

Dido & Æneas, 2002

29 & 30 June 2002, Mansfield College Oxford

28 August, Scuola Elementare di Santa Maria, Revine Lago

30 August, Madonna del'Orto (Sala dei mercanti), Venice



Oxford Girls' Choir

Oxford Baroque Players

(leader Marshall Marcus)

producer Victoria Couper

dance director Alice Armitage

musical director Richard

Vendome

choreography reconstructed

after Priest by Nancy Walker and Ian Brener

prologue music reconstructed after Purcell by Richard Vendome

cast in order of appearance

Phoebus	Miranda Jewess/Caz Henshaw
1st Nereid	Elena Marcus
2nd Nereid	Gaia Marcus
Venus	Charlotte Roberts/Katie Birtill
Spring	Sasha Brown
1st Shepherdess	Louisa Nye
2nd Shepherdess	Clare McQuitty
Dido	Catherine Young
Belinda	Charlotte Roberts/Clare McQuitty
2nd woman	Hannah Nye/Alice Armitage
Æneas	Benjamin Thompson
Sorceress	Victoria Couper
1st witch	Sasha Brown/Hannah Nye
2nd witch	Katie Birtill/Louisa Nye
Spirit of Mercury	Gaia Marcus/Imogen Gardam
Sailor	Sophie Kent/Daisy Venables
"Lady Dorothy Burk"	Louisa Nye

courtiers

Laura Addison, Lucinda Allen, Alice Armitage, Katie Birtill, Sasha Brown, Catherine Crosse, Caz Henshaw, Clare McQuitty, Gaia Marcus, Emily Moughton, Bonnie Mylrea-Lowndes, Hannah Nye, Louisa Nye, Rita Oldenbourg, Charlotte Roberts, Alike Salter

witches and furies

Eleanor Armitage, Elizabeth Barrett, Melissa Bori, Iryna Boubriak, Alice Brewer, Julia Callaway, Nicola Cutts, Rosie Dilnot, Marusa Dudareva, Anna Glockner, Rebecca Glockner, Nyamoi Fall-Taylor, Anna Fries, Imogen Gardam, Emma Gullifer, Miranda Jewess, Lucy Kroll, Elena Marcus, Tamara Smith, Hermione Thompson, Magda Walczak, Alice Warder, Kimberley Waechtler

sailors/Æneas' attendants

Sophie Kent, Daisy Venables

male chorus

Alan Armitage, Peter Brown, Roger Cutts, Robert Gullifer, Adrian Inscoe, Peter Kent

Oxford Baroque Ensemble

violin 1	Marshall Marcus (leader), Simon Kodurand
violin 2	Jim O'Toole, Giovanna del Perugia
viola	Ruth Player
cello	Jenny Bullock
bass	Alix Scott
continuo	Richard Vendome

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. 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, of which the only copy survives 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.

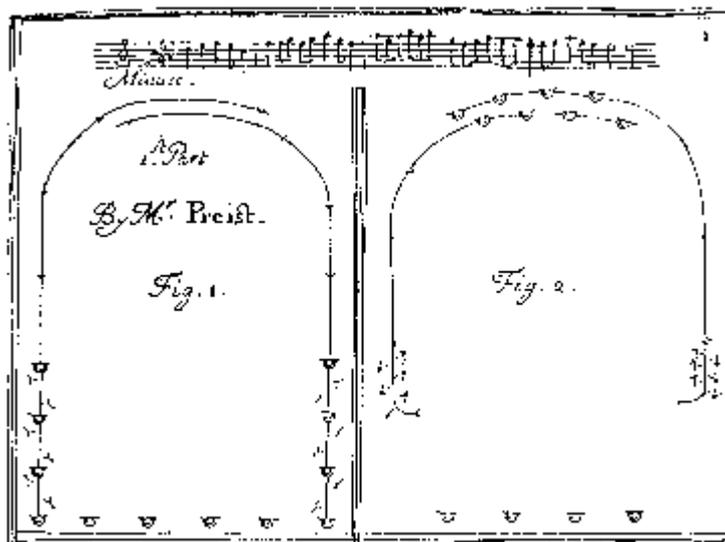
Singing, dancing and acting were part of the school curriculum for both girls and boys at this time. The year was 1689, and the event may have taken place to mark the coronation of William and Mary (21st April), or Queen Mary's birthday (30th April). This was probably not the first performance: we now think that the work dates from about 1684; the music is more typical of Purcell's earlier style, and the libretto makes several references to contemporary events, even the well-publicised exhibition of a crocodile in London at the time ("weeps the deceitful crocodile" - Act 3).

The allegorical prologue, which survives in the 1689 libretto, may have been intended to honour the new Protestant monarchs. 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".

Purcell, Priest and Tate were part of the closely-knit London theatre scene: Henry Purcell (1659-95), organist of Westminster Abbey and composer of much incidental music for the stage (this is his only opera as such); Josias Priest (1655-1734), the leading dancing master of his day, who ran a finishing school for girls; and Nahum Tate (1652-1715), of "While shepherds watched" fame and author of a book on the education of young ladies, whose play Brutus of Alba combined the tale of the founding of Britain by Brutus with Virgil's story. After 1689 Dido was probably not heard again in Purcell's lifetime; it was staged twice more in the early 1700s, in mangled versions, and the only two surviving sources of the music date from half a century later (one is now at the Bodleian Library, the other in Tokyo). The first modern performance was given at the Royal College of Music in 1895 on the 200th anniversary of Purcell's death, conducted by Stanford.

Many productions of Dido lack structure because the dancing is either handled in a modern, inappropriate manner, or omitted all together, ignoring the fact that the work is surely typical of the French opera-ballet tradition, each section ending with a "set piece" dance (Basque, Triumphant Dance, etc.). 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. 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, confidence and social skills. The dances from the 1689 performance have not survived, but period dance treatises and notated dances were used as basis for the choreography of our 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 Minuet for twelve ladies is used for "The Triumphant Dance" at the end of Act I.

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

