

SYNOPSIS

Act I

Scene - The Palace

Dido, the queen of Carthage, had determined to never remarry after the death of her husband. She is now tormented by her attraction to the Trojan prince Aeneas, who is a guest at her court (“Shake the cloud from off your brow”). He is soon to resume his journey in search of a site for a new city to replace Troy. Her sister Belinda and her courtiers urges that uniting their two kingdoms would benefit both (“When monarchs unite”). Aeneas arrives and convinces Dido of his love, and she accepts him. The act ends with general rejoicing (“To the hills and the vales”).

Act II

Scene I - The Sorceress' Cave

A sorceress and her witches plot the downfall of Dido (“Harm’s our delight”). They will conjure a storm to force the Queen and Aeneas back in town from the hunt they are attending, and then send an elf, disguised as the god Mercury, to remind Aeneas that the Gods have decreed his duty is to set sail for Italy (“But ere we this perform... In our deep-vaulted cell”).

Scene II - The Grove

Dido and Aeneas, accompanied by their court, are enjoying a day outdoors with a hunt and feasting (“Thanks to these lonesome vales”). Their festivities are ended by the storm conjured by the witches, and as all are rushing back

to the palace (“Haste, haste to town”), Aeneas is stopped by the false Mercury (“Stay, Prince”). Aeneas consents to what he believes are the orders of the Gods, but he is distraught because he must leave Dido.

Act III

Scene I - The seaside

At the shore, Aeneas’ men are preparing to leave (“Come away, fellow sailors”). The witches gloat over their success and sing of their delight (“Our next motion... Destruction’s our delight”).

Scene II - The Palace

Dido has been informed of her lover’s planned departure and furiously dismisses Belinda’s attempts to calm her (“Your counsel all is urg’d in vain”). The Queen confronts Aeneas over his unforgivable betrayal of their love and silences his excuses. Though he vows to stay, she orders him away. Knowing she must die at his leaving, she asks that she be remembered well, then she kills herself (“Thy hand, Belinda... When I am laid in earth”). Cupids mourn her, scattering roses on her tomb (“With drooping wings ye Cupids come”).