



THEATRE
of EARLY
MUSIC

Under the Direction of Daniel Taylor

Presented by the Edmonton Chamber Music Society
With support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Quebec Arts Council

Dido and Aeneas

by Henry Purcell (1689)

Noemi Kiss: Dido

Alexander Dobson : Aeneas

Grace Davidson : Belinda

Agnes Zsigovics : 2nd 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

Dido and Aeneas - 1689

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Dido and Aeneas, by Henry Purcell, 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, who was a dancing master. The libretto for *Dido and Aeneas* was adapted from the *Aeneid* by Virgil. Dido, Queen of Carthage, falls in love with Aeneas, who has landed in Carthage after 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 go and be the founder of the Roman Empire. Aeneas leaves Dido who is shamed, heartbroken and kills herself. This is altered from the version in the *Aeneid*, where there were no witches. In the *Aeneid*, 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 major¹. 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.

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, with tushes far exceeding those did Venus' huntsman tear.

DIDO The skies are clouded hark! How thunder rends the mountain oaks asunder.

BELINDA (*repeated by* CHORUS) Haste, haste to town, this open field no shelter from the storm can yield.

(*Exeunt Dido and Belinda and train.*)

(*The Spirit of the Sorceress descends to Aeneas in the likeness of Mercury.*)

SPIRIT Stay, Prince! And hear great Jove's command; He summons thee, this night, away

AENEAS Tonight?

SPIRIT Tonight thou must forsake this land, The angry God will brook no longer stay. Jove commands thee, waste no more In Love's delights, those precious hours, Allow'd by th'Almighty Pow'rs, To gain th'Hesperian shore and ruined Troy restore.

AENEAS Jove's commands shall be obey'd, Tonight our anchors shall be weigh'd But ah! What language can I try my injur'd Queen to pacify: No sooner she resigns her heart, But from her arms I'm forc'd to part. How can so hard a fate be took? One night enjoy'd, the next forsook. Yours be the blame, ye gods! For I Obey your will, but with more ease could die.

[Chorus, Then since our Charmes have sped. The Groves Dance]

ACT THREE *The Ships*

(*Enter sailors.*)

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.