

# **ERNANI**

Giuseppe Verdi

## **Part 1: The Bandit**

In the year 1519, in a forest in the mountains of Aragon, a group of rebels are celebrating the coming revolt against the king. The commander of the bandits appears, the outlawed nobleman Ernani who wishes to avenge the death of his father at the hands of the father of the reigning king, Don Carlo. He announces his intention of abducting Elvira, with whom he is in love, but who is about to be married to her elderly uncle, Don Ruy Gomez de Silva ("Come rugiada al cespite"). Elvira, in Silva's castle, awaits her elopement with Ernani ("Ernani, Ernani involami"). Don Carlo appears, however, for he is enamored of the girl, and intent on taking her away with him. Elvira resists, and just then Ernani arrives. The encounter is interrupted by the arrival of old Silva, who, not immediately recognizing the king, challenges both him and Ernani to a duel ("Infin che un brando vindice"). The arrival of Carlo's squire clarifies the situation: Silva kneels and asks for pardon; Carlo saves Ernani, who has meanwhile exchanged vows of love with Elvira, explaining to Silva that he had come to the castle to discuss with him the coming imperial election.

## **Part 2: The Guest**

At Silva's castle, where preparations for the wedding have been going on meanwhile. Ernani arrives; following the collapse of the conspiracy against the king, he had fled disguised as a pilgrim. Silva extends him his hospitality, but later surprises him with Elvira. Furious, he meditates on his vengeance; nevertheless, on the arrival of the king, who demands that the fugitive be handed over, Silva refuses and conceals Ernani, under the obligation of hospitality ("Lo vedremo, veglio audace"). After searching the castle in vain, Carlo departs, taking Elvira with him, however ("Vieni meco, sol di rose"). Silva again challenges Ernani to a duel. When the two realize that Carlo is their mutual foe, they agree to suspend their quarrel to take vengeance against the king. Once this is accomplished, Ernani's life will be in Silva's hands. As pledge, Ernani gives Silva a hunting horn: when it is sounded, Ernani will kill himself ("Odi il voto").

## **Part 3: The Pardon**

At Aix-la-Chapelle, before the tomb of Charlemagne, the election of the new emperor is awaited. Carlo ("Oh, de' verd'anni miei") enters the subterranean vault, where Silva, Ernani, and their fellow conspirators have planned their vengeance. The conspirators draw lots to decide who shall kill Carlo: Ernani is chosen. Silva asks Ernani to cede him the right, in exchange for his life, but is refused. The conspirators ("Si ridesti il leon di Castiglia") are interrupted by a cannon shot, announcing the imperial election. Carlo reappears for the coronation, followed by ladies and knights: among them is Elvira, who begs him to pardon the rebels and spare their lives. The emperor grants an amnesty, and magnanimously gives Elvira in marriage to Ernani, to whom his rightful property is restored. The act concludes with a paean to the new emperor, successor to Charlemagne ("O sommo Carlo"). One person, however, does not join the jubilation, but cries out for vengeance: Silva.

## **Part 4: The Mask**

A terrace of the palace of Don Juan of Aragon (Ernani's real name). During the wedding celebration, the servants note a man with an angry aspect, clad in a black cloak and masked, wandering around furtively. Elvira and Ernani are filled with happiness, but while they are exchanging promises of eternal love, they hear the sound of a horn. Ernani, recognizing the signal, grows pale and sends Elvira off on a pretext. Silva then reveals himself, removing the mask and recalling Ernani's pact. Ernani tries to dissuade him; then also Elvira, who has returned

and understood what is happening, intercedes with the old man, at first angrily, then with tenderness, but all in vain. Silva is adamant. Ernani has no choice but to hold to his oath: with a dagger he stabs himself in the breast and dies.