

## HENRY PURCELL



'Dido and Aeneas' is Purcell's only 'pure' opera, with sung recitative, in contrast to the spoken dialogue of the semi-operas 'Dioclesian', 'Faerie Queene', 'King Arthur' and 'The Indian Queen'. The first documented performance of Dido and Aeneas is at Josiah Priest's girls' school in Chelsea some time before December 1689 (when the spoken epilogue by Thomas D'Urfey was published separately). A printed libretto exists, but the earliest surviving score dates from the late eighteenth century; nor do we know who sang in the 1689 performance. There several reasons for supposing that, as with John Blow's 'Venus and Adonis', that a performance at Court or in a theatre preceded the Chelsea performance. Some surviving scores include tenor and bass parts and cast the Sorcerer as a baritone, and

there are also directions, such as "The Furies sink down in the cave, the rest fly up", which imply the presence of stage machinery presumably not available in a school.

## NAHUM TATE

Nahum Tate, Purcell's librettist for 'Dido', was born in Dublin in 1652 and died in London in 1715. His early works for the theatre include 'Brutus of Alba', 'Coriolanus', and a rewriting of Shakespeare's 'King Lear' (which ends with Cordelia marrying Edgar!)

Tate's play 'Brutus of Alba', was a failure, but he reworked it to provide the libretto for 'Dido and Aeneas'. He simplified and shortened the plot to produce a brilliant libretto. One possible defect is the lack of any proper aria for Aeneas. Although Aeneas's departure from Carthage may seem an anticlimax, it helps to focus the tragedy even more sharply on Dido.

Tate was appointed Poet Laureate on 24 December 1692 in succession to Thomas Shadwell His other text which is well known to the public are the words of the carol "When shepherds watched their flocks by night".