



Easy n Fun Piano

PURCELL
DIDO AND AENEAS (1689)

by
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“Dido and Aeneas in Full Score” edited by William H. Cummings

PURCELL: DIDO AND AENEAS (1689)

Dido and Aeneas was performed in 1689 although there are suggestions that it may have been performed earlier. This opera belongs to a tradition of domestic masques (like Blow's *Venus and Adonis* 1682). Blow was Purcell's teacher and was also interested in writing brief English *opera seria* (nothing is spoken). Similarities between the two composers include:

- Prologue (now lost)
- French style overture
- Three acts
- Soprano and baritone protagonists with extended passages of expressive declamatory dialogue
- The chorus has a prominent role and is required to dance (1689 version of the score mentions 17 dances)
- Both works end with situations of great pathos, set to heart-rending music
- Same distinctive tone created by the brevity of the movements and speed of action
- Duration of approximately one hour

HISTORY

- Written by Purcell (music) and Nathan Tate (libretto) with the first recorded performance at Josiah Priest's Boarding School for Young Ladies
- The cast was originally female however there are suggestions that later productions used male voices
- Josiah Priest was a dancing teacher so dances were included
- Purcell was fond of the French rondeau form (ABACA or AABACAA) in dance-songs, such as 'Fear no danger to ensue'. The slower first part (A) features dotted rhythms whilst the second part (B) moves at a faster pace

PLOT

Tragic love story of Dido (Queen of Carthage) and Aeneas (Trojan Prince) with 'narration' by Belinda.

Act I	Dido's Palace	Belinda and the Court urge Dido to express her feelings for Aeneas; he reciprocates.
	The Cave	The Sorceress and witches lay out their plots to ruin Dido and Aeneas.
Act II	The Grove	Dido, Aeneas and court celebrate the union, then hurry to town when a storm breaks up the hunting party. Aeneas is confronted by the Sorceress' elf.
Act III	The Dock	Aeneas' sailors are preparing to leave with excitement.
	The Cave	The Sorceress and witches celebrate and plan to create storms to sink Aeneas' fleet.
	Dido's Palace	The lovers part followed by Dido's death.

ORDER OF SONGS

Act	Title
Act I – Dido's Palace	Overture Shake the clouds Ah Belinda Grief increases When monarchs unite Whence could so much virtue spring Fear no danger See, see your royal guest appears Cupid only throws the dart If not for mine, for empire's sake Pursue thy conquest, love To the hills and the vales Triumphing dance
Act I – Cave	Prelude / Wayward sisters Harms our delight The Queen of Carthage Ho ho ho Ruined ere the set of sun Ho ho ho But ere we this perform In our deep vaulted cell Echo dance
Act II – Grove	Ritornelle Thanks to these lonesome vales Oft she visits Behold upon my bended spear Haste, haste Stay! Prince
Act III – Docks	Prelude / Come away fellow sailors Sailors dance See the flags and streamers Our next motion Destruction's our delight Witches dance
Act III – Palace	Your counsel all is urg'd But death, alas Great minds against themselves conspire Thy hand, Belinda When I am laid With drooping wings

INSTRUMENTS AND PERFORMERS

Soloists: Dido, Belinda, Aeneas, Sorceress, 2 witches, Elf, 1st Sailor
Chorus: SATB for witches, court and sailors
Instruments: Violins (1 and 2), viola, bass, Harpsichord continuo

TIME SIGNATURES

- Most pieces are in 3/4 or 4/4 however the following are exceptions:
 - 3/8 *Ho ho ho*
 - 3/2 *When I am laid*
 - 2/2 *Sailors dance* and *Destruction's our delight*
 - 4/4 – 3/4 – 4/4 *Witches dance*

INSTRUMENTATION

- Recitatives are secco (sparsely accompanied) by bass and harpsichord
 - *See, see your royal guest appears*
 - *Grief increases*
- Recitatives may also include strings for contrast and to add dramatic tension
 - *Behold upon my bended spear*
 - *Wayward sisters*
 - *Ruin'd ere the set of the sun*
- Strings will follow the unison chorus or the voice parts in canon
 - *When monarchs unite (unison)*
 - *Cupid only throws the dart (vocal canon)*
- Da Capo arias may be accompanied by bass and harpsichord or by the full orchestra
 - *Oft she visits (bass and harpsichord)*
 - *When I am laid (full orchestra)*
- Duets possess a canonic quality
 - *Fear no danger*
 - *But ere we this perform*

GROUND BASS

- Purcell adds extra dimension by articulating the drama with four ground bass airs:
 - *Ah Belinda*
 - *Triumphing dance*
 - *Oft she visits*
 - *When I am laid aka Dido's Lament – set to a chromatic version of the passacaglia bass*
- These create a sense of unity and inevitability through the constant use of V-I
- Allows melodic phrases of different lengths to be used, creating contrast
- Differences in melody and harmony create “typically English” dissonances that add to the atmosphere – *When I am laid*

KEYS AND TONALITY

Chromaticism

- Used throughout the opera for the impending sense of doom, especially in Dido's Lament

Major Keys

- Used for happy and positive emotions
 - *Fear no danger* C major
 - *To the hills and vales* C major
 - *Ho ho ho* C major and F major
 - *Destruction's our delight* B flat major

Minor Keys

- Used for sadness and the Witches' introduction
 - *Shake the Clouds* C minor
 - *Wayward Sisters* F minor
 - *Ah Belinda!* C minor
 - *When I am Laid* G minor

FOREIGN INFLUENCES

- Strong French influence (Lully) is shown through the opening 2-part overture that moves from dotted rhythms to running quavers
- The syncopation in the French styled duet *Fear no danger* also shows a familiarity with Lully's work

DANCE MOVEMENTS

- Dances are used to introduce or end scenes:
 - *Triumphing dance* precedes the Cave scene
 - *Echo dance of the Furies* precedes the transition to Act II in *The Grove*
 - *Ritornelle* indicates the beginning of Act II
 - *Prelude* indicates the beginning of Act III
 - *Sailors dance* precedes the transition to the Cave
 - *Witches dance* precedes the return to Dido's Palace

DEVICES FOR WORD PAINTING

- 'Shake', 'Languish', 'Storm'
- Recitatives are used to further the plot
- Chorus provides commentary
- Ground Bass is used to imply movement and inevitability i.e. *Oft she visits*
- Echo Chorus i.e. *In our deep vaulted cell* (side note: it is believed that in the original production, Purcell actually used a hidden chorus to add to the atmosphere of the work and enhance the sense of drama)
- Dotted rhythms used to create tension i.e. 'laid', 'prest'
- Semiquavers imply movement i.e. 'storm' and in *Haste, haste*
- Minor phrases i.e. 'cool shady fountains' in otherwise major keys



MUSICAL QUOTES

French Style Overture

Opening Theme: French Style Overture Part A



Opening Theme: French Style Overture Part B



Onomatopoeia

Ho Ho Ho Chorus



Dotted Rhythms and Melismas

Shake the Clouds



Ah Belinda



When I Am Laid



