

***Dido & Æneas* - 7 & 8 July 2000, Mansfield College Oxford**

Oxford Girls' Choir and Oxford Baroque Players

producer Susan Glaisher

choreographer Ian Brener

musical director Richard Vendome



***...harm's our delight and mischief all
our skill...***

***...her eyes confess the flame her
tongue denies...***

Georgia Black (Sorceress)

Louisa Nye (2nd witch), Hannah Nye (1st witch)

Clementine Franks (Dido), Thomas Herford (Æneas)

cast in order of appearance

Phoebus	Catherine Young
1st Nereid	Gaia Marcus
2nd Nereid	Caroline Henshaw
Venus	Charlotte Roberts
Spring	Alice Armitage
1st Shepherdess	Victoria Couper
2nd Shepherdess	Sasha Brown
Dido	Clementine Franks
Belinda	Emily Burn
2nd woman	Felicity Lingard
Æneas	Thomas Herford
Sorceress	Georgia Black
1st witch	Hannah Nye
2nd witch	Louisa Nye
Spirit of Mercury	Sophie Kent
Sailor	Sasha Brown
"Lady Dorothy Burk"	Charlotte Roberts

courtiers

Alice Armitage, Sasha Brown, Hannah Burnham, Victoria Couper, Hannah Fogg, Caroline Henshaw, Sophie Kent, Isobel Piper, Charlotte Roberts, Daisy Venables

witches

Iryna Boubriak, Josephine Donaghy, Marusa Dudareva, Leonor Fishman, Jessica Glaisher, Miranda Jewess, Lucy Kroll, Elena Marcus, Gaia Marcus, Angharad Milosevic, Liza Olienik, Magda Walczak, Catherine Young

furies

Harriet Ainsworth, Eleanor Armitage, Zoe Boulton, Laura Chaitow, Talia David, Rosie Dilnot, Anna Fries, Imogen Gardam, Joanna Sadler, Clemency Stephenson, Bee Taylor, Florence Taylor, Anna Walton, Francesca Woolgar

sailors

Hannah Burnham, Caroline Henshaw, Felicity Lingard

male chorus

Alan Armitage, Jerome Finnis, Peter Brown, Christopher Franks, Mike Geary

Oxford Baroque Players

violin 1	Nadja Zwiener
violin 2	Ann Lingas
viola	Felicity Cormack
cello	Judith Dallosso
recorder 1	Marianna Hay
recorder 2	Mary Bevan
continuo	Richard Vendome

producer	Susan Glaisher
choreographer	Ian Brener
musical director	Richard Vendome

wardrobe	Maura Allen
lighting	Chris Knowlton
special effects	Peter Kent

soloists

Clementine Franks (Dido) was a member of the Oxford Girls' Choir for ten years and studied at Cherwell School; she has performed as vocal soloist with the National Youth Jazz Orchestra and plays the piano, harp and double bass. Thomas Herford (Æneas) is a former New College head chorister and a sixth former at Abingdon School. He runs his own close harmony group and is an accomplished pianist and violinist.

Other members of the cast are students of Cherwell, Oxford High and St Helen & St Katharine's schools; most are studying music at GCSE or A-level and have achieved distinction in Associated Board singing examinations.

synopsis of the plot

Prologue, Scene 1 - the sea

Phœbus and the Nereids (sea-nymphs) arise from the sea, and are later joined by Venus. (Phœbus and Venus here represent the new monarchs William and Mary). The scene ends with a dance.

Prologue, Scene 2 - the grove

Venus sings in praise of Spring and her nymphs, Spring sings in praise of Nature. Shepherdesses sing of love and there is a country dance.

Act I - the palace

Dido enters her apartment. She is troubled by her feelings for the Trojan prince Æneas, but is reassured by Belinda. The courtiers are anxious that the thrones of Carthage and Troy should be united, and rejoice at the prospect. Æneas and his attendants arrive, and Dido's courtiers continue their encouragement. After a virtuoso "courtship dance" by Dido and Æneas (indicated in the libretto, though no music survives), the act ends with a Triumphant Chorus and Dance.

Act II, Scene 1 - the cavern

The Sorceress appears. She summons the witches, and together they plot Æneas' departure, Dido's ruin, and the consequent destruction of Carthage. The hunt as an image of courtship begins as the Sorceress sees the queen and the prince in chase. In contrast to the stately minuet at the end of Act I, the scene ends with an Echo Chorus and Dance of the Furies (evil spirits).

Act II, Scene 2 - the grove

The court, out hunting in the vale, is driven back to the Palace by a thunderstorm: a symbolic end to the hunt, for Dido, having yielded to Æneas, has lost all. The spirit of the Sorceress appears, disguised as Mercury, the winged messenger, and commands Æneas to leave and continue his quest for the site for the founding of the new Troy. Æneas laments his fate in a dramatic recitative.

Act III, Scene 1 - the ships

The witches drive Æneas' men to the ships. Some light relief is provided by the Sailors' song and dance. The Sorceress and her crones rejoice at their success, and the scene ends with a Witches' Dance.

Act III, Scene 2 - [back at the palace]

Torn between his desire to remain with Dido and the "will of the gods", Æneas hesitates and resolves to stay, only to be rejected by an angry Dido. He leaves. Belinda fails to appease the grief-stricken Dido, who sings a final lament before killing herself. The opera ends with "Mourning tableau", in which the Cupids dance around Dido's body.

historical background

The libretto of *Dido and Æneas*, the only surviving copy of which is in the library of the Royal College of Music in London, tells us that it was

*Perform'd at Mr. Josias Priest's Boarding School at
Chelsey
By Young Gentlewomen
The words made by Mr. Nat. Tate
The Music Composed by Mr. Henry Purcell.*

Singing, dancing and acting were part of the school curriculum for both girls and boys at this time. The year was 1689, and the date was possibly the 21st April (the coronation of William and Mary), or 30th April (Queen Mary's birthday). This was probably not the first performance: on stylistic and literary grounds it seems likely that the opera dates from a few years earlier. The style is that of Purcell's middle period (early 1680s), declamatory rather than florid. The prologue, for which the text survives in the 1689 libretto, may well have been intended as an allegorical compliment to the new Protestant monarchs; it also enabled Priest to add even more dances to the work! But an equally plausible theory is that it provides a general classical background to the main plot, Phoebus (= Apollo) being a god associated with the sun, with prophesy and archery, and Venus, associated with the moon, being the mother of Æneas. Thomas D'Urfey's epilogue, spoken by Lady Dorothy Burk, is also anti-Catholic: "Rome may allow strange tricks to please her sons, But we are Protestants and English nuns".

All three men were part of the closely-knit London theatre scene: Purcell (1659-95), organist of Westminster Abbey and composer of much music for the stage (this is his only opera as such); Priest (1655-1734), the leading dancing master of his day, who ran the school for "young gentlewomen"; and Tate (1652-1715), of "While shepherds watched" fame and author of a book on the education of young ladies, whose play *Brutus of Alba* (which combined Virgil's story of Dido and Æneas with the tale of the founding of Britain by Brutus) provided Purcell with his libretto. Our production is based on that performance, with dances based on Priest's own choreography and other contemporary sources.

After this performance Dido was probably not heard again in Purcell's lifetime; it was staged twice more in the early 1700s (in mangled versions with professional casts), and the only two surviving sources of the music date from half a century later (one is now at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the other in Tokyo). The first

modern performance was given on the 200th anniversary of Purcell's death at the Royal College of Music, conducted by Sir Charles Stanford.

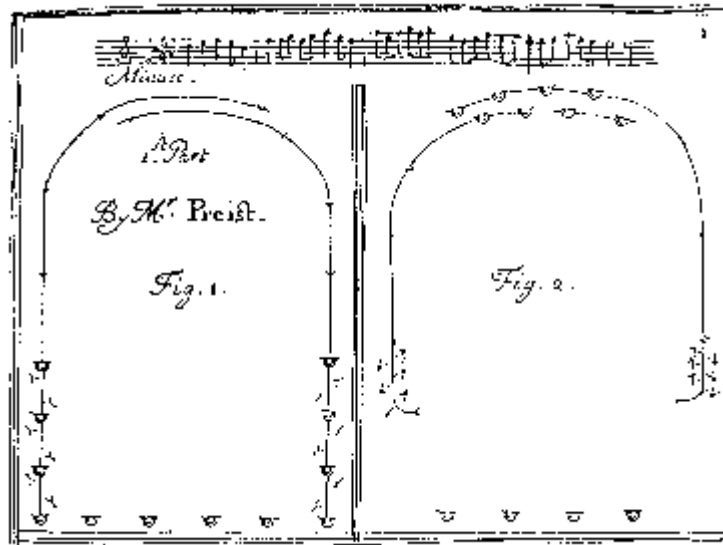
Many productions of *Dido* (and other early operas) are weak because the dances are treated as an optional extra, to be omitted at the whim of the producer or else handled in a modern, inappropriate manner. But the work is surely typical of the French opera-ballet tradition, each section ending with a set piece dance (Basque, Triumphant Dance, etc.). The 1689 libretto includes stage directions implying that elaborate effects, possibly even a flying-machine, were used.

Indeed, the art of dancing reached a zenith both artistically and scientifically in the seventeenth century. With the establishment of the *Academie Royale de Danse* by Louis XIV in 1661, dancing masters were given the means to classify, codify and refine their art form. This new style of dancing became known as the "French Noble Style" and was subsequently disseminated throughout the European courts by dancing masters who had trained in France.

Pierre Beauchamps, dancing master to Louis XIV, devised a graphic notation system called *Chorégraphie* in which the dance steps and figures of the Noble Style could be recorded. This notation system was quickly adopted by dancing masters to record the popular ballroom dances of the day as well as dances choreographed for the theatre. More than 300 notated dances have survived in either published or manuscript form.

The French Noble Style of Dance became popular in England following the restoration of Charles II to the throne. Dance training was considered an ideal method for a "person of quality" to improve his or her deportment, grace, confidence and social skills. Many English dancing masters flourished during this period such as Josias Priest who choreographed *Dido* and *Æneas* for the young ladies enrolled at his boarding school in Chelsea. The dances from the 1689 performance have not survived, and period dance treatises and notated dances were used as basis for the choreography of the Oxford Girls' Choir production.

One notated dance by Priest does survive, however, published in Edmund Pemberton's *An Essay for the Improvement of Dancing; Being a Collection of Figure Dances... Compos'd by the most Eminent Masters* (1711). This is a figured Minuet for twelve ladies, and it is used as the basis for "The Triumphant Dance" at the end of Act I in our production.

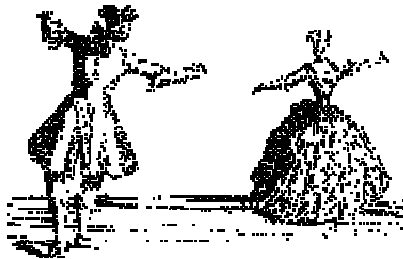


The start of Priest's minuet as given in E. Pemberton's *Essay*

Dido and Æneas is unique in having only one male character (even the sailor is a soprano in the earliest sources), which strengthens the argument that it was written for Priest's school. This and the fact that the libretto is at several removes from Virgil's original may be why Æneas makes just three appearances in the opera, and doesn't even have an aria. We can assume that the original audience were able to draw on their familiarity with the *Aeneid* (where the balance is the other way round) to fill in the gaps. With this knowledge, Dido's now famous lament can be heard in the context of the loss of what has been for her an all-consuming love, a love that has led her to betray her promise to her dead husband, lose the respect of her court and lose sight of her vision for Carthage.

To refresh your memory: in the *Aeneid*, before Dido appears we have learned how she escaped from Tyre after the murder of the king (her husband) and has come with a band of followers to found a new city at Carthage. When she appears it is in the role of queen, active, admired, beautiful and attended with all the honours of her royal condition. She receives Æneas and the Trojans who have been wandering the seas for many years after the fall of Troy, with generous sympathy. But almost at once she begins to be overcome by an obsessive love for Æneas inflicted on her by the Gods. She tries to resist this love out of obedience to a vow to her dead husband that she will remain faithful to him and because to be the slave of desire offends her self-respect and sense of dignity. But by a fatal combination of circumstances (contrived again by a higher power) the two of them are brought together alone during a hunting expedition (a picnic in the opera) and Æneas becomes her lover. From now on they live openly together as lovers. Dido is wholly absorbed in him, and under the influence of her personality and beauty he begins to forget his destiny: to found the new Troy. The Gods' intervention persuades Æneas that he must leave Carthage. Knowing the intensity of Dido's feelings he delays telling her of his plans to leave and as a result she hears of his plans to leave before he comes to her. A dreadful scene follows in which Æneas, himself in great distress and controlling himself with difficulty, can do no more than acknowledge his debt to her and remind her that he is

not a free agent but subject to a higher authority. He begs her not to make his parting harder for both of them. He makes no reference of his feelings for her or of the reason for keeping his plans to leave a secret. After her angry reply she is left alone, shaken and afraid.



The minuet: presentation of both hands