

THE RALPH OPERA PROGRAM PRESENTS

DIDO AND AENEAS

BY HENRY PURCELL



Colorado State University

OCTOBER 21-24, 2021 | GRIFFIN CONCERT HALL

PURCELL PRE-OPERA LECTURE AND PERFORMANCE OF PURCELL SONGS

TIFFANY BLAKE, DIRECTOR AND SOPRANO

NICOLE ASEL, MEZZO-SOPRANO

JOEL BACON, KEYBOARD

K. DAWN GRAPES, MUSICOLOGIST

“If Music be the Food of Love”

“Music for a While”

Dr. Asel

“Sweeter than Roses”

Dr. Blake

“Lost is My Quiet”

Drs. Asel and Blake

INTERMISSION

DIDO AND AENEAS

CSU RALPH OPERA PROGRAM AND OPERA ORCHESTRA

DIDO, QUEEN OF CARTHAGE

Lauren Bumgarner (10/21 and 10/23)
Emily Anderson (10/22 and 10/24)

AENEAS, TROJAN PRINCE

David Silvano

BELINDA, DIDO'S HANDMAID

Lucy Logan

SECOND WOMAN

Emery Leitch

SORCERER

Paul Rose

FIRST WITCH

Hannah Park

SECOND WITCH

Emery Leitch

FIRST SAILOR

Emmanuel Bonilla

SPIRIT

Lauren Lang

CHORUS: Emmanuel Bonilla, Haley Candelario, Lexi Carlson, Matt Doole, Mykayla Fitzpatrick, Deklin Herman, Floren Kahan, Lauren Lang, Emery Leitch, Jackson Mooney, Yuka Nagata, Hannah Park, Reagan Rademacher, Hayley Wood

FEATURED DANCERS: Kori Heidelberg, Ella Meyers, Ellie Schroeder, Jessica Schroeder

CHORUS DANCERS: Emmanuel Bonilla, Haley Candelario, Lexi Carlson, Matt Doole, Deklin Herman, Floren Kahan, Lauren Lang, Emery Leitch, Yuka Nagata, Hannah Park, Reagan Rademacher, Hayley Wood

PRODUCTION TEAM:

STAGE DIRECTOR: Tiffany Blake

CONDUCTOR: Wes Kenney

CHOREOGRAPHER: Grace Cooper

MUSIC DIRECTOR: Alaina DeBellevue

CHORUS MASTER: Hyemi Woo

REHEARSAL PIANIST: Hyeji Seo

LIGHTING DESIGNER: Natalie Doocy

STAGE MANAGER: Katie Kinslow

ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN 1

Landon Fennel, Concertmaster

Mary Fox, Asst CM

Peng Liu

VIOLIN 2

Annie Smith, Principal

Rhea Chan

VIOLA

Percy Slovut, Principal

Shawn Murphy

CELLO

Avery Smith, Principal

Alex Koster

BASS

Max Johnson, Principal

HARPSICHORD

Dr. Joel Bacon

CELLO

Avery Smith

Many thanks to Barbara Hamilton, Paul Primus, and Sarah Biber for their expertise, consul, guidance as consultants to the Sinfonia in Baroque performance practice.

PROGRAM NOTES

Dido and Aeneas

Henry Purcell (1659–1695)

As one of Henry Purcell's greatest works, *Dido and Aeneas* was a monumental achievement for English Baroque music, a significant moment in the history of seventeenth-century England. Yet to this day, information regarding much of the opera's creation, premiere, and reception remains a mystery. *Dido and Aeneas* was the only complete opera Purcell composed. From a young age, his musical career revolved around the Church and the Crown. Beginning in 1669, he found himself in the musical orbit of the Court as a chorister at the Chapel Royal. He then occupied the positions of organist of the Chapel Royal, organist of Westminster Abbey, and even composer-in-ordinary for the king until his death in 1695. The coronation of William III and Mary II, however, had consequences for court musicians and composers. With cuts in funding for music, court artists had to look elsewhere for alternative forms of revenue. Much like musicians today, this led to a gig economy where instrumentalists, singers, and composers were left to pick up whatever work was available. Many professionals such as Purcell looked to the world of theatre. In England, opera was initially met with resistance. While the genre was developing on the Continent, opera was at odds with English ideas and sensibilities. A society with a rich tradition of theatre, many found the idea of sacrificing drama for a greater emphasis on music to be distasteful. Widely-held biases towards opera based on intellectual beliefs and musical preferences were also common. A widespread acceptance of the genre did not take hold until the eighteenth-century—more than a decade after Purcell's death.

It remains uncertain when Purcell began composing *Dido and Aeneas*. He may have written the music around 1685 or earlier, but dates as late as 1689 have also been postulated. Another unknown detail is the exact date of the opera's premiere. The only known performance during the composer's lifetime took place at a Chelsea boarding school for girls in December of 1689, and one of the few mentions of this event came in the form of a letter from Mrs. A. Buck to Mary Clarke, the wife of a Whig politician. Though vague in its description, the note of seeing an "opera" at the school seems to be a giveaway. Otherwise, public references are seemingly nonexistent. Why would such a giant of English Baroque music write an entire opera only to premiere it at a girls' school? Surely other venues and audiences must have been more suitable for the unveiling of such a work. It seems inconceivable that Purcell could have composed an entire stage work for the voices of adolescent girls. There is, however, some precedent, as Purcell leaned heavily on his mentor John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* for inspiration in terms of style, form, and symbolism. Purcell may also have taken note of its performance progression. Blow's opera was initially written and performed for King Charles II. Following its premiere for the nobility, an altered arrangement was created for the very same school at which *Dido and Aeneas* took place. This surely cannot be a coincidence.

The political and religious overtones of the *Dido and Aeneas* reinforce an assumption that the piece was written for King William III and Queen Mary II. Allegiances to the Protestant and Catholic Churches were still at violent odds within the royal family and the kingdom as a whole. The opera's librettist, Nahum Tate, had already used the figure of Aeneas as an allusion to Queen Mary II's father, James II, in an earlier poem. James II was the last ruling Catholic monarch in British history. However, his daughter had been raised Protestant, and his eventual son-in-law was also of Protestant faith. Such tensions led to the Glorious Revolution, in which William III launched the last successful invasion of Britain, dethroning King James and restoring Protestant rule. Thus, the Sorceress in *Dido and Aeneas* might be understood to represent the Catholic church, leading James II astray from the British people.

While criticism of the libretto's truncated story, poor poetry, and disjointed plot remain, the music was a stunning leap forward in England's musical lexicon. Fully sung in the vernacular language, *Dido and Aeneas* remains a triumphant challenge to the tastes and norms of its time. The irony that it was only noted to be performed by girls at a boarding school seems more in line with twentieth-century British comedy than in the annals of Baroque history. One must wonder how circumstances might have changed the perception of the opera if Purcell had only lived long enough to see the genre's wide acceptance in the early 1700s. It is not hard to imagine that the lush vocal layers of "Great minds against themselves conspire" from Act III would have awed an audience watching an ensemble of adult performers. However, Henry Purcell succumbed to illness, probably of tuberculosis, in the prime of his career on November 21, 1695. While not initially a success, over time *Dido and Aeneas* has gained the notoriety it deserves. Widespread performances commenced upon the bicentenary of Purcell's death, and we today are incredibly fortunate to have a window into such a magnificent lost piece of music history.

— program notes by Austin Corley

PRODUCTION STAFF

PRODUCTION MANAGER/TECHNICAL DIRECTOR Steven Workman

COSTUME SHOP MANAGER Elise Kulovany

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER Matt Grevan

MASTER ELECTRICIAN Dan Minzer

PROPERTIES DIRECTOR Michael Dold

SCENIC CHARGE ARTIST Heidi Larson

MASTER CARPENTER Johnie Rankin

AUDIO ENGINEER Chris Carignan

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER Jacob Mosier

SUPERTITLES Lauren Bumgarner

SUPERTITLE OPERATORS Mykayla Fitzpatrick and Jackson Mooney

ELECTRICS SHOP – Laurel Ladzinski, Morgan Lessman, Alaina Noble, Thomas Ray, Katie Strickland, Abby Sumner

PAINT SHOP – Arina Bratkovska, Kiva Brearton, Mya Coca, Peyton Farnum, Rachel Garrison, Sarah Lepiere, Danielle Ranisate

COSTUME SHOP – Abby Allison, Lauren Boesch, Anna Cordova, Maddie Engeman, Dani Koski, August Mayer, Avery Rudman, Rachel Ross, Adie Sutherland

SCENIC SHOP - Jamie Chenhall, Doster Chastain, Anh Nguyen, Thomas Ray, Maya Ross, Lucas Rowse, Kelsey Shell

PROP SHOP – Kylie Barger, Frances Fedele, Rachel Ross, David Walters, Eric Zertuche

AUDIO SHOP- Dani Bonesteel, Megan Klane, Patrick Middlebrook, Lorna Stephens, David Walters

LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR – Anna Higgins

SOUND BOARD OPERATOR – Maggie O'Riley

WARDROBE/DECK CREW – Reanna Romero



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