

A pair of operas by England's first great composer, Henry Purcell, are featured on this week's WCPE Opera House. *Dido and Aeneas* (1688) is based on Book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and it recounts the love of the Queen of Carthage for the hero of the Trojan Wars, and her despair when Aeneas abandons her. *King Arthur* (1691), set to a libretto by John Dryden, focuses on the English monarch's efforts to rescue his fiancée, the Cornish Princess Emmeline, who's been kidnapped by King Oswald of Kent.

*Dido and Aeneas* takes place at the court in Carthage, where the courtiers and Belinda (soprano **Susannah Waters**) persuade Queen Dido (mezzo-soprano **Nancy Maultsby**) to admit her love for Aeneas (baritone **Russell Braun**). The witches plot the downfall of Dido and Carthage, agreeing to raise a storm so that the lovers out hunting will be forced to seek shelter in a cave. There, one of them disguised as Mercury will remind Aeneas of his destiny to go on to Italy. This duly takes place and Aeneas prepares to leave. Dido brushes aside his explanations and prepares to die, after which she is mourned by Cupids.

**Martin Pearlman** conducts Boston Baroque in this 1996 recording.

From a 1994 concert with the Orchestra of St. Luke's at New York City's Avery Fischer Hall, soprano **Jessye Norman** sings Dido's Lament, "When I am laid in earth":  
<http://youtu.be/QCpMFAPE5rs>.

In *King Arthur, or The British Worthy*, Arthur, king of the Britons and Oswald, Saxon king of Kent, are rivals for the hand of Emmeline, the blind daughter of the Duke of Cornwall. Already ten bloody battles have been fought and the Saxons have been driven back. The decisive conflict is about to be launched when Emmeline and her attendant Matilda are captured by Oswald. Arthur, having resisted the temptations of two sirens, captures the spirit Grimbald and breaks the enchantments that are set against him. In the last act the opposing armies fight: Arthur meets Oswald in hand-to-hand conflict and, disarming him, offers him his freedom. Emmeline (whose sight has been restored) and Arthur are united. Merlin banishes the winds and Britain's island rises from the sea.

Singing principal roles in this "semi-opera"--more a play with music than a true opera--are sopranos **Jennifer Smith**, **Gillian Fisher**, **Elizabeth Priday**, and **Gill Ross**; male alto **Ashley Stafford**, tenor **Paul Elliott**, and baritone **Stephen Varcoe**.

**John Eliot Gardiner** conducts the English Baroque Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir in this 1994 recording.

As a bonus we'll hear mezzo-soprano **Denyce Graves** sing arias by Purcell, Gluck, and Massenet.

This Saturday, March 9, please join WCPE at 11:00 a.m. EST for the Metropolitan Opera's broadcast of the beginning of Wagner's epic Ring Cycle: *Das Rheingold*. **Greer Grimsley** sings the role of Wotan, the conflicted lord of the gods. **Jamie Barton** sings her first Wagner role at the Met as Wotan's embattled wife, Fricka. Also featured are

**Tomasz Konieczny** (Alberich), **Wendy Bryn Harmer** (Freia), **Günther Groissböck** (Fasolt), **Dmitry Belosselskiy** (Fafner), **Gerhard Siegel** (Mime), and **Karen Cargill** (Erda). **Philippe Jordan** conducts.

Join me next Thursday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, for a 1969 recording of Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* featuring **Martina Arroyo**, **Carlo Bergonzi**, and **Piero Cappuccilli**. █

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina, and we're streamed online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>.

*Bob Chapman*

**W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House**