



THEATRE  
*of* EARLY  
MUSIC

Under the Direction of Daniel Taylor

***Dido and Aeneas***

by Henry Purcell (1689)

*Starring:*

Noemi Kiss, Dido  
Alexander Dobson, Aeneas  
Grace Davidson, Belinda  
Agnes Zsigovics, Second Woman  
Daniel Taylor, Sorceress  
Benjamin Butterfield, Sailor  
Meara Conway, First Witch  
Meg Bragle, Second Witch  
David Clegg, Spirit

*Consort of the Theatre of Early Music:*

Isabelle Huchette and Jana Miller  
Andrew Gray and Martin Auclair  
Chloe Meyers and Jean Patterson, violins  
Pemi Paull, ciola and Amanda Keesmaat, cello  
Sylvain Bergeron, lute and Reuven Rothman, double bass  
Christopher Jackson, harpsichord

*With support from the Canada Council for the Arts  
and the Quebec Arts Council*

## ***DIDO AND AENEAS***

By Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

*Dido and Aeneas* is England's oldest opera. The work was first performed in 1689, at a private girls' school in Chelsea, London, run by the choreographer Josias Priest, a dance master. The libretto for *Dido and Aeneas* was adapted from the *Aeneid* by Virgil.

The Story: Dido, Queen of Carthage, falls in love with Aeneas, who has landed in Carthage, fleeing from Troy after defeat in the Trojan War. However, a plot by the Sorceress and witches, who hate Dido, serves to remind Aeneas that he is fated to leave and found the Roman Empire. Aeneas leaves Dido who is shamed and heartbroken. She kills herself in her despair. This is altered from the version in the *Aeneid*, in which there were no witches and instead, the Gods intervene to remind Aeneas of his duty.

The story is exceptional for opera of this period because one of the major characters -Dido - dies. In most pre-19th Century opera, the hero or heroine's life may be threatened, but the convention of 'Deus Ex Machina' (an Act of the Gods) almost always surely preserved the safety of those threatened.

*Dido and Aeneas* has a well-defined key structure. Purcell used major keys to illustrate happiness and minor keys to evoke sadness. The first scene is in C minor because Dido is fearful about falling in love with Aeneas. However, Dido's wishes are returned and thus the next scene shifts in key to C major. Then follows the Cave Scene, where the witches hatch their plot. This mirrors the key structure of act one, but going from F minor to F major, when they have finalized their diabolical plan.

Although key changes from major to minor are a fairly common device used to illustrate emotions, Purcell's are exceptional because they change from tonic minor to tonic major (C minor to C major, for example), rather than tonic minor to relative major<sup>1</sup>. Purcell's use of dissonance is beautiful and effective. Particular examples of dissonance in *Dido and Aeneas* are the first part of the overture and Dido's Lament. In the lament, the string parts are very dissonant, helping to illustrate Dido's extreme anguish.

## LIBRETTO

### OVERTURE

ACT ONE, Scene One: *The Palace*

*(Enter Dido, Belinda and train.)*

BELINDA: Shake the cloud from off your brow,  
Fate your wishes does allow;  
    Empire growing,  
    Pleasures flowing,  
Fortune smiles and so should you.

CHORUS: Banish sorrow, banish care,  
Grief should ne'er approach the fair.

DIDO: Ah! Belinda, I am prest  
With torment not to be confest,  
Peace and I are strangers grown.  
I languish till my grief is known,  
yet would not have it guess'd.

BELINDA: Grief increases by concealing

DIDO: Mine admits of no revealing.

BELINDA: Then let me speak; the Trojan guest  
into your tender thoughts has pressed;  
the greatest blessing Fate can give,  
Our Carthage to secure and Troy revive.

CHORUS: When monarchs unite, how happy their state,  
They triumph at once, o'er their foes and their fate.

DIDO: Whence could so much virtue spring?  
What storms, what battles did he sing?  
Anchises' valour mixt with Venus' charms,  
how soft in peace, and yet how fierce in arms!

BELINDA: A tale so strong and full of woe  
Might melt the rocks as well as you.  
What stubborn heart unmov'd could see  
such distress, such piety?

DIDO: Mine with storms of care opprest  
is taught to pity the distress.  
Mean wretches' grief can touch,  
so soft, so sensible my breast;  
But ah! I fear, I pity his too much.

BELINDA and SECOND WOMAN (*repeated by CHORUS*):

Fear no danger to ensue,  
The Hero loves as well as you,  
Ever gentle, ever smiling,  
And the cares of life beguiling,  
Cupid strew your path with flowers,  
Gather'd from Elysian bowers.

[The Baske]

(*Enter Aeneas and train.*)

BELINDA: See, your Royal guest appears;  
How Godlike is the form he bears!

AENEAS: When, Royal Fair, shall I be blest,  
with cares of love and state distress?

DIDO: Fate forbids what you pursue.

AENEAS: Aeneas has no fate but you!  
Let Dido smile and I'll defy  
the feeble stroke of destiny.

CHORUS: Cupid only throws the dart  
That's dreadful to a warrior's heart,  
and she that wounds can only cure the smart.

AENEAS: If not for mine, for Empire's sake  
some pity on your lover take.  
Ah! Make not, in a hopeless fire,  
A hero fall, and Troy once more expire.

BELINDA: Pursue thy conquest, love;  
her eyes confess the flame her tongue denies.

[A Dance Gittars Chacony]

CHORUS: To the hills and the vales,  
to the rocks and the mountains,  
to the musical groves and the cool shady fountains.  
Let the triumphs of love and beauty be shown.  
Go revel, ye Cupids, the day is your own.

THE TRIUMPHING DANCE (*Orchestra*)

Scene Two: *The Cave*

(*Enter Sorceress.*)

SORCERESS: Wayward sisters, you that fright  
the lonely traveller by night,  
Who, like dismal ravens crying,  
beat the windows of the dying.  
Appear! Appear at my call, and share in the fame.  
Of a mischief shall make all Carthage flame.  
Appear!

(*Enter Witches.*)

FIRST WITCH: Say, Bedlam, say what's thy will.

CHORUS: Harm's our delight and mischief all our skill.

SORCERESS: The Queen of Carthage, whom we hate,  
as we do all in prosp'rous state,  
Ere sunset, shall most wretched prove,  
Depriv'd of fame, of life and love!

CHORUS: He he ... ha ha ... ho ho!

TWO WITCHES: Ruin'd ere the set of sun?  
Tell us, how shall this be done?

SORCERESS: The Trojan Prince, you know, is bound  
by fate to seek Italian ground;  
The Queen and he are now in chase.

FIRST WITCH: Hark! The cry comes on apace.

SORCERESS: But, when they're done, my trusty Elf  
In form of Mercury himself  
As sent from Jove, shall chide his stay,  
and charge him sail tonight with all his fleet away.

CHORUS: Ha ha ... ha ha ... ho ho!

*(Enter drunken sailors, a dance.)*

TWO WITCHES: But, ere we this perform,  
well conjure for a storm  
To mar their hunting sport,  
And drive 'em back to Court.

CHORUS *and* ECHO: In our deep vaulted cell the charm well prepare,  
too dreadful a practice for this open air.

ECHO DANCE OF FURIES *(Orchestra)*

[Horrid Music]

ACT TWO: *The Grove*

*(Enter Aeneas, Dido, Belinda and train)*

RITORNELLE *(Orchestra)*

BELINDA *(repeated by CHORUS)*: Thanks to these lonesome vales,  
these desert hills and dales,  
So fair the game, so rich the sport,  
Diana's self might to these woods resort.

[Gitter Ground: a Dance]

SECOND WOMAN: Oft she visits this lov'd mountain,  
oft she bathes her in this fountain;  
Here Actaeon met his fate,  
Pursued by his own hounds, and after mortal wounds  
Discover'd too late.

AENEAS: Behold, upon my bending spear  
A monster's head stands bleeding,



FIRST SAILOR (*repeated by CHORUS*):

Come away, fellow sailors, your anchors be weighing,  
Time and tide will admit no delaying  
Take a bouzy short leave of your nymphs on the shore,  
And silence their mourning with vows of returning,  
but never intending to visit them more,  
no never intending to visit them more.

SAILORS' DANCE (*Orchestra*)

(*Enter Sorceress and Witches.*)

SORCERESS: See the flags and streamers curling,  
Anchors weighing, sails unfurling.

FIRST WITCH: Phoebus' pale deluding beams  
Gliding o'er deceitful streams.

SECOND WITCH: Our plot has took, the Queen's forsook.

TWO WITCHES: Elissa's ruin'd, ho, ho!  
Our plot has took, the Queen's forsook, ho, ho!

SORCERESS: Our next motion must be to storm her lover on the ocean!  
From the ruins of others our pleasures we borrow:  
Elissa bleeds tonight, and Carthage flames tomorrow.

CHORUS: Destruction's our delight, delight our greatest sorrow!  
Elissa bleeds tonight, and Carthage flames tomorrow. Ho ho!

WITCHES' DANCE (*Orchestra*)

(*Enter Dido, Belinda and train.*)

DIDO: Your counsel all is urg'd in vain;  
To earth and heav'n I will complain!  
To earth and heav'n why do I call?  
Earth and heav'n conspire my fall:  
To Fate I sue, of other means bereft,  
the only refuge for the wretched left.

BELINDA: See, madam, see where the Prince appears;  
Such sorrow in his looks he bears,  
As would convince you still he's true.

*(Enter Aeneas.)*

AENEAS: What shall lost Aeneas do?  
How, Royal Fair, shall I impart  
The God's decree, and tell you we must part?

DIDO: Thus, on the fatal banks of Nile,  
Weeps the deceitful crocodile;  
Thus hypocrites, that murder act,  
Make Heav'n and Gods the authors of the fact.

AENEAS: By all that's good -

DIDO: By all that's good, no more!  
All that's good you here forswore  
to your promis'd empire fly, and let forsaken Dido die.

AENEAS: In spite of Jove's command, I'll stay.  
Offend the Gods and Love obey.

DIDO: No, faithless man, thy course pursue;  
I'm now resolv'd as well as you.  
No repentance shall reclaim  
The injur'd Dido's slighted flame,  
For 'tis enough, whate'er you now decree,  
that you had once a thought of leaving me.

AENEAS: Let Jove say what he please, I'll stay!

DIDO: Away, away! No, no, away!

AENEAS: No, no, I'll stay, and Love obey!

DIDO: To Death I'll fly, if longer you delay;  
Away, away!...

*(Exit Aeneas.)*

But Death, alas! I cannot shun;  
Death must come when he is gone.

CHORUS: Great minds against themselves conspire,  
and shun the cure they most desire.

DIDO: Thy hand, Belinda; darkness shades me:  
On thy bosom let me rest:  
More I would, but Death invades me:  
Death is now a welcome guest.

When I am laid in earth,  
May my wrongs create no trouble in thy breast;  
Remember me! but ah! forget my fate.

CHORUS: With drooping wings ye cupids come,  
and scatter roses on her tomb,  
soft and gentle as her Heart.  
Keep here your watch and never part.

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