

Cape
Consort

THE
FUGARD
THEATRE · CAPE TOWN
— STUDIO —

LENTE LOUW, WILLEM BESTER, ELSABÉ RICHTER,
NICK DE JAGER, ANTOINETTE BLYTH, RIAAN LE ROUX

in:

HENRY PURCELL'S

DIDO & AENEAS

Direction and Design: Marí Borstlap
Musical Direction: Hans Huysen

THE CAPE CONSORT @ THE FUGARD STUDIO

2-4 JUNE 20:00 | 5 JUNE 16:00

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Marí Borstlap received a master's degree in drama (with directing as practical component) in 2012 under Marthinus Basson at Stellenbosch University. She has written and/or directed close to twenty independent productions for schools and professional companies, including *WolkKop* (2014 ATKV-Tienertoneel winner, Best Director), *Lament in G* (2011), *Stamlint* (2014), *2092: God van Klank* (Fleur du Cap nominations for Best Director, Best Set Design, Best Sound Design; Rosalie van der Gucht Young Director's Award; nomination for Best Drama production at the 2013 Stellenbosch University Woordfees; ATKV WOORDtroFEE for Excellence in Drama), *Drif*, by Reza de Wet and, most recently, *Kristalvlakte*. Marí is also a freelance set and lighting designer and her recent work includes Mike van Graan's drama *Rainbow Scars* (nominated for a Naledi theatre award in 2013), *Richard the Third* (set design, Maynardville, 2014) *Dirk Ligter* (set design, 2015), *Vaselinetjie* (lighting design, 2015) and *Tyd en Weill* (lighting design, 2015). *Dido and Aeneas* is her first opera.

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WOULD LIKE
TO THANK THE
FOLLOWING
PEOPLE AND
ORGANISATIONS:

Joan St Leger Lindbergh Charitable Trust
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Cape Centenary Trust
Cape Consort Protea Patrons (R10 000 and more):
*Eric Fologwe, Catherine & Richard Lomborg
and Colin Davies*
Cape Consort Buchu Patrons (R1 000 and more):

Instrumentalists

Hans Huyssen (Musical director, baroque cello)
Annie Shaw and Janna Khweis (baroque violin)
Emile de Roubaix (baroque viola)
Uwe Grosser (lute, chitarrone, baroque guitar)

Singers

Lente Louw (*Dido*)
Willem Bester (*Aeneas/Medical intern*)
Elsabé Richter (*Belinda/Matron of Carthage Asylum*)
Nick de Jager (*Medical intern/CEO of Trojan&Trojan Marine Co.*)
Antoinette Blyth (*Medical intern*)
Riaan le Roux (*Medical intern*)

ABOUT HENRY PURCELL'S DIDO & AENEAS:

Book IV of Vergil's *Aeneid* (70-19 BC) tells the story of Aeneas, the mythological founder of Rome, who is temporarily distracted from his quest when he is shipwrecked in North Africa. He enters into a relationship with Dido, Queen of Carthage, but abandons her upon instructions from the gods. She subsequently commits suicide.

Nahum Tate (librettist) and Henry Purcell depart from the myth in a few significant ways: Dido is placed as the central figure and falls in love without the help of a love potion. The lovers part, not because Aeneas obeys the gods, but because he is deceived by witches in disguise and because Dido refuses to forgive him despite the fact that Aeneas vows to defy his fate. One can understand the attempts by Tate and Purcell at humanising the myth if one takes into account that the opera was first performed at the girls' school of Josias Priest in London (1689); an audience of teenaged girls (and a modern audience?) would probably identify more readily with the emotional trauma of a heroine than with the obedience of the ideal Roman citizen. Tate's version also reads as a morality tale: girls of easy virtue must beware, for men pursue their own interests. The unpopularity of the opera in Purcell's lifetime could be attributed to this, but perhaps also to the fact that tragic endings were simply not fashionable at the time.

Creative team

Mari Borstlap (*stage direction, set design, lighting design*)
Jeandré Hammond (*production assistant*)
Maryke Howard (*graphic design*)
Wyrd Films (*cinematography*)

Dido and Aeneas has often been revived since the 19th century and has since become one of the most beloved works in the repertoire, precisely because of its in-depth exploration of the intense emotional pain caused by a failed love affair. The opera is sometimes criticised for its weak characterisation, especially that of Aeneas, and this presents a challenge to any director wishing to tell the classic tale. Mari Borstlap addresses this shortcoming by setting the entire opera in the period between the breakup and her suicide. In Borstlap's rendering, Dido has been admitted to a psychiatric hospital after being driven to insanity by her emotional anguish. Plagued by hallucinations and nightmares, she spends her last days somewhere between reality, the past, and the inner world of her disturbed mind. In this way, the emotional impact of the breakup is placed in even sharper focus, and Borstlap's work becomes a continuation of Tate's humanising efforts. Borstlap's rendering of the libretto also supplies creative solutions to the doubling up of roles caused by the small cast of the Cape Consort.

– Lente Louw

SINOPSIS

FIRST ACT

Dido is a patient in the Carthage Asylum. Her emotional state fluctuates between depression, psychosis and manic euphoria (*'Shake the cloud from off your brow', 'Banish sorrow, banish care', 'Ah, Belinda, I am pressed with torment', 'When monarchs unite'*). Simple triggers, like hearing Aeneas' name or reading old love letters, set off emotional outbursts and hallucinations featuring Aeneas (*'Whence could so much virtue spring', 'Fear no danger', 'See, see, her royal guest appears'*). The staff need to sedate her to keep her calm and under control (*'Pursue thy conquest, love', 'To the hills and the vales'*). After a tumultuous day, Belinda puts Dido to bed.

SECOND ACT

Dido's fear and mistrust of the hospital staff, as well as the feelings of abandonment that plague her subconscious, manifests in an upsetting nightmare in which the staff appear as antagonistic phantom figures (*'Wayward sisters', 'Harm's our delight', 'But ere we this perform', 'In our deep vaulted cell'*). She wakes up so traumatised that she forgets that it is the morning of her birthday. In an attempt to lighten her spirits, Belinda organises a party for her. The hospital staff take advantage of Belinda's good intentions, and break a few rules (*'Thanks to these lonesome vales', 'Oft she visits', 'Behold, upon my bending spear'*). Belinda's plan succeeds at first, but backfires when one of the staff reminds Dido of Aeneas (*'The skies are clouded'*). Belinda panics, loses control of the situation, and Dido escapes from the asylum (*'Haste, haste to town'*).

The action is interrupted by a flashback, portraying the events that had caused Dido's psychological breakdown: Aeneas, an employee of Trojan & Trojan Marine Co., is promoted to their head office in Rome. He accepts, and decides to end his relationship with Dido. His promotion is celebrated at a jolly office party (*'Stay, Prince, and hear great Jove's command', 'Come away, fellow sailors'*).

THIRD ACT

After searching for a few hours, a staff member spots Dido on the roof of the hospital building. She is clearly hysterical and taunts the staff. For a while, everyone is too shocked to act. She is finally removed from the roof, and suffers harsh 'disciplinary' treatment from Belinda and the interns (*'See the flags and streamers curling', 'Destruction's our delight'*). In a few moments of clarity, Dido sees the events for what they are, namely a disproportionate punishment and a cruel violation of her dignity. Her distress triggers a psychotic episode and Belinda looks on in dismay as Dido has a heated argument with an invisible Aeneas (*'Your council all is*

urged in vain'). When Dido returns to reality, she finally comes to the conclusion that she no longer wishes to live in a world where her love for Aeneas causes her so much suffering. She calmly walks to her room and prepares to take her own life, leaving a note for Belinda. Belinda is overcome by sadness as she reads Dido's final, eloquent thoughts and wishes (*'Great minds against themselves conspire', 'Thy hand, Belinda', 'When I am laid in earth'*).

Dido leaves the Carthage Asylum and walks into the ocean to her death.

– Mari Borstlap

ABOUT THE CAPE CONSORT AND OUR DIRECTORS

The Cape Consort is a Cape Town-based ensemble dedicated to stylistically and historically informed performances of early music, co-founded and directed by Hans Huyssen. Since its inception in 2011, the group has given more than 70 concerts with close to 30 different programmes, exploring and presenting rarely performed Baroque and Renaissance repertoire. Conceived as a flexible group, the Consort adapts its core forces of 5 singers and basso continuo to the requirements of the repertoire. To date, the Cape Consort has released two CDs, both nominated for SAMA-awards. The group was awarded the WOORDtroFEE for Best Classical Music Production at the 2012 Stellenbosch University Woordfees, and was also recognised by a kykNET Fiësta Award nomination for the same production. With Mari Borstlap's dramatization of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, the Consort presents its first fully staged opera production.

Hans Huyssen is a composer, cellist, and conductor with particular interests in Baroque, indigenous African, and contemporary music. As cofounder of the Cape Consort, as well as the Munich-based ensemble *così facciamo*, he spends his time between South Africa and Germany. Hans was awarded the Helgaard Steyn Prize for Composition, and he holds an NRF rating for his research on intercultural music dialogues in South Africa. He recently completed his PhD in composition and the philosophy of complexity, and he currently lectures music history at the South African College of Music at UCT. Hans also manages the independent CD label mucavi records. For more information, visit www.huysen.de.