

# WASHINGTON CONCERT OPERA

## NABUCCO Plot Synopsis

Saturday, March 4, 2023 | 6 PM | Lisner Auditorium

### Setting the Scene

*Jerusalem and Babylon, 587 BCE*

### ACT I

*Jerusalem*

#### In the Temple of Solomon

As the people of Jerusalem lament the approach of the Babylonian army under King Nabucco (Nebuchadnezzar), they pray to their God for protection. High Priest Zaccaria urges them to trust in God ("D'Egitto là sui lidi" / On the shores of Egypt He saved the life of Moses). He explains that the Hebrews have captured Nabucco's daughter Fenena, and she will serve as a hostage against her father's wrath ("Come notte a sol fulgente" / Like darkness before the sun). Ismaele arrives warning that Nabucco and his forces are drawing ever closer to the Temple. Zaccaria leaves Fenena in Ismaele's custody, unaware that the two had fallen in love earlier when Ismaele was a captive of the Babylonians. Fenena had helped him to escape and followed him to Jerusalem.

Abigaille, Fenena's half-sister, enters with Babylonian soldiers disguised as Hebrews. She is furious to discover the two lovers because she, too, is in love with Ismaele. Abigaille threatens Fenena but promises to save the Hebrews if Ismaele will return her love. He refuses, and she swears vengeance (Trio: "Io t'amaza!" / I loved you).

Nabucco rides his horse to the entrance of the Temple, and Zaccaria threatens to kill Fenena if Nabucco desecrates the holy place ("Tremin gl'insani del mio furore!" / Let the madmen tremble at my anger). As the priest is about to stab Fenena, Ismaele stops him, returning Fenena to her father. With his daughter safe, Nabucco orders the destruction of the Temple. The Hebrews curse Ismaele for betraying them.

# WASHINGTON CONCERT OPERA

## ACT II

### *The Impious One*

#### Royal apartments in Babylon

While Nabucco continues his fight against the Hebrews, he has appointed Fenena his regent. Meanwhile, Abigaille has found a document that says she is not the daughter of Nabucco, but rather the child of slaves. Since the people of Babylon believe she is Nabucco's elder daughter, she swears revenge on Fenena and Nabucco. But she also sings sadly that once she knew love and was kind, but now all she feels is rage ("Anch'io dischiuso un giorno" / I too once opened my heart to happiness).

The High Priest of Baal, irate that Fenena is freeing the Hebrew prisoners, has spread the rumor that Nabucco was killed in battle. The people are acclaiming Abigaille as queen. Abigaille, crying "I am with you," accepts the throne ("Salgo già del trono aurato" / I already ascend the golden throne).

#### A room in the palace

Zaccaria prays to find a way to convert the Babylonians ("Tu sul labbro de'veggenti" / On the lips of the prophets). When Ismaele arrives, the Hebrews curse him for betraying them by freeing Fenena. Anna, Zaccaria's sister, proclaims that Ismaele must be forgiven, for when he saved Fenena, he was saving a Hebrew maid – Fenena has converted.

With the rumor of Nabucco's death spreading, Abigaille comes to claim the crown from Fenena. As she is about to seize the crown, Nabucco arrives and places it on his own head. In anger at Fenena's conversion, he orders the destruction of the Hebrews. He then proclaims himself King and God, commanding all to prostrate themselves before him ("Non son più re, son dio" / I am no longer King! I am God!). With these words, a thunder bolt appears above the King, and the crown flies off his head. It soon is clear that Nabucco has gone mad. He movingly pleads for help ("Chi mi toglie il regio scettro" / Who takes away the royal scepter), but Zaccaria says it is Heaven's revenge, and Abigaille places the crown on her head.

# WASHINGTON CONCERT OPERA

## ACT III

### *The Prophecy*

#### The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

A chorus of Babylonians sings of the joys of peace. The High Priest of Baal presents Abigaille, now ruler of Babylon, with the death warrant for the Hebrews, including Fenena. The still-mad Nabucco enters, and in a scene-long duet, Abigaille goads him into signing the warrant. When he realizes he has condemned his daughter Fenena, he searches for the document that shows Abigaille is not his true daughter. Mocking him, Abigaille tears the paper to shreds as he watches helplessly. Recognizing his powerlessness, he turns from anger to pleading, begging for the life of his beloved true daughter ("Oh, di qual onta aggravasi questo mio crin canuto!" / Oh, what shame must my old head suffer). Abigaille declares that he is now her prisoner.

#### The banks of the Euphrates River

The scene opens with the famous Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves ("Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate" / Fly, thought, on golden wings) where the enslaved Hebrews sing of their lost homeland. Zaccaria chides them for their pessimism and predicts the fall of Babylon.

# WASHINGTON CONCERT OPERA

## ACT IV

### *The Broken Idol*

#### Royal apartments in Babylon

Nabucco awakens, still confused about what has happened to him. He calls for his horse and sword but then realizes the doors are locked, and he is a prisoner in his own palace. Hearing distant voices, he looks out a window and sees Fenena and the Hebrews in chains being led to their execution. In desperation he prays to the Hebrew God for forgiveness for his pride and his treatment of the Hebrews, promising to rebuild the Temple and to convert to Judaism ("Dio di Giuda!" God of Judah!). As he prays, he feels his mind clearing. His officer, Abdallo, and loyal troops release him from prison, and they rush off to save Fenena.

#### The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

A funeral march is heard as the prisoners are led to the place of execution (Orchestral Interlude and Chorus: "Va! La palma del martirio" / Go, win the palm of martyrdom). Zaccaria urges Fenena towards martyrdom, while she welcomes death ("Oh, dischiuso è il firmamento" / Oh, open is the firmament). Nabucco and his troops arrive. Nabucco again promising to convert and to rebuild the Temple, orders the statue of Baal destroyed; it shatters of its own accord.

Everyone joins in praise of Jehovah. Abigaille appears, supported by two soldiers. She begs Fenena's forgiveness, urges Nabucco to make the two lovers happy, prays for God's pardon, and dies from the poison she has taken.

Zaccaria proclaims Nabucco the servant of Jehovah and the king of kings.