

Hasse – Didone abbandonata (2013)



Disc 1 1. Sinfonia 2. No principessa - Che a te non pensi - Parte così (1. Akt) 3. Dirò che fida sei - Didone, il re de' Mori 4. Son regina e sono amante - Araspe, alla vendetta 5. Tu mi scorgi al gran disegno - Già tel dissi, o Selene - Stranier, dimmi; chi sei? 6. Quando saprai chi sono sì fiero non sarai - Non partirà se pria - Non è più tempo - Ecco il rival - Siam traditi 7. Tu mi disarmi il fianco - Enea, salvo già sei dalla crudel ferita 8. Non ha ragione, ingrato, un core abbandonato da chi giuro gli fé? 9. A le mie amorose folie - Se resto sul lido Disc 2

1. Indegno, t'offerisci al mio sdegno e non paventi! - Chi sciolse (2. Akt) 2. Leon, ch'errando vada - Ah contro Enea v'è qualche frode ordita 3. Ogni amator suppone - Tu dici ch'io non spero 4. L'augeletto in lacci stretto perché mai cantar si ascolta? - Già so che si nasconde - Come! Ancor non partisti? 5. Ah! Non lasciarmi, no

Disc 3

1. Fra il dovere e l'affetto - Risparmia al tuo gran core 2. Vedi nel mio perdono, perfido traditor - Tanto ardir nella reggia? 3. Tacerò, se tu lo brami - Ah generoso Enea 4. Veggio la sponda, sospiro il lido - Ad ascoltar di nuovo i rimpoveri tuoi vengo - Didone, a che mi chiedi? - Senti 5. Chiamami pur così - E pure in mezzo all'ire 6. Va lusingando amore il credulo mio core 7. Già da larba in difesa - Non son contento (3. Akt) 8. Quando l'onda che nasce dal monte - Addio Selene 9. A trionfar mi chiama un bel desio d'onore - O dio, germana! - Araspe in queste soglie! 10. Già si desta la tempesta - Fuggi, o regina 11. Ombra cara, ombra tradita - Fermati 12. Cadrà fra poco in cenere il suo nascente impero - Numi, onde l'ira in sen tutta mi piomba - A che dissi, infelice!

Didone (Dido) - Theresa Holzhauser, Mezzo-soprano Enea (Aeneas) - Flavio Ferri-Benedetti, Countertenor Iarba (Iarbas) - Valer Barna-Sabadus, Countertenor Selene - Magdalena, Soprano Araspe - Maria Celeng, Soprano Osmida - Andreas Burkhardt, Baritone Hofkapelle München Michael Hofstetter - conductor

If one considers the almost endless list of settings of the first opera seria libretto by Pietro Metastasio, *Didone abbandonata*, one is amazed at the shadowy existence which it has today in comparison with *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate written 35 years earlier. Only Niccolò Jommelli's setting exists in a complete recording and only the scores by Giuseppe

Sarti and Leonardo Vinci were ever published. Written in 1724 for the Teatro di San Bartolomeo in Naples, Metastasio's adaptation was the most popular libretto on the Dido theme in the eighteenth century, a tradition which was continued into the nineteenth century by Saverio Mercadante.

Johann Adolph Hasse wrote his version of *Didone abbandonata* in 1742 to celebrate the birthday of August III, the Elector of Saxony, and also King of Poland, to whom Hasse had been appointed Kapellmeister in 1731. The first interpreter of the title role was Hasse's wife Faustina Bordoni, who was a prima donna at the Dresden Opera. Although it was the custom for operatic performances to be given on the occasion of the monarch's birthdays or name-days, this *dramma per musica* was performed to the inner circle of the court society in the hunting lodge at Hubertusberg. The Hubertusberg version of 1742 and the version which was performed the following year during the Dresden Carnival differ from each other, however, in their respective final scenes. From annotations in a copy of the score held in the archives of the Saxon State Library it can be deduced that this was because of the technical limitations of the tiny theatre in the hunting lodge. The closing scene of the Dresden version portrays Dido's death among the flames of Carthage, as in the original Virgil, whereas at the same point in the action at the premiere it was General Osmida who informed the audience of the tragic outcome.

Since by this time the royal sovereign was no longer identified with gods or heroes, as had been the case in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it became the practice for important court performances to add, at the end of the last act, a special occasion *licenza* (licence). This achieved the main purpose of honouring August III and at the same was in keeping with the festive nature of the performance.

Although the convention of the *lieto fine*, the happy ending, gradually prevailed in opera seria plots in the first half of the eighteenth century—and also in libretti which referred back to classical tragedies—in a few works Metastasio experimented with the dramatic impact of the *tragico fine*, the tragic ending. We find this not only in *Didone abbandonata*, but also in an earlier work, *Catone in Utica*, whose main character commits suicide in the final scene. But whereas Metastasio soon revised the libretto of this opera he left untouched the ending of his libretto about the Carthaginian queen.

Metastasio begins the action when Aeneas's decision has already been made; in the first scene of the piece he admits to his plan to leave Carthage for Italy. In spite of expressing his doubts he is resolute—and that is the conflict inherent in the work. The inner story-line is driven not by the tension between duty and love, but rather by Dido's anticipation of the personal catastrophe which will befall her, expressed in her desperate efforts to prevent Aeneas's departure. Her fear

of abandonment, which is exacerbated on the one hand by Iarba's political intimidation and on the other by her being thrust back into widowhood, adds to her hysteria. So the question is also raised whether it is Dido's real wish to continue her relationship with Aeneas or whether she will panic at her state of abandonment.

After the conflict is exposed—without even an atmosphere-producing introduction—time is excessively drawn out in what follows. In the context of a dramatic dialogue that presents argument rather than emotion, Dido exerts her power as queen less frequently, and instead concentrates all her efforts in trying to prevent Aeneas's departure. In her 'triumph' aria "Son regina e sono amante" in Act I she defends her political and emotional self-determination to Iarba. Her very being as both queen and lover has, however, become a balancing act, in which she visibly loses control of her emotional equilibrium. So Metastasio and Hasse let their heroine offer Aeneas a purely formal counter-argument; although at the beginning of the first act he is still riven by doubt he offers an almost stammered accompanied recitative, then composes himself and in the third act takes his leave with a heroic bravura aria ("A trionfar mi chiama"), devoid of any scruples.

For her part, Dido, in the final scene, takes her leave of the world in an accompanied recitative which, in its metre and linguistic style, clearly recalls Aeneas's aria "Dovrei...ma no...". In the first recitative section of this, the only closing monologue in the whole of Metastasio's oeuvre, Hasse's setting divides the eleven-syllable verse into musical phrases of seven and five syllables. These versi spezzati (broken verses) reveal Dido's deep insecurity, and the consonant-rich language highlights her bitterness and criminatory mindset. The short cavatina "Vado...ma dove...", derived from the declaimed accompanied recitative, emphasises through the contrasting elliptical verse structure and the sung element, Dido's existential helplessness, bereft of voice and face to face with the expression of her all-embracing desolation. The following recitative passage maintains a *tono grave* assonance—serenity and a re-discovered majesty are mirrored in this tragic style.

Amid the raging inferno of Carthage Dido has discharged completely her responsibility as queen to her people. Instead of a sense of an indebted demise there is the stylisation of herself as a tragic figure. So Dido chooses a death of a myth-like character. After Aeneas's curse she at least reverts to the imposing qualities of her identity as a queen and stage-manages her suicide for the benefit of posterity, without an audience in the here and now.--- Isabelle Kranabetter, naxos.com

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