

## Synopsis:

## Act 1 At Marathon

In the Theatre of Dionysos the Athenians celebrate the 10th anniversary of their victory over the Persians at Marathon. Among the people we see FEDIMA with her little son - she is a young Persian girl from Susa who fell in love with a handsome Macedonian soldier, ALEXANDER; she followed him to Greece but he deserted her. Since then she wanders around Greece with their lovechild as a touring actress and dancer, searching for her unfaithful lover.

Trumpets announce the entrance of THEMISTOCLES' Greece sees him as her future saviour from the imminent second invasion by the Persian King Xerxes. An Athenian herald tells Themistocles that a messenger from Xerxes requests admission. In fact the messenger is Alexander (Fedima's lover of course and an old acquaintance of Themistocles) heading the Persian envoys. He politely announces to the Athenians that Xerxes sends proposals of peace which Themistocles however rejects with the statement that Greeks prefer rather to die than become slaves. Themistocles' daughter MIRTO though is attracted by Alexander's good looks and wonders why people would not listen to him. Themistocles follows the rules of Greek hospitality however and invites Alexander to his house. While the Persian envoys retire Themistocles appeals to the Athenians to decide on the offer of Xerxes - they ask him to address the oracle at Delphi before a final decision.

## Act 2 The Traitor

In her home Mirto dreams of the handsome Alexander. When she hears that a woman covered with a heavy veil and with a child on her hand asks to see her. It is Fedima. The young Persian woman tells her her story concluding that now her troubles are over as she will see the man she seeks - the Macedonian envoy Alexander who is now dining in Themistocles' house. For a moment Mirto is too upset to reign in her temper and proudly tells Fedima to keep her place. Then she relents and shows pity about Fedima's troubles and assures her (falsely) that the man she loves is not here. Maybe she is talking about a different person? Fedima at once realizes the truth "*You love him!*".

Mirto shows her the door but Fedima refuses to leave. At this noise Themistocles and his guests rush in while Fedima quickly covers her face. Themistocles asks his daughter what all this shouting is about and she tells him that this unknown lady claims to know the delegate of the Persians and wants to see him. At this moment Fedima uncovers her face to Alexander, saying "*Here am I. Recognize the mother of your child!*". A beautiful quartet follows expressing the conflicting emotions of the participants. Alexander asks father and daughter to leave him alone with Fedima.

Then he coolly recommends to Fedima to forget about him, he has no intention of sacrificing his career for a courtesan and dancer; offering her gold for the child's upbringing. Fedima realizes that all is lost - he does not love her anymore. In desperation she pulls out a dagger and tries to kill the child, Alexander can barely stop her, and then she faints. Themistocles and Mirto rush in again and demand an explanation. Alexander tells them that this young woman lost her husband during the Capture of Militos, that the man was a friend and died in his arms. He had just told the young widow of her husband's death. Moved by pity Themistocles and Mirto take Fedima into their care as she slowly returns to her senses.

Outside the chorus urges the Athenian delegates to start on their road to Delphi.

## Act 3 The Oracle

The priests of the Oracle are chanting a Hymn to the Night. The Athenians with Themistocle, Mirto and Fedima among them - arrive, to hear the Pythian priestess who foresees the rescue of Athens from the Persians.

## Act 4 Salamis

All are back in Themistocles' house in Athens. After a lovely aria by Fedima Themistocles himself enters. He tells her that only she can save the Athenians as she is Persian and has free access to the enemy camp. In the disguise of a Persian slave she could approach Xerxes and tell him that the Greeks have lost all hope and intend to sail away. She should urge the king to attack the departing Greeks and thereby take revenge for his defeat at Marathon. Out of gratitude to Themistocles for having taken her in and

giving her son a home Fedima agrees. She would give her life for them and only asks Themistocles to protect her child should anything happen to her. Themistocles promises to be a father to the young boy

After a scene-change we see Athenian citizens pretending to leave the city taking farewell of their homes, hearths and altars, in feigned fear of attack. Themistocles cheers them up by telling them that even if the barbarians could destroy their Athens, the city would be reborn from the sea as victory is certain. In the Persian camp Fedima is led to Xerxes. She plays her role perfectly and the king is convinced that all the chaos that he witnesses from afar is due to the hasty flight of the Greeks from their city. He orders Athens to be fired and leaves his tent with his officers. Only Alexander remains in the shadows. He now stealthily approaches Fedima from behind and stabs her with a dagger, she is "*a viper that bites the breast that feeds her*". Mortally wounded, the young woman assures him that she did not betray Themistocles - on the contrary: it was Themistocles who sent her here. Seized by horror Alexander realizes what he has set in motion - as the Greeks spring their trap upon the unsuspecting Persians he whispers to Fedima that the same grave will cover them both and kills himself with his dagger. The Greeks celebrate their victory. Among the revellers are Themistocles and Mirto with Fedima's son in her hand. They come across Alexander's body and find Fedima *in extremis*; the boy throws himself on his mother while Mirto takes the dying woman in her arms. With her last breath Fedima tells her son that now at last she is happy as she will join her beloved. The boy has found another father in Themistocles.

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