

## ‘Performing *Dido and Aeneas*’

by MIGUEL ESTEBAN

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‘Producing an opera always brings a number of problems. Producing a Baroque opera doubles the number’.<sup>1</sup> With these words, Robert Savage began an article where he analyses the problems of producing Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. Although Savage largely approaches his analysis from the perspective of a stage director, his statement certainly applies to the musical director. Baroque opera poses a large number of issues. First and foremost, because the performer of

Baroque music has to actively participate in the completion of the music - composers of the time were scarce in their indications and expected musicians to understand performance practices that were not ‘written out’ in the paper. Therefore,



*Dido Receiving Aeneas and Cupid Disguised as Ascanius*  
Francisco Solimena, 1720s. National Gallery, London

many decisions have to be taken by the performer and, although it is possible to find guidelines about conventions and practices of the time, there is plenty of room for discrepancies and matters of personal preference. This should not, by any means, be taken as a disadvantage or a downside of Baroque music. On the contrary, composers of the time looked for the active participation of the performer, and ornamentation, improvisation and colour inflection were in some respect a measuring rate of the performer’s musicianship. Thus, modern performances and recordings of *Dido and Aeneas*, whether ‘historically aware’ or mainstream, differ -sometimes radically- in their approach towards performing aspects. In the particular case of *Dido and Aeneas*, this discrepancy is especially enhanced by the mystery surrounding the origins of the piece and the lack of authoritative sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Savage, R.: ‘Producing *Dido and Aeneas*: An Investigation into Sixteen Problems’ in Burden, M. (ed.) *The Purcell Companion* (London: 1995), p. 445

Knowing the background of a musical work is essential in order to take decisions affecting performance. However, the relative lack of information about *Dido and Aeneas* has lead performers to ‘guess’ on interpretative aspects more than it would have happened with other works. Traditionally, it was thought that *Dido and Aeneas* was first performed in 1689 at ‘Mr Josias Priest’s Boarding School at Chelsea by young Gentlewomen’.<sup>2</sup> However, the appearance of a printed libretto of a revival in Chelsea in 1684 of Blow’s *Venus and Adonis* – in many respects the model for *Dido and Aeneas*- has lead some scholars to suggest that *Dido* could have been composed several years before. Bruce Wood and Andrew Pinnock have suggested -mainly on stylistic grounds- that *Dido and Aeneas* was revived at the Chelsea school and had been composed, as was *Venus and Adonis*, for a court performance before Charles II some years before. The ongoing debate surrounding the dating of *Dido* is not futile and certainly has profound consequences for the performer as will be seen.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this essay is to set the grounds for a historically informed performance of *Dido and Aeneas*. The following suggestions for performance are drawn upon conventions and practices known to have been used during Purcell’s lifetime. But, as with any other composer, there is inevitably a degree of uncertainty and also personal preference. In order to illustrate the points of this discourse, I have provided musical examples from the score and from several recordings. These recordings are essentially contrasting and include both mainstream and historically informed performances. However, what will emerge is that even those performances claiming to be historically aware may not be so engaged with relevant historical practices.

### ***Choosing the text***

One of the major problems that editors face when producing an edition of *Dido and Aeneas* is that there are no extant manuscripts in Purcell’s hand. The earliest music source –known as the “Tenbury” manuscript- dates from several

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<sup>2</sup> Printed libretto for the 1689 performance of *Dido and Aeneas*, reproduced in H. Purcell: *Dido and Aeneas*, Margaret Laurie (ed.), (Novello, 1979)

<sup>3</sup> Wood, B., and Pinnock, A., ‘Unscarr’d by Turning Times?’ The Dating of Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* *Early Music*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Aug. 1992), 372-390

decades after the work was composed and was itself copied from another lost source dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century, years after Purcell's death. The "Tenbury" and the other manuscript copies of the work differ also from a surviving copy of the libretto printed for the 1689 Chelsea performance. Consequently, editors have had the difficult task of making each of these contradictory sources come to an agreement. From the point of view of the performer, it is very important to be aware of this situation. Arguably, no edition is ever a definitive text -and this becomes apparent when looking at the editions of *Dido and Aeneas*. Therefore, whatever edition is selected, the performer will have to approach it critically, and a comparison between the most representative or authoritative editions is probably the best solution.<sup>4</sup>

The choice of edition is not an easy one and will, in many respects, depend on the degree to which a performer understands baroque performance practices. Nowadays there are more editions orientated towards specialised performers and, thus, editorial additions are kept to a minimum. Absence of dynamic suggestions, articulation and realised figured bass are a common feature of these editions. The edition of *Dido and Aeneas* prepared by Clifford Bartley for King's Music falls into this category. However, this type of scholarly editions might be of no help to a student or a non-specialist. These will find performing editions more suitable to their needs. Widely available performing editions of *Dido and Aeneas* such as Dent's for Oxford University Press (revised in 1989 by Ellen T. Harris) or Margaret Laurie's for Novello (1979) may solve problems of dynamics, articulation and tempo but represent a very personal interpretation of the work that is, in my opinion, outdated in some respects. The indications suggested below for a performance of *Dido and Aeneas* have been based on a critical consideration of the different editions available and do not take for granted editorial additions.

One of the most characteristic features of performing editions is that they include a continuo realisation. This can be very helpful when a player able to realise figured bass is not available. However, the realisations in both the

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the sources for *Dido and Aeneas* see R. Shay and R. Thompson, *Purcell Manuscripts, The Principal Music Sources* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 232-234

aforementioned performing editions tend to be overcrowded and, at times, rather difficult to play.<sup>5</sup> It suffices to have a look at the instructions on thorough bass playing given by Blow, Handel or Lempe to realise that continuo playing is very closely related to the harmonic rhythm of the music and, therefore, should be kept fairly simple. Over-elaborated continuo parts do not reflect realistically how continuo instruments are played *ex tempore*. Also, this “excess” of notation is often an indication that the editor has in mind a much slower tempo than would be preferred.

The inconsistency between the sources of *Dido and Aeneas* brings forth other issues. For example, in the “Tenbury” manuscript, the Second Woman has a lesser role than is given in the 1689 libretto, and most of her text is sung by Belinda instead (see fig. 1, for example). In the same line, the First Sailor is given in treble clef in the “Tenbury” score, implying that should be sung by a soprano. However, the role is normally assigned to a tenor in performances and recordings of the piece. While decisions about these roles would not have, in my opinion, much repercussion on the drama, there is another more significant case. Curtis Price and Irena Cholij have suggested the possibility that the role of Sorceress may have been originally sung by a transvestite. Following this suggestion, some conductors such as Trevor Pinnock or Christopher Hogwood, have assigned the role to basses in their recordings. Nevertheless, however much academic ground there might be for their choice –and there is no conclusive evidence on the matter- it seems to me that the drama benefits from having the confrontation of two women in the main roles.<sup>6</sup>

Another important issue concerning *Dido and Aeneas* is that the work has not survived in its complete form. The 1689 libretto has revealed that there was originally a Prologue to the opera and that some music is missing from the end of Act II. The absence of the Prologue does not have implications on the opera due to its contingency and patent allegoric meaning. However, the missing music at the end of Act II presents us with a more practical problem. As it

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<sup>5</sup> See numbers 1, 11 or 31 in Margaret Laurie’s edition (1979); also, numbers 10, 12, 37 in Edward Dent’s edition (1925).

<sup>6</sup> C. Price, and I. Cholij, ‘Dido’s Bass Sorceress’ *The Musical Times*, Vol. 127, No. 1726 (Nov. 1986), 615-618

stands, Act II would finish after the scene between Aeneas and Mercury ('Stay Prince and hear') in the key of A minor and it would be followed by the Sailors scene in B flat major. If left like that, the harmonic progression carefully laid out by Purcell would be spoiled. There are, nevertheless, some possible solutions to this problem. One is to reconstruct the missing parts –a chorus and a dance– with other music by Purcell –this is a solution taken by Christie, Jacobs, Pinnock, Hogwood and Wentz. Another is to return to D minor by simply descending by steps, as done by Andrew Parrott. Whatever solution is taken, it seems coherent to finish Act II of *Dido and Aeneas* in the key of D minor. However, some conductors such as Anthony Lewis and Raymond Leppard in both of his recordings have done nothing about it.

### ***Choosing the Instruments***

It has been mentioned previously that the dating of *Dido* could carry important consequences for the performers. One issue regards the type and number of



instruments selected for a performance. If one was going to try to reproduce the circumstances of the first performance of *Dido and Aeneas* –whatever this means– then the date and occasion for which this work was composed would be very relevant. It certainly would make a difference whether the opera was composed for the court, with its Chapel Royal and the “Twenty Four Violins”, or for a more modest local Boarding School. However, the performer will have to consider other practicalities

such as the dimensions and acoustics of the concert hall in which the piece will be performed. Recently, Paul McCreesh wisely made use of no less than two harpsichords and three theorbos to play the continuo in a performance of *The*

*Fairy Queen* at the Royal Albert Hall<sup>7</sup>, despite the fact that Purcell would have never seen such display for a performance at Dorset Garden Theatre in 1692.

*Dido and Aeneas* can be performed with as little as a string quartet, a harpsichord (perhaps a theorbo) and a guitar. Such a small group of instruments produces a characteristic sound and resonance, and the music gains in flexibility, as can be heard in Wentz's recording. From there, all sorts of decisions have been made by conductors about the size and the instruments that form the ensemble. Considerations about number and type of instruments can be equally applied to modern and period instruments. In terms of number -even while considering the acoustics and dimensions of a concert hall- a very large number of strings tends to result in a distinctive change of colour, as can be heard in recordings such as Leppard's and Lewis. In fact, it is often the case that ensembles using a large number of instruments –and modern- also tend to use more vibrato and a less clear articulation. It is my opinion, nevertheless, that the choice of modern or period instruments is not at all that important *if* other conventions about rhythm, articulation, bowing and melodic inflection are followed.

In the Baroque period, it was a common practice that other instruments joined the string ensemble, even when there was not a specific part written for them. Traditionally, oboes and recorders accompany the violins and the bassoon doubles the bass. Andrew Parrot advises against the use of an oboe and bassoon in *Dido and Aeneas*, pointing out that these would be anachronistic and more appropriate to Handelian practices, as the oboe was not introduced in England until the 1670s and only consistently included in Purcell's scores from 1690. Also, the use of a 16' bass instrument would be inappropriate since there is no evidence that Purcell ever knew of such an instrument. On the other hand, I would argue in favour of using recorders in certain places. The pastoral setting of 'The Grove' scene and the music of 'The Ships' scene are particularly suitable

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<sup>7</sup> H. Purcell, *The Fairy Queen* Gabrieli Consort and Players, Paul McCreesh. Royal Albert Hall (17<sup>th</sup> July 2005)



for recorders, and Blow's *Venus and Adonis*, the model for *Dido*, expressly makes use of recorders at similar points in the drama.<sup>8</sup>

The normal choice for continuo instrument is the harpsichord, although the theorbo is an appropriate alternative. The choice remains one of personal taste. It would be even possible to combine different continuo instruments, as cleverly done by René Jacobs or William Christie -harpsichord, theorbo and organ are alternatively assigned to particular scenes or individual characters.

A final consideration about pitch has to be made. In Purcell's time, there was not a standard pitch in the same way as we more or less have today. Andrew Parrott has shown that pitches could range from as low as  $a' = 390$  to the "modern"  $a' = 440-442$  - his personal choice for *Dido* is  $a' = 403$ . Besides, questions of pitch will very much depend on the choice of instruments. Modern string instruments are prepared to support a greater tension, and conductors are probably aware that modern instrument players are not very keen on tuning at a lower pitch than the usual  $a' = 440-442$  because lowering the pitch would imply having to "work" with the pegs of the instrument, and this might bring difficulties when putting the strings back to their original tuning.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Choosing the right tempo***

In Baroque music, setting the right tempo is always a challenge for the performer. It is common for composers to leave no tempo indications at all and, when they do, these often have ambiguous meanings. For example, some composers did not agree on the relative pace at which tempo indications such as *lento*, *largo* or *adagio* should be taken, and for this reason, the best indicator of tempo is the character of the music itself.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A. Parrott, 'Performing Purcell' in Burden, M. (ed.), *The Purcell Companion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 404, 412-13

<sup>9</sup> A. Parrott, 'Performing Purcell' pp. 413-416

<sup>10</sup> R. Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, pp. 15-17

Time signatures can also be a useful way to determine the speed at which the music should be taken. However, the performer should bear in mind that time signatures can differ from their modern counterparts. Indications such as  $2/3$  and  $3/2$  are not technically time signatures as we understand them today but indicators of tempo proportions between two movements *Dido and Aeneas* is a work that favours continuity and, therefore, includes many examples of tempo relations that should be considered. Looking at fig. 1, the entry of the Second Woman should be taken at twice the speed at which Belinda was singing  $(\downarrow = \uparrow)$  or *dupla* relation; in the same way, the Chorus ‘When Monarchs unite’ should follow at the same beat speed  $(\downarrow = \downarrow)$ , a *sesquialtera* relation. This example shows that the conductor, by looking at a longer span of music and understanding their tempo relations, can be able to determine fairly accurately a sensible tempo for the beginning of the scene.<sup>11</sup>

Particularly problematic is the distinction between the signs  $\mathfrak{C}$ ,  $\mathfrak{C}$   $\mathfrak{D}$  and  $\mathfrak{C}$ .

In Baroque music, common time and *alla breve* time signatures have been used by many composers without making any distinction between them. In the case of Purcell, however, there is some evidence of the way he understood these signs. In the revision that Purcell made in 1694 of the twelfth edition of Playford’s *A Brief Introduction to the Skill of Musick*, ‘we find  $\mathfrak{C}$  as “the slowest”, with four beats two of which go to each tick (probably one second) of a “large Chamber-Clock”;  $\mathfrak{C}$  “a little faster”;  $\mathfrak{D}$  and  $\mathfrak{C}$  “quickest of all”.<sup>12</sup>

Undoubtedly, this is a very helpful remark for the performer of Purcell’s music and one wonders what took Rene Jacobs to take such a slow tempo in ‘Cupid only throws the dart’.

<sup>11</sup> R. Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, pp. 11-13

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in R. Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, p. 13



In a work like *Dido and Aeneas* where the action is carried through declamation, inevitably, there is room for tempo flexibility. Tempo changes are also a means to underscore word painting and other expressive devices. For example, after bar 3 (fig 1), a subtle stop could be introduced after Belinda sings ‘Then let me speak’ in order to stress the importance of her message.

**Fig. 1**

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system features Belinda and Dido. Belinda's line includes the lyrics: "Grief in-crea-ses by con-ceal-ing Mine ad-mits of no re-vea-ling Then let me speak. The Tro-jan guest In-to your". Dido's line includes: "Then let me speak. The Tro-jan guest In-to your". The piano accompaniment consists of chords and moving lines in the right and left hands.

The second system is for a [2nd Woman]. Her lyrics are: "ten-der Thoughts has prest. The great-est bles-sing Fate can give, Our Car-thage to se-cure and Troy re-vive, The great-est bles-sing Fate can give, Our Car-thage to se-cure, and Troy re-vive." The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic support.

The third system is a choral or instrumental section in 3/8 time. The lyrics are: "When Mon-archs u-nite how hap-py their State, They Tri-umph at once o'er their Foes and their Fate, When Mon-archs u-nite how hap-py their State, They Tri-umph at once o'er their Foes and their Fate, When Mon-archs u-nite how hap-py their State, They Tri-umph at once o'er their Foes and their Fate, When Mon-archs u-nite how hap-py their State, They Tri-umph at once o'er their Foes and their Fate." The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and chords.

### ***Rhythm and Articulation***

*Dido and Aeneas* is a fine example of the influences that Purcell absorbed from French and Italian music. The instrumental numbers in *Dido* are very much modelled on French music, while the vocal declamation is very much indebted to mid-seventeenth century Venetian opera. While this is helpful to know, we should be cautious before applying indiscriminately, for example, French rules on rhythm alteration or bowing. Nevertheless, while Purcell used foreign moulds, the music inside them is certainly more attached to the English tradition. In addition, we ignore what use English performers would make of foreign performance practices. Despite this word of caution, it is worth considering some conventions regarding inequality and other rhythmic alterations that may be applied to the music of *Dido and Aeneas*.

The usual instances in Baroque music where notated rhythms may be altered are those of overdotting and inequality. The obvious places for overdotting in *Dido* are in the opening bars of the Overture and the ‘Prelude for the Witches’ that opens ‘Act II’, where the dotted crotchets can be prolonged –as in a modern ‘double dot’- following the conventions of the Lullian French Overture. Inequality or, as defined by Robert Donington, ‘the unequal performance of notes notated equally’ also finds its place in *Dido*.<sup>13</sup> Inequality remains mostly up to the performer’s discretion although it is possible to find some clues in the music. Quavers moving by step are more likely to be suitable for inequality than those moving by leap and, on occasions, slurred quavers are an indication of reversed inequality (short-long type) as can be seen in fig. 2. Instances of inequality can be introduced in the *arioso* passages (fig. 3) although Purcell, unlike other composers, already tends to fully notate inequal rhythms in the vocal line.



<sup>13</sup> R. Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, pp. 42-65

The matter of articulation is one of vital importance for Baroque music and probably, the one most engaged with the “spirit” of this music. So many are the subtleties that one has to care for in *Dido and Aeneas* that it would be out of the scope of this essay to try to explain them in totality. As a general rule, however, instruments should proceed in what is known as the “ordinary movement”, playing separated notes but not as short as *staccato*. *Legato* and *staccato* should normally be saved for meaningful occasions. In ‘Cupid throws the dart’, most conductors prefer to opt for fast staccato crochets in order to imitate the action of a dart –not Jacobs as mentioned above. Other numbers, such as the famous Lament sung by Dido at the end of the opera, are more suitable for legato passages.

**Fig. 3**

'Shake the cloud'

Belinda

Fate your wish - es... does al - low;

Attached to articulation is the question of bowing. Although with many exceptions, an appropriate bowing should follow “The Rule of Down Bow”, i.e. down bow on strong beats.<sup>14</sup> It must be warned that the choice of modern or period instruments does affect the bowing on occasions. What would be easy to play with a Baroque bow, can be very problematic using a larger and heavier modern bow, as in cases where retake could be an option. Considering the fast speed of the music, the bowing in fig. 4a would be more inconvenient than the one suggested in fig. 4b.

**Fig. 4 a**

**Overture**

[Violin I]

**Fig. 4 b**

<sup>14</sup> Mary Cyr, *Performing Baroque Music*, (Aldershot : Scholar, 1992), pp. 128-131

## Expression

Indications for dynamics in *Dido and Aeneas* are scarce. Apart from a *soft* or *loud* here and there, the score is almost free from dynamic instructions. The choice of dynamics has then been left to the performer's discretion. Although there are not exact rules about dynamics, some points should be considered. *Crescendos* and *diminuendos* are possible and desirable, for instance, to subtly help shape the phrases, but variations of sound over a long period of time would certainly be out of style. There are several instances where echo effects are possible (see fig 5)—in other places echoes are expressly called for by Purcell such as in the chorus 'In a deep vaulted Cell' and the following 'Echo dance of Furies'. Another common option is to vary the dynamic range in repeats of music.

**Fig. 5**

'Scene the Ships'

1st Sailor 61

No ne-ver, No ne-ver  
(*f*) (*p*)

As it happens with many other variables, dynamics should also reflect the character of the music. For example, it seems reasonable to make a distinction in dynamics attending to the meaning of the text. In fig 6, piano is suggested when Dido sings 'How soft' in contrast to a louder and more sharply articulated 'and yet how fierce'. In the same line, Aeneas should sound more energetic when he is defying the Gods –'Yours be the blame ye Gods'- than when he shows total resignation for their mandate -'For I obey your will' (Act II, final scene).

**Fig. 6**

'Whence could so much virtue spring'

Dido 7

How soft, how soft in Peace, and yet how fierce, how fierce in Arms?  
(*p*) (*f*)

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Continuo playing should also be related to matters of expression and word painting. Despite the limitations of the harpsichord, dynamic changes can be achieved by selecting different stops, and also by *adding* or *taking* notes from the chord, sharpening or smoothing the rhythm or choosing carefully the register in which these are played. Since Purcell did not provide a figured bass for most of the score, the choice of chord can be sometimes open to interpretation, as could happen in ‘Your counsel all is urg’d in vain’ –on the words ‘To earth and heaven’.

### ***Ornamentation and improvisation***

As we know, Purcell gathered influences from both Italian and French music. In the Baroque period, ornamentation and improvisation were largely related to questions of national style. French music was renowned for its elaborate and fully notated ornamentation while Italian musicians were more prone to improvise “on the spot”.<sup>15</sup> However, the question remains to what extent did English performers follow these foreign practices. Regardless, there is only one true guidance for the performer of Baroque music: ornamentation was then - and still is- a question of taste. Having said that, it is also true that experience, common sense and comparison of music sources will show that some places are particularly suitable for the use of ornaments, such as cadential passages where trills or mordents are a sensible choice (fig. 7a). Other embellishments may occur, to the performer’s discretion, in repetitions of music or as an expressive device (fig. 7b).

A highly controversial matter facing performers of Baroque music is the use of vibrato. Evidence shows that vibrato was used in Baroque times. The difficulty arises from the fact that Baroque composers have different, and contradictory, opinions on the subject. Nevertheless, the use of vibrato is desirable but considering that it was regarded in the Baroque period as an ornament, and thus the exception rather than the norm.<sup>16</sup> The continuous use of vibrato that

<sup>15</sup> N. Harnoncourt, *Baroque Music Today Music as speech : ways to a new understanding of music*, trans. M. O'Neill, R. G. Pauly, (ed.) (London : Christopher Helm , 1988), pp. 144-148

<sup>16</sup> A. Parrott, ‘Performing Purcell’ pp. 415

features some mainstream performances and recordings is, in my opinion, excessive and responds to much later performance practices. The same principle applies to voices; Emma Kirkby, Lynne Dawson and Rosemary Joshua seem to me more suitable, from a historical perspective, to the role of Dido than singers of earlier generations such as Janet Baker or Jessey Norman.

**Fig. 7a**

'The Triumphant Dance'  
[Violin I]

**Fig. 7b**

'Stay Prince and hear'

Regarding *appoggiaturas*, an important convention must not be overlooked. In vocal lines, an *appoggiatura* should be added in most cases when, at the end of a phrase, there are two repeated notes.<sup>17</sup> This convention, mostly noticeable in declamatory passages, remained a standard in operatic genres even beyond the Classical period and it appears very often in *Dido and Aeneas* (see fig. 1).

A final word must be said about improvisation. Apart from the already discussed matter of continuo playing, there are a few instances in this work where some improvised dances can be added. In several instances, Purcell calls for improvised dances such as the “Gitter” ground before ‘Oft she visits these lone mountain’. Andrew Parrott has suggested that there is no music missing from the score and the dances should be improvised on the ground basses given by Purcell. This is the solution taken by Parrot himself among others. However, Jed Wentz chose to include new music for these guitar dances.

<sup>17</sup> Erich Leinsdorf *The composer's advocate: a radical orthodoxy for musicians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 65-76



### ***Considerations about the drama***

Up to this point, we have considered mainly technical aspects of music making. However, conductors facing operatic scores have to make important considerations about the dramatic outline of the work, as these will inevitably have an effect on musical decisions. A good knowledge of the story is, needless to say, essential. Also, in the case of *Dido and Aeneas*, the relation of the plot to Virgil's *Aeneid* and the departures that Nahum Tate's adaptation made from it. Firstly, in Tate's libretto Aeneas is not really commanded to leave by the Gods but tricked by the Sorceress and her followers, hence the importance of the Sorceress in advancing the action of the plot. Secondly, Tate's libretto never mentions suicide and, as it stands, Dido seems to die instead from a broken heart, a decision perhaps based on the inappropriateness of sending a "wrong" message to the girls of Chelsea's boarding school. Finally, the plot is filled with symbolic references to death. Purcell underscores the progression towards the final tragedy by using a ground bass at three key moments in the opera: Dido's opening aria 'Ah Belinda' already anticipates the final 'Lament', and, right at the heart of the opera, 'Oft she visits' makes reference to the story of Actaeon, who was torn to pieces by 'his own hounds' after Artemis turned him into a stag. As Marielle D. Khoury has pointed out, 'in its literal sense, 'ground' is suggestive of earth and, thus, a poignant symbol of death'.<sup>18</sup>

An analysis of the characters involved will raise other practical issues. Whether Aeneas should be regarded as a hero or just as a complete "booby" may not have so many musical consequences; however, the consideration of the Sorceress and the witches is more controversial. Some degree of characterisation is agreed by most music directors in the form of the Sorceress and the Witches avoiding 'beautiful' singing, but whether their role should be comic or sinister is not so clear. Robert Savage makes a strong point in favour of their sinister nature.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Marielle D. Khoury affirms that 'witches had become caricature figures, sources of amusement to theatre audiences by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marielle D. Khoury, liner note to Purcell, H., *Dido and Aeneas*, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Rene Jacobs, 2001. Compact disc. Harmonia mundi. HMX 2901683

<sup>19</sup> R. Savage: 'Producing Dido and Aeneas', pp. 455-457

century', and this provides the grounds for Jacobs' interpretation.<sup>20</sup> Although this is not the solution preferred by the majority, in my opinion, it provides the opera with a greater equilibrium between comedy and tragedy as can be found, for example, in *Dido's* model *Venus and Adonis*.

A close study of Purcell's score will show that the issues considered above are just a small percentage of the practical problems that arise when producing *Dido and Aeneas*. Nevertheless, it will hopefully be enough to exemplify a line of thought and an approach to the work from historical grounds. It cannot be stressed enough that the choice of instruments, whether modern or period, is not essential to achieve a convincing performance of Baroque music. I do not intend to defend the historically informed movement and its presupposed 'authenticity' –whatever that means- because, as many have concluded, the issue reverts ultimately to a question of taste.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the historicist movement has brought many positive consequences, throwing new light on music that seemed obsolete. More importantly, thanks to the amount of research that has accompanied historicism we know much more now about Baroque performance practices than we did fifty years ago, and musicians of every kind should benefit from that.

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<sup>20</sup> Marielle D. Khoury, liner note to Purcell, H., *Dido and Aeneas*, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Rene Jacobs, 2001. Compact disc. Harmonia mundi. HMX 2901683

<sup>21</sup> P. Kivy, *Authenticities: philosophical reflections on musical performance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 282-286  
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