

## Synopsis

### Act I – Fairies. Masque of the Drunken Poet

The lovers' meeting is disturbed by the fairies and they seek somewhere more secluded for their tryst. The fairies lead in a drunken poet and taunt him with a game of Blind Man's Buff, poking and pinching him. The lovers return to dance a jig.

### Act II – The Great Grotto. Masque of Night, Mystery, Secrecy and Sleep.

The fairies "join their warbling voices" followed by a tripping solo, chorus and dance on the Green. The scene darkens as Night, Mystery and Secrecy enter, each singing a song in turn, followed by a Sleep chorus, reminiscent of "With drooping wings" from *Dido and Æneas*. The Followers of Night end the act with a dance in the French manner.

### Act III – A great wood. Masque of the Trials of Love. Haymakers.

A distraught lover bewails her loss in "The Plaint" - an extended ground bass aria in the style of Dido's Lament. A solo and chorus reflects on the bitter-sweet nature of love. The fairies dance and the mood is transformed by Corydon's comical attempts to court Mopsa, leaving the other haymakers to get on with the work. The haymakers join in a dance. The act ends with a chorus of love "A thousand ways" and a Hornpipe is danced by the Three Graces.

### Act IV – A garden of fountains. Masque of the Four Seasons.

A grand symphony and chorus celebrates the birthday of King Oberon, followed by the duet "Let the fife and the clarions". Chorus and instruments then join in praise of Phoebus (i.e. Apollo, god of the sun), after which Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter each sing in turn.

### Act V – A Chinese Garden. Masque of Marriage.

Six monkeys are lead in by their handlers and perform a dance. Two women of the court sing virtuoso arias, "Hark how all things in one sound rejoice" and "Hark the echoing air". Joined by the chorus they summon Hymen "the dull God of Marriage" who laments that his "torch has long been out", but with the duet "Turn thine eyes" they rekindle his flame "my torch indeed will from such brightness shine". They join with him to sing "They shall be happy as they're fair", which is repeated by the chorus while our two lovers, newly married, dance in celebration. The work ends with a stately Chaconne for sixteen ladies.

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As in *Dido and Æneas*, dances in *The Fairy Queen* were choreographed by Josias Priest (1655-1734). Our production makes use of treatises and notated dances from the period, including one by Priest himself, taken from Edmund Pemberton's "*An Essay for the Improvement of Dancing; Being a Collection of Figure Dances... Composed by the most Eminent Masters*", 1711).

## Henry Purcell – The Fairy Queen

Like that other great composer for the stage, Mozart, a century later, Purcell died half way through the psalmist's "threescore years and ten". Had he lived out his full span, at the age of 53 he would probably have befriended Handel on his arrival in London (1712), have helped him establish the original Royal Academy of Music (1719), have taken a meal at his new house in Brook Street (1723), and shared with him the festivities for the coronation of George II (1727). Purcell's music for the post-Restoration theatre, already under the influence of French opera-ballet, would surely have evolved into something more Italianate in character, an art form in its own right and not just a bolt-on to the dramatic ambitions of Thomas Betterton and his circle: mature, cosmopolitan and operatic.

*The Fairy Queen*, its libretto probably by Betterton, was first performed on 2nd May 1692 at the Queen's Theatre (originally the Duke's Theatre), Dorset Gardens, perhaps as part of a royal celebration, and was revived and expanded the following year. The theatre (below, left) was built in 1671 by Christopher Wren on the site of Dorset House, destroyed by the Great Fire, and was pulled down in 1709.

Although described in the title page (below, right) as an Opera, it post-dates the first "true English operas" *Venus and Adonis* (John Blow, 1684) and *Dido and Æneas* (1688 or earlier) by several years. Here Purcell's musical language, three years before his death, clearly belongs to a later age than that of *Dido*, and gives us a glimpse of what might have been had he survived into the age of Handel; the arias are more extended, the harmonic language more developed.

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THE  
Fairy-Queen:  
AN  
OPERA.  
Represented at the  
Queen's-Theatre  
By Their  
MAJESTIES SERVANTS.

LONDON,

Printed for Jacob Tonson, at the Judges-Head,  
in Chancery-Lane. 1692.

Where you may have complete Sets of Mr. Dryden's Works in four Volumes; the  
plays in the order they were Written.

### Soloists (in order of appearance)

“Come let us leave the town” – Lucy Prendergast, Ian Brener  
*Drunken Poet* – George Coltart, *First Fairy* – Pandora Dewan, *Second Fairy* – Ruth Warner  
“Sing while we trip it” – Margaret Lingas  
*Night* – Ruby Reed-Berendt, *Mystery* – Sophie Hazell, *Secrecy* – Harriet Stephenson  
“The Plaint” – Henrietta Gullifer  
“If Love’s a sweet passion” – Charlotte Mattocks  
*Corydon* – Ben Reed-Berendt, *Mopsa* – Elizabeth Dobson  
*Attendant* – Julia Dilnot  
“Let the fife and the clarions” – Julia Dilnot, Harriet Stephenson  
*Spring* – Yilan Huang, *Summer* – Phoebe Talbot,  
*Autumn* – Joseph Mason, *Winter* – Ian Brener  
*First Courtier* – Felicity Souter, *Second Courtier* – Rosalind Dobson  
*Hymen* – George Coltart

**Courtiers** Amber Carter, Julia Dilnot, Elizabeth Dobson, Rosalind Dobson, Henrietta Gullifer, Alice Harberd, Sophie Hazell, Yilan Huang, Alice Koston, Margaret Lingas, Charlotte Mattocks, Emily Prendergast, Lucy Prendergast, Ruby Reed-Berendt, Emily Robinson, Felicity Souter, Harriet Stephenson, Phoebe Talbot, Rose Walker, Alexandra Wilkinson

**Light fairies/swans** Lucy Britton, Zoe Morgan-Jennings, Sofia Radaelli, Philippa Stone, Ruth Warner, Maisie Watson

**Dark fairies** Amy Aron-Muellbauer, Eloise Breen, Pandora Dewan, Isolde Hill, Elizabeth Swadling, Sophie Taylor

**Green nymphs** Eleanor Feeney, Miranda Nixon, Olivia Frazer-Smith, Bella Salter, Olivia Sandham

**Monkeys** Lucy Arqué, Annabel Baldwin, Elspeth Horn, Kathryn Norris, Emily Price, Iona Tritton

**Monkey handlers** Charlotte Bestwick, Lilian Watson

**Haymakers** Alice Brown, Frannie Brown, Sofia Deas, Tanglewest Douglas, Olivia Frazer-Smith, Olivia Hill, Aphra Hiscock, Jessica Howarth, Molly Jones, Holly-Maya King, Honey Mounce, Ciara Neil, Elise Pollock, Sophie Price, Bella Salter, Harriet Spring

**Male voices** Alan Bills, George Coltart, Jack Harberd, Fergus McLusky, Joe Mason, Joe Parker, Ben Reed-Berendt, Tom Stell, Robert Taylor

**Ensemble** Eleanor Harrison (violin 1), Ann Lingas (violin 2), Heather Birt (viola), Judith Dallosso (cello), Philip Wilkinson (bass) Amy Aron-Muellbauer, Tom Warner, Susan Lea (recorders) Nick Wright (trumpet 1), Miranda Nixon (trumpet 2) Felix Higginbottom (kettle drums) Matthew Spring (baroque guitar)

Many thanks to those parents who have helped with costumes and who have volunteered as stewards for these performances.



# The FAIRY QUEEN

*Henry Purcell*

*with period instruments,  
costume and dance*

## Oxford Girls' Choir Oxford Baroque Players

*Producer:* Hannah Nye

*Choreographer:* Ian Brener • *Wardrobe:* Judith Thomas

*Musical Directors:* Richard Vendome & Rory McCleery

Saturday 26th March 2011 · 5.30 PM *and* 8.00 PM

## UNIVERSITY CHURCH of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford

(by kind permission of the Vicar and the PCC)

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