

RAMALA

(transcribed verbatim)

An Indian Opera
In Four Acts

Libretto By
NELLE RICHMOND EBERHART

Music By
CHARLES WAKEFIELD CADMAN

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Obeska, Chief of the Omaha..... Bass.
Aedeta, a young Warrior wooing Ramala..... Baritone.
Nemaha, a young Warrior, rival to Aedeta..... Tenor.
Kaela, a Messenger..... Baritone.
A Sentinel..... Tenor.
A Scout..... Bass.
Ramala, Obeska's Niece..... Dramatic Soprano.
Megena, Ramala's Cousin..... Lyric Soprano.
Taene, Ramala's Mother..... Contralto.

Members of the Omaha and Pawnee Tribes.

Scene. Nebraska, near the Missouri River.

Time. Three hundred years ago.

THE STORY OF THE OPERA

This story is an Indian Idyl or Pastoral, the action, at times slow and deliberate as is characteristic of the Indian nature. The theme is the Friendship Vow—a vow held as sacred among the Omahas as the vow of marriage.

Ramala, the niece of the Omaha Chief, Obeska, is wooed by two young braves, Aedeta and Nemaha, the David and Jonathan of the tribe. The Maiden does not know her own heart but hesitates between the two, for so different are the natures of the two lovers—though to all appearances equally worthy—that each appeals to her in different moods.

The curtain rises on Aedeta, the graver of the two men, singing his love-song in the dawn, as is the Indian custom. The theme is an ancient melody which he uses as his song of defiance in the fourth act. At the close he hears a rustle and disappears in the bushes as Nemaha bounds up the knoll to fling his passionate declaration upon the morning air.

Aedeta then discloses himself and they discover to their surprise that they love the same maiden. For the sake of Friendship, each offers to yield his chance of winning Ramala to the other but neither friend will accept the sacrifice. They decide finally to permit the girl to choose between them, declaring that, whatever her choice, their friendship shall remain true. They then discuss the coming war expedition and part after a solemn vow of eternal friendship.

Meanwhile, Ramala is puzzling over the situation. Unable to come to a satisfactory decision, she concludes to trust the matter to the Higher Powers. In the second scene, before the tent with her mother and cousin, she chooses her mate by means of a game of antelope hoofs. The choice falls upon Aedeta. Megena, who secretly loves Nemaha, is much pleased although she pretends to chide Ramala who, in an aria founded on two Indian themes, earnestly defends her reliance on the Unseen Powers. Taene tells her vision of the Northern Lights and prophecies that, according to the legend, there shall be death in the tribe. To dissipate the atmosphere of

gloom, Megena relates a gay tale of her encounter with an unwelcome suitor. As they cease speaking, the mounted warriors pass singing on their way to fight the Pawnees.

It is now sunset. Taene enters the tent; Megena, weeping, leaves the stage with a group of Indian girls who are, for a little way, following the war-party, and Ramala is left alone. Motionless, she watches the warriors ride away over the hills in the gathering dusk. The evening sounds of the camp fall faintly on her unheeding ears, the fire-flies play about her, the night deepens, and still she stands in grief. All at once, as if inspired by sudden thought, she raises her head and starts from the scene. Soon horses' hoofs are heard thudding the prairie grass until they die away in the direction the warriors have taken; Megena steals back and sings a lament.

Ramala overtakes the warriors in their camp the next fore-noon. She implores the Chief to forgive her lack of maidenly Reserve in following her lover, but declares that through fear or his death in battle, she wishes to be united to Aedeta in marriage before he meets the enemy. Though this request is contrary to Indian custom, Obeska makes an exception of this case, and the ceremony is performed. The warriors sing a chorus of joy and approval.

Immediately afterward, a scout rushes in announcing the approach of the Pawnees. Placing Ramala in comparative safety, Aedeta and Nemaha hasten away to the conflict, advising her not to wait for them after sunset. They are positive they will return by that time if at all. Aedeta lingers a moment after Nemaha's departure for a private farewell, and there is a tender love scene between the young husband and wife.

Left alone, Ramala, hearing the sounds of battle from a distance, prays in anguish for the life of Aedeta and his friend. After a time, Kaela, wounded, comes running up and announces that the Omahas are surrounded and doomed to defeat. He begs her to escape with him, but she courageously insists on waiting for her husband. Soon after, Nemaha appears alone and tells her that Aedeta has been killed. She requests him to go with her to the battle-field to cover the face of her dead, but Nemaha refuses, urging her to fly from danger with him. Failing in his entreaties, he loses all restraint and declares his love anew in a passionate outburst. She repulses him with indignation.

As Nemaha resumes his flight, Ramala hastens away to seek her husband's body. Upon the Battle-field, in approaching darkness and storm, she searches until she finds his bow with the string, as she supposes, broken. Closer examination reveals the fact that the string has been cut, not broken. Convinced then that there has been treachery to her husband, she gives way to indignation in the Bow Song. Then she takes up the Pawnee trail to learn Aedeta's fate.

In the early dawn of the second day, she comes upon a Pawnee village and finds the tribe singing its victory songs and preparing to sacrifice the captive Aedeta to the Morning Star. Stealing into the tent where Aedeta, bound and wounded, is shouting his death song, she releases him and they escape unnoticed.

In the last act, the Omaha tribe is assembled to receive Aedeta and Ramala. On the command of the Chief, Aedeta tells the story of Nemaha's treachery and his own capture. The people demand the death of Nemaha. Megena pleads vainly that he be spared. Aedeta and Ramala try also to soothe the anger of the people but to no avail. While the tribe clamors against him, Nemaha rushes in stripped save for a loin cloth, as the Indian habit is in all great crises, and announces that he will be his own executioner. He then stabs himself, and Megena and Ramala bend in an abandonment of grief over his body.

From a true Omaha tale by Francis La Flesche.

Nelle Richmond Eberhart.

(Transcribed verbatim from librettist's text by J. Allison-July 2017)