



Dido & Aeneas – Opera by Henry Purcell

On a rainy and cool Sunday afternoon, numerous members and friends of our Association found their way to the Salle Laetitia in Ixelles. A brightly lit and nicely decorated hall set the stage for a lovely musical performance.

Charlotte Messiaen, member of the Hungarian group, conducted a concert version of the opera *Dido & Aeneas*, performed by the vocal ensemble 'Artemiss' and Chelsae string consort. This is the only opera written by the baroque composer Henry Purcell between 1683 and 1688. It consists of a prologue and 3 acts.



Purcell and his librettist Nahum Tate based the work on an episode in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the ancient Roman epic about the Trojan prince, Aeneas, after the fall of Troy.

In Act one, after escaping from Troy, Aeneas and his men set sail for Italy, where he is destined to find Rome. Blown off course to Carthage on the northern shore of Africa, Aeneas falls in love with Dido, Queen of Carthage. The act ends with general rejoicing.



In Act two, the evil Sorceress and her witches are intent on destroying their happiness. To trick Aeneas into leaving Dido, Sorceress, disguised as Mercury, reminds Aeneas of his destiny in Rome and commands him to leave Carthage. Dido and Aeneas realize that they must separate.

In Act three, as the fleet is being prepared to leave, the wicked Sorceress and her witches celebrate their victory and sing of their delight. Dido and Aeneas sing the famous duet 'Away, away! No, I stay- Away, Away!' When Aeneas realizes that he must leave, Dido is embittered and broken hearted, she knows she cannot live without him. She then prepares to meet her fate – death on the stake - in the moving aria 'When I am laid in earth' (also known as 'Dido's lament'), whereupon cupids come to scatter roses on her tomb, 'soft and gentle as her heart'.



The enthusiasm and sense of humour of the young singers and string ensemble, together with some amusing costume details, particularly for the witches, made for a great experience. Charlotte Messiaen, apart from conducting the ensemble, also played the role of Mercury, telling Aeneas that his destiny was to leave to found the new city of Troy, creating the enormous dilemma between his duty and the love for Dido, eventually leading to a very sad ending.



This sadness was quickly forgotten when the audience's gaze fell upon the generous cake and sandwich buffet, lovingly prepared by our Hungarian friends. Much socializing followed, lubricated by excellent Hungarian wines, thanks to the Hungarian Embassy. It seemed like nobody wanted to go home after such an enlightening and beautiful musical afternoon.

Many thanks to all the ladies from the Hungarian group, your hospitality is world famous! And a great big 'Thank you' to Charlotte Messiaen and all the singers and musicians who gave their time so generously.

Renate Smith, Austrian group