

December 2, 2021 – Gioachino Rossini's *Il Turco in Italia*

On this week's Thursday Night Opera House, I'm presenting Gioachino Rossini's thirteenth opera, *Il Turco in Italia* (*The Turk in Italy*), which was premiered on August 14, 1814 in Milan's Teatro alla Scala. Rossini clearly relished Felice Romani's outrageous farce, which serves up brazen ridiculousness with cynical delight. But the heroine's wildly immoral antics caused some consternation at the premiere, and the opera disappeared later in the century, not to reappear until 1950 in Luchino Visconti's La Scala production, which starred Maria Callas as the incorrigible Fiorilla.

Set in eighteenth-century Naples, the poet Prosdocimo (bass **Mariano Stabile**) encounters a group of Gypsies and decides they would make a perfect opening for his drama. He directs them towards old Geronio (bass **Franco Calabrese**), who always wants to have his fortune told. Geronio is plagued by his young wife, Fiorilla (soprano **Maria Callas**). Selim the Turk (bass **Nicola Rossi-Lemeni**) disembarks, where he meets—and flirts with—Fiorilla. Prosdocimo is overjoyed at this spicy material for his play but Geronio and his friend Narciso (tenor **Nicolai Gedda**) are indignant.

Geronio interrupts Fiorilla, who's serving coffee to Selim. When Fiorilla explains that Geronio is her husband, Selim draws his knife. The cowardly Geronio has to kiss Selim's coat in order to smooth things over. Narciso—who also loves Fiorilla—is indignant, Geronio pours out his troubles to the poet, but his attempt to discipline Fiorilla fails. The Gypsy Zaida (mezzo-soprano **Jolanda Gardino**) offers to tell Selim's fortune. The two long-lost lovers are reunited, but Fiorilla and Zaida fight over Selim.

Selim tries to persuade Geronio to sell Fiorilla, but Geronio refuses. The men threaten each other. Fiorilla is determined to defeat Zaida even though she doesn't want Selim for herself. The two women confront Selim—who ends up with Fiorilla. Prosdocimo warns Geronio that Selim means to run off with Fiorilla. "She's going to a party in disguise where she will meet him," the poet explains. Geronio disguises himself as a Turk and Zaida as an Italian.

Narciso also disguises himself as a Turk and finds Fiorilla first. Selim pairs off with Zaida. Geronio is presented with two Fiorillas and two Selims. He tries, unsuccessfully, to prevent both couples from leaving. Fiorilla repents and is reunited with her boring husband, while Zaida and Selim head back to Turkey.

Gianandrea Gavazzeni conducts the Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, in this 1955 EMI recording.

From Act I, scene 2, **Nicola Rossi-Lemeni**, **Maria Callas**, and **Nicolai Gedda** are heard in "Ola, tosto il caffè. Sedete....Siete turchi": <https://youtu.be/HuZoLRAWR9Q>.

As a bonus, we'll hear an abridged Italian version of *William Tell* featuring **Franco Bonisolti** (Arnoldo), **Sigmund Nimsgern** (Guglielmo), **Katia Ricciarelli** (Matilde),

Gianfranco Cassarini (Gualtiero), **HansTschammer** (Gessler), **Birgit Finnilä** (Edwige), and **François Castel** (Leutoldo).