

“Frondi tenere e belle...Ombra mai fu” (Delicate, graceful boughs...Never was shade)
SERSE (Xerxes), Act I, music by Georg Frideric Handel, libretto by Nicolò Minato, 1738.
(This aria is widely known as Handel’s “Largo.”)

Synopsis: Serse (Xerxes), king of Persia, sings this ode to a majestic tree at the beginning of the opera.

SERSE

Recitative:

Frondi tenere e belle
del mio Platano amato,
per voi risplenda il Fato.
Tuoni, lampi, e procelle
non vi oltraggino mai la cara pace,
ne giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.

Delicate, graceful boughs
of my beloved plane tree,
may Fate smile warmly upon you.
May thunder, lightning, and tempests
never upset or disturb your blissful silence,
nor the predatory winds defile your beauty.

Aria:

Ombra mai fu
di vegetabile,
care ed amabile
soave più.
Ombra mai fu
di vegetabile
care ed amabile,
soave più.
Cara ed amabile
ombra mai fu
di vegetabile,
cara ed amabile,
soave più
soave più.

Never was shade
of any living plant
more dear and lovable,
more pleasing, too.
Never was shade
of any living plant
more dear and lovable,
more pleasing, too.
More dear and lovable,
never was shade
of any living plant,
more dear and lovable,
more pleasing, too,
pleasing, too.

--From a course, “Sweet and Low,” for OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learners Institute) at UC Santa Cruz, 2013 © Miriam Ellis