

Dido &...

Arts & Humanities Festival, 12-14 October 2016

Audience feedback



Gender

51 questionnaires were received back. 28 F (54%), 23 M (44%), 1 other.

Age

66% of respondents were in the 18-35 bracket, many of them (to judge by answers to later questions, friends and colleagues of the performers), with the next largest number aged 46-65 (29%), many apparently parents of participants. (Other groups were in single figures.)

Attendance at classical music concerts varied quite widely. 35% go several times a month, 27%, three or four times year, 19% once a month. Equal numbers (10%) go once-or-twice a year or less. Attendance at opera was more polarised, with 17% going 16 times or more per year, and at the other end of the scale 35% 4-6 times, and 38% 1-3 (including some, to judge by later answers, seeing an opera for the first time).

Levels of musical training within the audiences were somewhat polarised, with 25% trained to professional level and 25% not at all. 10% read music at university and went to conservatoire, 6% read music at university but not conservatoire. 12% had got as far as grade exams, and 15% had learned briefly as a child.

Reasons for coming to see 'Dido &...'

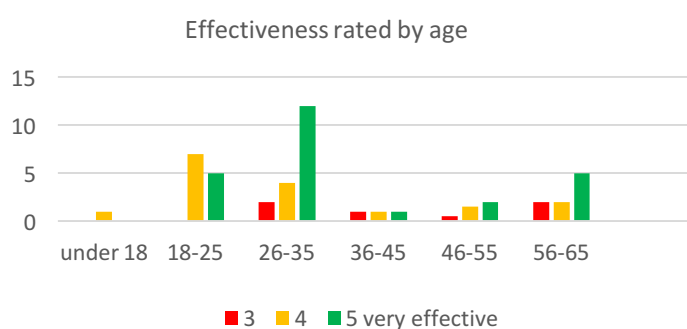
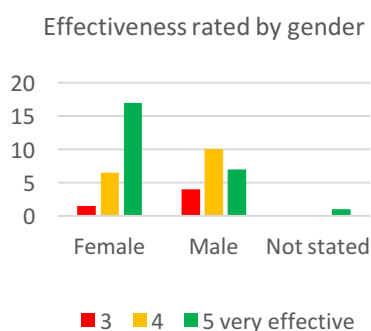
Half of those who answered this question (50%) were friends of performers or the production team or fans of the company. 30% were interested in the concept, and 28% in 'Dido & Aeneas' or Purcell's music more generally. Two people were just passing and were intrigued.

Expectations beforehand

77% expected an interesting and engaging performance. 12% had no expectations and 13% had mixed expectations, several wondering whether they'd love it or hate it. Two people expected not to enjoy it, though (as later answers reveal) both did.

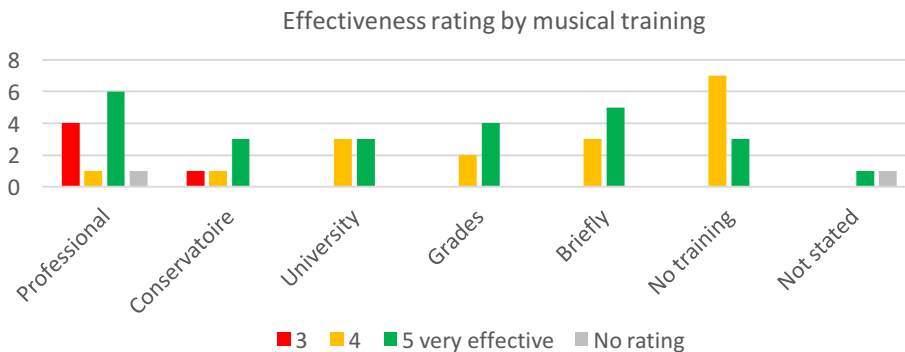
Effectiveness of 'Dido &...' as opera

In the event, over half (52%) of the 48 people who answered this question found 'Dido &...' 'very effective', level 5 on a scale of 1-5 (from 'not at all' to 'very effective'). 36% rated it at level 4, and 11% at level 3. There were no lower scores. Women were much more likely to rate it 5 than men (perhaps not entirely surprising given the reworking of the plot), as were those in the 26-35 and 18-25 age brackets (those whom the project especially aims to reach since they have most to gain from new performance options).



Opinions were most divided among professional musicians, as one might expect given that the

production aimed to challenge those values of *Werktreue* in which professional musicians are trained: all level-3 ratings came from professionals (4) or those trained at conservatoires but not identifying as professionals (1); on the other hand, professionals also provided the largest number of level 5s (6). Only one professional rated effectiveness at level 4. Those with university music training (but not conservatoire) were evenly divided between scores of 4 and 5 for 'effectiveness'. Those with less musical training mostly scored effectiveness at 5; those with none mostly at 4.



Individual comments on the performance's effectiveness as opera

Rated 3 (all Professional musicians):

- It felt like a forceful take on the opera. It had its moments, but I thought it was unnecessary. Probably for someone who doesn't know anything about opera it could work. I'd rather create new operas; I felt no need for this tampering. (M, 36-45)
- The story worked, and the performers were engaging. The opera, however, may work better for someone who does not know Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas*. (M, 26-35)

Rated 3.5 (also Professional):

- Concept works but some of the subtleties of the narrative need to be clearer (F, 46-55)

Rated 4:

University-trained in music:

- The freedom exercised in performance from both the pit and the stage promoted a narrative flow that transcended the 'number' aspect of Purcell's structure. The result had some similarities with watching a piece of musical theatre in which the music is at all times at the service of the narrative. Initially I was concerned that the 'radical' elements of the re-working may be rather too subtle but this was gradually dispelled, particularly with the arrival of the witches. (M, 46-55)
- The opera certainly was very unconventional, both in terms of the dramaturgy and performance on stage (costumes, gesture). But this work addresses modern issues with traces of Purcell music, which proves itself to be capable of communicating modern problems. (F, 18-25)
- I think for a completely modernised production it would have been good to update the text. (F, 18-25)

Trained as far as Grade exams:

- I recognize that this kind of experiment is not aimed at 'gaining' new public/audience. It is aimed at adapting music performance to our times. (M, 18-25)

No musical training:

- Hard to say because I'm not really a fan of operas (M, 26-35)

Rated 5:

Professional musicians:

- Extremely effective in reimagining how *Dido* could sound. Felt there was almost too much variety all at once (orchestra + stage combined) to take it all in -- wanted to see it all 3 times so as to notice and absorb all that creativity. But as a starting point for this kind of work that's no bad thing! (F, 26-35)
- Truly enjoyable! Though a classical musician, I've strangely managed to avoid Purcell to this point. Wonderful entry point. (M, 26-35)

Trained at Conservatoire but not identifying as a professional:

- The adaptation of the score was energising! The changing of the plot worked and the production was great! (F, 56-65)
- Everything in opera has to be emotional, dramatic, extreme, etc, in a modern implementation (F, 18-25)

Trained as far as Grade exams:

- The staging made it captivating. The singers were engaging. It was easy to hold the imagination and concentration throughout (unusual) (F, 56-65)

Trained briefly as a child:

- Thought provoking and very well sung and played (F, 56-65)
- Very amusing and entertaining (F, 26-35)
- Highest musical and theatrical quality. Sexy, engaging direction. But elegant reinterpretation. (F, 26-35)
- I felt it was as operatic, mixing a classic idea & making it modern I could see the influence of the old with such modern ideas. (F, 26-35)
- I really enjoyed how well the piece was adapted for a modern audience. There was no sense of a gimmick or clunkyness about it. (F, 18-25)

No musical training:

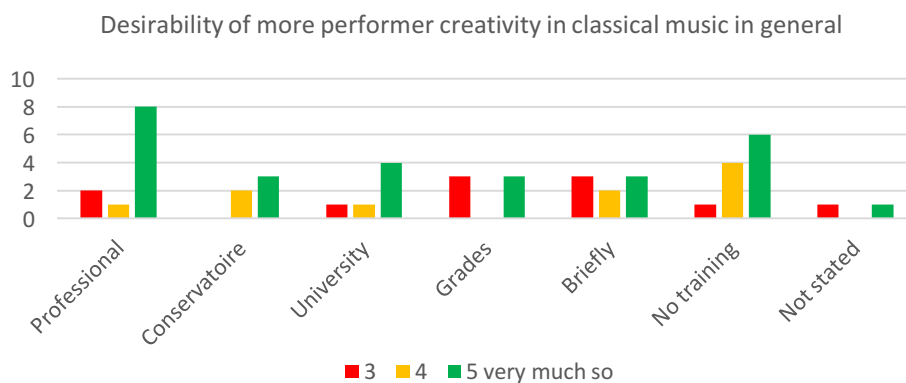
- Enjoyed the production, both visually and musically. It made me consider Purcell and particularly 'Dido's Lament' in an entirely new and provocative light. The modernity and relevance of Purcell's music shone through. (NS, 46-55)

Not rated:

- Not sure how "effective" and "opera" go together. Do you mean how effective was the updating? I didn't really know the music well enough to catch all that had been done to the score during the performance (and so was grateful for the demo/discussion afterwards) but it sounded great. I was also amused and charmed by the take on the libretto, although neither the singing style nor the lyrics helped clarify the story, which relied almost entirely on mime and the synopsis to make itself understood. Interesting twist to turn tragedy into comedy. (F, 56-65)
- Setting can be improved a little bit. Costume. (F, 18-25)

The desirability of more performer creativity

Over half those who answered (57%) think now that classical music performances would benefit 'very much' (5 on a scale of 1-5) from more performer creativity. 20% rated this question at 4, and 22% at 3. There were no lower scores. Within these ratings, professional musicians are much clearer that they would like more creative freedom:



This result reflects an important element in the research hypothesis, that musicians feel constrained and would like more creative freedom, and yet through their training, and through the policing of their work by gatekeepers (adjudicators, critics, agents, programmers, producers, etc), they are inhibited from attempting it or from even imagining quite how that freedom might be realised in musical practice. Instances therefore produce conflicted responses, even while the notion receives strong support. It's precisely to overcome this conflict that lively and engaging instances need to be staged and disseminated.

Audience members were asked to name four aspects of their experience at 'Dido&...' that they noticed, and to comment on how they reacted to each. Responses are grouped thematically below, and in each line are arranged as: aspect noticed / reaction to it.

Reinterpreting the text

- Emotional message / very interesting implementation of the feminist aspect (C, F, 18-25)
- Changes to the message / meh...unsure. Too much forced feminism, didn't like it. (P, M, 36-45)
- Dramatic content / Seeing this reworking made me realise more strongly than before that Purcell's 'original' itself brilliantly reworks well-worn tropes and conventions (B, M, 56-65)
- I quite liked the Belinda--Dido love idea. (C, F, 56-65)
- Emotional message / Enjoyed the feminist take. Powerful and kind at the same time. (B, F, 26-35)
- Message / strong roles for women in charge of their destiny and also was quite comic. (B, F, 56-65)
- Emotional message / women less aggressive but more empowered. (B, F, 26-35)
- Importance of female roles / The women are hurt and angry. (P, F, 46-55)
- Re-working / Enjoyed how the story was re-worked. The women were very powerful, although I disliked the women resorting to violence in one scene. The violence reduced their power. (N, PN, 46-55)
- Re-interpretation of drama / I felt disappointed by the gay subtext. It was the least radical thing about it. (P, M, 56-65)
- Misogyny reproduced, in the lesbian relationships, e.g. Belinda crossing Dido's boundaries in 1st scene, women beating men to show their strength, camera surveillance etc, implying male gaze. Glorifying the misogyny internalised by the women while trivialising that reproduced by the men. Both equally problematic. / A missed opportunity to question, radically critique and respond to the contemporary and historical relevance of patriarchy to intimate relationships, art and society. Felt similar about the hierarchical relationships between director/conductor and musicians. (P, F, 26-35)
- The production's emphasis on the decadent nature of courtly life. / Got a little bit wearisome -- the bawdiness and sexual liberation were a little overdone. It wasn't that they appeared lewd or offensive in any way, or even gratuitous, just a little un-subtle, there was a sense that 'we got the message' quite early. (U, M, 46-55)
- Raunchy behaviour / didn't really like it -- it was a bit gratuitous. (C, F, 56-65)
- Overt sexuality / slightly shocked, refreshing. (B, F, 18-25)
- The lesbianism / Wild. Fascinating interpretation. (G, F, 56-65)
- Lesbian action! / An intense start, but I eased into it. (U, F, 18-25)
- Overt sexual innuendos / Resonates with the "Club" feel of part of the opera. (P, F, 46-55)
- Setting the scene of the witches in a nightclub / 'What is going on?!' (U, F, 26-35)
- Dramatic reinterpretation / Amused, provoked, engaged. (U, M, 56-65)
- Reversals/adjustments of roles / fascinating. (N, -, 66-75)
- Prima donna Dido / I think this worked but I would have liked there to be more moments of fragility. (U, F, 18-25)
- The pathetic men / A bit cruel but true. (G, F, 56-65)
- Humor / Great, sad no more of others laughing. (N, F, 26-35)
- Staging / entertained. (P, M, 36-45)
- Drama / good. (N, M, 56-65)

Reinterpreting the music:

- Musical choices / surprised; displeased; slightly angered at times. (P, M, 36-45)
- Music / it's difficult to judge. Music is for me sacred. It's the composer who decides how to make it sound. The act of composing is an unique moment which can't be repeated. I appreciate the attempts, but are the results not new composition? (G, M, 18-25)
- Musical content / Purcell is pretty bomb-proof – not that this reworking did any 'damage' – and it struck me that he perhaps meant this score to be highly adaptable (B, M, 56-65)
- "Playing around" with score / Thought it was fun and adventurous but not convinced it works. (P, F, 46-55)
- Reworking the score / mainly effective. (C, F, 56-65)
- The changes in the score / At first I felt bad -- then I understood where we were going. (N, M, 18-25)
- Tweaking' of the musical content / Interested, sometimes disturbed. (N, -, 66-75)
- The modulation in 'Ah, Belinda' / Didn't like it, why was it there? Maybe I missed something. (P, M, 26-35)
- Musical transformations / Intriguing, sometimes unconvincing, others brilliant. (U, M, 56-65)

- Jazzy bits, reimagining score / These weren't always too integrated and thought out into dramatic concept, but when they were they worked. (P, M, 26-35)
- Musical content / great arrangement and compositions, mix of Baroque, jazz etc. (B, F, 26-35)
- Musical flourishes and additions / delightful. (N, F, 56-65)
- Re-ordering of musical numbers, e.g. 'Haste, haste to town' and 'But 'ere we this perform' / Disorientated -- I thought I knew the music! Moving the numbers, however, did make dramatic sense. (U, F, 26-35)
- 'Thy hand, Belinda' and 'When I am laid in earth' / Inventive, has emotional impact, works. (U, F, 26-35)
- Musical content -- excellent / Dido's Lament -- message affected by the change of story -- effective when sung by sop. (B, F, 56-65)
- Duet singing of arias / I really liked the sharing of arias. (C, F, 56-65)
- More radical re-workings, e.g. changes of meter, tempo fluctuations. / Entirely appropriate to the action, e.g. in 'Ah Belinda' this helped intensify the emotional content. The re-working of the lament was also very effective, particularly hearing it twice, the second time in a more 'authentic' version. The expressive intensity of Purcell's original was compromised slightly here though -- I think substantial cuts were made -- this, perhaps is the price paid for matching it so closely to the action. (U, M, 46-55)
- Music / How modern and relevant Purcell's work sounded in Leo's hands. Enjoyed the reinterpretation of 'Dido's Lament' — thought it was brave, provocative, and reassuringly confident to tackle such a venerated piece in such an insightful way. (N, PN, 46-55)
- Reprise of "when I am laid in earth" / a sense of closure. (G, M, 56-65)
- The added ending with "never, never" / It worked well as the dramatic concept required it. It was clever. (P, M, 26-35)
- The change in the emotional message at the end of the opera / I really enjoyed the new interpretation of the story, but agreed with the audience member who'd never seen any opera before, but immediately picked up on the lost emotional intensity when the three different musical interpretations were illustrated in the discussion afterwards. (G, F, 36-45)
- Music / good, wanted it to go further. (N, M, 56-65)
- Un-notated inflections from musicians in pit / Felt appropriate, helped bring the performance more up to date although could probably have gone a little further and/or been performed with more confidence. (U, M, 46-55)
- Freer vocal performances including improvised (?) ornamentation. / Some sense of spontaneity was generated here but I think the singers could have gone even further. (U, M, 46-55)
- Club night music re-interpretation / Both direction and musical re-interpretation successfully translated. 21st century re-imagining could've possibly extended. (P, M, 26-35)
- Club scene, witches scenes / I felt the content was amplified by the new musical interpretation. (G, F, 36-45)
- The club version of the witches music / The concept demanded this as well, but I feel it didn't work as well for some reason. (P, M, 26-35)
- The witches' dance—haka-style routine / very effective! (B, F, 18-25)
- Sexualised haka / possibly culturally insensitive? (P, M, 26-35)
- Haka chorus / I liked. (C, F, 56-65)
- Stylistic differences / It was fun. (F, <18)
- Less repetitiveness / Much closer pairing of action and music – great. (N, F, 26-35)
- Score / was very touching and had me in the moment. (N, M, 26-35)
- Swing / Loved it. Concentrated on music alone. (G, F, 56-65)
- Musically / I felt it helped to tell the story. (B, F, 26-35)

Performance communication:

- Communication with musicians / Little or none with instrumentalists from where I was sitting (2nd row, middle of the hall); good with singers. (U, M, 56-65)
- Musicians' communication / Young musicians have a special energy which fills you with hope and reassurance. Dido, Belinda and the lead Witch were simply brilliant! (B, M, 56-65)
- Musicians' communication with audience / very direct, therefore higher personal involvement. (C, F, 18-25)
- Musicians' communication / very acute. (B, F, 26-35)
- interplay of cast / very good. (N, -, 66-75)
- Performers were committed to their roles, there was energy and strong intention in the way they carried out the stage action. / The story felt believable. (P, F, 26-35)

- Good communication between performers / enjoyed the placing of a tenor behind the video camera. (B, F, 56-65)
- Professional voices / it's a very physical experience, being that close to trained voices. (P, M, 56-65)
- Performance re-interpretation / Classical trained singers trying to sound other than they have been trained always feels rather awkward. (P, M, 56-65)
- Singing style / mismatched music. (N, F, 56-65)
- Vocal techniques (portamenti, chest singing, 'pop' singing) / Yes! Very good, classical music does need this. (P, M, 26-35)
- 4 barbershop sailors / worked perfectly. (U, F, 18-25)
- Voices / Generally good, but some of them were 'shouty'. (U, F, 26-35)
- Quality of singing / Excellent!! (C, F, 56-65)
- The exception singing / Great singing and right next to me! (N, M, 18-25)
- Tempo, pacing / It was fun. (F, <18)
- The chorus of women, witches / Great singing. Powerful. (G, F, 56-65)
- Actors / engaging overall emotional, but sometimes they didn't feel 100% in it. (N, M, 26-35)
- Actors / good acting and well performed. (N, M, 26-35)
- Good involvement / movement and also dance. (B, F, 56-65)

Orchestral contribution:

- Orchestral parts *much* more varied and creative and unpredictable than I've ever heard them before / Revitalising, engaging, exciting, interesting, rejuvenating, refreshing in ways I almost never feel about opera (although I love opera!). Much the most radical 'feature'. (P, F, 26-35)
- Orchestra seemed to have more agency as a musical entity than I am used to hearing in opera. It seemed more integrated with the stage action than it would in a more traditionally conceived operatic performance. / I wondered about the physical separation of orchestra and stage action. A 'pit area' had been demarcated by placing the clothes rack between orchestra and stage. What would it be like if there was no such separation? (P, F, 26-35)
- Musical instruments playing / Loved the score and classical music part of it. (N, M, 26-35)
- The brilliant instrumental playing / Such energy from the band. (N, M, 18-25)

Performance space:

- Performance space / from a fashion show to a gay club and a witch ritual, brilliant. (B, F, 26-35)
- The performance space was intimate, in the sense that I felt close to the stage action and the orchestra. / Opera is usually experienced from a distance, in a larger space. Tonight's production felt more like 'theatre'. (P, F, 26-35)
- Venue / Seeing (small-scale) theatre and opera up close and in the round is always more involving – but, obviously, not always economical... (B, M, 56-65)
- Use of the space / definitely involved the audience. (N, -, 66-75)
- Use of the space / more integrated, felt part of it. (G, M, 26-35)
- Closeness of performers to audience / Feel like we are in the thick of the action. (P, F, 46-55)
- Performance space / very positive -- I feel closer to action. (G, M, 18-25)
- Performance space / Great to have an opportunity to experience opera at such close quarter – very engaging. (G, F, 36-45)
- Lovely use of space / outside – inside. (N, F, 26-35)
- In the round / worked well. (B, F, 26-35)
- The 'up close' production / I loved from the start. (N, M, 18-25)
- Performance space / Good but not ideal: slightly less characterful than somewhere else like eg Wilton's Music Hall. (U, M, 56-65)
- Intimate setting / More visible -- reactions can be seen by performers & fellow audience. (B, F, 18-25)
- Audience interspersed with singers / Highly enjoyable to connect so directly. (P, M, 26-35)
- Lack of sets / incredibly effective, removed distractions and allowed the performance to speak for itself. (N, M, 26-35)

Costumes:

- Costumes / Loved the styles, colors. (N, M, 26-35)
- Costumes / Very bright and well designed. (N, M, 26-35)
- Luminous hair / Loved it. (U, F, 18-25)

- Fashion and heels / Feminist power, but why the focus on fashion? (P, F, 46-55)
- Use of dramatic fashion world as an opera setting / amusing, clever. (B, F, 18-25)
- Staging / Beautiful. Love the fashion stage. (P, M, 26-35)
- Staging / Fluid, colourful and creative. (P, F, 46-55)

Projection:

- Text was still difficult to understand in places. / An audience member who was coming to see Dido for the first time might have benefitted from the surtitle facilities of a more traditional opera venue. (P, F, 26-35)
- Language / wanted surtitles. (N, M, 56-65)
- Vocals / Diction needs to be better to make performance more accessible. (P, F, 46-55)
- Staging / Imaginative staging, but it came at the cost of fluctuating delivery, depending on where the singers were standing and which way they were facing. (N, PN, 46-55)
- Story / didn't always understand it, but glad it was in the programs. (N, M, 26-35)
- Story / good retelling of the story and easy to kind of follow. (N, M, 26-35)
- Libretto / mismatched story. (N, F, 56-65)

Length:

- Length / I would have enjoyed a longer and more detailed production. Some of the scenes passed very quickly, limiting their emotional depth. Would like to see Dido and ... performed again and lengthened to a full opera. (N, PN, 46-55)
- Performance length (shorthand opera?) / not enough time to develop the story. (N, F, 56-65)

Workshop/discussion sessions

In order of preference, audience members appreciated the opportunity to:

gain insights into the artists' creative processes	30
think differently about options for performing classical music in general	24
see how performers collaborate and relate to one another	23
think about performance options for 'Dido' I'd not considered previously	21
think about aspects of opera performance I'd not considered previously	19
enjoy a feeling of intimacy in being 'behind the scenes'	17
interact with artists	13
gain deeper insight into Purcell's 'Dido & Aeneas'	12

Asked whether the workshop/discussion changed the way they felt about the performance, audience members replied:

- Knowing more about the work and decisions that went into the production. (P, F, 46-55)
- Workshop enriched the experience of watching the opera (P, F, 46-55)
- I was particularly interested to hear about how the orchestral parts were conceived and manipulated, so it was great to hear from the musical director. Showing the audience several different versions of a scene was an effective way of communicating the nature of the creative process, and gave the audience a sense that this process continues even once the 'final product' has been presented. (P, F, 26-35)
- The discussion revealed how differently different audience members had interpreted the agenda of 'radical' opera as imagined in this particular context. If it were more clearly communicated/understood what in particular was being radically reimagined, the discussion and perhaps people's experiences might have been quite different. (P, F, 26-35)
- Not really. (P, M, 56-65)
- Yes. (P, M, 26-35)
- Loved the music explanation from Leo, and the experimenting live. Always interesting to see the trials and failures that lead into the decision making process. The performance itself was quite easy to follow however; meaning this workshop didn't necessarily need to explain anything new -- which is great!! (P, M, 26-35)
- Yes. The discussion is important and interesting to give people the opportunity [to] share their recreations/thoughts and ask questions not understood. (P, M, 26-35)

- No -- though the workshop was interesting. (C, F, 56-65)
- Gained more information & insight into the musical content and realised how brilliant it was (C, F, 18-25)
- I have a better understanding/appreciation of the theory behind the experiment, even if I am not sure I can whole-heartedly agree with it. (U, F, 26-35)
- I think it's more Purcell's opera than I originally thought. (U, F, 18-25)
- Yes -- seeing/hearing transformation of Recit/Lament interesting in showing process and helping to explain/motivate final result -- and by extension could imagine how some of the other changes might have been arrived at. (U, M, 56-65)
- I didn't stay for the workshop which I rather regret now. (U, M, 46-55)
- More knowledge of the original and changes. (G, F, 56-65)
- Not having done any homework in advance of the performance, the workshop and discussion shed light on what had been changed both musically and in the narrative, how it had been done and why. Without the workshop, I wouldn't have understood how radically or not you had interpreted the opera and the music. (G, F, 36-45)
- More awareness of the creativity displayed in the performance, beyond the composer. (G, M, 26-35)
- Yes -- it did clarify the reasons to change the score to meet the needs of the change of story. (B, F, 56-65)
- I understood better why the changes were made. (B, F, 26-35)
- Thinking about the after life of works of art. Liberate these works from the belljars in which we put them. Respect a work without mummifying them. (B, F, 26-35)
- How faithful the piece stayed to Purcell's original. (B, F, 18-25)
- Only very slightly differently. Honestly, the workshop didn't add much to my enjoyment. I found the illustrations of how a short segment was developed hard to compare, without a chance to 'rewind' – and a bit 'tl;dr', as the final version was brilliant. I did find it interesting how the score was reworked. The audience discussion needed to be more structured – the whole event really needed a full day? (B, M, 56-65)
- I had no idea how much can be done with old scores, since my background is in classical theatre rather than music, but it makes sense. (N, F, 56-65)
- I really enjoyed seeing the process live and understanding the evolution of the piece. (N, F, 26-35)
- Yes, not having a musical background I didn't realise the work that went into adapting the score. (N, F, 26-35)
- The workshop really helped me to understand the creative process involved & how many decisions / consideration went into this particular adaptation. (N, F, 18-25)
- Insight into the creative process (especially the comparisons to the original music). Showcased the subtle changes that resulted in such a profoundly different characterisation of the story. (N, M, 26-35)
- I enjoyed the discussion. I think the audience would have been happier with a longer discussion session. I would have reworked the space to make the discussion more open and accessible. It was thought provoking and insightful. More companies should engage with their audiences in this way. (N, PN, 46-55)

Asked to comment on the most memorable aspects of the workshop/discussion:

- Loved Leo's demo of how he changed the musical score. (P, F, 46-55)
- The story themes are refreshingly different, maybe because of its overt feminist themes. The infusion of pop/jazz into the classical idiom was a welcome change. (P, F, 46-55)
- Lament as staging a suicide! (P, F, 26-35)
- It was fantastic to observe such a fearless attitude to creativity in young artists. (P, F, 26-35)
- The re-interpretation of the drama was actually the least interesting thing about it, though it worked very well. And I'm sure that's because opera is just so stuck in traditions of its own. (P, M, 56-65)
- Disco adaptation. (P, M, 26-35)
- It was very very interesting seeing the various versions of the pre-lament recit ('thy hand Belinda'), as it showed how a director reimagines an opera story (which happens lots) and how that can be further reimagined and articulated with changes to the score. I found the changed witches dance the least strong of the changes, so that was less interesting for me. (P, M, 26-35)

- It completely changed my views about opera-reinterpretations. (C, F, 18-25)
- It was good to see people's ideas workshopped / being put into practice, and the musicians should be credited for their agility, but some of the manipulations left me squirming on the inside! (U, F, 26-35)
- How the composer adapted the score. (U, F, 18-25)
- Recit/Lament demonstration/discussion (as above); introductory remarks by Dan L-W; lucid explanation by Leo; seating format (House of Commons-style!) not very good for audience engagement/ interaction/ involvement. (U, M, 56-65)
- The orchestra performing different versions on a theme -- they were superb. (G, F, 56-65)
- I'm an enthusiastic attender of opera, but very much as a non-specialist audience member, so for me the workshop and discussion was really fascinating – for the insight into how the production had been put together, for the illustration into the different musical interpretations that were explored, and for the explanation of the context for the project and what it's trying to explore. (G, F, 36-45)
- I have not seen an opera before that was contemporary and yet retained its conventions as an opera. (G, M, 26-35)
- I enjoyed the re-interpolation of the musical excerpts to reorganise the narrative to the performer interpretation. (G, M, 18-25)
- Differing performer interpretation of similar passages giving very different message. (B, F, 56-65)
- Seeing the process of transformation for stage & music was fascinating and interesting. (B, F, 26-35)
- The choreography. The music. The feeling of closeness to the performance and music. Music, direction and choreography very well integrated, great reflection of the collaborative process. (B, F, 26-35)
- The steps from original score to final version. (B, F, 26-35)
- Different ways of playing the same piece. (B, F, 18-25)
- I was surprised how long it took for the show as we saw it to emerge, and how much trial and error there was. All good, but again possibly difficult to achieve in a commercial production. (B, M, 56-65)
- Hearing variations in parts of the score. I find most opera performances take themselves much too seriously, so seeing more musicians willing to mess around with them is heartening. (N, F, 56-65)
- Seeing how the musicians / performers developed the work. (N, F, 26-35)
- Workshop part where the conductor took audience suggestions to adapt the score. (N, F, 26-35)
- I loved hearing the different 'versions' of Purcell's music. (N, F, 18-25)
- The fact that both the score and the script were so true to the original, yet there was a vast difference in the story told through the tone and performance. (N, M, 26-35)
- I think the production (performance and workshop) as a whole worked very well. The music felt new and revitalised, and the story made Purcell feel modern and relevant. I really wanted a stronger and longer script in order to build up a better picture of the relationship between Dido and Belinda. (N, PN, 46-55)

More general comments

Turning to general conclusions from the evening, it seemed particularly interesting to group responses according to musical training, which brings with it particular expectations and beliefs about obligations to composers and traditions. Asked **how the evening “changed their view of ‘Dido’, opera, and/or classical music in general”**, audience members commented:

Professionals:

- As an actor/singer who has moved from classical to Musical Theatre, I am always aware of the creativity of all artists/directors/choreographers involved and I look out for performers who take these opportunities to allow works to be reinventive. I think this movement is prevalent on the London Fringe and needs to be encouraged. (P, F, 46-55)
- Not really, but I support the ideas (regarding original performance) behind the production. (P, F, 46-55)
- It has encouraged me to imagine how other operatic productions, and indeed, even solely instrumental works could be offered in alternative ways. It made me question what the enduring qualities of a ‘work’

- might be, and whether or not I was still hearing 'Purcell' in this version. It also reminded me of how effective opera can be as a communicative medium, if we are flexible in terms of what we understand to be 'opera' and think seriously about the kind of audience to whom we are trying to communicate. (P, F, 26-35)
- Not really, or at least not profoundly. (P, M, 56-65)
 - I definitely prefer a 'proper' historically informed performance. Well, I am a musician and this evening won't change what I do and how I do it. (P, M, 36-45)
 - Beautiful -- loved the adaptations (P, M, 26-35)
 - Great to meet others moving in the same direction. Opera is 100% the key to unlocking the door which will let us escape our current aesthetic prison we find ourselves in. Here's to an exciting future... (P, M, 26-35)
 - No -- but I do want to refresh my memory of the original score. (P, M, 26-35)
 - Not of Dido in particular, but yes to the possibilities of performance practice of classical music. (P, M, 26-35)
 - Not changed, but it is pleasing to see the concept of reinvention continuing to be explored. (P, M, 18-25)

Conservatoire training (not identifying as professionals):

- Classical music in general -- like Nigel Kennedy's 'Four Seasons' (C, F, 56-65)
- Classical music is a flexible art in that it can be adapted to appeal to a wider audience that will find it more interesting and inspiring. (C, F, 18-25)
- When it comes to theatre & opera I always choose the traditional approaches. I was skeptical about modern approaches and used to find them unnecessary. Today, I experienced a modern performance for the second time, and realised once again how wrong I was. I *do* see the point of *re-interpreting* classical pieces, in the end this is what art is about: to evolve, criticize, *question* and *push*/provoke society's boundaries. (C, F, 18-25)

University, read Music:

- I'm not sure it has. I like the familiarity that re-visiting a piece of music (like reading a book) can bring, and like any good book, a good opera or piece of music will reveal more or different facets of itself with repeated viewing. While I am not against experimenting with interpretations and settings of opera, I still believe in the integrity of the composer's score/libretto. (U, F, 26-35)
- Rethought the relationship between Dido & Belinda! (U, F, 18-25)
- Vivid example of how a very well-known piece can be brought to life in a different way; offers an example for much other music that could also have new life in this way; connects up with other developments in classical music (different venues; new attitudes to how an understanding of the past in performance might point to many possibilities for the future in performance without falling into mimicry/reconstruction -- ie New HIP[?] or perhaps HSP [historically stimulated performance]?) (U, M, 56-65)
- It was an inspiring evening that proved much more radical interventions in scores can be vitalising forces, not vandalising ones. Perhaps opera is an ideal site for such experimentation because close attention to narrative and emotion provides justification for more radical interpretation which, in turn, affords more powerful storytelling. (U, M, 46-55)

Musical training as far as Grade exams:

- Jazz inclusion was great (G, F, 56-65)
- I really enjoyed the experiment and the experience; I thought it was clever, thought-provoking, and really well done. (G, F, 36-45)
- It made me think I always looked at opera/classical music in fixed and strict terms. There are lots of thinking aspects think about after today. (G, M, 18-25)

Musical training briefly as a child:

- Not sure -- All arts need to be able to speak to modern audiences about contemporary issues, but audiences do love classical scores. (B, F, 56-65)
- That changing music/scores still leads to enjoyable performances (B, F, 26-35)
- This take brings back breath and life back to Purcell's opera. The performers and set-up allow the audience to be immersed and participate more closely to the ritual that is the performance. (B, F, 26-35)
- Quite how plastic even the most traditional notation still is (B, F, 18-25)
- Dido is my favourite opera, and this performance made me love it even more! When I got home, I listened to three recordings, and I realised I now find a version I used to enjoy (one of the first 'HIP' ones), dull and

boring. I don't think it was hearing tonight's performance that made me feel this – it was revisiting that recording after quite some time, having had my taste very considerably shifted by listening to lots of historical recordings over the last few years. I thought tonight's reworking of the plot very ingenious and witty, and I enjoyed most of the musical changes. Otherwise, this evening didn't alter my view of opera or of classical music in general. I'm not an opera 'buff', and I see mainstream opera (which isn't my thing) as more theatre (mostly not my thing either) than 'classical music'. I'd argue attempts to 'reform' the two are necessarily going to be very different. Do I think they need 'reforming'? Actually, the kind of things that were done tonight are already being done, in opera – though it's little talked about. For years, my partner managed a company which performed mainstream operas (*Carmen*, *La Bohème*) away from urban centres, in summer, outdoors, on a small portable stage, with a small cast and tiny band – piano, string quartet, flute doubling clarinet, trumpet. There are several such companies. True, they make revisions out of necessity, whereas tonight's were made out of choice, with a point. But I wonder if unusual tempi and re-harmonisations are less striking (or offensive) in opera, where your attention is focused mainly on the singers and stage. On the other hand, maybe someone who couldn't accept the new plot as happily as I did would also find the musical changes hard to accept. But then again, I defy anyone not to give in to tonight's young cast! As for classical music in general, this evening didn't and couldn't address the question of what 'reformed' performances and presentation of, say, Beethoven string quartets or piano sonatas, or Boulez's *La Marteau sans maître*, might feel and sound like. Still, food for thought and for future experiments. (B, M, 56-65)

No musical training:

- I'm open to change/challenge and could be interested to see/hear other adaptations (N, NS, 66-75)
- I didn't know how much variation there apparently is in interpreting old scores, although that shouldn't really surprise me (a somewhat lapsed Shakespearean performance scholar). (N, F, 56-65)
- Adaptability and the way in which opera might effectively interact with the theatre. (N, F, 26-35)
- Didn't have much to begin with. (N, F, 26-35)
- The experience has made me realise that opera/classical music can be interpreted in ways that make performances feel more relevant and engaging, especially for an audience not well-versed in classical music. (N, F, 18-25)
- Not sure, still not a fan of opera, but I liked the performance and new take on the material. I liked the intimate feel of the production. (N, M, 26-35)
- One doesn't often speak of opera and 'innovation' in the same breath, this is obviously not true. (N, M, 26-35)
- Thought it was a great telling of the story and I do want to see it again. It also makes me want to go see more events like it. (N, M, 26-35)
- Certainly of *Dido*, and certainly in terms how opera can be made relevant to modern audiences. I think the production would work very well as a gateway to audiences who would normally be reluctant to see operas. The kind of production the BBC, C4, or the Opera Platform should broadcast. (N, PN, 46-55)

Finally we asked whether audience members had anything they'd like to add:

Professionals:

- Keep up the good work -- exploration like this should continue! (P, F, 46-55)
- Thank you for a most enjoyable evening! (P, F, 46-55)
- Nothing like long enough for discussion and to try things out -- could have done with an hour or three. Discussion didn't really get off the ground -- **so** much more that could be fascinating to explore if only there were time and 'audience' spoke directly with each other, not all through performers in Q&A style. Wanted musicians to stay for participatory masterclass! Understand today wasn't the time and there wasn't time. (P, F, 26-35)
- Thanks for a great musical experience! (P, F, 26-35)
- Would have liked more drum & bass adaptations and maybe more instruments (P, M, 26-35)
- You didn't improve Purcell. And that is **exactly** what I loved: by virtue of the fact I think you weren't trying to create the 'quintessential' performance. But it was different. And really successful. And in a country where 100 other *Didos* are being staged this year, the opportunity to experience a unique version is really wonderful. (P, M, 26-35)

Conservatoire training (not identifying as professionals):

- It was radical -- it was daring -- it worked! It worked well! (C, F, 56-65)

University, read Music:

- Loved it! (U, F, 26-35)

- Amazing how adaptable the musicians were. Very rare to find such musicality & [lack of?] musical inhibitions. (U, F, 18-25)

- Dido great choice cos of its comparative sparseness/openness/schematic qualities -- musically as well as in other ways. How would it go with 'bigger' [in various ways] operas eg *Così fan tutte?* Or *La Bohème*? On the other hand I could imagine *Wozzeck* transformed (perhaps for reasons similar to *Dido*) (U, M, 56-65)

- I wonder if any of the production/research team are aware of the recent treatment of *Ming Arthur* by Peter Wiegold's group *Notes Inegales*. This went quite a bit further in its reworking, incorporating non-Western musicians and electronics but without turning Purcell into some sort of cross-over project. It might be interesting for the two groups to make some links as you are perhaps approaching the same topic from different directions. Going further I would be interested in utilising different kinds of singers, e.g. actor-singers, those trained in musical theatre and pop traditions. I think dissemination should focus on taking the production out to a breadth of communities to establish how effective this approach is in making Purcell more relevant to contemporary audiences. I think it would be more worthwhile to expend effort on This than in trying to convince ENO/ROH to take an interest; in any case they probably will if the approach can be seen to work elsewhere. (U, M, 46-55)

Musical training as far as Grade exams:

- Give time and money to more of these please King's. To Helios of course. (G, F, 56-65)

- Great performance, love Camilla (G, M, 26-35)

- I just wanted to ask a question: Are there any examples of such kind of attempts/experiments in the past? Did Mozart take Purcell's/Vivaldi's works and readapt them? We should think, as always, to this experiments and to these needs we have as part of a greater context, which is our time, our way of thinking. Why aren't we creating new things? Why didn't Mozart readapt Vivaldi? -- Because he wrote '*Le Nozze*' -- and it was better than Vivaldi. (G, M, 18-25)

Musical training briefly as a child:

- Excellent performances made it very enjoyable. (B, F, 56-65)

- More of this please! Pushing the boundaries while respecting the original work, giving it new life. Recontextualisation of opera performance. (B, F, 26-35)

- To frame The relationship as one of genuine emotion. I want to see love & lust between women. The sexuality element is so aggressive. Men are more subtle, women are more subtle & opera if modern with realistic modern themes could reflect this genuine element more. (B, F, 26-35)

No musical training:

- It was loads of fun to watch. And far more effective than the Purcell staging at the Barbican on Monday. (N, F, 56-65)

- Wonderful fun and great to see the process. (N, F, 26-35)

- As a first exposure to opera it was a thoroughly enlightening and engrossing introduction. (N, M, 26-35)

- It was good / great (which is high praise from me) (N, M, 26-35)

- Loved the main redhead girl and the sorceress. Also loved the classical musical instruments playing. (N, M, 26-35)

- Loved the musicians contribution too. Well done! (N, NS, 66-75)

- Thank you for providing such an original evening of entertainment. More, please. (N, PN, 46-55)