

# *FROSSINI*

## An Opera in Three Acts

*Composed by: Gerasimos N. Tsandoulas (F. DiArta-Angeli pseud.)*

### **Cast**

|                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Ali Pasha          | Baritone          |
| Tahir              | Bass              |
| Frossini           | Soprano           |
| Chrissi            | Mezzo Soprano     |
| Mouchtar           | Tenor             |
| Lord Byron         | Tenor             |
| Mixed Large Chorus |                   |
| Male Chorus        | Group of Guards   |
| Female Chorus      | Group of Officers |

### **Silent Cast**

Veli, Ali's Second Born Son  
Veli, Tahir's Second in Command  
Lord Byron's Attendant  
Shqipetar Chiefs, Warriors, Women, Dervishes  
An Array of Entertainers, Jesters, Dancers, Magicians

### **Orchestra**

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| 3 Flauti (1, Piccolo)        | Timpani          |
| 2 Oboi                       | Campane          |
| Corno Inglese                | Gran Cassa       |
| 2 Clarinetti in Bb           | Cinelli          |
| Basso Clarinetto in Bb       | Tam Tam          |
| 3 Fagotti (3, Contrafagotto) | Tamburo Militare |
|                              | Triangolo        |
| 2 Arpe                       |                  |
|                              | Violini I        |
| 4 Corni in F                 | Violini II       |
| 3 Trombe in C                | Viole            |
| 3 Tromboni                   | Violoncelli      |
| 2 Tube                       | Contrabassi      |

## BACKGROUND

The opera is structured around an episode in the life of the Shqipetar (Albanian) Ali Pasha (1741-1822) governor of what was then most of European Turkey, with the city of Yannena in the Greek province of Epirus as the capital. Nominally in the service of the Sultan of Constantinople, Ali Pasha, ruthless and totally devoid of morals, enjoyed essentially complete independence and freedom of action. He negotiated independently with the European powers and was visited by Lord Byron who makes a cameo appearance in the first act of the opera. Following the collapse of his rebellion against the Sultan, Ali was eventually isolated in a small island in the lake of Yannena and shot there by the Sultan's agents.

Frossini, the opera's central female figure, was a Greek woman of supposedly exquisite beauty living in Yannena circa 1800. She became the mistress of Mouchtar, Ali's eldest son, thereby arousing the enmity of his Moslem wives who plotted against her and who precipitated her eventual downfall. According to a different scenario, Ali himself developed a powerful passion for her but his advances were rejected. Ali exacted revenge by accusing her of treason and sentencing her to death. In both versions she was executed by drowning in the lake of Yannena. It is the latter version that forms the basis for the opera's story line.

In writing the libretto the composer borrowed freely from the epic poem "Kyra Frossini" (Lady Frossini) by the 19th century poet A. Valaoritis, and he used the poems "Elia" and "Mouchroma" by Lorentzos Mavilis (1860-1912) as well as fragments of the poem "Eptanissa" by C. Palamas (1859-1943). Dramatic highlights were added to reinforce the story line. The composer also relied on his own recollection of the story of "Kyra Frossini" as recounted to him many times by his mother who was born in Yannena during the last years of the Turkish occupation and who was herself steeped in the romantically embellished version of this epic of fall and redemption.

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## ACT I

### Cast

Ali Pasha  
Tahir  
Frossini  
Mouchtar  
Lord Byron

Male Chorus

Female Chorus

Veli, Ali's Second Born Son  
Veli, Tahir's Second in Command  
Lord Byron's Attendant  
Shqipetar Chiefs, Warriors, Women, Dervishes  
An Array of Entertainers, Jesters, Dancers, Magicians

The setting for the first act is the main courtyard of Ali Pasha's palace. This is where large official gatherings take place. Ali's latest victory is about to be celebrated. Now the list of his unconquered enemies numbers only two, the Souliots and Osman, Pasha of Adrianople. The curtain rises to reveal a group of workers putting the finishing touches to the necessary preparations and installations. Prominent among the latter are three ornate thrones set over some steps in the back and toward the left part of the stage, the central one larger and more opulently decorated than the other two.

Ali enters flanked by his ever present and totally devoted bodyguard Tahir. He is greeted by the workers who kneel in his presence. He inspects the arrangements quickly with his eyes, nods his approval and dismisses the workers with a move of his hand. Ali and Tahir are left alone on stage.

Ali's brow is furrowed. He informs Tahir that he has been harboring a deep secret for many years and now is the right time to tell him. Tahir pledges secrecy. It all started some years ago, Ali begins, when one day, as he was riding his horse in the countryside outside Yannena, he came upon a small group of young Greek women on a picnic.

His eyes fell on one of them and he immediately felt a powerful, all-consuming passion for her. The sudden appearance of his horse frightened them and they ran into the nearby woods. Time passed but he did not forget that encounter. Her image haunted him even in his sleep. His military campaigns took him away from Yannena and distracted him for a while. When peace was restored temporarily he returned to Yannena only to encounter her again. This time he made some inquiries which revealed that the bishop of Yannena, shrewdly assessing the situation based on the woman's description of the circumstances of the original encounter, had arranged her marriage to a wealthy and prominent local merchant. Ali dismisses with contempt this stratagem which is obviously aimed at foiling him.

Three years went by, Ali continues. The woman's husband left for a long voyage. During his absence she was wooed ardently by a prominent Shqipetar and they became lovers. Tahir wants to know who he is. Ali then reveals the terrible secret. The woman is the beautiful Frossini and her lover is his own first born son Mouchtar Pasha. Tahir replies that he is ready to act on his master's behalf but asks him to think of his son. Ali explodes with anger. As far as he is concerned, he declares, his children mean nothing to him. He detests both of his offspring, Mouchtar and Veli. In a moment of supreme defiance he asserts that he was not put on this earth to start new generations but to extinguish existing ones and leave nothing but death and destruction in his wake.

Tahir unsheathes his sword and asks for orders. With the calmness of someone in total control of the situation Ali tells Tahir to be patient. He then reveals his simple but effective plan. After the festivities are over and in full view of the entire court and foreign guests, he will order Mouchtar to begin operations immediately against the Pasha of Adrianople, so that by the next day he will be gone, leaving Frossini alone in the palace. Ali's mood becomes festive as he contemplates the implementation of this plan. He walks over to the central throne, sits down and commands Tahir to give the order for the festivities to begin.

A chorus of Greek women, singing the praise of Ali Pasha, precedes the gathering. Lord Byron, the guest of honor, is first to enter accompanied by his attendant. Ali rises, descends the steps and embraces Lord Byron warmly, like an old friend. He reciprocates and Ali guides him to the throne on his right.

Ali's two sons, Mouchtar Pasha and Veli Pasha, enter next. Mouchtar Pasha is accompanied by Frossini. They bow momentarily to Ali before ascending the steps. Mouchtar, as Ali's heir apparent, takes the throne on the left with Frossini standing next to him. Veli moves over and stands between Ali and Lord Byron. Tahir stands between Ali and Mouchtar.

The procession of the Shqipetars begins. The noblemen enter first, resplendent in their strikingly multicolored formal attire, gleaming silver weapons, and silk turbans. Their wives follow with faces covered up to the eyes, as befits Moslem women of status, with cascades of gold jewelry on their exquisitely embroidered robes and shoes. The dervishes appear next, clad in austere black and white jackets and baggy trousers ahead of a band of the bravest warriors, battle-hardened captains of Ali's elite regiments. After the procession is over, games and

displays are performed by entertainers, dancers, magicians and jesters to the delight of the assembled crowd.

The games over, Tahir steps forward to state that the Pasha's enemies have been vanquished except for Osman, Pasha of Adrianople, and the Souliots. Ali rises to announce his decision to deal with them by sending Veli against the Souliots, and Mouchtar against Osman. Taken completely by surprise by this turn of events, Mouchtar and Frossini exchange anxious glances. Mouchtar makes an attempt to extricate himself by appealing to Ali's need for him at home. Ali fixes his stare at him, nods in Lord Byron's direction, and slowly, deliberately reminds him that all of Europe is watching to see if his designated successor chooses the safety of the harem instead of the glory of battle. Mouchtar knows he has been outmaneuvered. He resigns himself to the inevitable and announces that he will leave at dawn. Ali, Mouchtar and Veli embrace icily. Ali gives the sign that the festivities are over. The assembled crowd withdraws in reverse order of appearance. However, Ali, with Tahir always at his side, is the first to leave in the company of Lord Byron and his attendant, talking to Lord Byron and laughing heartily. Frossini and Mouchtar manage to escape attention by mingling with the crowd and hiding in the shadows. They are left alone on stage after every one else is gone.

Frossini and Mouchtar embrace spontaneously and passionately. They bid each other farewell, full of anxiety and concern for their future. Their love duet over, they stand side by side, Frossini resting her head on his chest as he holds her gently by the waist. Slowly she turns, buries her head in his chest, and sobs uncontrollably as the curtain descends.

## ACT II

### Cast

Ali Pasha  
Frossini  
Chrissi  
Tahir

Group of Guards

The setting is Frossini's boudoir and chambers. The decor is oriental but with a restraint suggested by Frossini's Christian convictions and background. A private chapel for Frossini to pray in is visible in the back area of the stage. The curtain rises to reveal a scene of carefree merriment. Frossini's ladies-in-waiting are engaged in enjoying one another's company, laughing, gossiping, playing and readying the chamber for retiring, while the music from *Intermezzo* is playing.

Frossini and Chrissi enter. Frossini announces that the hour is late. Chrissi tells the ladies-in waiting to finish their tasks and withdraw. Alone with Chrissi, Frossini confides that she feels an undefined fear and wishes to have the lantern on all night. Chrissi calms her down and tells her she will sleep near her. Frossini asks her to sing Elia, her favorite song, to lull her to sleep. This Chrissi does, with Frossini briefly joining her. At the end of the song, Frossini falls asleep. Chrissi kisses her on the forehead, locks the door, checks the lantern and lies down to sleep. The interplay of clouds and shafts of moonlight is visible through the windows while night sounds are heard as the two women sleep. But the tranquility does not last long.

Slowly, imperceptibly a secret door opens somewhere in the back recesses of the chamber. Two figures enter the room. They are Ali Pasha and Tahir. They advance noiselessly, carefully surveying the scene right and left. Tahir moves toward Chrissi's bed while Ali watches. Tahir bends over Chrissi and with a swift move puts his hand firmly over her mouth. Before she has a chance to react he lifts her out of bed and guides her to the door. He unlocks the door and steps out with her. Ali closes the door carefully behind him.

Ali removes his weapons and places them on a table near Frossini's bed. He then approaches the sleeping Frossini and leans over her, trembling with desire. She senses his presence, opens her eyes and screams. He tries to pin her down on the bed and a struggle ensues. She somehow manages to free herself from his embrace. She gets up in panic, notices the pistol on the table, takes it, and points it toward Ali who rises slowly from the bed. He shows no alarm over this turn of events. He tells her laughingly that he sent Mouchtar away to his certain death so he can possess her.

Frossini realizes that all is lost. In desperation, as Ali advances toward her, she fires the pistol. The bullet strikes Ali in the left shoulder. He is momentarily stunned. He brings his right hand to the wound, which shows some bleeding, and just stands there. A commotion builds beyond the door. The guards with Tahir and Chrissi heard the shot and are heading toward the boudoir. Tahir opens the door and they all enter. Ali regains his composure. Tahir accuses Frossini, still holding the pistol, of attempted murder and asks the guards to prescribe her punishment.

The guards immediately condemn her to death. Tahir swiftly disarms Frossini. Chrissi throws herself at Ali's feet begging for Frossini's life. Tahir

intercedes that there can be no mercy for traitors. Ali decides to give Frossini a last chance to save herself by becoming his mistress. She pushes him away.

Ali then delivers his verdict, which is that on the next day Frossini will be drowned in the lake. Tahir moves over to his master and attends to his wound. Ali prepares to leave the chamber but suddenly, as an afterthought, he turns around and orders Tahir to choose sixteen of Frossini's fairest companions to accompany her to the bottom of the lake. Frossini and Chrissi are dumbfounded by this show of cruelty. Ali then walks out of the room taking the guards with him. Tahir follows shortly thereafter escorting the two women out and taking Frossini to her place of temporary confinement high up in the ramparts of the castle. A distant chorus of women is heard in a brief lament for Frossini as the curtain comes down.

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### **ACT III**

#### ***SCENE 1***

#### **Cast**

Mixed Large Chorus

The setting is an open area near Ali's castle with the lake as background. This is exclusively a choral scene with the full, mixed chorus delivering a hymn to the lake, the only durable, dependable reality in the oppressive world of Ali Pasha but also the repository of countless innocent victims of his cruelty.

## *SCENE 2*

### **Cast**

Frossini

Group of Officers

Tahir, Chrissi, Guards (Muted Appearances)

The setting is a large room serving as a jail cell, high up in Ali's castle. Frossini is awaiting the appearance of Tahir who will take her to her place of execution.

She gazes out the large, barred windows. It is late April and all around her she senses the life-giving essence of springtime. Full of emotion she begins her farewell. Her pensiveness is suddenly interrupted by the sound of festivities somewhere in the castle. Ali is giving a formal reception and ball to honor Lord Byron's presence. A group of carousing officers is heard approaching from a distance. They are celebrating before going to war with Mouchtar in the morning. As they pass under her windows they burst into song. Excitedly, Frossini tries to lean over the window to see them. She is carried away and sings along. The singing group disappears and the festive sounds fade away. Now she begins to feel the impact of her decision.

With irony and some bitterness in her voice she reflects on her impending fate. She becomes more and more agitated. The heavy burden seems unbearable and she bursts in tears. She regains her composure for a moment. Slowly, a steady rumble of voices and footsteps begins to build downstairs. Tahir, the guards and

Chrissi are moving toward Frossini's prison quarters. She realizes they are coming for her. As the commotion draws nearer she becomes more and more agitated. The emotional level surges forward. There is no escaping the terrible verdict. As the group reaches her door she curses Ali to be done in by the lake, just as she is about to be.

Tahir flings opens the door and they all burst into the room. Chrissi rushes over to Frossini. The two women embrace and weep together while Tahir and the guards allow them a moment to themselves. Soon the guards encircle the women. Tahir moves toward them. As he reaches Frossini and is about to tie her hands the final curtain comes down.

## **End of the Opera**