



DIDO and **AENEAS**



Digital Program
Booklet

SATURDAY
MAY 21, 2022 | 7:30 PM
FOLLOWED BY OPENING NIGHT DINNER

SUNDAY
MAY 22, 2022 | 2:30 PM

Zilkha Hall, The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts

Matthew Dirst
Artistic Director

ARS
LYRICA
HOUSTON 

DIDO AND AENEAS

Music by Henry Purcell (1659–1695)

Libretto by Nahum Tate (1652–1715)

Performed in the original English.

*The performance will last approximately one hour,
with no intermission.*

CAST (in order of appearance)

Belinda, Dido's Sister	Alexandra Smither
Dido, Queen of Carthage	Abigail Fischer
Second Woman	Dominique McCormick
Aeneas, a Trojan Prince	Mark Diamond
Sorceress/Spirit	Nicholas Garza
First Witch	Sarah Neal ^o
Second Witch	Sarah Dyer*
Sailor	Phillip Velarde
Chorus of Courtiers and Witches	Members of Moores School Concert Chorale of the University of Houston

^o*cover for Dido*

**cover for Sorceress/Spirit*

DANCERS OF THE NEW YORK BAROQUE DANCE COMPANY **Catherine Turocy, Artistic Director**

Julia Bengtsson, Lady in Waiting to Dido, Will o' the Wisp
Brynt Beitman, Soldier of Aeneas, sailor
Julian Donahue, Soldier of Aeneas, sailor
Carly Fox, Lady in Waiting to Dido, witch, Diana the Huntress
Alexis Silver, Lady in Waiting to Dido, witch
Matthew Ting, Soldier of Aeneas, Lizard, sailor, Mercury

PRODUCTION TEAM AND ARS LYRICA STAFF

Stage Director & Choreographer	Catherine Turocy
Conductor & Artistic Director	Matthew Dirst
Producer & Executive Director	Kinga Ferguson
Choral Preparation	Betsy Cook Weber
Operations and Outreach Manager	Emma Wine
Marketing & Administrative Assistant	Lauren Ross
Education Consultant	Kathleen Staten
Scenic & Lighting Design	Christina R. Giannelli
Wardrobe, Hair & Makeup	Shaun Heath
Stage Manager	Julius Sanchez
Assistant Stage Manager	Morgan Brochu

The majority of the costumes are pulled from the New York Baroque Dance Company stock, designed by Marie Anne Chiment. Additional costumes by Shaun Heath.

ORCHESTRAL PERSONNEL

Violin I

Stephen Redfield, concertmaster
Maria Lin
Anabel Detrick
Andrés González

Cello

Barrett Sills

Violone

Deborah Dunham

Violin II

Alan Austin
Hae-a Lee
Matthew Detrick

Theorbo/Baroque guitar

Michael Leopold

Organ

John Mitchell

Viola

James Dunham
Erika Lawson

Harpsichord & conductor

Matthew Dirst

Viola da gamba

Mary Springfels

Special thanks to the Members of Moores School Concert Chorale, University of Houston, for providing rehearsal space and the two keyboard instruments heard in this production.

MEMBERS OF MOORES SCHOOL CONCERT CHORALE

Betsy Cook Weber, Director

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Mariam Haider
Tasneem Islam
Keora Stevens
Katelynn Watson

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Ethan Ha
Ryan Ludwig
Kyle Maninantan
Phillip Velarde

Alto

Emily Hobson
Meghan Krish
Karen Lo
Aubrey Seulean

Bass

Oliver Hassall
Matthew Hazzard
Cam Michalak
David Oluwo
Robin Scaria

SYNOPSIS AND HISTORY

ACT I. Having vowed never again to marry, the widowed Dido, Queen of Carthage, keeps a morbid evening vigil in the cave where her husband is buried. And yet she is attracted to Aeneas, a Trojan prince recently shipwrecked in Carthage. She fears breaking her mourning vow—and worse, being abandoned if her affections are not returned. Dido’s courtiers, first among them her sister Belinda, nevertheless encourage her new romance and rejoice at the prospect of a royal union. Following Aeneas’s declaration of love, Dido assents to the match. The entire entourage then adjourns “to the hills and the vales...to the musical groves,” where the union will be officially consummated and fêted.

ACT II. In the darkly comic opening “Cave Scene,” a Sorceress and her witches plot to ruin Dido. Fate hangs over the supposedly happy couple in the subsequent “Grove Scene.” Here Dido’s companions wistfully recall mythical figures of the hunt: Diana, goddess of the forest, and Acteon, the unfortunate hunter whose prying eyes got him turned into a stag and killed by his own men. The Sorceress puts an abrupt end to these courtly musings with a storm that chases everyone but Aeneas back “to town,” after which the former reappears disguised as Mercury and orders Aeneas to leave his beloved Dido and return to Troy. The act ends with the witches giddily celebrating their success.

ACT III. Aeneas’s sailors bid farewell to their “nymphs on the shore” while the Sorceress and witches gloat over Dido’s now-certain doom. Encountering her lover one last time, the injured queen spurns his offer to stay and chooses a noble, if tragic, end: death from a broken heart.

The opera ends with her iconic lament (“When I am laid in earth”) and a poignant chorus, which invites the cupids to “scatter roses on her tomb.”

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In the fourth book of the *Aeneid* (c20 BC), the Roman poet Virgil recounts the timeless story of Dido and Aeneas. Nahum Tate’s poetic adaptation from the 1680s conveys its essence in compact English verse, while Henry Purcell’s music renders the tale with powerful economy. The finished product, among the first of its kind, incorporated certain features of Italian and French opera but within a novel English context.

As reimaged by Tate and Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas* focuses squarely on the choice between love and duty, a familiar theme in Baroque opera especially. This Dido must additionally contend with malevolent forces seeking her destruction. In melodious recitative and tuneful airs, none of which last more than a minute or two, the secondary characters and the omnipresent chorus attempt to sway the outcome. In the end, Dido decides her own fate, and she does so with perfect equanimity, in a song striking not only for its ingenious imposition of a long-breathed melody above a repeating “ground bass” but for its sheer duration: the whole builds inexorably toward this devastating final scene. Who can resist shedding a few tears over a heroine who dies this beautifully?

Long thought to have been premiered at a young ladies’ boarding school in the London neighborhood of Chelsea, *Dido and Aeneas* is Purcell’s only surviving stage work intended to be sung throughout. The founder and headmaster of this school, a dancing master by the name of Josiah Priest, cultivated an elite demographic, which may explain this opera’s combination of mythology with artful music and dance. Its core message, that rash love often backfires, was surely not lost on those who participated in or witnessed the 1689 Chelsea performance.

More recently, scholars have proposed that *Dido and Aeneas* was first given as a court masque in the early 1680s, as was its predecessor and model, John Blow’s *Venus and Adonis*. The works have much in common: both are compact tragedies of about an hour’s length, with abundant French-style dances and an opening French overture. Purcell composed more extensively for the London stage in a mixed genre called (for lack of a better term) “semi-opera,” in which musical entre’acts interrupt the flow of well-known plays. *Dido and Aeneas* remains, however, his only true opera and his best-known work.

In addition to its murky origins, this opera has come down to us incomplete. The surviving 1689 libretto includes an extensive prologue, for which no music exists (Purcell may never have set it), and we also lack original music for the witches’ chorus at the end of the Grove Scene. What we have, however, is miraculous in musical details and

psychological impact, hence its eternal popularity. To that torso our production adds several numbers that are named in the libretto but for which there is no extant music. For these interpolations, we have relied mostly on other works of Purcell himself, principally his semi-opera *The Fairy Queen*. © MATTHEW DIRST

ON THE STAGING AND CHOREOGRAPHY

Of all the operas re-imagined for today's audiences, performances of *Dido and Aeneas* may outnumber the rest. In addition to period instruments, our production employs period movement, dance, and staging. The costumes, however, are not what the audience would have seen in seventeenth-century England. Painters of this era such as Poussin, Bourdon and Lorain employed the classical style in ancient dress; but by contrast, typical opera costumes were still modeled after current fashions of Restoration England or the masquerade costumes of Inigo Jones, a popular theatrical designer of the previous age. Our production, which employs an ancient Roman look, features costumes from the stock of the New York Baroque Dance Company, many of which were designed by Marie Anne Chiment. The ancient garb reveals more of the body and its movements, especially in the dancing. We hope this nod to Antiquity brings our audience a deeper kinesthetic sympathy with the expression of the performers.

The choreography is based on English dances by contemporaneous choreographers whose works have come down to us through an abstract dance notation system developed at the court of Louis XIV. As adapted to Purcell's music—which requires a rearrangement of dance phrases, creating canons and expanding beyond the single line in the dance score—the result is not the typical French use of space but rather a more expansive sailing through the air. The final dance is based on a minuet choreographed by Josiah Priest, the original choreographer of *Dido and Aeneas*. The character dances are my own creation in the Baroque style, following stage conventions of the time. The dancers of the New York Baroque Dance Company have been trained in Baroque ballet technique and in reading the period notation system, allowing them to more fully participate in the creative and interpretive process of this work. We are very pleased to be joining forces with Ars Lyrica Houston in bringing this masterpiece to life!

Catherine Turocy, Stage Director and Choreographer
Director, The New York Baroque Dance Company

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Catherine Turocy, recognized as one of today's leading choreographer/reconstructors and stage directors in 17th and 18th century period performance. With over 60 Baroque operas to her credit, she has been decorated by the French Republic as a Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters. She received the prestigious BESSIE Award in New York City for sustained achievement in choreography, as well as the Natalie Skelton Award for Artistic Excellence. As a sought-after period stage director/choreographer, Ms. Turocy has worked nationally and internationally, including eleven years at the Handel Festival in Goettingen, Germany. In New York, Ms. Turocy works closely with Concert Royal. Highlights include Gluck's *Orfeo*, Handel's *Ariodante and Terpsicore*, and Rameau's *Pygmalion*. In Washington D.C., she has collaborated with the Opera Lafayette Orchestra and Chorus. Ms. Turocy is currently on faculty at the Juilliard School in the newly formed program of Historical Performance. She is a guest teacher at the Early Music Institute at Indiana University, Oberlin College, Curtis Institute of Music and Case Western Reserve.



Known for her "serenely captivating" operatic presence "and disarming intimacy," (*NY Times*), **Abigail Elizabeth Fischer** has enjoyed singing any "chest-heavy soprano" repertoire that connects her with embodied wisdom and truth. Some examples of this include premiering Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar* and Du Yun and Royce Vavrek's Pulitzer Award Winning *Angel's Bone*, Peter Lieberman's *Neruda Songs* (with Columbus Symphony), Handel's *Messiah* (with Kansas City Orchestra), Mahler 3rd Symphony (with Santa Rosa Symphony), Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*; collaborating with Boston Symphony Orchestra and Boston Baroque, and touring internationally performing music by John Zorn. Abigail is happy to return to Houston, where she has enjoyed working with Da Camera Houston, Mercury Chamber Orchestra, and Ars Lyrica with Handel's *Aminta e Fillide*. During the pandemic Abigail birthed A Big AUM, offering private and communal breathwork, sound meditation and free your voice workshops, including writing music for breathwork and inspirational song to bring community together in embodied authenticity.



Complimented for his “virile and buzzy baritone”, **Mark Diamond** is excited to be returning to one of the companies he considers home, Ars Lyrica Houston. This season you can hear him on the stages of San Antonio Opera, Cincinnati Opera, and Austin Opera. Mr. Diamond is a versatile singer who performs a wide range of operatic roles, concert, and recital repertoire. Highlights from his career include leading roles at Houston Grand Opera, Seattle Opera, Opéra de Limoges, Théâtre de Caen, Opéra de Reims,

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Glimmerglass Festival, Seoul Philharmonic, and more. A native of Augusta, Georgia, Mr. Diamond is on the voice faculty at Baylor University and holds degrees from Rice University, University of Houston, and Georgia Southern University.



An adventurous performer, fearless activist, and one of the CBC’s 2017 “30 Young Hot Classical Musicians Under 30”, Canadian soprano **Alexandra Smither** is a fresh fixture on the worldwide stage. Her “sunny, cloudless top” and “silky, light, soprano” are an organic fit in staple repertoire of Mozart and Monteverdi; Ms. Smither’s signature rapport with new music shows her as “an extraordinarily adept soprano, one who can shriek, gurgle, cackle, mutter, gesture, and declaim as well as

sing beautifully.” (*The Threepenny Blog*) During the 2021-2022 season, Ms. Smither sings Iphigenia of the Light in Wayne Shorter and esperanza spalding’s new opera *Iphigenia* at MASSMoCA, ArtsEmerson, The Kennedy Center, Cal Performances at UC Berkeley, and The Broad Stage in Los Angeles, as well as her debut with California Symphony as the soloist in Balch’s *Cantata for Orchestra and Voice* (rescheduled from 2020), a recital series with Jeunesses musicales Canada, returns to Houston Grand Opera for the workshop of *Another City* (Beck/Fleischmann) and a return to Ars Lyrica to sing Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas*.



Dominique McCormick is a soprano from New York. She has performed opera, musical theatre and oratorio in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and the United States. She holds a doctoral degree in Vocal Performance specializing in the vocal works of French composer Martial Caillebotte. Currently she is on the voice faculty at the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston, where she is producer of the first Katherine G McGovern College of the Arts’ collaborative musical, Little Shop

of Horrors, and program director and creator of the Moores School of Music summer study abroad Paris Workshop. She is Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Century Fine Arts, a music and fine arts school in Sugar Land, TX.



Characterized by *The Dallas Morning News* as a “countertenor full and fluent, glowing on top, dispensed with the loveliest legato,” **Nicholas Garza** has been hailed for intimate, engaging performances across the United States, Mexico, and Canada. An early music specialist, Garza has performed with ensembles including the Chicago Arts Orchestra, ensemble viii, Spire Ensemble, Austin Baroque Orchestra, Tactus, and Mountainside Baroque, among others. In the 2021–2022 season, he will make his Ars Lyrica debut as the Sorceress in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. Working with noted singer and conductor Simon Carrington, Garza was twice a singing fellow at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival of Yale University; additional festival credits include the International Cervantino, Victoria Bach, Big Moose Bach, and Hawaii Performing Arts Festivals. A frequent performer with the American Baroque Opera Company, Garza has sung roles including the Sorceress in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, Ruggiero in Handel’s *Alcina*, Cortez in Vivaldi’s *Montezuma*, and Rinaldo in Handel’s *Rinaldo*. He also appears regularly with the Dallas Bach Society, Orpheus Chamber Singers, Orchestra of New Spain, and Incarnatus. A Harlingen, Texas native, Garza studied at the University of Texas at Arlington under Jing Ling-Tam and David Grogan.



Sarah Dyer, contralto, is a native Nebraskan currently based in Houston, Texas. She is thrilled to make her debut with Ars Lyrica as Second Witch and cover the Sorceress in *Dido and Aeneas*. Miss Dyer is completing a Certificate of Performance at the University of Houston where she has been featured with the Moores Opera Center as Cornelia in *Giulio Cesare*, Madame Armfeldt in *A Little Night Music*, and Florence Pike in *Albert Herring*. She recently received the silver prize in The 37th Annual Young Texas Artist Competition, was voted audience choice in the 2022 Houston Saengerbund Competition, and was a scholarship awardee of the 2021 AIMS Voice Competition. This summer she looks forward to joining Music Academy of the West as a Vocal Fellow performing *Madame Larina* in *Eugene Onegin* along with other concert works.



Sarah Neal is a rising mezzo-soprano who began 2022 as a District Winner of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and was most recently a winner for the San Antonio Tuesday Musical Club Young Artists Competition as well as the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Houston Career Grant Competition. This upcoming summer, Sarah will join Central City Opera as an Apprentice Artist to both perform and understudy Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*. Sarah received her Masters of Music in Vocal Performance at the University of Houston in 2021, where she performed the title role in *La Cenerentola*, Dinah (*Trouble in Tahiti*), Nancy (*Albert Herring*), and Cherubino (*Le Nozze di Figaro*). Last fall, Sarah made her debut with Ars Lyrica Houston as the mezzo-soprano soloist in a fully staged performance of J.S. Bach’s cantata *Ich habe genug* (BWV 82), and she is thrilled to return for the company’s production of *Dido and Aeneas*.

The **New York Baroque Dance Company** is a leader in the revival of 18th-century ballet, bringing forgotten masterpieces to life with what *The Guardian* has called “a whirlwind of desperately needed fresh air.” Founded in 1976 by Catherine Turocy and Ann Jacoby, NYBDC has collaborated on over 70 operas, reconstructing dances from period notation and choreographing in period style. The company has toured North America, Europe and Japan with conductors James Richman, John Eliot Gardiner, Christopher Hogwood, Nicholas McGegan and Wolfgang Katschner. NYBDC also performs with Opera Lafayette, the Dallas Bach Society, Ars Lyrica Houston, and Philharmonia Baroque, among others. Groundbreaking productions include premieres of Rameau operas at the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence and the Opera de Lyon and a double bill with Rameau’s *Pygmalion* and Handel’s *Terpsicore* that has been given over 100 times. The company appears regularly at the International Handel Festival in Goettingen and is being archived by the New York Public Library. Through educational residencies, NYBDC dancers also offer instruction to professionals and the general public.

The **University of Houston Concert Chorale** is the university’s premiere large choral ensemble and has been hailed as one of the country’s best collegiate choirs. Under the direction of Betsy Cook Weber since 2002, the ensemble appears regularly at conventions of the Texas Music Educators Association and the American Choral Directors Association. Chorale has also been active on the world stage, winning prizes at the 2009 *Eisteddfod* in Langollen, Wales, the 2013 International Chamber Choir Competition in Marktobendorf, Germany, the 2018 Bela Bartok International Choral Competition in Hungary, and the 2019 European Grand Prix in Arezzo, Italy, among other competitions. This summer the Chorale will be competing in the Grieg International Choral Competition. The Concert Chorale performs frequently in Houston, including appearances with the Houston Symphony, Ars Lyrica, Mercury, the Latin Grammys, Star Wars in Concert, NBC’s Clash of the Choirs, Josh Groban, Houston Astros, Houston Texans, The Eagles, and on KUHF, ABC, NBC, and Fox. They are pleased to be part of Ars Lyrica’s 2022 production of Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*.

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ABOUT ARS LYRICA

Founded in 1998 by harpsichordist and conductor Matthew Dirst, Ars Lyrica Houston presents a diverse array of music in its original context while creating connections to contemporary life. Ars Lyrica's acclaimed programming features neglected gems alongside familiar masterworks, and extracts the dramatic potential, emotional resonance, and expressive power of music. Its local subscription series, according to the *Houston Chronicle*, "sets the agenda" for early music in Houston. Ars Lyrica appears regularly at international festivals and concert series because of its distinctive focus, and its pioneering efforts in the field of authentic performance have won international acclaim, including a Grammy nomination for Best Opera.

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THE WELL- TEMPERED CLAVIER *at Rienzi*



Ars Lyrica Artistic Director Matthew Dirst continues his survey of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* with two performances of excerpts from Book 1 in the sumptuous surroundings of Rienzi, the house museum for European decorative arts of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The featured instrument, inspired by the work of the Gräbner family in Dresden in the early eighteenth century, is visually and acoustically stunning, a perfect complement to the Baroque-era décor at Rienzi.



Matthew Dirst
Artistic Director



SATURDAY | JUNE 4, 2022 | 6 PM

Rienzi | MFAH





Once Upon *a* Time

Virtual Release:
Sunday, June 5 | 2:00 pm CT
Houston Chamber Choir
Digital Stage



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