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THE QUEEN OF CARTHAGE – WORLD PREMIERE

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 8:00 P.M. | SFU GOLDCORP CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

PROGRAMME

DIDO, OUR ANCESTOR

Robyn Jacob (b.1988)
When the Memory dies with the Body, it is still held in Time
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)
"See, see even night herself is here", from *The Fairy Queen*, z.629, ACT I
Overture to Act I, from *Dido and Aeneas* (EXCERPT)

DIDO, THE EMPEROR

Henry Purcell
"Come away, fellow sailors", from *Dido and Aeneas*, ACT III (additional Text by Dr Debi Wong)
Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704)
Battalia à 10: Der Mars ~ Presto - Die Schlacht - Adagio. Lamento der Verwundten Musquetirer

DIDO, THE LOVER

Alonso Mudarra (c.1510-1580)
Dulces Exuviae
Henry Eccles (1670-1742)
Sonata Quinta in E minor: Andante
John Eccles (1668-1735)
"Restless in thought" (excerpt), from *She Ventures and He Wins* (1696)
Henry Purcell
"When I am laid in earth" (Dido's Lament), from *Dido and Aeneas*, ACT III

INTERVAL

DIDO, THE OUTCAST

Henry Purcell
"What Power Art Thou" (The Cold Song), from *King Arthur*, z.628, ACT III
John Eccles
The Mad Lover Suite: Slow Aire
Jessica McMann (b.1987)
Blood, Fire, Flames
John Dowland (1563-1626)
Semper Dowland, Semper Dolens
Flow my tears (Lachrimae Antiquae)

DIDO, THE DREAMER

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)
Improvisation on *Lagrima mie*
Afarin Mansouri (b.1974)
I choose to love you in silence

EPILOGUE: IN HER DREAMS, SHE DANCES

Henry Purcell
Dance from *Dioclesian*, z.627, ACT V
Henry Purcell
Chaconne to Act V, from *King Arthur*, z.628

THE ARTISTS

Dr Debi Wong

CONCEPT, DRAMATURGY & STAGE DIRECTOR

Catalina Vicens

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Stephanie Wong

CO-STAGE DIRECTOR

Marisa Gold

CHOREOGRAPHER & DANCER

+ + +

Cecilia Duarte

MEZZO-SOPRANO, DIDO

Juolin Lee

DANCER

Yenny Lee

COVER FOR DIDO

+ + +

Jessica Mc Mann

Afarin Mansouri

Robyn Jacob

COMPOSERS

+ + +

Dr Debi Wong & Suzie LeBlanc

CREATIVE DIRECTORS

Joanna Dundas

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Elsa Orme

STAGE MANAGER

Camilla Tassi

PROJECTION DESIGN

Vanka Salim (Chimerik 似不像)

LIGHTS

Roberta Doyle

COSTUMES

+ + +

EMV Festival Players

DIRECTED BY

Catalina Vicens

HARPSICHORD & ORGAN

Chloe Meyers

VIOLIN I

Majka Demcak

VIOLIN II

Nolwenn Le Guern

VIOLA DA GAMBA

Margaret Little

VIOLA & VIOLA DA GAMBA

Natalie Mackie

VIOLONE

Adrienne Hyde

LIRONE & VIOLA DA GAMBA

Antoine Malette-Chénier

TRIPLE HARP

Lucas Harris

THEORBO

PROGRAMME NOTES

BY DR DEBI WONG

“When I am laid in earth, may my wrongs create no trouble in thy breast.
Remember me, remember me, but forget my fate!”

Nahum Tate, Librettist of *Dido & Aeneas*

Dido, The Queen of Carthage, is a figure that has captivated my imagination since I first encountered Henry Purcell's beloved aria, “When I am Laid In Earth” from his opera *Dido and Aeneas*. I discovered the piece as a second-year voice student at the University of British Columbia after I made the switch from training as a soprano to a mezzo soprano. I remember cracking open my very first copy of the infamous anthology “25 Arias for Mezzo-Soprano” and there was Dido. Waiting for me.

Dido's haunting aria has captivated the imaginations of countless creatives – from Jeff Buckley to Jessye Norman – and Nahum Tate (librettist) and Henry Purcell's famous opera is one of the few English works to become embedded in the canon of regularly performed operas today. When up against the likes of *Carmen*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and all things Verdi, it is curious that this incomplete, English, Baroque opera written for a boarding school performance did not get permanently lost to obscurity.¹

After submerging ourselves in this opera and in her story, all I can say is that it feels nearly impossible to turn away from Dido. Whether you meet her through Virgil's *Aeneid*, Purcell's music, Norman or Buckley's haunting performances, there is simply so much left to the imagination. For the curious creator and the curious audience, engaging and reengaging with Dido's story and wondering what could exist in all the empty spaces becomes an exercise in leveraging collective creativity.

Purcell and Tate's operatic depiction of Dido is the most dominant version of her tale in Western European cultures today, and the libretto dramatically interprets the events from book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In both sources, Dido's story begins with the inner turmoil she is experiencing after having listened to Aeneas recount his history up to the day of their fateful encounter on Carthagian shores. Her sister, Anna, recognizes this turmoil as the pangs of passion and desire, and encourages Dido to pursue Aeneas. The Fates and the gods conspire to bring them together, but unbeknownst to Dido and Aeneas, Aeneas is fated for Italian shores – his destiny bound to the founding of ancient Rome. Shortly after they express their love for one another, Aeneas learns of his destiny and makes the decision to obey the will of the gods. Dido is heartbroken and angry. She accuses Aeneas of deceit and treachery and sends him and his people away. Dido, who cannot bear the shame and heartbreak nor the fate that awaits a woman who has been abandoned by a man, takes her own life.

To be rather blunt, it is a pretty typical operatic storyline and an even more typical depiction of a leading female figure. As beautiful as the music is, this very narrow portrayal of Dido – the woman who rallied a community to leave behind the oppression faced in their birthlands and sail across the sea on the mere hope of establishing a better life – seems to miss a few marks.

¹There is much debate over when the first performance of *Dido and Aeneas* was given but the first clearly documented performance was for and by the Josias' Priest Girls School in London as early as 1687.

With so much left untold and unexplored, I can't help but wonder, what else? What else is there to this myth, this history? How should we remember Dido? How should we tell her story?

The renowned Latin writer Virgil depicted [Dido] as a neglected and grieving princess, voluntarily ignoring her status as the founder of a powerful city. Other authors often portrayed her as a grieving lover who, after being seduced and abandoned by the Trojan Aeneas, committed suicide by setting herself on fire.

Dr. Halima Ouanada,

Women's Rights, Democracy and Citizenship in Tunisia

Whether we accept Dido as a mythological goddess or historical figure, Carthage was more than a backdrop for a tragic love story. Its legacy still has influence over our world today. In its time, it was a shining beacon of ancient civilization, a hub of trade, culture, and innovation. Their advanced ships ventured into uncharted waters, establishing new trade routes for its bustling markets filled with goods and merchants from diverse lands. It was a city whose peoples boasted a rich and complex history and whose language and alphabet laid the foundations for all Western writing systems. Its unique mixed political system influenced the likes of Aristotle and other critical thinkers to come; whose radiance preceded and rivaled that of Rome; whose foundations were envisioned, laid and fostered by a woman around 813 BCE.

It's the last two points that always make me pause: *before Rome, there was Carthage; Carthage was founded by a woman.* When I think about the story we know about Dido and Aeneas, within the confines of our current socio-political systems, I can see how their tale becomes an allegory for the domination of Rome and patriarchal systems. Dido's powerful empire would thrive for hundreds of years before succumbing to Rome in the famous Punic wars of 264 - 146 BCE. It would be over a hundred years later, around 30 BCE, that Virgil

rebrands Dido's legacy into a secondary plot and tragedy that enhances the tales of Aeneas' heroism and the foundation of Rome.

Again, my imagination takes over: What if our understanding of Western European civilizations extended beyond Rome, reaching back to Carthage, to Dido, to a woman from Tyre (modern-day Lebanon)? What if she was depicted in our histories and mythologies as fully represented and nuanced as most of her male contemporaries?

Creating 'The Queen of Carthage' has been a journey of rediscovering Dido, not as the tragic figure she has so often been depicted as in Western European Art, but as a powerful, multi-faceted leader who shaped Western Civilizations and history. The programme is made up of six sets that explore different aspects of Dido's innerworld juxtaposed against the expectations placed on her because of her identity. The historical and contemporary works presented in this programme amplify the continuous and ever evolving dance between past and present, asking us to consider how our interpretations of history impact our present and future.

We open with Dido, Our Ancestor, in which we call forward Dido's story and reclaim her legacy as part of an unbroken but often unseen lineage of female-identifying, gender diverse and Black, Indigenous and racialized leaders. With Robyn Jacob's new piece, *When The Memory Dies With The Body, It Is Still Held In Time* we consider the impact of erasing people, like Dido from our histories. Jacob's lyrics (created by herself) raises poignant questions for us all to consider: "*What is the sound of all the stories being told together? What is the sound of all the stories telling stories? What is the sound of all possible worlds?*"

This is followed by Dido's rise to leadership, highlighting her prowess as a sea-farer, her success in maritime navigation, technological innovation, and her role as one of the early empire-builders in Western European civilization. At the same time, we emphasize the discord and struggles female-identifying and gender diverse people experience as they rise

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up in society and are expected to take on roles in structures that were created for and by men. The set concludes in a musical depiction of the isolation that is often experienced by women in leadership as expressed through Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber's *Lamento der Verwundten Musquetirer*.

In *Dido, The Lover*, we explore an intimate dialogue between Dido and her inner psyche, breaking away from the traditional narrative that is bound to Aeneas. Instead, famous works such as Alonso Mudarra's *Dulces Exuviae*, with Virgil's version of Dido's demise and Purcell's emotive *When I am Laid In Earth* create an introspective commentary on the perpetual conflict between self-doubt and self-love. This inner struggle is embodied in the contemporary dance created by Marisa Gold and performed in duet with Chloe Meyer's rendition of the andante movement from Henry Eccles Violin Sonata Quinta in E minor. As we bring the first half of the programme to a close, Dido's voice echoes, asking us to remember her, not as an ending note but as an invitation. As we transition into the second half of our programme, we collectively wonder: how shall we remember her?

The second half opens with *Dido, The Outcast*, and a musical and thematic rumination on the tropes that are assigned to female-identifying people when they do not fit into societal expectations, such as the "mad lover" and the "witch". These themes are expressed in Jessica McMann's "Blood, Fire, Flames". The music is energetic and furious, evoking the text and music of the witches from Purcell and Tate's opera as well as pleading and lamentful melodies. The full set moves through the gamut of emotions that women and equity-seeking people can experience when they feel they are always

being ignored, or not taken seriously or looked at in the light of "otherness" - from the feelings of isolation in Purcell's *Mad Genius*, to the frustration in McMann's piece, to the heaviness of grief felt in John Dowland's iconic *Flow My Tears*.

Dido, The Dreamer, asks us to contemplate Dido as a person who dared to bring her dreams to fruition. In an improvisation inspired by Barbara Strozzi's *Lagrima Mia*, Music Director Catalina Vicens and Gambist Nolwenn Le Guern embody both the historical and contemporary, connecting our story and our new commissions to a lineage of female creators, past and present, who are slowly gaining visibility.

We close our story of Dido with Afarin Mansouri's new piece, *I Choose To Love You In Silence*. Mansouri created this piece as a response to Purcell's lament but returns agency to Dido. Her love for herself and for others is reframed as choices she makes freely and willingly, and they are no longer byproducts of the fates and external forces. Mansouri's piece leaves us with a new image of Dido who calls on us all to remember her for her accomplishments, her choices, her legacy, and her joy.

The programme concludes with an Epilogue that brings forward two famous dances from Purcell's *Dioclesian* and *King Arthur*. We have experienced Dido's story as a tragedy for thousands of years now, and in our finale, we reimagine her as a person who reveled in her life, who loved with agency, and led with a powerful vision for a new future. Now we invite you, our audience, to envision a world that consistently honours and uplifts the lives of female-identifying people, especially Black, Indigenous and racialized peoples - past, present, and future - who lead with strength, tenacity, and joy, wholly embracing their individual identities. ■

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Alonso Mudarra: *Dulces exuviae*

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book IV, Lines 651-660

Dulces exuviae, dum fata deusque sinebat,
accipite hanc animam meque his exsolvite curis,
Vixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi,
et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago.

Urbem praeclearam statui, mea moenia vidi,
ulta virum poenas inimico a fratre recepi,
felix, heu nimium felix, si litora tantum
numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae.

Dixit, et os impressa toro, Moriemur inultae,
sed moriamur, ait; sic, sic iuvat ire sub umbras.

"Objects so close and dear to me, while my Fate will allow it,
Receive from me my burdened soul; rescue me from these heavy troubles.
I lived and completed all exploits assigned me by Fortune.
All trace of my greatness beneath the earth will be buried.

I have raised up a noble town, built my fortifications.
I avenged my husband, and I punished my brother, the traitor.
Happy, alas, but too happy. If only the Trojans,
Roaming exiles from Troy, and their ships had not come to our shores!"

This said, her mouth pressed to her pillow, unavenged she will perish.
"But let me die", she cries out, thus, thus sweetly fading in shadows.

Translation: Carol Anne Perry Lagemann