in London because the Bishop of London objected to Handel's plans to produce a staged version of the Biblical story. The Bishop considered the opera house an immoral place, and as Handel scholar Winton Dean writes, "Hearing Holy Writ in a theatre was like meeting a clergyman in a brothel; the conjunction was disgraceful, if the aim was pleasure, and dangerous, if it was not." The Puritan reformers of the 17th century objected to the sensuality and triviality of the theater, and it is often commented that English audiences found the oratorio more tasteful. In addition, there was the expense of opera: an oratorio was less costly to produce. But it is clear that in addition to these practical considerations Handel found artistic delight in the challenges of conveying dialogue, emotion, scenery, and action all through the music alone.

In listening to an oratorio, it helps if you can avoid feeling cheated. "If only those Puritans hadn't been so prudish, this would be an opera and I could see costumes, lights, action!" Handel does not cheat the listener. He gives it all to us. As Winton Dean says, Handel's oratorios are "beyond all question among the greatest productions of musical drama."

Forget the carrot sticks. Enjoy the party

-Rebecca Parker

## Our Soloists

Soprano Felicia Dobbs makes her Broadway Symphony/Seattle Chamber Singers debut tonight in the role of *Theodora*. Ms. Dobbs has won acclaim from audiences and critics alike for her impressive performances in opera, operetta, oratorio and the concert stage. She has performed in the United States and Europe and most recently in Japan where her engagements included an appearance as soprano soloist with the Sapporo Symphony. Ms. Dobbs repertoire is extensive and varied, ranging from Handel to Wagner. Recent successes have included the challenging works of Britten's *War Requiem*, Berg's *Wozzeck Fragments*, Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony*, and Ravel's *Chansons Madecasses*. A native of Boston, Ms. Dobbs received advanced training at the Music Conservatory in Frankfurt, Germany, and was an invited participant in the prestigious Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria. Ms. Dobbs is represented by Manning Music Management, 935 NW 19th, Portland, OR 97209.

Mezzo Soprano Carolyn Maia (*Didimus*) is also making her BS/SCS debut this evening. Ms. Maia has been a frequent soloist and recording artist with most of the major opera companies in Britain and Southern Ireland as well as on the B.B.C. radio and television. She also has appeared on many occasions as mezzo soloist with the B.B.C. Symphony and Royal Philharmonic orchestras. In addition to the British Isles, Ms. Maia's career has brightened opera houses and festivals on the continent in Stockholm, Brussels, Copenhagen and in Montreal, Victoria, and Vancouver, Canada. Upon Ms. Maia's move to the Pacific Northwest, she has been in demand as a featured soloist in all of the major cities on the West Coast of the United States. She has been able to demonstrate not only her vocal talents but her acting ability from tragedy to comedy. Her range, versatility and stage presence have received wide acclaim from audiences and critics alike.

Mezzo soprano Emily Lunde is a Seattle native and has performed much concert and oratorio repertoire in the Seattle area including Handel's *Messiah*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Brahms' *Alto Rhapsody*, and Bach's *B-minor Mass*. She has performed with the Choir of the Sound, the New Whatcom Choral Society of Bellingham, the Seattle Symphony and Chorale and others. Most recently, Ms. Lunde has been a featured soloist in the City Cantabile Choir's presentation of Mozart's *Requiem*, and was one of the featured singers in the Pacific Northwest Ballet production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Tenor Paul Karaitis last appeared with the BS/SCS in their production of Monteverdi's opera *Il Ritorno di Ulisse in Patria*. A frequent performer in opera, concerts, and oratorio throughout the Northwest, he is well known to classical music enthusiasts in the Seattle area. Last month he appeared as Ruiz in Seattle Opera's production of *Il Trovatore*, and last May he made his Portland Opera debut in *The Merry Widow*. Other recent appearances include performing with the Northwest Chamber Orchestra in their critically acclaimed *Royal Holiday at Versailles* and as the tenor soloist in the Seattle Choral Company's production of *Carmina Burana*. Mr. Karaitis will perform as a guest soloist for the Seattle Choral Company's opera gala this coming May; in February he makes his debut with the Bellevue Philharmonic.

Baritone Brian Box is a native of Washington and received his Master of Music degree in vocal performance from Western Washington University. Mr. Box has appeared frequently with the BS/SCS as a soloist in cantatas and oratorios and with the Broadway Symphony in Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer*. Among his credits are performances of Brahms' *Four Last Songs* with the Western Washington University Orchestra and the leading role in Dominic Argento's opera *Postcard from Morocco* at the University of British Columbia. Mr. Box has also performed with Northwest Opera in Schools, Etc. and the Seattle Opera's education program, singing children's opera throughout the state.

Note: Tonight's performance of *Theodora* is the Seattle premiere. After going to press with some of our publicity which announced this as the West Coast premiere, we discovered *Theodora* was performed recently in Portland. We regret the error, apologize to our musical colleagues in Portland, and celebrate that we are not alone in our commitment to Handel's neglected works.

# The Story

## ACT I

Handel's *Theodora* tells the story of a woman caught in a situation in which she must choose whether to remain faithful to her convictions and her love or compromise them and save herself from violence. Though set in the context of a big historical event (the Third Century persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Diocletian) it is not an epic drama like *Israel in Egypt* but an intimate portrayal of human beings struggling with issues of power and oppression, love and fear, conviction and compromise, hope and despair. These themes reflect Handel's own humanism—the concern that human beings be freed from dogmatic intolerance and unjust oppression. These were the qualities Beethoven so admired in Handel. The whole oratorio has been described by S. W. Bennett as "an urgent plea for a social morality germane to Handel's own time; it is that for tolerance and freedom of thought... So

Didimus tells Septimius,  
"Ought we not to leave  
The free-born mind of man still ever free?  
Since vain is the attempt to force belief  
With the severest instruments of death."

The oratorio begins by setting the stage for conflict. First we meet Valens, the Roman governor of the city of Antioch. In an opening recitative and aria he announces that is the Birthday of the Emperor, and sends his servant to begin the celebration and sacred rites in honor of the Emperor. The announcement carries a threat. "Anyone who will not participate in worship of the Emperor 'shall feel our wrath in chastisement or death.'" The chorus of Romans, unconcerned with the threat, sings the opening prayer asking that the Emperor be blessed. It is stately and festive, and gives a hint of the implacable Roman insistence on obedience to authority.

But Didimus, a Roman soldier who is secretly a Christian, is disturbed by the threat. He approaches Valens and requests that the Governor not persecute those who for reason of conscience will not worship the Roman gods. His is a plea for religious tolerance, but Valens is an obedient Roman. The persecution of the Christians is the Emperor's decree and Valens holds the position, "They are not Caesar's friends Who own not Caesar's gods!" Any one departing from the party line is a traitor who must be punished! Valens sings an aria, "Racks, gibbets, sword..." full of stubborn anger. The Chorus confirms the Roman position in a chorus, "For ever thus stands fixed the doom..." which Handel sets as a Siciliano, bringing in a feeling of pathos.

A dialogue ensues between Didimus and Septimius, his superior officer. Didimus decries the cruel decree, asserting that threats of violence cannot prevail against convictions of the truth. "No engines can the tyrant find to storm the truth-supported mind," he sings in the B section of the aria, while the strings play music that storms against the vocal line. In Septimius' response, we see a Roman who is not comfortable with the authoritarian threat of his governor. Caught between the claims of his own conscience and his sense of duty, he sings an aria that expresses his awareness that only mercy from the governor will prevent a tragic end. His prayer, "Descend kind pity..." contrasts with the opening chorus and closes the first scene of the story. In contrast to the prayer of the opening chorus, "Bless the Emperor," Septimius hopes for the advent of mercy in "each human breast."

The second half of Act I introduces us to the Christians. Handel makes the conflict between Roman authority and Christian conscience clear by the contrast between music the Christians sing and the music of the Romans. The Christians' music is more legato, it doesn't use any of the banal gestures found in the Romans' music, and where the Romans' musical accents are almost funny in their awkwardness, the Christians' music is full of elegant line and sweet suspension.

We meet Theodora as she is teaching and encouraging the her friends. She appears to be the leader of the community of Christians, and thus is the most in danger because of Valens' decree. She counsels them to not be afraid in the face of violent threats—affliction teaches the soul to discern what is of lasting value. In her aria, "Fond, flattering world, Adieu!" she communicates her conviction that truth offers the greatest possible delight and joy. We see that she understands that holding fast to her convictions will put her in mortal conflict with the powers that be. She either has to give up her beliefs or say good-bye to the world. She has already made her decision: She will hold fast, and sing her farewell in advance of her fate.

Irene, another member of the Christian community, praises Theodora for her inspiring instruction, and the Chorus, now representing the Christian congregation, prays to be filled with love, grace and truth. Their prayer-inflecting is disrupted by the arrival of a messenger frantically warning them

all to flee for their lives. But inspired by Theodora's leadership, Irene sings one of the most beautiful arias of the oratorio, "As with rosy steps the morn..." in which the light of God is invoked as a an advancing dawn, whose "rosy steps" drive back the shades of night.

The Chorus says Amen to Irene's aria by singing a hymn of praise. The prayer meeting is disrupted a second time by the entrance of Septimius, the sympathetic Roman who doesn't want to see violence done. "Oh mistaken wretches!" he cries in his recitative, arguing that their faith in God is impractical—they are going to get killed! Here the librettist makes an interesting choice of words. "Why thus blind to fate, Do ye in private oratories dare rebel against the President's decree..."

A momentary scholarly excursion is in order here. The word "oratorio" comes from the Latin "oratory", which means "a prayer." In 16th century Italy it became popular to form society's for religious study. These societies met for prayer and discussion, in gathering places built especially for this purpose called Oratories, or prayer-halls. A popular aspect of oratory gatherings was the singing of Laude—hymns of praise. The Laude gradually were developed into narrative motets that dramatized Biblical stories. The most famous early collection of songs for singing in the oratory was published as a "Spiritual Harmonic Theatre of Madrigals." By the beginning of the 18th Century when Handel lived for a few years in Italy, the "prayer hall" music had become full-fledged musical drama (though without costumes, scenery, or acting) with soloists singing different characters in the Biblical story or story from the lives of the Saints, using recitatives and arias, with the chorus taking the crowd scenes or commenting on the events. Oratorios, as the oratory music was called by then, were so popular they were sung both in oratories and as a form of secular entertainment in the palaces and courts of the nobility. While in Italy Handel wrote his first Oratorio, and his later works in England draw upon this Italian tradition.

Handel appears to be imagining the Christians in an oratory. They are doing just what the 17th Century Italians did—Offering one another spiritual instruction, and performing music. What we have here is like the ever popular "play within the play" in Shakespeare; only this is an "oratorio" within the "oratorio."

Roman guards arrive to arrest Theodora, and threaten her with sexual violence (forced prostitution). We can imagine the guards laying hands on her, while she says she would rather die than face sexual violence. She asks the angels to take her instead, in her famous aria, "Angels, ever bright and fair."

Didimus arrives just after Theodora is taken away. We discover that he is in love with Theodora, in his anguished recitative, "Where is my love, My life, my Theodora?" He sings an aria praying for courage or cleverness to rescue Theodora. Irene praises the power of love, and the Chorus of Christians sends him forth to rescue Theodora, with their prayer that he be rewarded either with Theodora's charms, or heavenly rest. Repeated throughout the Oratorio are these two hopes of the Christians, either for earthly enjoyment of their love for one another, and joy in life; or for heaven's recompense—eternal bliss. Handel does not present "world-denying" Christians, longing for the glories of martyrdom. These Christians love life, affirm earthly joys, and long for freedom from oppressive power. Faith in heaven gives them courage in the face of death, but they do not want to die, except when despair overshadows hope. The first Act closes with this hymn of shining confidence and hope.

## ACT II

The tensions that propel the rest of the drama have been drawn. Will Theodora stand up under torture, or will she recant? Will Didimus succeed in finding a way to rescue her? Will Valens continue in his stubborn insistence on obedience to the Emperor or will his heart be softened by mercy? Will Septimius continue his feeble efforts to avert violence, or will he take decisive action?

Act II is brilliantly structured, and as Handel scholar Winton Dean argues, "claims to rank as the finest single act in any of the oratorios." Repeating the Structures of Act One, it opens in the Roman court, with the Roman chorus; and ends in the Christian oratory, with the Christian chorus. In between these two chorus scenes, are four intimate scenes, which take us deeply into the characters' feelings and decisions.

The Act opens with the Roman festival proceeding gaily. The Chorus, "Queen of Summer" is a rollicking dance. Valens takes time out the celebration to coldly announce that if Theodora hasn't recanted by sundown, "the meanest of my guards shall triumph o'er her boasted chastity." The Roman chorus takes lustful delight in this threat of sexual violence, and sings "Venus, laughing from the skies, will applaud..." in music that laughs itself.

In an abrupt scene change we leave the laughing Romans to their festivities and are taken to the prison where Theodora is in despair. The orchestral Sinfonia sets the scene of misery and loneliness. Theodora, alone, is

overcome with fear and despair. She wants to die. A repeat of the Sinfonia gives us the feeling that the prison walls are closing around her. She struggles to regain her faith and hope, and her mood lifts as she affirms her trust that, if she must die, she will rise like "the silver dove" to the saints and angels in the courts above.

We leave Theodora in this more exalted mood, and are let in on a conversation between Didimus and Septimius. Didimus has decided on a plan to rescue Theodora, but he needs the help of his friend, Septimius. Septimius responds to his request by revealing the depth of his character. Though a Roman, he does not believe that his Gods sanction the violence Valens' proposes, "Yet nor Venus nor Flora delight in the woe, that disfigures their fairest resemblance below." He resolves to take decisive action to assist Didimus, and will instruct the guards to take him to her cell.

Now comes the most beautifully crafted section of the Oratorio. We are taken briefly, back to the Oratory, where the Christians are keeping vigil. Irene, who earlier announced in her serene aria that God's power, like the dawn, would scatter the shades of night, now announces that the dreaded hour of sunset is arriving, when Theodora must face her torture. They pray for her protection and peace.

We see this prayer is answered as we return to the Prison cell, Didimus finds Theodora peacefully asleep, He sings a lullaby love song to her. She wakes, startled. He announces that he is there to rescue her, and that they are to change clothes so that she can escape undetected. But Theodora, either crazed, or comprehending the big picture better than Didimus, asks him for another kind of rescue. She asks him to kill her. Her reason for this request becomes clear in the following recitative, "Ah! What is liberty or life to me, That Didimus must purchase with his own!" She is not willing to have her liberation from prison cost him his life. The only way out she sees, is her death, and she'd rather it be by the hand of one she loves, than by those who oppose her. But Didimus manages to convince her that there is hope that they both can escape death, and she consents to his plan, and changes clothes with him.

In a mood of hope that life and love will be preserved the two lovers sing a parting duet, praying for the blessings of life and safety, and affirming their hope that if their plan fails, they still have the hope of heaven. "I hope again to meet you on earth, But sure shall meet in heaven!"

At their parting, we are returned to the Oratory, where the Christians are still keeping their prayer vigil. They do not know that the rescue has been accomplished, but they are putting their trust in God who "can raise the dead to life and joy." In the tradition of the Italian oratory gatherings they sing a mini-oratorio, a musical dramatization of a Biblical story. The Bible story they sing to one another is found in Luke 7:11,

"Soon afterward Jesus went to a town named Nain; his disciples and a large crowd went with him. Just as he arrived at the gate of the town, a funeral procession was coming out. The dead man was the only son of a woman who was a widow, and a large crowd with pity for her and with her. When the Lord saw her his heart was filled with pity for her and he said to her, "Don't cry!" Then he walked over and touched the coffin, and the men carrying it stopped. Jesus said, "Young man! Get up, I tell you!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother."

In the style of early 17th century "spiritual madrigals" from which the grand oratorios evolved, Handel dramatizes this story in the chorus. The opening of the chorus captures the scene of the funeral procession. Jesus sees the grief and is filled with pity. His words, "Rise youth!" are set as a dramatic command, immediately fulfilled by the music rising in a strong upward scale. Then the mother bends to embrace her child with joy, "Lowly the matron bowed, and bore away the prize." and the music paints both the picture of her bending embrace, and through a canon that builds to a joyful height of intensity, the profound human joy that life has been rescued from the jaws of death.

Handel considered this chorus, which occurs at the high point of hope in the oratorio, and is itself a reconstruction of the beginnings of the oratorio as an art form, to be the greatest oratorio chorus he ever composed. It is, simultaneously, a grand chorus, an affirmation of the power of life over death, and a celebration of art integrated with life.

### ACT III

Act III of Theodora is the denouement of the Oratorio. Only one question remains to propel the dramatic action forward. Will Didimus succeed in escaping so that the lovers can enjoy the pleasures of life together? The act opens in the Oratory. Irene is singing a hymn of praise expressing hope in God. The words of this aria may have had special poignancy to the citizens of London who attended the premiere performance of Theodora. The audience was small because there had just been an earthquake in London, and people were terrified to leave their homes. Ironically, we may find the words poignant for us as well,

"Strong in hope we sing and pray,  
Though convulsive rocks the ground.."

Theodora arrives dressed in Didimus' clothes. The Chorus rejoices to discover she is free, and prays that Didimus, also, will be blessed with "liberty and life..." But a messenger arrives with the news that Valens is not going to release Didimus. He is enraged, and now is seeking Theodora to kill her.

Theodora resolves immediately that she must go rescue Didimus. She is unwilling to have him die for her, and with the courage of her convictions, and strengthened by her passionate love, she refuses Irene's counsel that she should think of her safety. She goes to liberate Didimus from the Romans.

In the Roman Court, Didimus is on trial before Valens. Valens sends him off to be tortured just as Theodora arrives and pleads that he let Didimus go and inflict his "justice" on her instead. Septimius sings an aria, praising virtue, and hoping that the virtuous be saved. Valens, enraged, answers the prayer with his words of condemnation, "The powers below, No pity know, For the brave or for the fair."

Didimus and Theodora then both entreat Valens to only kill one of them, pleading that their beloved be spared. The Chorus sings, marveling how strange this outcome of the conflict—that the two lovers are pleading to be killed, so their beloved can be spared. Valens' anger is only intensified by these pleas, and he pronounces that both shall die.

In the end, the plot turns on Valens, alone. He holds fast to the rule of dogmatic authority, and admits no mercy. He is the unmoved mover, who places obedience above all other virtues.

The Oratorio might have concluded with a dramatization of the violent death of Didimus and Theodora, but Handel puts the focus elsewhere. We do not see or hear the martyrdom itself. The Oratorio ends portraying how Theodora and Didimus face their unjust, tragic death. Earthly hopes destroyed, they have one hope left—heaven. This hope they celebrate in their final duet, singing together of the pleasures of paradise.

The Oratorio closes with a final chorus in which the Christians pray for zeal equal to the serene confidence and joy demonstrated by Theodora and Didimus. The final notes affirm that earth is a blessed place. Heaven's streams flow not only in the afterlife, but also in this life. Theodora and Didimus were themselves testimony to the presence of Heaven on Earth.

It is with this serene and gentle conclusion that Handel makes it clear that his interpretation of the conflict between Roman authority and Roman power demands obedience, discipline, submission to authority—and backs up this demand with violent threats. In contrast, the power of Truth is gentle, like the dawn. It advances as a natural and gracious force, as Irene sang in her aria, "As with rosy steps the dawn." The music expresses confidence not in bombastic, authoritarian power, but in a triumphant gentleness.

Commentators often suggest that Theodora reflects Handel's personal faith. If so, it appears that Handel's confidence was, as the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead would express two centuries later, in a religion that:

"does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy a kingdom not of this world." (Process and Reality, p. 343)

The work also reveals that Handel was a humanist whose convictions transcended sectarian religion. It is not only the Christians who hope in mercy, love, and justice with unflagging confidence in the ultimate triumph of righteousness; the Pagan Septimius believes in the same virtues, and trusts his Gods are their foundation. It has been said that genius is almost always accompanied by a tolerant spirit. Handel appears to have been this kind of genius. Furthermore, he did not insist that art be detached either from life or moral issues. He pleads for tolerance, and celebrates those who stand by their convictions of truth in spite of intolerance and oppressive tyranny.

These human concerns are not foreign to our time. Tyrannical power takes many forms in our world, from overt totalitarian governments who terrorize their citizens who advocate for social change, to the more subtle controls of rigid or oppressive cultural institutions. The struggle to have courage in the face of constraining forces is a universal human dilemma. Theodora asks us all a question. Will you be faithful to your convictions and to those you love?

We, of course are free to entertain, or not entertain, the question any work of art asks us. We can accept or not the function of art as a moral challenge, and even then, the moral presuppositions of any artist are open to our scrutiny. Handel's own moral vision frustrated English society, especially in the Victorian era. He was both more tolerant, more an individualist, and

more accepting of the erotic dimensions of life than his later audience wanted him to be. It is also important to observe that Handel himself probably liked the final chorus of Act II so much because it presents art integrated with life. The "oratorio within the oratorio" in Theodora functions to encourage the people to hold fast to that which is good. Perhaps here is revealed to us Handel's own view that art has a function in life—to ease our sorrows, undergird our hope, deepen our delights, and strengthen our courage.

--Rebecca Parker

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**ACT I.**

Scene 1.

VALENS, SEPTIMIUS, DIDIMUS. *Chorus of Heathens.*

*Valens.* 'Tis Dioclesian's natal day:  
Proclaim throughout the bonds of Antioch  
A feast, and solemn sacrifice to Jove!  
Whoso disdains to join the sacred rites,  
Shall feel our wrath in chastisement, or death;  
And this, Septimius, take you in charge.

Go, my faithful soldier, go,  
Let the fragrant incense rise  
To Jove, great ruler of the skies!

CHORUS.

And draw a blessing down  
On his imperial crown,  
Who rules the world below!

*Didimus.* Vouchsafe, dread Sir, a gracious ear  
To my request. Let not thy sentence doom  
To racks and flames all, all, whose scrup'ulous  
minds

Will not permit them, or, to bend the knee  
To Gods they know not, or, in wanton mood,  
To celebrate the day with Roman rites.

*Valens.* Art thou a Roman? and yet dar'st defend  
A sect, rebellious to the Gods, and Rome?

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As you may know, the Broadway Symphony and Seattle Chamber Singers moved to new and spacious office quarters, graciously donated for our use by Pioneer Square Properties. Now that we are in this wonderful large space, we have found ourselves in need of some basic (and some not-so-basic) office furniture and supplies.

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*Didimus.* Many there are in Antioch, who disdain  
An idol offering, yet are friends to Caesar.

*Falens.* It cannot be; they are not Caesar's friends,  
Who own not Caesar's Gods. — I'll hear no  
more!

Racks, gibbets, sword and fire  
Shall speak my vengeful ire  
Against the stubborn knee.  
Nor gushing tears,  
Nor ardent pray'r  
Shall shake our firm decree.

CHORUS of *Heathens.*  
For ever thus stands fix'd the doom  
Of rebels to the Gods and Rome,  
While sweeter than the trumpets sound  
Their groans and cries are heard around.

### Scene 2.

DIDIMUS, SEPTIMIUS.

*Didimus.* Most cruel edict! Sure, thy gen'rous soul,  
Septimius, abhors the dreadful task  
Of persecution. Ought we not to leave  
The free-born mind of man still ever free?  
Since vain is the attempt, to force belief  
With the severest instruments of death?

The raptur'd soul defies the sword,  
Secure of virtue's claim,  
And trusting Heaven's unerring word,  
Enjoys the circling flame.  
No engines can a tyrant find,  
To storm the truth-supported mind.

*Septimius.* I ask thy virtues, and ask thy faith;  
Enjoy it as you will, my Didimus.  
Though not a Christian, yet, I own,  
Something within declares for acts of mercy.  
But Antioch's President must be obey'd;  
Such is the Roman discipline, while we  
Can only pity whom we dare not spare.

Descend, kind Pity, heav'nly guest,  
Descend, and fill each human breast  
With sympathizing woe!  
That liberty and peace of mind  
May sweetly harmonize mankind,  
And bless the world below!

### Scene 3.

THEODORA, with the Christians.

*Theodora.* Though hard, my friends, yet wholesome are the  
truths  
Taught in affliction's school, whence the pure soul  
Rises refin'd, and soars above the world.

Fond flatt'ring world, adieu!  
Thy gayly-smiling pow'r,  
Empty treasures,  
Fleeting pleasures,  
Ne'er shall tempt or charm me more.  
Fond flatt'ring world, adieu!  
Faith inviting,  
Hope delighting,

Nobler joys we now pursue.  
Fond flatt'ring world, adieu!

*Irene.* Oh bright example of all goodness!  
How easy seems affliction's heavy load.  
While thus instructed, and companion'd thus,  
As'twere with Heaven, and conversing, we look down  
On the vain pomp of proud Prosperity!

CHORUS.

Come, mighty Father, mighty Lord,  
With Love our souls inspire!  
While Grace and Truth flow from thy Word,  
And feed the holy fire.

### Scene 4.

Enter Messenger.

*Messenger.* Fly, fly, my brethren! heathen rage  
Pursues us swift, —  
Arm'd with the terrors of insulting death.

*Irene.* Ah! whither should we fly? or fly from whom?  
The Lord is still the same, to day, for ever;  
And his protection here and ev'rywhere.  
Though gath'ring round our destin'd heads  
The storm now thickens, and looks big with fate:  
Still shall thy servants wait on Thee, oh Lord,  
And in thy saving mercy put their trust!

As with rosy steps the morn  
Advancing, drives the shades of night,  
So from virtuous toils well-borne  
Raise thou our hopes of endless light!  
Triumphant Saviour! Lord of day!  
Thou art the life, the light, the way!  
As with *Da Capo*.

CHORUS.

All pow'r in heaven above, or earth beneath,  
Belongs to Thee alone,  
Thou everlasting One!  
Mighty to save in perils, storm and death.

### Scene 5.

Enter SEPTIMIUS.

*Septimius.* Mistaken wretches! why thus blind to fate  
Do ye in private Oratories dare  
Rebel against the President's decree? and scorn  
With native rites to celebrate the day,  
Sacred to Caesar, and protecting Jove?

Dread the fruits of christian folly,  
And this stubborn melancholy,  
Fond of life and liberty!  
Chains and dungeons ye are wooing,  
And the storm of death pursuing,  
Rebels to the known decree.  
Dread the fruits: *Da Capo*.

*Theodora.* Deluded mortal! call it not rebellion,  
To worship God; it is His dread command,  
His, whom we cannot, dare not disobey,  
Though death be our reward.

*Septimius.* Death is not yet thy doom,  
But worse than death to such a virtuous mind!  
Lady, these guards are order'd to convey you  
To the vile place, a prostitute, to devote your  
charms.

*Theodora.* Oh worse than death indeed! Lead me, ye guards,  
Lead me, or to the rack, or to the flames,  
I'll thank your gracious mercy!

Angels, ever bright and fair,

Take, oh take me to your care!

Speed to your own courts my flight,  
Clad in robes of virgin white!

Take me,

Angels: *Da Capo*.

(Exit with Septimius.)





## Scene 4.

IRENE, with the Christians.

*Irene.* The clouds begin to veil the hemisphere,  
And heavily bring on the night; the last  
Perhaps to us — oh! that it were the last  
To Theodora, ere she fall a prey  
To unexampled lust and cruelty.

Defend her Heaven, let angels spread  
Their viewless tents around her bed!  
Keep her from vile assaults secure,  
Still ever calm and ever pure!  
Defend her: *Da Capo.*

## Scene 5.

THEODORA'S place of confinement.

DIDIMUS at a distance, the visor of his helmet closed.

*Didimus.* Or lull'd with grief, or rapt her soul to heaven.  
In innocence of thought, intranc'd she lies.  
(approaching her.)

Sweet rose and lily, flow'ry form!  
Take me your faithful guard,  
To shield you from bleak wind and storm —  
A smile be my reward!

*Theodora.* Oh save me, Heaven, in this my perilous hour!  
(starting.)

*Didimus.* Start not, much injur'd princess — I come not  
As one, this place might give you cause to dread,  
But your deliverer  
And that dear ornament to Theodora,  
Her angel-purity. — If you vouchsafe  
But to change habit with your — Didimus.  
(discovering himself.)

*Theodora.* Excellent youth!  
I know thy courage, virtue, and thy love!  
This becomes not Theodora,  
But the blind enemies of truth — Oh no,  
It must not be! Yet Didimus can give  
A boon, will make me happy!

*Didimus.* How? or what? my soul with transport  
Listens to the request.

*Theodora.* The pilgrim's home, the sick man's health,  
The captive's ransom, poor man's wealth  
From thee I would receive!  
These, and a thousand treasures more,  
That gentle death has now in store,  
Thy hand and sword can give.

*Didimus.* Forbid it, Heaven!  
Shall I destroy the life I came to save?  
Shall I in Theodora's blood embrue  
My guilty hands, and give her death, who taught  
Me first to live?

*Theodora.* Ah! what is liberty or life to me,  
That Didimus must purchase with his own!

*Didimus.* Fear not for me! The Pow'r that led me hither,  
Will guard me hence; if not, His will be done!

*Theodora.* Yes, kind deliverer, I will trust that Pow'r!  
Farewel, thou gen'rous youth!

*Didimus.* Farewel, thou mirror of the virgin state!

### DUET.

*Theodora.* To thee, thou glorious son of worth,  
Be life and safety given!

*Didimus.* To thee, whose virtues suit thy birth,  
Be every blessing given!

*Both.* I hope again to meet on earth,  
But sure shall meet in heaven!

## Scene 6.

IRENE, with the Christians.

*Irene.* 'Tis night; but night's sweet blessing is deny'd  
To grief like ours.  
Be pray'r our refuge, pray'r to Him, who rais'd,  
And still can raise, the dead to life and joy!

### CHORUS.

He saw the lovely youth, Death's early  
prey,

Alas! too early snatch'd away;  
He heard his mother's fun'ral cries:  
Rise, youth! he said: the youth begins to rise!  
Lowly the matron bow'd, and bore away the  
prize!

## A C T III.

### Scene 1.

IRENE, with the Christians.

*Irene.* Lord to thee, each night and day,  
Strong in hope we sing and pray!  
And thy thunders roll around:  
Still to thee we sing and pray!  
Lord to thee: *Da Capo.*

### Scene 2.

Enter THEODORA, in the habit of DIDIMUS.

*Irene.* But see, the good, the virtuous Didimus!  
He comes to join with us in pray'r for Theodora.

*Theodora.* No, Heaven has heard your pray'rs for Theodora —  
(discovering herself.) Behold her safe! — Oh, that as free and safe  
Were Didimus, my kind deliverer!  
But let this habit speak the rest.

### CHORUS.

Blest be the hand, and blest the pow'r,  
That in this dark and dang'rous hour  
Sav'd thee from cruel strife!  
Lord, favour still the kind intent,  
And bless thy gracious instrument  
With liberty and life!

### Scene 3.

*Messenger.* Undaunted in the court stands Didimus,  
Virtuously proud of rescued innocence:  
But vain to save the gen'rous hero's life  
Are all entreaties, ev'n from Romans vain;  
And high-enrag'd the President protests,  
Should he regain the fugitive, no more  
To try her with the fear of infamy,  
But with the terrors of a cruel death.

*Irene.* Ah, Theodora! whence this sudden change  
From grief's pale looks to looks of red'ning joy!

*Theodora.* Oh my Irene, Heaven is kind!  
And Valens too is kind, to give me pow'r  
To execute in turn my gratitude,  
While safe my honour. — Stay me not, dear  
friend!  
Only assist me with a proper dress,  
That I may ransom the too gen'rous youth.

#### DUET.

*Irene.* Whither, princess, do you fly?  
Sure to suffer, sure to die?

*Theodora.* No, no, Irene, no,  
To life and joy I go!

*Irene.* Vain attempt — oh stay, oh stay!

*Theodora.* Duty calls! I must obey!  
(*Exit Theodora.*)

*Irene.* She's gone! disdaining liberty and life,  
And ev'ry honour this frail life can give.  
Devotion bids aspire to nobler things,  
To boundless love and joys ineffable:  
And such her expectation from kind Heaven.

#### Scene 4.

*Valens* — — Is it a Christian virtue then  
(to *Didimus*). To rescue from justice one  
Condemn'd?

*Didimus.* Had your sentence doom'd her but to death,  
I then might have deplored your cruelty,  
And should not have oppos'd it.

*Valens.* Take him hence,  
And lead him to repentance or to death!

#### Scene 5.

*Enter THEODORA.*

*Theodora.* Be that my doom! — you may inflict it here  
With legal justice; there 'tis cruelty.

*Septimius.* Dwells there such virtuous courage in the sex?  
Preserve them, oh ye Gods, preserve them both!

From virtue springs each gen'rous deed,  
That claims our grateful pray'r.  
Let justice for the hero plead,  
And pity save the fair.  
From virtue: *Da Capo.*

*Valens.* Cease, ye slaves, your fruitless pray'r!  
The pow'rs below  
No pity know  
For the brave, or for the fair.  
Cease, ye slaves, your fruitless pray'r!

*Didimus* 'Tis kind, my friends; but kinder still,  
(to *Septimius*). If for this daughter of Antiochus,  
In mind as noble as her birth, your pray'rs  
Prevail, that *Didimus* alone shall die.  
(to *Theodora*). Had I as many lives as virtues thou,  
Freely for thee I would resign them all.

*Theodora.* Oppose not, *Didimus*, my just desires;  
For know, that 'twas dishonour I declin'd,  
Not death — : most welcome now, if *Didimus*  
Were safe, whose only crime was my escape!

#### CHORUS.

How strange their ends,  
And yet how glorious!  
Where each contends  
To fall victorious!  
Where virtue its own innocence denies,  
And for the vanquish'd the glad victor die!

*Didimus* On me your frowns, your utmost rage exert,  
(to *Valens*). On me, your prisoner in chains!

*Theodora.* Those chains  
Are due to me, and death to me alone!

*Valens.* — Are ye then judges for yourselves?  
Not so our laws are to be trifled with — :  
If both plead guilty, 'tis but equity,  
That both should suffer. —  
Ye ministers of justice, lead them hence, —  
I cannot, will not bear such insolence!  
(*Exit.*)

#### Scene 6.

*Didimus.* — And must such beauty suffer?

*Theodora.* — Such useful valour be destroy'd?

*Septimius.* Alas! by an unhappy constancy!  
Destroy'd,

*Didimus.* Yet deem us not unhappy, gentle friend,  
Nor rash; for life we neither hate nor scorn:  
But think it a cheap purchase for the prize  
Reserv'd in heaven for purity and faith.

Streams of pleasure ever flowing,  
Fruits ambrosial ever growing,  
Golden thrones,  
Starry crowns  
Are the triumphs of the blest:  
When from life's dull labour free,  
Clad with immortality,  
They enjoy a lasting rest.

#### DUET.

*Theodora*  
and  
*Didimus.* Thither let our hearts aspire!  
Objects pure of pure desire,  
Still increasing,  
Ever pleasing,  
Wake the song and tune the lyre  
Of the blissful holy choir!

#### Scene 7.

*IRENE, with the Christians.*

Behold this their doom is past, and they are gone  
To prove, that Love is stronger far than Death.

#### CHORUS.

Oh Love divine, thou source of fame,  
Of glory and all joy!  
Let equal fire our souls inflame,  
And equal zeal employ:  
That we the glorious spring may know,  
Whose streams appear'd so bright below!

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