

# *Karkinos*

Chamber Opera in One Act  
Dedicated to the memory of Ray Sidoti (1929-2018)

Music and Libretto by Jacob Bancks  
Commissioned by the Quad City Symphony  
Created in collaboration with Living Proof Exhibit

## LIBRETTO

### 1. Prelude (Instrumental)

### SCENE ONE

#### 2. Scene

*The curtain rises to reveal a grand palatial bed-chamber, with adjacent balcony overlooking the audience. In the chamber are a large bed, a chair, a freestanding mirror, and a small side table, on which rests a headform holding a large crown.*

*The Empress enters the chamber from within, walks triumphantly out onto the balcony, and addresses the crowd below.*

EMPRESS:  
Citizens of the Realm, rejoice with me.  
Our time of mourning has come to an end,  
And tomorrow we behold the dawning of an age!

CROWD:  
Hail! Hail! to the Empress-Soon-to-Be!  
Her wisdom is wider than the sky,  
She is more beautiful than all the stars,  
And her glory is the rising sun!  
Long may she live; long may she reign.

EMPRESS:  
As you know, today marks one hundred days since my beloved father, the Emperor died.

He ruled with wisdom, strength, and charity,  
And died as he had lived, with courage to the end.

CROWD:  
Beloved Emperor, may he rest in peace.

EMPRESS:  
But, tomorrow, all our grief shall cease,  
All our fears shall vanish,  
When, in the light of the dawn, I begin my reign,  
And take my rightful crown.

CROWD:  
Hail! Hail! to the Empress-Soon-to-Be!  
She too will rule with wisdom,  
She too will rule with strength and charity,  
With courage even to the end!  
Long may she live; long may she reign.

EMPRESS:  
And so, tonight, before you sleep, remember me.  
Pray that prosperity may mark my reign,  
Pray that my armies conquer boldly,  
Pray that no plague nor dragon oppress the Realm,  
And may we all live in peace!

*The crowd bursts into cheers.*

*The Empress acknowledges their applause by bowing her head, then grandly departs the balcony for the bedchamber.*

### 3. Aria

*Looking behind herself to be sure she is out of view of the crowd, the Empress lets out a high-spirited laugh of relief.*

EMPRESS:

Did I see one million faces in the crowd?  
My heart is racing,  
My hands are shaking,  
And I can hardly breathe!  
They seemed to hang on my ev'ry word,  
And when I lowered my voice all were still,  
And when I bowed my head the people rose  
and cheered for me!

How long I've waited for this day to come,  
The day before I claim my crown.  
To think, all the silly rumors in palace halls.  
"How could she, barely a schoolgirl, ascend  
the throne?"  
But now, what do they think, hearing the people  
sing my praise?  
They have nothing to say,  
The rumors are laid to rest.

Now I see the sun setting in the west.  
The light is fading,  
The shadows are falling,  
But falling not nearly fast enough!  
Why does ev'ning fade so slowly?  
I want to sleep so I can wake.  
To think, all my sleepless nights,  
My foolish fears.  
How could I rule the empire my father ruled?  
But, look at me now, all of the people sing my  
praise!

I have nothing to fear, the night will pass, the  
sun will rise again.

I can hardly breathe!  
My hands are shaking, while time is standing  
still!  
My heart is racing!  
My heart is full of joy!

### 4. Scene

EMPRESS:

Maid!

*A Maid enters from within.*

MAID:

Yes, Your Majesty?

EMPRESS:

Have all the visiting nobility arrived?

MAID:

Yes, Your Majesty.

EMPRESS:

How do they seem?

MAID (*after a pause, diplomatically*):

The same as ever.

EMPRESS:

I was afraid you would say that.  
Other royals make me nervous.

MAID (*changing the subject*):

Is Your Majesty pleased with her new room?

EMPRESS:

Yes! It's much more spacious, with that balcony,  
and a view of the city.

MAID:

Does Your Majesty require anything more?

EMPRESS (*facetiously*):  
Can you make the sun go down faster?

MAID:  
I would, Your Majesty, if I could.

*The Maid bows reverently, then exits.*

## 5. Aria

*Left alone, the Empress walks around, slowly surveying the room. Her eyes come to rest on the crown.*

*She looks away, and continues to walk around the room.*

*Again, the crown draws her gaze.*

EMPRESS:  
O crown, hidden in you all power lies,  
Desire of the gods,  
Soon you will be mine.

*She turns to look at herself in the mirror.*

Ah, Your Majesty! You are radiant tonight.  
Your eyes flash like diamonds, your skin is  
pure as gold.  
In the ev'ning light your beauty is in bloom.  
(*melancholy, trailing off*) Such a shame to wait...

*She looks again toward the crown.*  
... to wear your crown.

*Looking away, she begins walking toward the balcony and surveys the city.*

O empire, darkness falls upon you,  
Desolate without a sovereign,  
Soon you will be mine.

Your lands are jewels without number,

With sapphire seas, beneath the silver mountains,  
And this, your greatest city, bright as crystal.

(*with sudden anxiety*) But in you, O city, tonight,  
are visitors from distant lands,  
Lesser kings and queens with hearts aflame  
with jealousy!

*Returning to her chamber, she again addresses the crown.*

O crown, what if they should steal you in the night,  
Or kill me in my sleep?  
Usurpers to the throne!  
I cannot wait, I cannot wait until the dawn,

*She lifts the crown from its resting place and prepares to put it on her head.*

I must have you now!  
Now you are mine!

## 6. Scene and Hymn to the Empress

*The Empress is startled to hear a trumpet call outside, and quickly returns the crown to its resting place.*

EMPRESS (*terrified*):  
What is that?  
Maid!  
Maid!

*The Maid enters hurriedly.*

MAID:  
Yes, Your Majesty?

EMPRESS:  
What is that sound in the street?

*The Maid walks cautiously toward the balcony to look outside. A gathered crowd sings in honor of the Empress.*

CROWD:  
All honor and glory to the Empress-Soon-to-Be.  
May she live a thousand years.

*Hearing the crowd, the Maid is relieved.*

MAID:  
A procession in your honor.

*The Empress walks past the Maid and out onto the balcony, calmed by the singing of the crowd.*

CROWD:  
All glory to our Empress-Soon-to-Be,  
May she maintain her power and her might,  
That by her vision may we always see,  
And live in peace within her blessed light.  
May she live a thousand years.

*The Empress, in quiet ecstasy, returns from the balcony to her room.*

MAID:  
May I help Your Majesty dress for bed?

EMPRESS:  
No. I am already dreaming.  
Do not touch me.

*The Maid bows and exits. The Empress prepares for bed.*

CROWD:  
All peace be to our Empress in her rest,  
And through the night may angels guard her sleep,  
That neither foe nor sorcerer molest,  
Nor famine, plague, nor dragon of the deep.  
May she live a thousand years.

*The Empress has become very sleepy.*

EMPRESS:  
At last, it is night.

*She retires to her bed.*

Soon, all my fears shall cease.  
From tomorrow, I am immortal.

*She falls asleep.*

## SCENE TWO

### 7. Interlude (Instrumental)

*Night in the Empress's chamber. She is still sleeping on her bed.*

### 8. Scene

*The voice of the Angel is heard offstage.*

ANGEL [angelic language]:  
(like a stern warning) Maiamiaiamaio.  
(like a battle-cry) Tiooiooiooay.

*The Angel appears on the balcony.*

*The Empress sits upright, startled.*

EMPRESS:  
What's that?  
Is someone there?

It must be nothing.

*She rests back, still listening.*

ANGEL:  
Maiamiaiamaio.

EMPRESS:  
There! Again!

ANGEL:  
Tiooiooiooay.

EMPRESS:  
It sounds like singing,

*She ventures cautiously away from her bed.*

But in a language I have never heard.

*The Angel steps into the bedchamber, terrifying the  
Empress.*

Stop! Come no closer!  
Who is hiding in the shadows?  
And what is this language you speak?

ANGEL:  
Do not fear me.

EMPRESS:  
Who let you in here?

ANGEL:  
Do not fear me.

EMPRESS:  
Guards! Intruder!  
Maid! Where are you?  
Have they all betrayed me?

ANGEL:  
Do not fear me.

EMPRESS:  
Have you come here to kill me?

ANGEL:  
No. I have come here to bring you a warning.

EMPRESS:  
Am I in danger?

ANGEL:  
You must not sleep.

EMPRESS:  
I need to sleep.

ANGEL:  
You must keep watch.

EMPRESS:  
Keep watch for what?

ANGEL:  
You must prepare for battle!

EMPRESS (*indignantly*):  
Battle?!

ANGEL:  
Yes!

EMPRESS:  
And when, I ask, is this battle?

ANGEL:  
Tonight!

EMPRESS (*furiously*):  
Tonight?! No!  
There will be no battle tonight!  
My armies are asleep.  
In the morning I ascend the throne.  
Then will we battle.

ANGEL:  
No army may fight in your place,  
Nor may you choose the day or the hour.  
Tonight, the evil, invisible monster Karkinos  
comes for you.

*The Empress, horrified, falls to her knees.*

Tiooiooiooay.  
Maiamiaiaiao.

*The Empress remains on the floor, in stunned silence.*

This much I know now.  
The rest we will know in time.  
I am departing now.  
Keep watch until I return.

*The Angel flies away.*

## 9. Scene

*The Empress springs to her feet, overcome with terror.*

EMPRESS:  
No!  
No! Angel of Death, come back here!  
How can you desert me?  
Why don't you kill me now?

Karkinos, the monster!  
The legends must be true!  
As a child, I feared him,  
And then forgot him,  
And now he comes for me!

No, I must be dreaming.  
I don't believe in monsters!  
This angel, he might be lying!  
Why should I trust him?

If I should die tonight, what will become of my people?  
"May she live a thousand years," they sang, a filthy lie!

*The Maid, startled, enters from within and observes the Empress with concern.*

I will die tonight! But why?

*The Maid approaches the Empress, seizing her arms in an attempt to calm her.*

MAID:  
Your Majesty! Please! What is wrong?

*The Empress pushes the Maid away violently.*

EMPRESS:  
Do not touch me!  
An Angel of Death has been here tonight.  
He said an invisible monster is coming for me.

MAID (*gravely*):  
Karkinos.

EMPRESS (*with overwhelming despair*):  
This is the end.  
There will be no coronation.  
Why?!

MAID:  
Your Majesty, please!  
(*sternly*) With Karkinos, you must have patience.

EMPRESS (*turning on the Maid, enraged*):  
And what do you know, servant woman?!  
You tell an Empress to have patience with a monster?!  
What do you know?!  
How dare you?!

MAID (*trembling, with measured intensity*):  
Karkinos killed my father,  
And I, too, have fought him.

*The Empress is astonished.*

EMPRESS (*desperately*):  
So there is hope;  
I may see the morning!  
Please, help me!  
How do I defeat him?

MAID (*severely*):  
With Karkinos, you must have patience.

## 10. First Battle

*The Angel enters via the balcony.*

ANGEL [angelic language]:  
Maiamiaiaiao.

EMPRESS:  
There he is again, the Angel of Death!

MAID:  
No. I know this angel.  
Do not fear him.

ANGEL:  
Karkinos is near.

EMPRESS:  
I feel as cold as ice.  
I can hear his footsteps,  
But I cannot see him.

MAID:  
I remember it now.  
The empty silence,  
The overwhelming darkness,  
Waiting, endless waiting.

ANGEL:  
Beware his lies.  
He is a thief.  
He will try to steal ev'rything you own.  
If he can, he will steal your very soul.

*The Empress is surrounded by an eerie, isolating  
light while the rest of the room is plunged into  
darkness and the voice of Karkinos is heard.*

KARKINOS:  
Well, well, well!  
Where are we now?

A castle? A palace? Oh!  
And who are you?

*The Empress addresses Karkinos as if he were hovering invisibly above her head.*

EMPRESS:  
You don't know who I am?

KARKINOS:  
How would we know?

EMPRESS:  
I am the Empress of the Realm.

KARKINOS:  
An Empress?

EMPRESS:  
Well, no.

KARKINOS:  
Not an Empress.

EMPRESS:  
But I will be soon.

KARKINOS:  
You will be? When?

EMPRESS:  
Tomorrow.

KARKINOS:  
Tomorrow?  
This is a day we have never heard of.

EMPRESS:  
Karkinos, you monster,  
I forbid you to enter my Realm.  
Begone. You are not welcome here.

KARKINOS:  
Not welcome? Karkinos?

We go where we will!  
We will not serve!  
We will not serve an Empress!  
An imaginary Empress!  
And we will not leave!  
In fact, we have been here for quite some time.

EMPRESS:  
You have been here?

KARKINOS:  
Yes.

EMPRESS:  
Where?

KARKINOS:  
Hiding.

EMPRESS:  
Hiding where?

KARKINOS:  
Inside you.

Enough of this, Your Majesty.  
You know we have come to battle you,  
And we will triumph.  
You may fight us, but we multiply!

*The Empress convulses violently, as if struck by  
Karkinos's unseen hand.*

You are not an Empress,  
But you may yet become one

*Another blow,*

On a day we've never heard of

*... and two more,*

Called tomorrow.

*... and yet another. The blows continue with increasing frequency and intensity.*

You are not an Empress!  
Not an Empress!  
Not tomorrow!

## 11. Scene

*With a final blow, the Empress falls to the ground, but remains alert and anxious. The light in the room slowly returns; the Empress's crown and mirror are gone. On the headform, in place of the crown, is a long, ragged cloth. The Angel is standing near the Empress while the Maid watches cautiously from a distance.*

EMPRESS:  
Silence.  
Where did he go?

ANGEL:  
He is gone for now.

EMPRESS:  
Am I still alive?

ANGEL:  
You are alive.

EMPRESS:  
I see he has wounded me.  
My side, it is burning.

ANGEL:  
Yes, but you have wounded him, too.  
No doubt he is angry.  
He will be back tonight.

EMPRESS:  
I am going to sleep.

ANGEL:  
No.

You may not sleep.  
He may return at any moment.  
Should he find you asleep, you may not see the  
dawn.

*The Angel flies away. The Maid continues observing the Empress in the background.*

EMPRESS:  
(sarcastically) It must be nice to keep flying  
away!

*She notices her crown and mirror are missing.*

No! My crown! Karkinos has stolen it.  
My mirror, too.  
A liar and a thief!  
He steals my treasures,  
He takes a part of my flesh,  
And he may be back at any moment!

Why should he come to me?  
What evil have I done?  
(increasingly exhausted) The angel flies away, but  
for me, there is no escape.  
He says I may not sleep, but neither can I stay  
awake.

## 12. Aria

EMPRESS:  
Part of me is lost.  
Can the whole world change in an hour?  
I thought I knew who I was,  
And who I would become,  
But I am not, will never be an Empress.  
How cruel the gods must be.  
Part of me is lost.

## 13. Maid's Song

*Observing that the Empress is near failing, the  
Maid cautiously interjects.*

MAID:  
Your Majesty, may I touch you?

*Taken off guard, the Empress nods, and the Maid  
embraces her.*

Do not ask what wrong you have done.  
Karkinos is a monster; he has no reason.  
And do not ask if you are brave enough to triumph.  
He is a coward; to die by his hand is no defeat.

*Profoundly comforted, the Empress sits on the chair,  
listening intently to the Maid.*

When I was a girl, my father, a farmer,  
Would sow his potatoes and carrots and corn,  
And as I would watch him, I always would ask  
him  
How long it would be 'til the crops would be  
born.  
The seeds would be sleeping under the soil.  
Day after day I would wonder away,  
Afraid that the food he had planted had perished,  
Until he would see me and smile and say:

“Slowly, slowly, what is your hurry?  
Little by little the bird builds a nest.  
Patience obtains all things.  
Sooner or later a seedling will climb.  
Wait, and all that has life will flourish in  
time.”

Many years later, with twilight around him,  
My father the farmer was suddenly made  
To battle an evil, invisible dragon,  
Whose terrible name makes the hero afraid.  
I rushed in to help him; I wanted to save him.  
The battle was lengthy and painful and slow,  
But still he just smiled, and as he was dying,  
He sang me the song he had sung long ago.

“Slowly, slowly, what is your hurry?”

Little by little a bird builds a nest.  
Patience obtains all things.  
What I've been given to you do I give.  
Wait, and after I die, you'll know that I live."

Ever thereafter, no matter the danger,  
When terror or famine or tempest drew near  
Although he had left me, I knew that my father  
    father  
Was watching, and so I had nothing to fear.  
And when that same dragon came later to  
    haunt me,  
Afraid though I was, I remembered the way  
In planting and growing and living and dying,  
My father, with patience, had taught me to say:

Slowly, slowly, what is your hurry?  
Little by little a bird builds a nest.  
Patience obtains all things.  
Even when dragons are near, carry on.  
Wait and rest and hope and watch for the  
    dawn.

## 14. Second Battle

*The Empress, much revived, rises to her feet in anticipation of the return of Karkinos.*

EMPRESS:  
No.  
I feel he is near again.

MAID:  
I will stay with you.

EMPRESS:  
Please stay with me.  
My heart is racing,  
My hands are shaking,  
And I can hardly breathe.  
My heart is full of fear.

MAID:  
You must have patience.

Have I been some comfort to her?  
Her hands are shaking,  
Her heart is racing,  
She can hardly breathe.

O father!  
I could not save you.  
I have no power to save her.

EMPRESS:  
Where is the Angel? Angel!  
Where is the Angel?  
He said he'd help me!  
The Angel, I need him!  
Where is he?  
Is he a liar too?  
MAID:  
Her darkest hour is still ahead.  
Karkinos, why must you return?

EMPRESS:  
Karkinos!  
Why must you return to haunt me again?

*The Empress is again surrounded by an isolating light, as the rest of the room falls into darkness. The Maid remains near her in the shadows.*

KARKINOS:  
Your Majesty! Awake?  
Is still awake?  
We thought we would find you asleep!

MAID:  
You are still awake, Your Majesty.

EMPRESS:  
I am awake, Karkinos!

KARKINOS:  
Ah, well. It doesn't matter.  
You will be sleeping soon!

MAID:  
Remember you have wounded him.

EMPRESS:  
I understand I have wounded you.

KARKINOS:  
You? Us? No!  
You cannot wound us!

MAID:  
Beware his lies.

EMPRESS:  
I know I wounded you!

KARKINOS:  
We are one, Your Majesty.  
Our wounds are your wounds, too.

EMPRESS (*enraged*):  
You stole my crown!

KARKINOS:  
We? Never!

EMPRESS:  
You stole my mirror!

KARKINOS:  
Too dark for mirrors!

EMPRESS:  
It seems to me that all you do is lie and steal!  
Is that correct?  
I am not afraid of thieves.

KARKINOS:  
You have much more to say than you did before, Your Majesty.  
Is this how you address your subjects, with diatribes and accusations?  
We only take what we know you do not need,  
And now, we take your words.

*The Empress struggles to speak.*

EMPRESS:  
I... but... you...  
No... but... you...

KARKINOS:  
What is the matter, Your Majesty?

EMPRESS:  
I... but... how...  
I am... not...  
I cannot...  
Please...

KARKINOS:  
We cannot understand what you are trying to say.

*As the Empress struggles, Karkinos speaks to her sarcastically.*

EMPRESS:  
But you are... No!  
Please... I... You... But you...  
Have... My...

KARKINOS:  
What a marvelous speech, Your Majesty!

EMPRESS:  
But, I cannot...  
Help! Please... I... you...  
Give me back...

KARKINOS:  
We have your words,  
We have your crown,  
And now we dance!

*A menacing red light fills the entire room. The Empress stumbles a bit.*

There once was a queen who lost her crown,

*The Empress stumbles again, as if afflicted by vertigo. The Maid attempts to support her, but she stumbles yet further.*

She didn't know up, she didn't know down,

*The Empress's staggering continues, increasing in severity.*

And all of her servants were running around.  
Ah, me! What kind of queen was she?

*The Empress's vertigo has grown into a macabre dance; she is reeling around the room, apparently pushed by the invisible monster.*

There once was a queen whose voice was lost,  
Around and around and around she was  
toss'd.

'Til her tongue was twisted and eyes were  
cross'd!

Ah, me! What kind of queen was she?

*As the Empress is about to fall, the Angel appears on the balcony and seizes her.*

ANGEL:  
Tioooooooy.

## 15. Trio

*The Angel, Maid and Empress all fall back into the chamber from the balcony. The Empress collapses on the floor, sobbing. The Angel and Maid watch her in silence.*

*The Maid walks to the headform and picks up the long cloth which was left behind in place of the crown.*

*The Maid rests the Empress's head on her lap, and wraps it in the cloth, forming a tightly-wound, turban-like head-dress.*

MAID:  
What more can I do for her?  
What more can I say to her?  
I have given all I can,  
But it is not enough.

What kind of hell is this?  
This room is her prison,  
Silent as a tomb.  
If she should die tonight, who will rule her empire?  
What will become of me?

ANGEL:  
I have seen this many times.  
She has fought him bravely,  
But does she have the strength  
To fight Karkinos again?  
He is a thief.  
He is a liar.  
He does not sleep.

MAID:  
Karkinos, why have you haunted me all my life?

*The Empress struggles to her feet.*

EMPRESS:  
I... But... I am..  
Let me...  
Please let me die.

MAID:  
She cannot go on.  
She cannot escape.  
Karkinos, what do you want from her?

EMPRESS:  
Hail to the Empress!  
Hail to the Empress.

MAID:  
If only I could save her.

If only I could suffer instead of her.

ANGEL;  
He may soon return.  
Karkinos!  
He does not sleep, he is a liar and a thief!

EMPRESS:  
No crown, no Empire, only...

MAID, EMPRESS & ANGEL:  
Karkinos!

## 16. Aria

ANGEL:  
Your grief is nearly over.  
Tonight, Karkinos returns one final time.  
You have fought bravely, and now, at last, you  
    may sleep.  
I will keep watch.

*The Angel sings to the Empress; she is calmed gradually by his singing.*

Deep in the forest,  
Under the darkest night,  
Beside a stream,  
A nightingale is singing.  
Dragonflies whisper below her,  
While angels guard above.

*The Empress sits calmly on the floor.*

Here will she sing forever.  
She knows no song of sorrow,  
She has no fear of monsters.  
Her peace is perfect peace.

*The Empress falls gently to sleep on the floor.*

[angelic language]  
Looalooalooamiami.  
Shioloamiami.

*The Angel turns to the Maid, who has been listening. She, in turn, is also calmed by his singing.*

Near to this stream,  
Under the darkest night,  
In an ancient tree,  
A wise old owl is watching.  
She listens with contentment  
To the music of the nightingale.  
Here will she watch forever.

*The Maid sits in the chair.*

She has no need nor worry.  
She has no fear of monsters.  
Her peace is perfect peace.

*The Maid drifts off to sleep in the chair.*

Looalooalooamiami.  
Shioloamiami.

*The Angel moves to the balcony, guarding the room.*

## 17. Interlude (Instrumental)

*A mysterious, ethereal light appears in the distance.*

## 18. Final Battle

*The ethereal light disappears. The sleeping Empress is again surrounded by an isolating light. The Angel departs via the balcony.*

*The Empress wakes. The Maid remains sleeping in the chair.*

EMPRESS:  
What was this vision?  
Have I seen Heaven?  
Is this legend also true?

*Sensing Karkinos, she springs to her feet.*

Karkinos is near!  
One final battle.  
I must still be alive.  
*(with growing determination)* I am not afraid.  
I am not alone.

*(aware but untroubled)* He approaches again.  
Let him come, and let me face him once more.  
*(smiling, defiant)* He sounds furious!  
I must be angering him.  
Does he think I should be dead by now?  
Did he expect I would give up so easily?

*(with awe)* Ev'ry moment he draws closer  
I am more and more at peace.  
My hands are calm,  
My heart is full of joy,  
For the night is nearly passed  
And dawn is coming soon.  
I may die tonight or I may live,  
But either way a crown awaits.

*(feisty)* I am here, Karkinos!  
Come and fight me!  
Do not deny me this final battle.

*The voice of Karkinos is once more heard in the darkness.*

Karkinos, no!  
You may not speak.  
I have regained my voice, and only I will speak.  
You have stolen my words,  
You have stolen my crown,  
But you many not steal me.  
It is true, your strength is great,  
But so is my will to fight,  
And the powers of Heaven are with me!  
I am not afraid to die.  
You are a coward, Karkinos.  
To die by your hand is no defeat.

*(ardently, without anger)* You, Karkinos, tonight  
have dragged me to the gates of Hell.

You taunted me, and tortured me body and  
soul.  
So why am I at peace?  
Though the sky is dark, all around me is light!

Goodbye, Karkinos,  
And you may keep my crown.  
I see that you were right,  
I do not need it now,  
Because I am already an Empress!  
Not tomorrow, but now!

Citizens of the Ream, rejoice with me!  
Our time of mourning has come to an end!

*She lifts both arms high in the air.*

Behold, the dawning of an age!

*She falls to the ground. Immediate blackout.*

## SCENE THREE

### 19. Interlude (instrumental)

*Sunrise in the Empress's chamber. She is asleep on the bed; her headdress is gone. The mirror and crown have been returned to their original places.*

*The Maid enters quietly from within. She surveys the room solemnly, looking with concern toward the Empress in her bed.*

*The Empress stirs, and slowly sits up in her bed.*

### 20. Scene

MAID:  
Good morning, Your Majesty.

EMPRESS *(barely awake)*:  
Good morning.  
*(waking a bit more)* Am I still alive?

MAID:  
Yes, you are alive.

*The Empress rises from her bed.*

EMPRESS:  
What day is today?

MAID:  
Today is your coronation day.  
EMPRESS (*with concern*):  
But where is Karkinos?

MAID:  
He's gone.

EMPRESS (*amazed*):  
Gone?

MAID:  
Yes. You have defeated him.

EMPRESS:  
I have defeated him.  
(*again, with concern*) But where is the Angel?

MAID:  
He, too, is gone.  
EMPRESS (*troubled*):  
Why? Why must he leave?  
And what if Karkinos returns?

MAID (*firmly*):  
He may never return,  
(*reassuringly*) But if he does, you will fight him  
again.

*The Empress notices the crown and mirror.*

EMPRESS:  
He left me my crown and mirror.

*She looks at herself in the mirror.*

(*irked*) I look like a shipwreck.

MAID (*smiling*):  
No, Your Majesty.  
You are more beautiful than ever.  
Today is the dawning of an age.

## 21. Duet

*The Maid assists the Empress in preparing herself  
for the coronation.*

EMPRESS:  
Today is my coronation day,  
But how can I bear my crown?  
I could not wait for the dawn,  
But now that dawn is here, it comes too  
quickly.  
Was the sun always so large?  
The sky so heavy before?  
Ev'rything has changed.  
I have opened my eyes for the first time.

MAID:  
Your battle has ended.  
Your enemy is conquered.  
And now the crown is yours.  
Shadows may still haunt you,  
But each day you will grow stronger.  
You have opened your eyes for the first time.

EMPRESS/MAID:  
Today is my/her coronation day,  
And I/she must bear my/her crown.  
Ev'rything has changed.

EMPRESS:  
I have opened my eyes for the first time.

## 22. Finale

*The Empress places the crown unceremoniously on  
her head and begins a slow march toward the  
balcony. She hears the crowd outside.*

CROWD:  
Citizens of the Realm, rejoice.  
Hail to the Empress.

EMPRESS:  
My crown is too heavy.

CROWD:  
Our time of mourning has come to an end.  
Hail to the Empress.

EMPRESS:  
I am not strong enough to bear it.

CROWD:  
Behold, the dawning of an age.  
Hail to the Empress.

MAID:  
Ev'ry day you will grow stronger.

CROWD:  
Her wisdom is wider than the sky.  
Hail to the Empress.

EMPRESS:  
I am not who I was,  
But who have I become?

CROWD:  
She is more beautiful than all the stars.  
Hail to the Empress.

MAID:  
Patience, patience, Your Majesty.

CROWD:  
Her glory is the rising sun.  
Hail, hail to the Empress.

*The Empress arrives on the balcony and surveys the  
crowd below.*

All honor to our Empress on this day,  
Her time of coronation is at hand.  
O may her wisdom never fade away,  
And may her joy be joy to ev'ry land.  
Long may she live,  
Long may she reign!

*End of the opera.*