

Dido and Æneas

Henry Purcell

Libretto by Nahum Tate

Texts taken from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, and *Richard III*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Scarron's *Le Virgile Travesti*.

Musical direction and arrangements, Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas

Stage direction, set design and costumes, Pierre Lebon

Choreography, Iris Florentiny

Light creation, Bertrand Killy

General direction, Juliette Guignard

Distribution :

DIDO, Blandine de Sansal*

ÆNEAS, Grace Durham*

BELINDA / THE SPIRIT, Clara Penalva*

2nd WOMAN / 1st WITCH, Louise Bourgeat*

THE SORCERESS, Eugénie Lefebvre*

2nd WITCH / SAILOR, Juliette Gauthier*

actor and dancer, Pierre Lebon

dancer, Iris Florentiny

dancer, Aurélien Bednarek

stage management, Arthur Tourenne

general management, Bertrand Killy

*Winners of the 28th Clermont-Ferrand International Singing Competition

Gabriel Grosbard and Anaëlle Blanc-Verdin, violins – Charlotte Gerbitz, viola

Matthieu Bertaud, flutes and oboe – Xavier Miquel, oboe and flutes – Lucile Tessier, bassoon and

flutes – Juliette Guignard, viola de gamba – Damien Pouvreau, theorbo and guitar – Louis-Noël

Bestion de Camboulas, harpsichord

Set and costumes construction: Opéra de Limoges

Co-producers : Clermont Auvergne Opéra, Fondation Royaumont,

Opéra de Limoges, Atelier lyrique de Tourcoing,

Office artistique de la Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Fondation Orange, Adami, CNM et SPEDIDAM

The sea, the waves,

and the fate of men, small, rolled about like pebbles on the shore. The sea, the waves carry and bring back hopes and despair.

Among these rocks, Aeneas, the weary exile, lies down to rest his limbs. From his temporary bed, he embarks on another journey. It is in the mind that insomnia reigns when the body rests. And the horror of the nights makes beauty out of darkness.

The sea, the waves,

Among these rocks, Dido, the light of a home port and the lighthouse, destroyed by the passing of the surf.

A small sandcastle erased by the tide.

The sea, the waves

We wanted to give this *Dido and Aeneas* a particular direction by choosing an exclusively female vocal cast. This is a nod to the origins of this work, which was performed in Purcell's day at a girl's school. This choice was also motivated by the vocal and theatrical excellence of the candidates who took part in the Clermont competition.

Dido and Aeneas was staged in the style of English "masques," performances combining music, theater, dance and mechanical effects that were all the rage with London audiences in the second half of the XVIIth century. Henry Purcell's music will be accompanied by spoken texts taken from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*. The latter is a master of fantastical plots, using language as the gods play with the fate of men. A prologue and some interludes are thus recreated in the form of scenes with spoken texts, arias, choruses and dances, blending the arts into a total spectacle. All the artists on stage, in a true spirit of ensemble, participate in the same gesture, taking turns as singer-actor, ensemble singer, actor and dancer. The sea is the main character, within which human emotions struggle grotesquely and magnificently. It is at once the music, the movement, and the setting.

After a glowing *Medea and Jason*, the ensemble Les Surprises continues its adventure with director Pierre Lebon around Purcell's famous *Dido and Aeneas*, an opportunity to pursue the myths (re)discovering and putting them into perspective. Caught between power and duty, these two heroes will be put to the test, accompanied by a merry band of artists, instrumentalists, stage managers, actors, dancers and singers.



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PRESENTATION OF THE SET

It is an ancient, fortified port with a lighthouse, welcoming the sea's waves, arrivals and departures, the past and destiny.

It is a port wedged between heaven and Earth, between the history of Men and that of the Gods. A backdrop of tangled canvases of skies that merge with the sea floor.

It is an amphitheater where the tragedy of ancestors is played out in the play being performed today. And the sea continues to wash the destinies of the insignificant onto the shore. Small human loves and the will of angry gods.



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PRESENTATION OF THE COSTUMES

- DIDO : Symbol of chastity. Armor representing the three Marys or the three Fates; the armor opens. Dido takes out her heart, like representation of the Pietà.
- ÆNEAS : Waterproof sailor's costume, old wooden/cork life jacket like bloodstained armor.
- THE SORCERESS : Blindfold, long cigarette holder or dirty bar owner.
- WITCHES : Welsh folk costume. Tulle over their eyes, they are blind.
- THE SPIRIT : Postman's costume with wings on the cap (attributes of Mercury).
- BELINDA AND SECOND LADIES : Strawberry hooded maid or companion.
- FIRST SAILOR
- INSTRUMENTALISTS – DANCERS: Street clothes, sailors, fishermen, dockers...



Belinda and Dido

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Æneas

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1st Witch, The Sorceress, 2nd Witch

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A Sailor

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Æneas and The Spirit

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Sailors

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Synopsis Dido and Æneas

Prologue (recreated from texts from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, music by Purcell)

Fleeing the Trojan War, Aeneas and his crew must face a storm. Some of the sailors drown in the sea, while Aeneas washes up unconscious on an unknown shore, Carthage.

Act 1

Belinda tries to comfort Dido, who is plunged into deep melancholy. She has guessed her love for Aeneas and assures her that it is reciprocated. Belinda and Dido's court celebrate this love.

Interlude (recreated from texts by Shakespeare's *Richard III*, music by John Blow and Jeremiah Clarke)

Aeneas relives scenes from the battles of Troy in a dream and attends a funeral scene. During this funeral scene, Aeneas sees both his companions who died in battle at Troy and shipwrecked sailors being carried away by the waves.

Continuation of Act 1

Aeneas is welcomed by Belinda and Dido's court. They sing and dance to celebrate Cupid and love.

Interlude (recreated from texts from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*)

An enchantress and her two witches meet in a dark cave and prepare strange potions.

Act 2

FIRST SCENE :

The enchantress informs the witches of her Machiavellian plan: she will send her elf in the guise of Mercury to remind Aeneas of his destiny as foretold by the gods and thus force him to leave Dido. The witches plan to unleash a storm.

SECOND SCENE :

Dido's court is out hunting when the storm breaks, forcing everyone to flee. Aeneas finds himself alone and receives a message from Jupiter via a spirit (the enchantress's elf): "Leave Carthage to found a glorious city." He is ready to obey despite his love for Dido.

Interlude (recreated from texts by Paul Scarron's *Virgile travesti*, drinking songs by Purcell, and traditional sea shanties)

In a tavern at the port, sailors gather after a day at sea to drink, celebrate and prepare Aeneas' ship. They play various games, dance, fight and get drunk.

Act 3

The sailors prepare to set sail with Aeneas. The witches triumph, happy to have achieved their goal of destruction. Aeneas presents himself to Dido and Belinda to tell them of the divine oracle. Dido welcomes him with anger and irony. Aeneas is ready to stay, but she sends him away. He leaves for good, leaving Dido alone and desperate, with no other option but to take her own life.

Technical conditions

Duration : 1h25 without intermission

Artistic headcount : (18 persons)

6 actors-singers

1 actor-dancer

2 dancers

9 instrumentalists (2 violins, 1 viola, 1 viola da gamba, 1 theorbo-guitar, 1 oboe, 1 flute, 1 bassoon, 1 harpsichord)

Technical and production headcount (3 persons)

1 general/light manager

1 stage manager

1 in charge of production/costumes

This headcount doesn't include the provision of a dresser by the theater

Technical specific feature

Show without orchestra pit, all performers are on stage.

Plan for lighting setup D-2 to performance and set construction D-1 to performance.

The set is transported by semi-trailer.

Instruments :

The instruments are provided by the ensemble (including harpsichord and percussion).

A bass drum is requested if the venue has one available.

General stage layout :

Scenery on stage.

Actors and instrumentalists are in and around the scenery.

Large version : 12m x 12m, 7.5m high

Small version : 10m x 10m, 6.5m high

Pierre Lebon, staging

Pierre Lebon was eight when he started theater, playing soloist roles at the Opéra de Paris and on international stages. He graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Lyon and the École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg, where he learned carpentry, tapestry, locksmithing, paint and machinery. He assisted lots of producers and decorators such as Rodolfo Natale, Jean-Guy Lecat, Pierre-André Weitz, Olivier Py in the United States, in Europe and in plenty national stages in France. Alongside, he dances in different troupes.

Since then, people can find him front or back-stage : he has performed in *Alceste*, where he drew the sets live at the Paris Opéra, and directed *Medea and Jason* with the ensemble Les Surprises, a parody of baroque operas performed at the Limoges Opera, the Montpellier Opera and on tour until 2025. He directed *Le Docteur miracle* and *L'Arlésienne* for a show dedicated to Bizet at the Opéra de Tours, the Théâtre du Châtelet, the Opéra de Rouen and is still touring. He sang in the comic operas *Les Chevaliers de la Table ronde*, *Mam'zelle Nitouche* and *V'lan dans l'œil*, directed by Pierre-André Weitz, which toured for four years, as well as in *L'Amour vainqueur*, written and directed by Olivier Py at the 2019 Avignon Festival. He created *On aura tout vu*, a show about café-concerts produced by the Palazzetto de Bruzane at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord and on tour.

Bertrand Killy, light creation

Three meetings made a mark on Bertrand Killy's career : Pierre Barrat, François Tanguy and Olivier Py. With Pierre Barat, we can name : *Le Grand Mystère de la Passion*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Le Château de Barbe-Bleue*, *Le Racine / Qu'un corps défiguré*, *La Marche de Radetzky* etc. With François Tanguy : *Ricecar*, *La Bataille de Tagliamento*, *Choral*, *Chant du Bouc* and *Fragments forains*. He works with Olivier Py since 2000. In theater, we can name : *L'Apocalypse joyeuse*, *Le Soulier de satin*, *Les Vainqueurs*, *Les Illusions Comiques*, *A Cry from Heaven*, *Les Contes de Grimm*, *Épître pour jeunes acteurs*, *Adagio*, *Orlando ou l'Impatience*, *Le Roi Lear* etc. In Opera, he cooperates with him for *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *La Damnation de Faust*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser*, *Der Freischütz*, *Lulu*, *Manon* in the Grand Théâtre de Genève, *Le Vase de parfum* in Nantes, *Pelléas and Mélisande* in Moscou and Amsterdam, *Romeo and Juliet* in Amsterdam and Copenhagen, *The Rake's Progress*, *Mathis der Maler*, *Alceste*, *Aida in Paris* (ONP), *Les Huguenots*, *Lobengrin*, *La Gioconda* in Bruxelles, *Hamlet*, *Der fliegende Holländer* in Vienne (Theater an der Wien), *Curlew River* (Festival d'Edimbourg), *Carmen*, *Claude*, *La Juive* in Lyon, *La Forza del Destino* in Cologne, *Il Trovatore* in Munich (Opernfestspiele and Staatsoper), *Dialogues des Carmélites* in the Théâtre des Champs Élysées, *Ariane and Barbe-Bleue*, *Pénélope* in Strasbourg, *Le Prophète* in Berlin, *Macbeth*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Bâle, *La Traviata* in Malmö, *Wocceck* in Athènes, *La Dame de pique* (Nice). He also created the staging lights for Ivan Alexandre (*Orfeo*) and in joint effort with the Palazzetto Bru Zane, for Pierre-André Weitz (*Les Chevaliers de la Table ronde* in Bordeaux/Nantes/Angers/ Rennes/Venise, *Mam'zelle Nitouche* in Toulon and on tour and finally for Pierre Lebon (*Le Docteur Miracle* in Paris/Saint-Étienne/Tours).

Ensemble Les Surprises

Artistic direction, Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas

General direction, Juliette Guignard

« L'ensemble s'est affirmé comme un authentique spécialiste de la musique du XVIII^e siècle français avec un sens du rythme, de la couleur et une identité sonore vraiment très séduisante. » (*Musicologie.org*).

« (...)Ce que souligne la direction charnelle et engagée de Bestion de Camboulas, avec ses solos de vents sensuels, ses cordes chantantes aux basses profondes et son percussionniste illusionniste » (Marie-Aude Roux, *Le Monde*)

The ensemble Les Surprises is a baroque and multifaceted ensemble, founded in 2010 on the initiative of Juliette Guignard, violist, and Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas, organist and harpsichordist.

In borrowing its name from the opera ballet *Les Surprises de l'Amour* by Jean-Philippe Rameau, the group has placed its destiny under the lucky star of this composer, with the aim of exploring operatic music in all its shapes and forms !

By taking the ensemble artistic direction, Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas wishes to participate to the baroque repertoire rediscovery and its improvement with new interpretations but also to explore the sounds richness offered by a baroque instrumentarium. The work of the ensemble is anchored in a process of musicological and historical research. Indeed Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas endeavour to highlight scores that have never been released since the XVIIIth century, thanks to music libraries such as Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) or Bibliothèque de l'Opéra de Paris. The records *Passion* with Véronique Gens and *Rameau chez la Pompadour* are good examples of this will.

In 2014, Les Surprises received the “Révélation musicale” (new discovery) prize awarded by the French critic's circle for the performing arts (“Syndicat professionnel de la critique de théâtre, musique et danse”).

Les Surprises recorded six discs for the Ambronay Editions label. All have received warm praises from international and national press. The ensemble also begun a partnership with the Alpha Classics label in 2020 (*Purcell-Tyrannic Love*, *Passion* with Véronique Gens, *Rameau chez la Pompadour*, *Nuit à Venise*, *Te Deum*, *Leçons de Ténèbres*), the next record *Reines* with Véronique Gens will be released in March 2026. All have received warm praises from international and national press.

At the same time, the ensemble collaborates with the Harmonia Mundi label on projects by Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas. The album *An Unexpected Mozart* was released in 2022, followed by *The Experts: The Bach & Silbermann Families* in October 2024.

Since the beginning of its activities, the ensemble performed on multiple stages and festivals all over Europe and worldwide : Opéra royal de Versailles, Opéra de Massy, Auditorium de Radio France, Opéra de Montpellier, festival d'Ambronay, festival Sinfonia en Périgord, festival de Saintes, Rencontres Musicales de Vézelay, festival Sanssouci (Potsdam – Allemagne), saison des Bozar (Bruxelles – Belgique), Saint John's Smith Square (Londres – UK), Salle Bourgie (Montréal), Beirut Chants Festival (Beirut – Liban), Singapour...

Les Surprises is ensemble in residence at the Cité musicale – Arsenal de Metz.

Les Surprises is ensemble associated with the Ferme de Villefavard in Limousin for the period 2026–2028.

Équipe : **Juliette GUIGNARD** – general direction

Laure CAILLAUD – administration

Eléonore MINOT – production

Audrey PELTRET – distribution and communication

The ensemble benefits from the support of the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication – Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles de Nouvelle Aquitaine, the Conseil Régional de Nouvelle Aquitaine, the city of Bordeaux and the Conseil Départemental de la Gironde. It occasionally receives the support of the Centre National de la Musique, ADAMI, SPEDIDAM, Institut Français, Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles and Office Artistique de la Région Nouvelle Aquitaine and the Fondation Orange.
The ensemble is a member of the Rézo Musa and Scène ensemble.

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