

## IB MUSIC – Prescribed Work

**Henry Purcell**

**(ca. 1659 - 1695)**

**Dido and Aeneas  
(1689)**

### Overall Work

*Dido and Aeneas*, by Henry Purcell, is England's oldest opera. As far as we know it was first performed in 1689, at a girl's school in Chelsea, London, run by a Mr Josias Priest, who was a dancing master. Unfortunately, neither the original, nor any 17th Century copy of the score, survives.

#### Orchestration

**Violin I , Violin II, viola, cello, Basso Continuo/ Harpsichord**

Since it was first performed at a girls' school, we might assume that the tenor and bass parts in the chorus were added at a later date. In modern performances, sometimes the Sailor and the Sorceress are played by women.

#### Characters

- Dido, Queen of Carthage      soprano
- Aeneas, the Trojan Prince      tenor
- Belinda, Dido's sister      soprano
- 2nd Woman      mezzo-soprano
- Sorceress      mezzo-soprano
- First and Second Witches      soprano
- First Sailor      soprano (or tenor)
- Chorus of Courtiers, Witches or Sailors, depending on the scene

#### Synopsis

The story for *Dido and Aeneas* was adapted from part of the *Aeneid* by Virgil. Dido, Queen of Carthage, falls in love with Aeneas, who has landed in Carthage after fleeing from Troy after defeat in the Trojan War. However, some witches living near Carthage, who hate Dido, remind him that he is fated to go and be the founder of the Roman Empire. Aeneas leaves Dido, who is heartbroken and kills herself.

This is slightly changed from the version in the *Aeneid*, where there were no witches. In the *Aeneid*, the gods intervene to remind Aeneas of his duty.

In the opera the action is divided into six scenes. There are various ways of splitting up the action in the opera, stemming from different manuscripts of the score. In some versions the action is split into two parts; in others the action is split into three acts. However, underlying all of these is the basic structure of six dramatic scenes.

The story is exceptional for opera of this period, because one of the major characters (Dido) dies. In most pre-19th Century opera, the hero or heroine's life may be threatened, but something usually happens to save the day by the end of the opera.

### 1. Overall Form:

If divided into two major sections, each would be divided into three parts. Each section has its own tonal centre.

	<b>Dido's Palace</b>	
Section 1	Introduction of Dido <i>(Dido reluctant to submit her feelings)</i>	C minor
	<b>Dido's Palace</b>	
Section 2	Entrance of Aeneas <i>(Belinda optimistic and encouraging, triumph of emotion over reason and destiny)</i>	C major
	<b>Cave Scene</b>	
Section 3	Witches <i>(plot to destroy happiness)</i>	F major
	<b>Grove Scene</b>	
Section 4	The Hunt	D minor/ major
	<b>Harbour</b>	
Section 5	Sailors Depart <i>(witches revel in own success)</i>	Bb major
	<b>Dido's Death</b>	
Section 6	Dido's anguish and death	G minor

If the **score** is planned in two large parallel sections, each one including three dramatic and tonal divisions, then dramatically the 6 sections form an arch:

1. Dido's anguish
2. Aeneas's renunciation of his destiny, gets together with Dido
3. Witches plot against the pair
4. Witches carry out their plan
5. Aeneas accepts his destiny, separation from Dido
6. Dido's anguish/ death

## ACT I

### No.1

#### Overture

- follows 2-section pattern made popular by Lully
- french overture
- Frequent chromaticism
- begins with 3 bar tonic pedal

### No. 2: Scena and Chorus 20th Century Blues

- Both are more cheerful, due to the movement to the softer mediant and submediant.

### No. 3:

#### Ah! Belinda

- Miniature da capo aria (see ground bass analysis)

### No. 4: Recitative

#### Grief increases

### No. 5: Chorus

#### When monarchs unite

### No. 6: Recitative

#### Whence could so much virtue spring

- Note: The recitatives in Act 1 are like the battleground for Dido's struggling conscience.
- Dido:
- Metre: regular, rhythmical; declamation forcible; wide range; alternation between C major and minor, bold coloratura
  - Belinda: moves through G minor, Eb and Ab ,ends with suspense on the dominant G.

**No. 7: Duet and Chorus****Fear no danger**

- Balletic duet and chorus considered the most “frenchified” piece in the opera.
- intrusion of G minor (death key of Dido) cruelly ironic in a chorus celebrating her love triumph.

**No. 8: Recitative****See your royal guest****No. 9: Chorus****Cupid only****No. 10: Recitative****If not for mine****No. 11: Air****Pursue thy conquest****No. 12: Chorus****To the hills and the vales****No. 13: The Triumphant Dance**

- see ground bass analysis)

**No. 14: Prelude for the Witches and Recitative****Wayward sisters****No. 15: Chorus****Harm's our delight****No. 16: Recitative****The Queen of Carthage****No. 17: Chorus****Ho! ho! ho!****No. 18: Recitative****Ruin'd ere the set of sun****No. 19: Chorus****Ho! ho! ho!****No. 20: Duet****But, ere we this perform****No. 21: Chorus****In our deep vaulted cell**

- witches-each echo is either three or 6 beats long, the stress on the 2nd or 5<sup>th</sup> beat
- the shift of the accent to the **hemiola cadence** (bars 15 -19) emphasizes the cross relations.

**No. 22 Echo Dance of Furies****Act II****No. 23: Ritornelle****No. 24: Song and Chorus****Thanks to these lonesome vales****No. 25: Song****Oft she visits****No. 26: Recitative****Behold, upon my bended spear****No. 27: Song and Chorus****Haste to town****No. 28: Recitative****Stay, Prince**

**Act III****No. 29: Prelude, Song and Chorus****Come away, fellow sailors****No. 30: The Sailors' Dance****No. 31: Recitative and Song****See the flags; Our next motion must be to storm****No. 32: Chorus****Destruction's our delight****No. 33: The Witches' Dance****No. 34: Recitative****Your counsel****No. 35: Recitative****But Death, alas!****No. 36: Chorus****Great minds****No. 37: Recitative****Thy hand, Belinda****No. 38: Lament****When I am laid in earth (see ground bass analysis)**

- Dido's lament
- a passacaglia: the bass line repeats over and over; an example of the bass-oriented thinking of the new harmonic system of tonality
- text painting on the world "trouble" with a **tritone**, an interval carefully avoided in the Renaissance, but now part of the forward-striving energy that drives tonality

**No. 39: Chorus****With drooping wings**

- echoes chromaticism of Dido's air; in bars 14-17 the chromatics lessen, in bar 18 the rests boost the emotional effect and the grief motive is repeated for the last time in alto (f natural – Bb)

**Purcell's compositional style****2. The Affectation of Key**

*Dido and Aeneas* has a well-defined key structure. Purcell used major keys to evoke happiness and minor keys to evoke sadness. The first scene is in C minor, because Dido is unhappy and fearful about falling in love with Aeneas. However, Aeneas loves Dido back and everyone is happy and so the next scene shifts in key to C major. Then follows the Cave Scene, where the witches hatch their plot. This mirrors the key structure of act one, but going from F minor to F major, when they have finalized their diabolical plan.

Although key changes from major to minor are a fairly common device used to illustrate happiness and sadness, Purcell's are exceptional, because they change from tonic minor to tonic major (C minor to C major, for example), rather than tonic minor to relative major.

There are some interruptions to the otherwise neat key structure, however. When the witches in the cave scene refer to the hunting party in the grove scene, the F tonality of this scene is interrupted by the key of D, the key of the grove scene. Also, when Aeneas enters in scene two, the tonality shifts from C major to E minor, showing that Aeneas formed an interruption to Dido's life in Carthage.

One can also tell from the key structure that the end of the Grove scene has been lost. The overall key of this scene is D. However, the scene ends in the dominant key of A. For the scene to be complete it would have to return to D again, which it doesn't. In one of the early sources for *Dido and Aeneas*, there is reference to an extra chorus at the end of this scene. Happily, whatever is missing doesn't affect the story line in a major way.

KEY	symbolises/ often associated with-	Used in:
<b>C minor</b>	Tragedy/Anguish - Dido	No. 3 'Ah Belinda'
<b>C major- trumpet key</b>	'Ceremony and battle' key for Purcell –Dido  Belinda/ 2 <sup>nd</sup> woman  Sorceress  witches	Within recit. 1 'Whence should so much virtue' Duett/Chorus no. 7- 'Fear no danger'  No. 16, (bars 8-10) 'Deprived of fame' Chorus 17. 'Ho, ho, ho'
<b>D minor</b>	Restrained grief	
<b>E minor</b>	'Hate' key	
<b>F major</b> ('recorder key' lowest note on treble)	'Love' key for Purcell, strongly associated with pastoral peace Belinda	Within Recit. 1 'Whence should so much virtue'
<b>F minor</b>	horror	Sorceress
<b>G major</b>	Royalty / Aeneas	
<b>G minor- (the gamut, lowest note g symbolises the grave)</b>	Death – Dido	Lament Come Away
<b>Bb</b> (favourite oboe key)	Bacchic jollity	Sailor's

### 3. Dance Movements

The opera includes several dance movements. Sometimes the music for a chorus is repeated and, instead of singing, the chorus dance, and sometimes there is a whole separate dance movement. The Echo Dance in the cave scene and the Sailor's Dance at the harbour are examples of this.

It is thought that there was more dance music to start with, but some of it was lost. This may provide an explanation for the incompleteness of the Grove Scene - there may have been a dance at the end which restored the key to the tonic.

French opera of the time often had ballet music, but this wasn't terribly fashionable in England. However, *Dido and Aeneas* was written for Josiah Priest, who was a dancing master, which may explain the number of dances in the opera.

#### 4. Word Painting – the use of musical tools to enhance the meaning of the text

Emphasizing text over music was important in the Baroque period, as well as to Purcell personally. He believed that "as poetry is the harmony of words, so music is that of notes; and as poetry is a rise above prose and oratory, so is music the exaltation of poetry".

Among the first musical choices a composer makes when approaching a text is that of key or mode. There are two main musical modes, major and minor. Major modes are generally happy, minor the opposite. One expects a sad sentiment to be sung in a minor mode; however, composers can play with these expectations to highlight an underlying ambivalence in a text.

Another musical choice is that of tempo..

A composer's most direct tool for word painting is melodic shape. Words are set to melody in two ways, syllabic and melismatic. Syllabic is the most common. With one note per syllable of text, it emphasizes clarity and flow. A melisma is more than one note sung on a single syllable. This expressive device highlights certain words and enhances their emotional impact. Melismatic text setting is a special expressive choice. When a composer writes a melisma on a word, the clarity of that word can be partly or even greatly obscured as the shape of the melody takes prominence over the natural flow of the text. A fine composer will use melismas in important moments where the expressive meaning of a word overwhelms its grammatical or rhythmic place in the poem.

Melismas offer performers great opportunity for personal expression. Purcell writes exquisitely complex melismas to color key words such as "torments," "pity," and "sorrows."

Nahum Tate, better known for writing the words to the Christmas Carol 'While Shepherds Watched', wrote the libretto for this opera. It isn't a particularly inspiring piece of English poetry. However, Purcell demonstrates his skill in bringing the words to life. For example, in Dido's recitative, 'Whence could so much virtue spring', Purcell paints the word 'storm' with a melisma (several notes on the same syllable) to conjure up the impression of a storm. This contrasts to the painting of the word 'soft', a few bars later, which uses a sighing, descending semitone.

#### 5. Poetic Metre in Purcell's Works/ similarity and differences between French and Purcell's dance styles.

Duplets	Triplets
Iambic (I.I)	Anapaestic (..I.I)
Trochaic (I.I.)	Dactylic (I..I.)

Declamatory style is an expressive recitative focusing on the text, musical repetition is avoided; harmonic rhythm, pace and phrase lengths are irregular. Purcell tries to mirror speech rhythm therefore the high rhythmic variety in the vocal line.

Purcell's declamatory style is usually in 4/4 accompanied by a static note in the bass which often rises to the dominant after a couple of bars. In a lyrical piece however, the bass moves quickly, predictably and sometimes imitates the vocal line.

Purcell uses variations of metre to create different effects:

- 1) i.e. the give a feeling of triple time signature
  - a. Iambic lines, first foot inverted : I..I
  - b. 'Thanks to these lonesome vales' (Belinda,
- 2) an effective musical way to support the stress on 2 syllables was to position each on a primary count,
  - a. i.e. a duple-metre opening with the 1st syllable on count 1, the next on count 3, e.g.

IGreat Iminds a Igainst them Iselves con Ispire'

2            4            6            8

This is known as 'iambic lines beginning with two adjacent stressed syllables', ( I I . I )

- 3) to allow the singer to choose which syllable he/she would like to emphasize depending on how the text should be interpreted
 

Purcell uses iambic beginnings with 3 adjacent unstressed syllables  
(...I). This is particularly effective in rapid conversational speech.  
Lyrical style: 'When I am laid'  
Declamatory style: 'If not for mine, for empire's sake' and 'And yet this death of mine I fear'
- 4). Trochaic lines are usually lyrical, the few exceptions being 'From silent shades' and 'See the fags and streamers curling'.

**Two syllable** schemes are common in trochaic lyrics e.g. 'Banish sorrow, banish care/ Grief should ne'er approach the fair)

The **gavotte** introduced in the court of Louis XIV features duple metre (2 or 2/2), a moderate tempo and eight, 4 bar phrases.

'Banish Sorrow' however, begins with regular phrasing but in the second half expands the expected final 2 bars to 3 ½ bars and, in the repeat, to 3 bars.

**Hence the Purcell gavotte is not exactly in line with the French.**

'**Fear no Danger**' – is very similar to the Lullian minuet with its ¼ ½ ½ ¼ rhythm pattern beginning on the first beat of the bar.

Lully used this style in his *Ballet des Nations* and *Les adamants magnifiques*. They include almost the same rhythmic patterns as 'Fear no Danger'.

- 5) Mixed iambic and trochaic lines:
  - very common in the recitatives of Dido and Aeneas.
  - only 4 exceptions are 4 trochaic lines 'See the flags and streamers curling' and a couple of iambic lines. 'The Queen of Carthage, whom we hate'.
  - 10 declamatory texts are set in mixed style; 5 are lyrical
  - in triple metre 'Ah Belinda I am press'd'
  - in duple 'Cupid only throws the dart'.

- 6) Anapaestic lines with occasional iambic feet  
To the /hills and the /vales, to the /rocks and the /mountains,

3            6            9            12

To the /musical /groves, and the /cool shady /fountains - **is regular**

3            6            9            12

**But**

When /monarchs u/nite, how /happy their /state

2            5            7            10

They /triumph at /once o'er their /foes and their /fate

2            5            8            11

Are all irregular, showing Purcell's flexibility towards expressing the meaning of the text.

## 7) Dactylic lines, alternating in 11 and 10 syllables

- The triumphing dance – The ground begins on the downbeat, divided into 4 bar phrases, beginning with 2 bars of quarter beats.
- It differs in that the endings of the 4 bar phrases consist of a half beat to a quarter beat, or a dotted half beat.
- This helps the piece to move forward rather than coming to a halt every 4 bars due to the cadence at the end of the ground.

## 6. Ground Bass in Purcell's Dido and Aeneas.

The four pieces which employ ground bass technique in 'Dido' are:

1. **Act I – No. 3** - Ah, Belinda
2. **Act I – No. 13** - The Triumphing Dance
3. **Act II – No. 25** - Oft she visits
4. **Act III – No. 38** - When I am laid in Earth

Common to all ground bass pieces is:

- Their built-in rigidity
- Regularity of bass serves to influence harmony, melody and phrase structure
- Recurring full cadence at the end of the pattern

This regularity never becomes a repetitious restriction for Purcell.

### Analysis:

#### 1. Ah, Belinda

Key	Time Signature	Form	Sung by	Style
C minor	3/4	AABCB	Dido	Declamatory/Air

##### 1) 1<sup>st</sup> Section (AA - free declamation style)

- a. the ground bass lasts 4 bars, throughout the song the bass is played 21 times.
- b. Purcell uses the same harmonic pattern is repeated every 4 bars ending with a strong V-I cadence (except for 2 repetitions in the dominant key, the 12 and 13<sup>th</sup> repeat)

#### How does Purcell maintain interest throughout his ground bass pieces?

- P's harmonic use of dissonance → resolution
- P's unique treatment of phrase structure

#### Purcell's treatment of Phrase Structure

##### 1<sup>st</sup> declamatory phrase:

Ah, Belinda, I am prest,  
With torment not to be confest.

Purcell does not stick to this phrasing, rather breaks the phrase into smaller sections-

- 1<sup>st</sup> phrase -(**Sib. Ex. 1**); phrase 2 -only includes 'Ah, Belinda, I am prest with torment'
- 3rd phrase includes the whole couplet (**Sib. Ex. 2**)
- **Thus the three phrases are of quite different length and serve to counteract the repetitive ground bass.**
- The 1<sup>st</sup> phrase, like the ground, is 4 bars long but begins after the ground, remains out of sync. and is based nearly only on the C minor chord (tonic).
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> phrase, longer in text, begins also on 2<sup>nd</sup> bar of ground but is squeezed ('prest') into only 3 bars (just one way of how Purcell choose to portray the word), and cadences with the bass.



- The 3<sup>rd</sup> climaxing phrase stretches over 9 bars, begins with the ground; the middle cadences coincide but the last cadence is forestalled by a repeating 'f' in the melody, causing the vocal cadence to occur at the beginning of the new ground pattern.
- **Here the bass is like a thread which helps to tie the piece together as a whole.**

The section is then repeated.

### 2nd Section of Song: (in song style -rounded BCB form)

'Peace and I are strangers grown  
I languish till my grief is known  
Yet would not have it guess'd.'

- 1<sup>st</sup> Phrase: - is 4 bars long but anticipates the bass by 1 bar.
  - Note: the pitch of the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 notes in the vocal line are the same as the bass thus emphasizing the melodic and contrapuntal nature of the ground bass – here Purcell changes the function of the cadential bar.
- The bass and vocal line imitate each other ending out of synchronization thus heightening the meaning of the word 'peace'
  - Dido's attempt to capture peace by the steady re-occurring bass line is undermined by the strange change in the harmonic line and, as Dido and peace become strangers, so the melodic line and the bass line grow apart.
- As the phrase is repeated it is extended to last 5 bars allowing the cadences to correspond but then the bass modulates to the dominant – again an expression of 'strangeness'.
- The next phrase is stated in 4 bars, coinciding with the transposed bass.
- During its repeat Dido's 'languishing' is accentuated through melisma (similar to 'grief' in 'Banish Sorrow').
- The phrase is extended to 7 bars without the bass returning to the tonic (C) but leads to the final 5 bar vocal phrase, providing a V-I cadence in symmetry with the bass.
- The double-lined repetition of the first line of the section
- **'Peace and I are strangers grown'** help to give the whole piece a more rounded structure.
- 

Purcell creates interest throughout his ground bass compositions in that he:

- blends regularity with irregularity
- The bass is not a mechanical facet of the composition but a thread that ties the composition together
- The vocal line is often asymmetrical to the bass line but is regular within its own pattern (here AABCB)
- The bass line and vocal line sometimes combine but always coincide

### Purcell's harmonic use of dissonance → resolution.

#### Dissonance

- Purcell's use of dissonance is very English. English contemporaries and predecessors of Purcell were far more likely to have dissonance in their music than, for example, their Italian counterparts.
  - Particular examples of dissonance in *Dido and Aeneas* are the first part of the overture and Dido's Lament. In the lament, the string parts are very dissonant, helping to illustrate Dido's extreme anguish.
    - E.g. The various treatment of the cadence (see sib.example 4).
- a). the assumed harmonies are strongly emphasized by placing the root of the tonic 6/4 and the leading note over the dominant consecutive g's.
- b). the bass 'f' and melody a' confirm the implied subdominant chord but the sonority is quickly tainted by the movement of the a' to g'.
- The rhythm, together with this dissonance depict the meaning of the word 'presst'.
  - The dissonance resolves to the root of the subdominant but the bass moves up to g, creating a new dissonance.

- This appoggiatura resolves to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the tonic when the word changes but the word change is not synchronised with the movement in the bass – both this and the dissonant melodic tones help to maintain interest and detract from the persistency of the ground bass.
- c). similar melodic and rhythmic means but altered enough for a distinction to be made:
- the bass f is reinterpreted as the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the supertonic chord, the dissonant g` is approached by leap from d`, thus emphasizing the dramatic sharpness of the ‘torment’ in comparison to the closeness of ‘presst’.
  - This subtle device akes the bar seem quite different – the higher range and the disjunct motion give added to the energy to the phrase.
- d) Here the strong harmonic structure of the ground is not emphasized by either melodic dissonance or rhythmic decoration.
- Instead, the B is held over 3 beats, altering the harmonic rhythm and meaning of the pattern.
  - The f in the bass seems like an accented passing note (appoggiatura) with the two g’s supporting the dominant harmony, thus eliminating the subdominant and I6/4 chords making the bar not a cadential movement in C minor but a plagal cadence in G major.

## 2. The Triumphant Dance

Key	Time Signature	Form	Sung by	Style
C major	3/4	AB		dance

- is due to its function as a dance much more regular than ‘Ah, Belinda’. (Phrases of 3, 5 or 7 simply wouldn’t work – Purcell adjusts his compositional style to accommodate for the function of the piece)
- the ground in the dance is 4 bars long, repeated 12 times
- is very simple harmonically
- rhythmically square; few striking dissonances

### most interesting compositional device is the Phrase structure:

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Half

- 1st two lines follow bass line, 4 bars long each; third phrase begins with an upbeat of one and a half.
- This motion is carried through to until the cadence in the dominant.
- This melodic phrase is therefore 8 bars long, it misses out the intermediate tonic cadence and ends with the bass in the dominant key.
- The section is balanced by a 4 bar musical couplet which coincides with the 2 bass statements ending in the tonic. This ends the first half.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Half.

- Beginning melodic phrase corresponds to the ground, followed by a 2 bar interlude which serves as an elongated upbeat to the next 8 bar phrase connecting a tonic / dominant bass statement.
- A melodic couplet in the tonic follows with the piece ending with a final single phrase in the tonic.
- Cadences and structure are maintained throughout but phrases are varied into a two-part pattern that helps to give the movement more shape than just the bass pattern would allow.
- The only irregularity is the 2 bar interlude in the second part where the melody shifts from the bass into the melody (a device also used in Ah, Belinda).

## 3. Oft she visits

Key	Time Signature	Form	Sung by	Style
D minor	4/4	AB	2 <sup>nd</sup> woman (often Belinda)	air

- here both function and meaning are combined in the compositional song/ dance style.
- ground is 4 bars long
- is written in 1/8ths rather than ¼ beats hence more harmonic possibilities
- bass is repeated 8 times throughout the song; in bars 24-25 with a cadence to the dominant, then 5 times in the dance postlude.
- the bass is never transposed nor taken up by the vocal part.
- Song begins with 1 statement of the bass, then the voice enters with a 4 bar phrase which matches the bass exactly – this is then repeated.

- From then on the cadences of melody and bass do not coincide until the end of the vocal part. The reason for this can be discovered in the meaning of the text.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> phrase: rhyming couplet, describing regular practice of Diana, goddess of the hunt.

**Of she visits this lone mountain**

**Of she bathes her in this fountain**

- The text goes on to describe how Actaeon accidentally witnessed this ritual and was turned into a stag by Diana and as punishment killed by his own dogs.
- The ritual is represented by the ground bass, proceeding regularly throughout the piece.
- The dismantling of Actaeon's life is portrayed in the voice. 'Here Actaeon met is fate' is only 3 bars long, cadencing in the tonic, D minor.
- 'Pursu'd by his own hounds' is two bars long, ending in A Major (the dominant of D). 'And after mortal wounds' is only one and a half bars, cadencing to Bb major.
- After this the music is elongated musically and textually.
- The last phrase is repeated with the addition of the text 'discovered too late'; lasts 4 ½ bars and cadences to the dominant, A major.
- The whole phrase is then repeated with the addition of 'here Actaeon met his fate); lasts 6 bars and cadences to D minor.

Circular and asymmetrical text of the second part of song:

Here Actaeon met is fate	(1)
Pursu'd by his own hounds	(2)
And after mortal wounds	(3)
Discovered too late	(4)
Here Actaeon met his fate	(5)

Voice	(1)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(3+4)	(3+4+5)
key	d	G	A	Bb	A	d
bass	d	d	d	d	d	d

- Note the central rhyme (hounds-wounds) joins two separate grammatical phrases, Purcell mirrors this disjunction by setting his melody and bass at cross purposes.
- In the figure above notice the cadence points of the lines (numbers) and the bass.
- While the lines of the poem change key according to the meaning of the text Purcell employs 5 repetitions of the bass.
- The two do not coincide, nor does the sentence structure.
- The result is that the piece loses its rigidity, the melody comes across as free, almost improvisatory in feeling.
- As soon as the song ends regularity returns, cadences and melody correspond. A 4 bar phrase is repeated (AA) followed by another 4 bar phrase moving to a cadence in F major (B), then two 4 bar phrases again in D minor (CC) finish the piece.

#### 4. 'When I am laid in Earth'

#### Dido's Lament

Key	Time Signature	Form	Sung by	Style
G minor	3/2	AB	Dido	lament

➤ *Dido's Lament - is considered the masterpiece of the opera*

- The Ground Bass – Ex .1**
  - Is unusual as it :
  - is 5 bars in length
  - chromatic descent through the upper 4<sup>th</sup>, then the cadence leap to the lower octave (G minor)
  - these two distinct parts of the ground divide it into two equally balanced halves.

### Analysis:

- Voice enters after one full bass pattern.
- First two lines ‘When I am laid in earth may my wrongs create/ no trouble in thy breast’ are both set so that they end on D, the centre of the ground bass, (the dominant harmony).
- The bass descends chromatically, the voice strives upward in stepwise motion from the tonic to Eb.
- Phrase structure is free – 9 bars divided into 4 + 5 over bass repetitions of 5 bars.

#### Ex. 2 Small symmetries tying the 9 bar phrase together

- The declamatory section ‘Thy hand, Belinda’ is tied closely to the lament beginning on c’’ then moving chromatically through to d’ (moves from th subdominant of G to its dominant, from a 4<sup>th</sup> above to a 4<sup>th</sup> below the tonic. (see sib. Ex. 3)
  - The plagal cadence to D major ends the declamation and leads to the lament in G minor –the typical pattern of most two-part airs.
  - The bass melody following the plagal cadence derives its chromatic, descending motion from the preceding vocal line.
    - The whole chromatic octave is not given, it is interrupted in the middle at ‘d’ just as the declamation had ended on ‘d’. Dido does resolve the downward octave, diatonically however.
    - As Dido dies (during the instrumental epilogue) the full chromatic G minor scale is given in the treble; a heart rendering, sublime moment in the opera.
    - The second section begins with outbursts on d’’; the line continues to hover around this note until on the third and last ‘remember me’ it leaps to the high g’’, then to descend diatonically through the octave to the song’s starting point, cadencing with the bass in G minor.
    - The section is then repeated but is initially aligned differently to the ground.
    - This change helps to portray Dido’s distraction and helps to build up the necessary climax for the repeated high g’’.

In Dido’s lament Purcell achieves total mastery over regular and irregular musical elements:

- **the ground repeats strictly while the vocal line varies**
- **vocal line sticks to a larger but regular repetitive pattern**
- **vocal cadences overlap successfully with bass because the ground itself is irregular in length**
- **ground bass proceeds the declamatory section which proceeds the air**
- **chromatic and diatonic scales are combined, the full chromatic scale only employed once in the postlude.**

#### Note: Purcell’s use of chromaticism - fate motive?

- ❖ First used as Dido speaks of her impending death
- ❖ Underlies her final words to Belinda
- ❖ As Dido completes her requests her vocal line coincides with the bass chromaticism-she dies. Only then is the full chromatic scale heard.

## Vocabulary

**‘ground bass’** is a short bass line (usually 4 to 8 bars long) which is repeated constantly throughout a piece.

While the bass stays the same, the melodic voices develop and change above it. A good ground bass piece will have a clear, simple bass line, with imaginative development of the upper parts. Passacaglia and Chaconne are alternative names for this type of piece.

### **dec-la-ma-tion** *n.*

1. A recitation delivered as an exercise in rhetoric or elocution.

2.

a. Vehement oratory.

b. A speech marked by strong feeling; a tirade.

The culminating exercises of a rhetorical education were those practice speeches known as declamations.

These complete practice orations came after the rudimentary exercises or progymnasmata. While those preliminary exercises dealt with general themes in abstract terms (such as the *thesis* exercise), a declamation applied a theme to a specific individual or a given pragmatic concern (*hypothesis*). By providing a specific context or kairos for oratory, students were introduced to the constraints of both occasion and audience, and the need (through decorum) to find apt words for them within a unified oration.

These exercises were either deliberative in nature (the *suasoria*) or forensic (the *controversia*):

**‘lament’** : in music is a piece featuring a ground bass. Its repeating bass theme contains a descending, typically chromatic figure (often descending from tonic to dominant) in slow triple meter.

### **Air-**

**Ayre:** An English song, equivalent to the French *Air de cour*. It generally was written in strophic form, and was sung in solo voice with lute accompaniment. Occasionally parts were written for the bass viol, and other voice parts, such as alto, tenor, and bass.

While the earlier music, especially that for multiple voices, was polyphonic, after about 1610 the music usually was homophonic, sung syllabically and without meter, with a clear influence from the *musique mesurée* which developed in Paris around 1570.

Notes : Henry Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas – E.T.Harris

Purcell Studies – Curtis Price

Purcell – Dido and Aeneas, An Opera – Curtis Price

Intranet.