**Lucio Silla (i)**

(‘Lucius Sulla’).

*Dramma per musica* in three acts, K135, by [**WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O007498) to a libretto by [**GIOVANNI DE GAMERRA**](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O901235); milan, Regio Ducal Teatro, 26 December 1772.

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| Lucius Sulla *dictator of Rome* | tenor |
| Giunia [Junia] *daughter of Caius Marius*, *betrothed to Cecilius* | soprano |
| Cecilio [Cecilius] *exiled Roman senator* | soprano castrato |
| Lucio [Lucius] Cinna *his friend*, *a conspirator* | soprano |
| Celia *sister of Sulla* | soprano |
| Aufidio [Aufidius] *tribune*, *friend of Sulla* | tenor |
| Guards, nobles, senators, people of Rome |
| *Setting* Rome, 79 BC |

The contract for *Lucio Silla*, dated 4 March 1771, required Mozart to deliver the recitatives in October 1772 and to be in Milan by November to compose the arias and rehearse ‘with the usual reservations in case of theatrical misfortunes and Princely interventions (which God forbid)’.

The primo uomo Venanzio Rauzzini (Cecilius) arrived only on 21 November, the prima donna Anna de Amicis-Buonsolazzi (Junia) still later. Bassano Morgnoni (Sulla) was a last-minute replacement (so his role is relatively simple). The other singers were Felicità Suardi (Cinna), Daniella Mienci (Celia) and Giuseppe Onofrio (Aufidius). Mozart had to make alterations in the light of Metastasio’s comments on the libretto. Archduke Ferdinand’s letter-writing delayed the première two hours; it was immensely long (there were three ballets), but nevertheless was followed by 25 more performances, a major triumph. The libretto was set by other composers including J. C. Bach (1775, Mannheim), but Mozart’s opera was not revived until 1929 (Prague, in German).

The successful general Lucius Sulla seized total power in Rome but unexpectedly laid it down the year before his death. Some of the characters are historical, but the plot is fiction.

Act 1 *A neglected grove* The banished Cecilius reappears secretly in Rome and learns from Cinna that Sulla, declaring him dead, proposes to marry Junia. Cecilius may see her when she goes to mourn her father; love promises a better future (‘Vieni ov’amor t’invita‘). Cecilius is prey to fear and joyful anticipation (the first of many fine obbligato recitatives) as well as feelings of tenderness (‘Il tenero momento’).

*In Sulla’s palace* Celia agrees to persuade Junia to accept Sulla (in minuet style, ‘Se lusinghiera speme’); no girl will resist for the sake of the dead. Junia rejects the tyrant who has deposed her father and banished her lover. Sulla, at first not unkind, says the price of obstinacy may be death. Junia responds (‘Dalla sponda tenebrosa’): in an *adagio* section she invokes her father and lover, then (*allegro*) pours scorn on his love. Sulla decides he must overcome the weakness of affection and, like a true tyrant, condemn her (obbligato recitative and aria, ‘Il desio di vendetta’).

*The mausoleum* The rest of Act 1 uses no simple recitative. After the fiery D major of Sulla’s aria, Mozart sets the new scene by sombre music which modulates obliquely to C minor. Cecilius’s mixed feelings bring varied figurations and rapid tempo changes. Junia enters with mourners; within their funeral chorus she sings a G minor lament (‘O del padre ombra diletta’). Cecilius is taken for a ghost. Their duet (‘D’Eliso in sen m’attendi’), a moving Andante and brilliant Allegro, ends the act on a note of hope.

Act 2 *A military arch* Aufidius tells Sulla that as Junia has many supporters in Rome he should publicly declare her his wife (‘Guerrier, che d’un acciaro’). Sulla permits Celia’s betrothal to Cinna. Cecilius pursues Sulla with a sword but Cinna restrains him; rashness will gain nothing. Cecilius mingles hope and despair in snatches of obbligato recitative, but his aria (‘Quest’improviso tremito’), a concise Allegro in D, shows his fierce desire for revenge. Celia tries to declare her love for Cinna but is tongue-tied (an appealing Grazioso, ‘Se il labbro timido’). Cinna is more concerned with plotting; but Junia refuses to marry Sulla and murder him in bed. He must care for Cecilius (obbligato recitative), whose danger freezes her heart. Her aria (‘Ah se il crudel periglio’) is a grandiose Allegro of stunning virtuosity. Cinna decides that he must take communal vengeance upon himself (obbligato recitative and a vigorous aria, ‘Nel fortunato istante’).

*Hanging gardens* Struggling with contradictory feelings, Sulla again assures Junia that refusal means death. His aria (‘D’ogni pietà mi spoglio’) explodes without ritornello. Drained of pity, he will assuage his hurt by killing. In a short middle section he is overcome by tenderness towards her, quickly suppressed. Cecilius tells Junia that he must kill the tyrant; if he dies his shade will watch over her (‘Ah, se a morir mi chiama’). Exceptionally, the main section is Adagio, nobly arching in wide leaps (up to a 15th), and the middle section a tender Andante. Celia urges Junia to marry Sulla (‘Quando sugl’arsi campi’). Her cheerful A major is followed by the tragic D minor of Junia’s soliloquy on the conflict of duty and love. She will kill herself rather than submit, and gasps out her despair in an agitated aria (‘Parto, m’affretto’) with a daring harmonic shift (E from G, the tonic being C) at the reprise.

*The Capitol* The chorus hopes that Sulla’s glory will be crowned by love (‘Se gloria il crin ti cinse’). Sulla publicly claims Junia as the token of civil peace; she is prevented from killing herself when Cecilius vainly attacks Sulla. In a trio (‘Quell’orgoglioso sdegno’) Sulla declares that he will humble his enemies, Cecilius is defiant, and Junia, joined by Cecilius, anticipates the consolation of death.

Act 3 *Before the prison* Cinna excuses his failure to support a futile assassination attempt. He agrees to marry Celia if she can persuade her brother to have mercy; she promises to achieve this whatever storms arise (‘Strider sento la procella’). Cinna expresses optimism (Cecilius has supporters) in a heroic aria in D (‘De’ più superbi il core’). Junia appears for a last farewell; she will not save Cecilius by yielding to Sulla. Aufidius comes to take Cecilius to public judgment; in a melting, rondo-like aria (‘Pupille amate’) in minuet tempo he says her tears will make him die too soon; his soul will return, dissolved in a sigh. Junia is left to her premonitions, her obbligato recitative richly scored and anticipating the motif of the aria (‘Frà i pensier più funesti’), in which she imagines Cecilius dead, lamenting over a throbbing muted accompaniment; then with a determined Allegro she runs after her lover.

*A hall in the palace* The denouement takes place in simple recitative. Even as Sulla condemns Cecilius, Junia publicly proclaims her betrothal. Baffled, even moved, the tyrant decides to forgive her and permit the two couples to marry. He retires from public life (finale); the chorus praises his devotion to Rome, and the soloists sing of love and freedom.

Mozart constructed the first two acts cleverly, gradually abandoning the conventionally formed and very long arias liked in Milan for more flexible designs perhaps suggested by Gluck’s *Alceste*. Despite the magnificent mausoleum scene, *Lucio Silla* remains an unreformed type of *opera seria*. Several D major arias with trumpets and drums are contrasted with remarkable richness of expression in the splendid roles of Cecilius and Junia while Celia’s lightly scored music provides relief. Although its plot is turgid and its denouement unconvincing, *Lucio Silla* is musically the finest work Mozart wrote in Italy, and ranks with *opera seria* by the greatest masters of the time.