

# GIOACHINO ROSSINI

(1792–1868)

## MOSES AND PHARAOH, or The Crossing of the Red Sea

*An opera in four acts*

### • ACT I – *The Hebrew camp before Memphis*

In despair, the Hebrews pray to God to end their bondage in Egypt and allow them to return to their homeland. Moses reproaches their wavering faith and reassures them that the Lord will soon interfere. He awaits the return of his brother Eliezer, who was sent to Pharaoh to negotiate their release.

Eliezer returns with Moses' sister Marie and her daughter Anai, reporting that Pharaoh— influenced by Queen Sinaide—has agreed to let the Hebrews go into the desert to sacrifice to their God. Marie also shares that Anai has remained loyal to her people despite her love for Pharaoh's son, Amenophis.

A sign of divine favour appears in the sky. In prophetic ecstasy, Moses receives God's command that the Israelites rise in faith. The people gather around him, solemnly renew their devotion to the Law and consecrate their firstborn to God.

Left alone, Anai struggles with her feelings. Amenophis confronts her, trying to prevent her departure, alternating pleas and threats, claiming her as his slave. Anai resists, choosing obedience to God and her people over love. Enraged, Amenophis vows revenge.

As the Hebrews prepare to leave and celebrate, Anai remains torn. Marie urges her to overcome her forbidden love. Suddenly news arrives: at Amenophis' urging, Pharaoh has withdrawn his promise. Moses foretells terrible plagues. Egypt is struck by catastrophe—the sun darkens, the earth trembles, and God's wrath appears amid fire and ruin.

### • INTERVAL •

### • ACT II – *A gallery in Pharaoh's palace in Memphis*

Egypt is engulfed in darkness. The people, priests, and court beg Pharaoh for deliverance. In despair, he summons Moses and swears to release the Hebrews so they may pray and offer sacrifice to the Lord in the desert. At Moses' prayer, the darkness lifts and light returns, astonishing the court. The rejoicing is disrupted by Amenophis, who sees the Hebrews' freedom as the loss of Anai and urges Pharaoh not to submit to Moses.

Pharaoh announces that Amenophis is to marry the Assyrian princess Elegenja. The prince hides his despair in vain. Queen Sinaide insists that duty to the state comes first, rendering

Anai unattainable. Amenophis appears to submit, but secretly resolves to prevent Anai from leaving.

• **ACT III – *The temple of Isis***

A lavish ceremony honours the goddess Isis, and priests, people, and court seek to restore order shattered by the Lord's plagues. Moses arrives and reminds Pharaoh of his oath to release the Israelites. High priest Osiride challenges Moses, demanding that the Hebrews first worship the Egyptian gods. The commander of the guard, Auphide, reports new calamities: the Nile has turned to blood, the land swarms with insects, and a desert wind brings destruction. Fear turns to hatred—Egyptians call for vengeance, the Hebrews for mercy.

At Moses' sign, the altar flames are quenched and the statue of Isis shatters. Pharaoh orders the Israelites to be led out of Memphis in chains. The Egyptians foretell death in the desert, yet Moses strengthens his people: the God who led them out of darkness will also lead them to freedom.

• **INTERVAL** •

• **ACT IV – *Sand dunes by the Red Sea and the shore of the Red Sea***

Amenophis has secretly abducted Anai and leads her through the desert. He intends to ask Moses, before Marie, to bless their union. He promises Anai her freedom and vows to defy his father's will and save the Hebrews—if she stays with him. Anai prays for strength to resist. When the Hebrews find them, Moses confronts her with a final choice: Egypt and Amenophis, or her people and God. After a painful inner struggle, Anai submits to God's law. Rejected, Amenophis departs, threatening that for Moses and his people there is no escape from Pharaoh's armies.

On the shore of the Red Sea, the Hebrews pray to the Lord, and their chains are loosed by miracle. Pharaoh's army appears, and the terrified people pray for salvation. Moses leads them through the waves, and all cross safely to the far shore. As the Egyptians pursue them, a storm rises and Pharaoh and his army are swallowed by the sea.