

A Kalmus Classic Edition

Henry

PURCELL

DIDO AND AENEAS

An Opera in Three Acts

VOCAL SCORE

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PREFACE.

SIR JOHN HAWKINS in his "History of Music" gives the following account of the production of "Dido and Æneas":—"One, Mr. Josias Priest, a celebrated dancing master, and a composer of stage dances, kept a boarding-school for young gentlewomen in Leicester Fields. The nature of his profession inclining him to dramatic representations, he got Tate to write, and Purcell to set to music, a little Drama called 'Dido and Æneas.' Purcell was then of the age of nineteen, but the music of this Opera had so little appearance of a puerile essay, that there was scarce a musician in England who would not have thought it an honour to have been the author of it. The exhibition of this little piece by the young gentlewomen of the school, to a select audience of their parents and friends, was attended with general applause, no small part whereof was considered as the due of Purcell." This error of Sir John Hawkins in stating the composition to have been the work of Purcell in his nineteenth year has been adopted by later writers, notably Professor Taylor in a preface to the Opera published by the Musical Antiquarian Society in 1841, and also by Mr. Husk in his notice of Purcell in Grove's Dictionary; but there is abundant evidence to show that the Opera was written for a special occasion. D'Urfey's "New Poems," published in 1690, contains "An epilogue to the Opera of 'Dido and Æneas,' performed at Mr. Priest's boarding-school at Chelsey. Spoken by the Lady Dorothy Burk." We know from an advertisement that Priest removed to Chelsea in 1680.* The *London Gazette*, November 25. 1680, has the following:—"Josias Priest, dancing master, who kept a school of gentlewomen in Leicester Fields, is removed to the Great School House at Chelsey, that was Mr. Portman's. There will continue the same masters, and others, to the improvement of the said School." The library of the Sacred Harmonic Society, now happily preserved in the Royal College of Music, contains an original libretto of the Opera, with the following title—

AN OPERA

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.

This libretto was unknown when the Musical Antiquarian Society published the Opera with prefaces by Professor Taylor and Mr. G. A. Macfarren. The latter says: "Unable to meet with a copy of the Drama separate from the music, and the MS. scores to which I have had access presenting but the mere words and the names of the characters who sing them, I have ventured to make such divisions of the Acts as were suggested to me by apparent musical climaxes and by the progress of the plot." The discovery of the book of the Drama showed that a considerable amount of music was wanting in the scores consulted by Macfarren. As recently as 1870 Dr. Rimbault published an edition of "Dido and Æneas," and he, having referred to the book of the Drama in the Sacred Harmonic Library, noted that certain pieces of music were wanting, but was unable, notwithstanding diligent search, to supply the deficiency.

Since then an old MS. score of the Opera, written in Purcell's time, and a set of instrumental and vocal parts have come into my possession; these I have collated with a fine MS. score in the Rev. Sir F. A. G. Ouseley's library—this latter was written by John Traversa about the year 1720. Both these scores supply the missing music, which is now first printed. Certain points in the scores are worthy of remark—in the first place, the whole of the solo parts, excepting that of *Æneas*, are written in the G clef, recalling to mind the fact that Purcell composed the music for a performance by "Young Gentlewomen"; secondly, the

* Purcell, born in 1658. would be 22 in 1680. † Nat doubtless a misprint for Nah.

PREFACE.

MSS. agree in naming *Dido's* attendant *Belinda* not *Anna*, thus following the printed libretto. Macfarren's scores had *Anna*, and it is probable Sir John Hawkins never saw an early or authentic score, for he says—"the song in the *Orpheus Britannicus* 'Ah! Belinda' is one of the airs in it ('Dido and Æneas'). In the original Opera the initial words are 'Ah! my Anna.'" My own and the Rev. Sir F. A. G. Ouseley's scores give various stage directions, marks of time and expression, the latter are few but always in English, to these I have added others in Italian, to enable the reader to distinguish them from Purcell's own.

Professor Taylor in his preface speaks of the surprising originality of Purcell, of his quick and accurate perception of the use and power of music regarded as a dramatic agent; these qualities are very discernible in the earlier scores of "Dido." We find that the composer made many of his scenes continuous, thus showing himself far in advance of his age and contemporaries. In setting the libretto to recitative instead of spoken dialogue, he had no model or precedent to work upon—there had never been seen or heard in England an opera consisting entirely of music. Lawes, Lanieri, Locke, and Banister had written detached recitatives, but these cannot compare with those by Purcell in pathos, passion, and dramatic force.

It is curious that none of Purcell's contemporaries, with a solitary exception, followed his example of perfect Opera composing—the exception was that of Lewis Grabu, who, a few years later, in 1687, set to music Dryden's Opera "Albion and Albanus," and entirely discarded spoken dialogue. This work is sometimes quoted by Continental writers as the first opera performed in England. Purcell seems never to have ventured on the production of another real opera, and Grabu's opera achieved no success, we may therefore conclude that the times were not ripe for true music drama. The choruses in "Dido and Æneas" are remarkable for their melodiousness and adaptability for stage purposes. One chorus, "In our deep vaulted cell," was evidently performed by two sets of singers, one in view of the audience and the other behind the scenes, an ingenious novelty which must have surprised and delighted on its first performance. The final chorus is particularly beautiful, forming an appropriate close to *Dido's* death-scene, in which she sings one of the most pathetic songs ever composed. In this song, as in several other instances in "Dido and Æneas," the composer has voluntarily fettered himself by adopting the scholastic custom of composing on a ground-bass, and it is curious to note that the theme is nearly identical with the ground-bass used by J. S. Bach to the "Crucifixus" in his B minor Mass.

Purcell's original orchestration is for two violins, viola, bass, and harpsichord. Some of the recitatives are accompanied by the strings, in other cases, and also with some of the airs, the only accompaniment is that indicated for the harpsichord with figured bass. Doubtless the composer's limited orchestra was necessitated by the space available at Mr. Priest's school; in other dramatic works we find that he used three hautboys, trumpets, bassoons, and drums. Dr. Rimbault supposed that the part of *Belinda* was written for a male alto, and hazarded a conjecture that Purcell, noted for his beautiful alto voice and style, sang it himself; but we now see that the part was composed for a soprano, and it is far more likely that at the first performance Purcell presided at the harpsichord, and supplied the necessary filling up accompaniment.

The author of the Drama was Nahum Tate, born in Dublin in 1652, best known as co-author with Nicholas Brady of a metrical version of the Psalms of David. "Dido and Æneas" appears to have been Tate's first production for the stage, and some of his lines are not too elegant, for example—

Our plot has took,
The Queen's forsook.

It may be as well to state that, with the exception of the Overture, every number in the following pages differs more or less from the incomplete version issued by the "Musical Antiquarian Society." The Triumphant dance, the Echo dance, the Ritornelle, the Witches' dance, and a Recitative are all now printed for the first time.

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DIDO AND ÆNEAS

OVERTURE.

Adagio.

PIANO. *p*

f *pp*

Allegro moderato.

f

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems. The first system is marked 'Adagio' and 'PIANO. p'. The second system continues the 'Adagio' tempo. The third system includes dynamic markings 'f' and 'pp'. The fourth system continues the 'Adagio' tempo. The fifth system is marked 'Allegro moderato.' and 'f'. The score is in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature (C). The piano part is written in a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system has a 'PIANO.' marking on the left and a 'p' dynamic marking. The second system has a double bar line. The third system has a double bar line and dynamic markings 'f' and 'pp'. The fourth system has a double bar line. The fifth system has a double bar line and dynamic marking 'f'. The tempo changes from 'Adagio.' to 'Allegro moderato.' between the fourth and fifth systems.