

Dido & Belinda

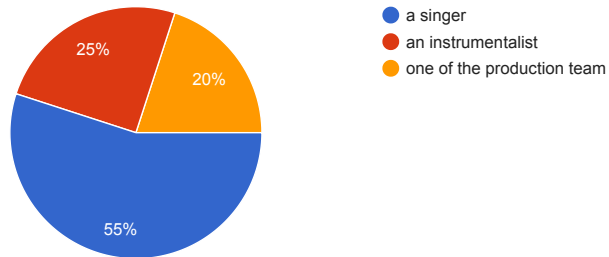
20 responses

Performer feedback



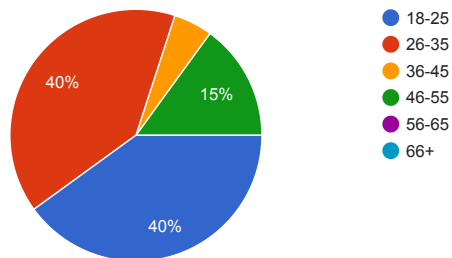
1. Were you taking part as:

20 responses



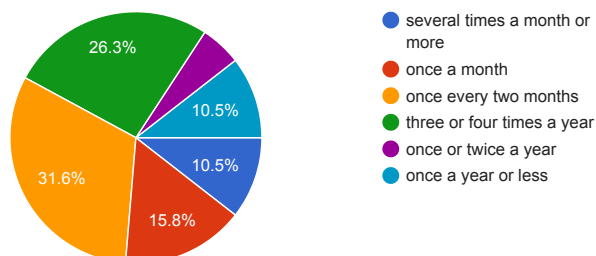
2. Aged:

20 responses



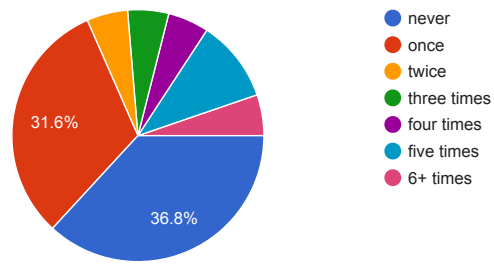
3. On average, how often do you take part in opera (other than as audience)?

19 responses



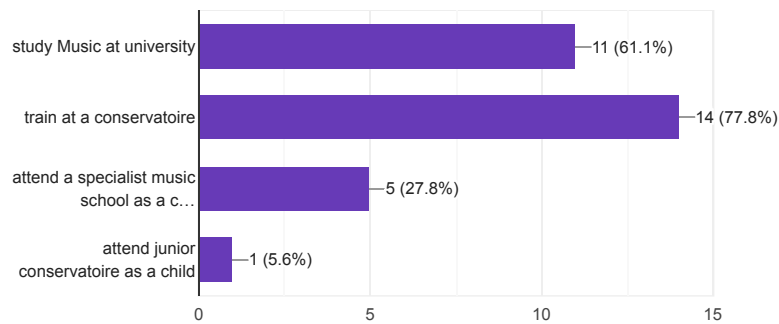
4. In how many productions have you performed 'Dido & Aeneas', not including this one?

19 responses



5. Did you?

18 responses



'comments'

Drama school

Royal Northern College of Music (post graduate studies)

I studied for an undergraduate degree in Drama and Theatre Arts and a postgraduate degree in Applied Theatre.

Acting and Directing post graduate

I have never studied music academically.

I'm on the production team but studied music at University and have a DipABRSM piano and Grade 8 singing and cello.

I've been involved in medieval, renaissance and baroque music since graduating but started my music journey as a rocker and then jazz player. If we leave out classical, romantic and hard core modern music, where the text is more precise, music is the same, one just have to learn the language of each style.

Singer and Instrumentalist to Diploma level

Private education; choristership aged 9-13

6. What appealed to you when you agreed to take part in this production?

19 responses

Taking part in Dido and Aeneas

I looked forward to exploring the piece in a new light. Having done the opera a few times before, I was interested to see what a new approach might bring out of the characters and the story. I was also interested to know if changing the way we sing the notes themselves could bring new colour to the music, and perhaps inform my performances in other operas.

Creative freedom. Trying something new.

At that point, I was still only interested on the money

I actually didn't know much about the production itself (as I had auditioned for something else). However, I wanted to work for Helios as I had heard a lot about the company and was keen to get involved in contemporary opera projects alongside "up and coming" and ambitious participants.

Helios' new perspective on traditional pieces

Money and music

To have the ability to work and perform with a group of young singers and musicians to a high standard. Also the location of the project (the Strand) was an excellent location for me as I live in London anyway and could fit my other work around the project

The opportunity to perform at Kings

the idea of playing around with the score.

I was drawn to the production as it offered an opportunity to be part of something innovative and imaginative, that wasn't concerned about breaking the traditional boundaries and restrictions so often adhered to within opera productions.

I'm always keen to approach opera from alternative perspectives, and was very interested in exploring the idea of musical adaptation/modernisation in the same way as we often explore updated and radical dramatic interpretations of opera.

I care about the future of opera and it frustrates me that people are intimidated by the genre by in large. I am frustrated by the fact that a conductor and director often work to different agendas and that the music and dramatic content are not integrated enough. I also love opera that thinks outside the box.

I was really interested in what direction the opera would be taken, and how far it would go.

I love Purcell and baroque music and was trying to get some operatic experience under my belt – I was actually unaware of the modernisation when I applied.

Always nice to be asked and to be involved in a production with energetic people with new ideas.

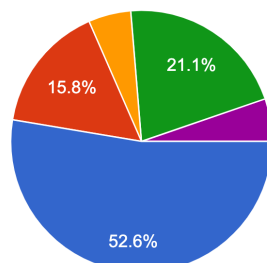
The freedom with all aspects of production, music, theatre

Quite fond of the opera, knew most of the band, decent pay.

The opportunity to engage creatively with the work at hand rather than just perform it.

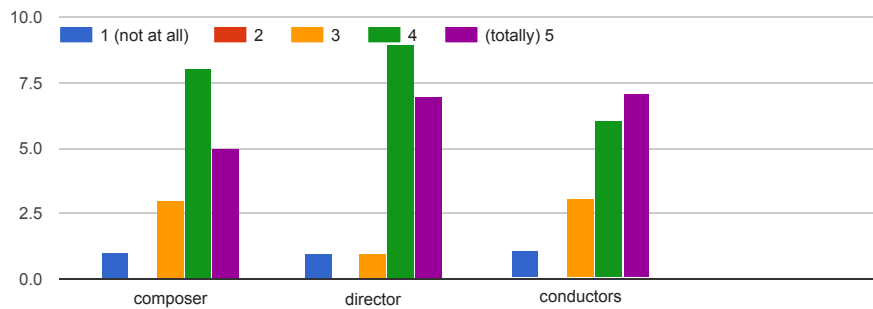
7. If you had any, what were your prior expectations, knowing that this might not be a conventional 'Dido & Aeneas'?

19 responses



- I expected an interesting and engaging experience
- I expected to be neither more nor less interested than in other productions
- I expected a difficult or unpleasant experience
- I didn't have any expectations
- None of the above

8. In this production, 'Dido &...', how creative do you feel you were allowed to be by each of the following:



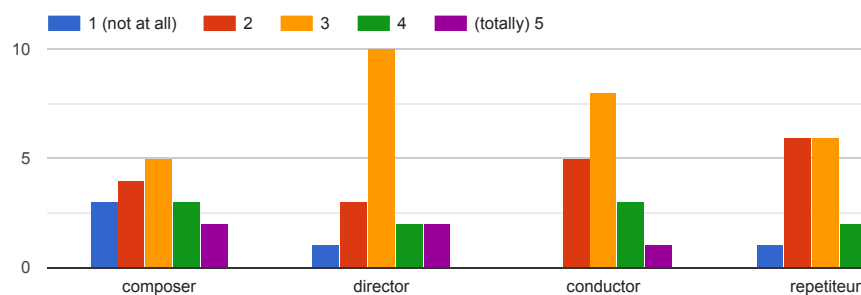
3 responses

Myself

We were definitely given permission to be very creative by the artistic team although I don't feel the rehearsal process was long enough for many of the performers to really engage with this opportunity.

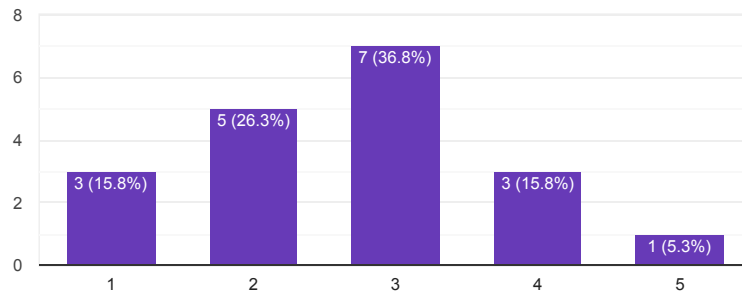
As one of the conductors, my answer reflects my view of the other conductor.

9. In a typical performance situation, how creative do you feel you are allowed to be by each of the following:



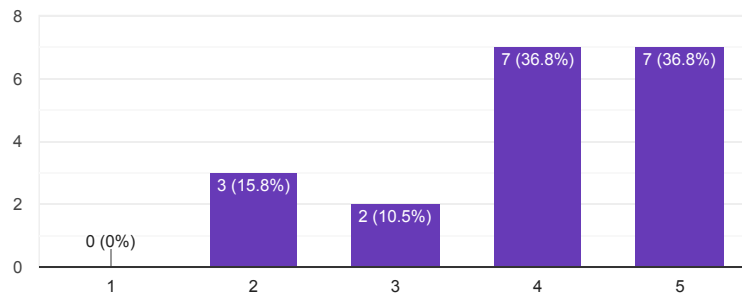
10. In a typical performance situation, how comfortable do you feel to change or ignore what's in the score?

19 responses



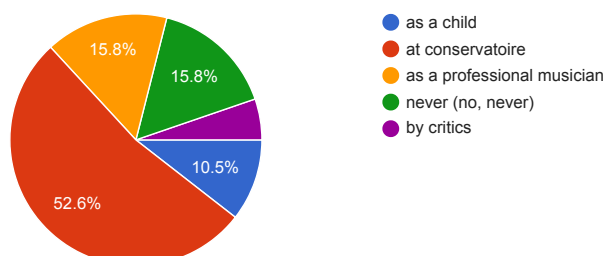
11. In a typical performance situation, how much do you worry about performing in correct style?

19 responses



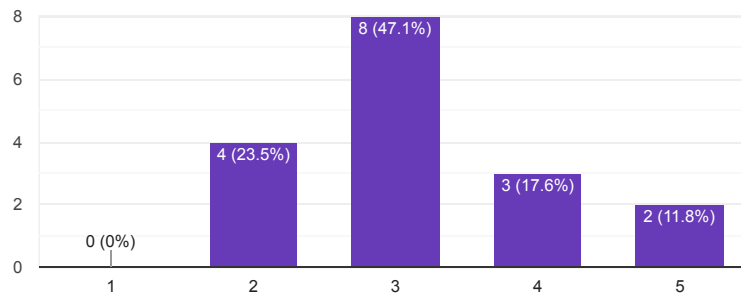
12. When in your life have you felt most criticised for interpreting scores too freely?

19 responses



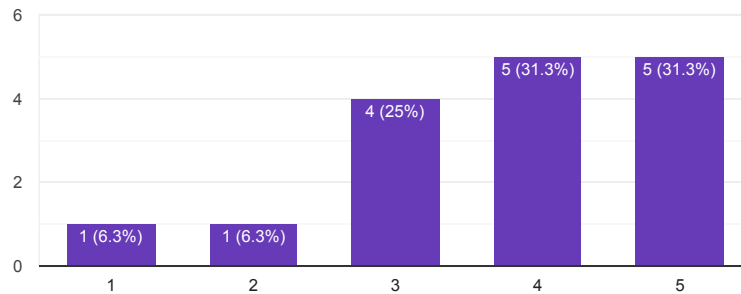
13a. How free do you currently feel to teach your pupils to be creative with scores?

17 responses



b. Would you like to, if it felt safer?

16 responses



c. What stops you at the moment?

15 responses

Nothing stops me - I allow as much creativity as makes dramatic sense

Exceptions as a teacher to produce results

Expectations

I don't have pupils

In built experiences from past

My respect for the original

Feeling that there is a 'correct' way something should be interpreted and that by doing something different I am somehow doing a disservice to the music or at risk of being criticised for not doing it in the 'correct' way.

External adjudicators, mark schemes etc which do not allow for this type of creative freedom.

I don't do any teaching.

My current pupils are all fairly new to the instrument, and therefore I don't get the opportunity to teach them to be creative with scores!

I am quite a firm believer of performing what is written and performing what is believed to be the composers' intentions, stylistically and musically. I just would like to interpret music as close to what the

composer might have wanted.

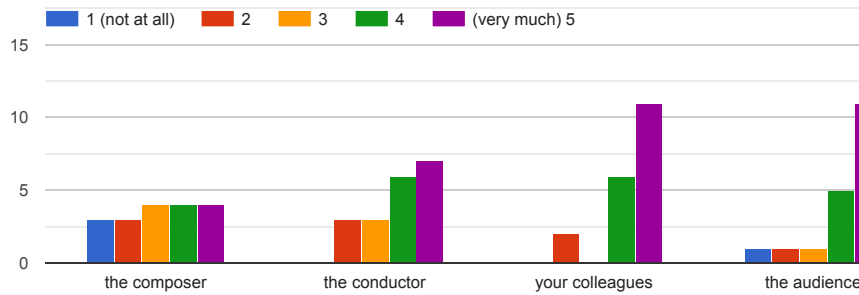
I guess it depends on the music and period involved. I wouldn't tell a student to be creative with a modern, clearly written out music, but with earlier music (and more so the earlier it gets) one has to be able to improvise and make the music one's own, but, always with historical reasoning. Unless the aim is to try to create a totally new sound world, like playing medieval music as jazz (which I'm very much for), if people sell them selves as being "authentic" and still put north african drumming in everything I'm not as keen on that...

Institutions , exam requirements , the restrictions of other musicians

Nothing

Professional expectations of accuracy.

14. When you feel you have given a really good performance, is it because you have satisfied



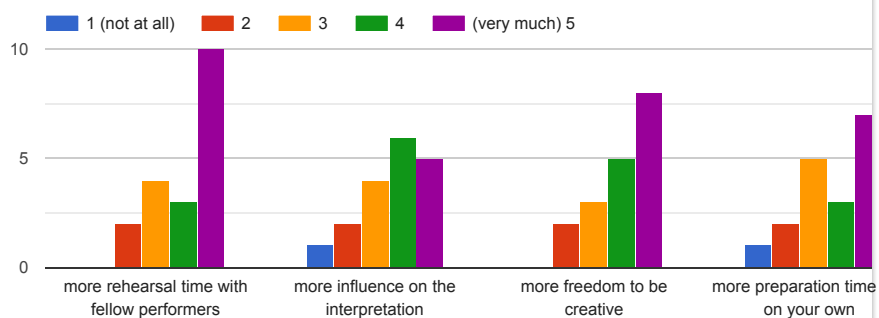
3 responses

I'm pleased if I have performed/sung the pieces to the best of my technical ability (vocal technique) and felt that I've communicated something remorable to an audience

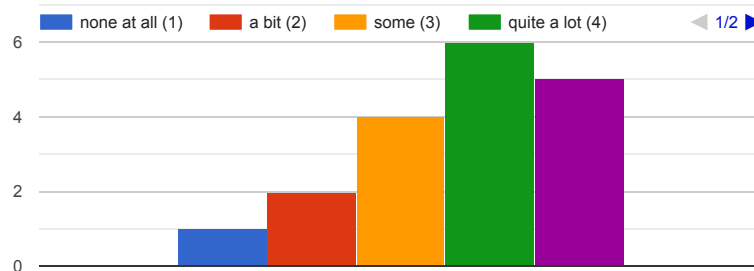
My singing teacher

The director.

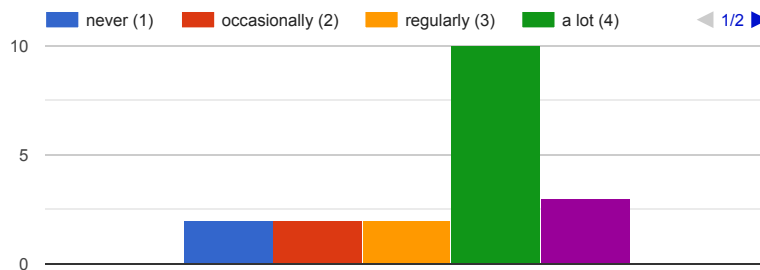
15. What would most improve your life as a professional performer (apart from better pay)?



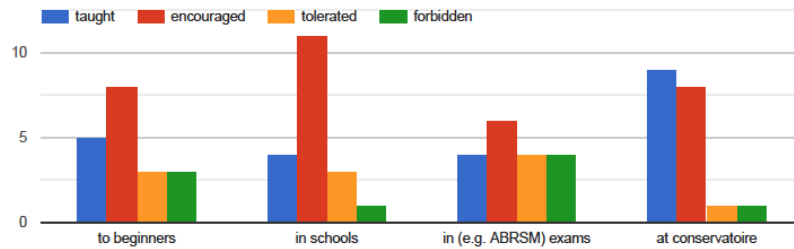
16. How much power did you feel you had to influence how your part in 'Dido &...' should be played/sung?



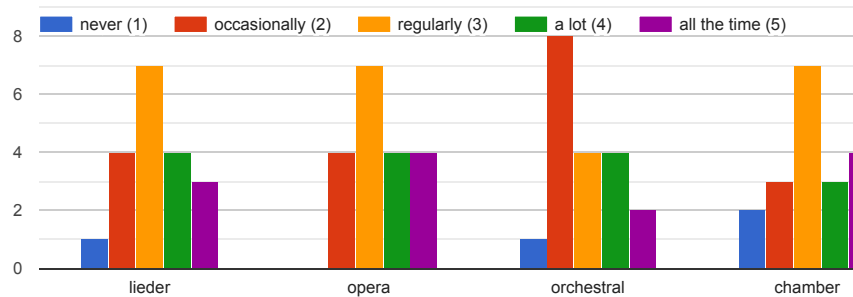
17. Would you like to work like this with other well-known scores?



18. Should this approach to performing classical scores be:



19. Would you like to see this approach taken in public performances of:



3 responses

Song cycles

early music

In an orchestral context, I can imagine the number of people involved would lead to that process becoming inconceivably difficult - and to an extent an orchestral player's role inevitably involves compromise to the wishes of the large group.

20. What did you most dislike about working on 'Dido &...?'

17 responses

1. Scheduling needed to be tighter, to make maximum use of everyone's time 2. It would have benefitted performers more to have a blocking structure achieved earlier on, as some performers come to character only when they have a structure to play with 3. Limit changes to the action as it was difficult to keep track of them, especially towards the end of the rehearsal period

1. Occasionally I felt like the physicality of the show made it difficult to sing as well as I might have liked.
2. The acoustics in the Great Hall was a little tricky, and I felt we could have had more connection between Leo and the singers.
3. The scheduling made life difficult - its not ideal to have a tech rehearsal, dress rehearsal, and an opening night on one day.
4. Sometimes I wondered whether our new story was totally understood by the audience.

Limit on time with instrumentalists

Sometimes rehearsal schedules were not very well-organised

I didn't like it when the rehearsal schedule was changed

My personal availability was difficult so felt I did not have the time to experiment as I would have liked

Changing notation

Over rehearsing, leaving the voice tired

Sometimes the improve sounded like a type of hetrophany which is nice but In parts It would of be really helpful if in the score there was perhaps a way of organising the improvisation as it is difficult in a section of instruments to gage how much or little you could do (perhaps more direct inspiration from the notation of jazz or how a recit is lade out with chords)- if we had more rehearsal we may of been able to sort that out as a group however.

1. The length of time we had to rehearse. By the end of the rehearsal process I felt like the performers were just beginning to feel comfortable enough to be really creative and take risks musically and theatrically, if we had more time I think this could have led to something really exciting in which the performers offered just as many creative ideas as the composer and director. I also feel being able to work more with the orchestra throughout the rehearsal process, even as individuals, would have also offered more opportunities for the performers to be more creative.

Time constraints. With so many ideas and possibilities to play with, there wasn't always time to really explore them and to finesse those ideas eventually chosen for performance.

Shame about that musicologist ;-). No I really loved every part of the experience apart from the extensive chorus NA's which was frustrating and dealign with King's sometimes to sort out contracts etc.

The singers had obviously spent more time on it than the orchestra. This meant that their interpretation was a lot more different. This meant they were often freer which was hard to follow at times.

I would have preferred to have received the score earlier (I received it the day of the first rehearsal!) so that I could have gotten a better understanding of what was happening. I actually enjoyed working on a revamped version of the score which I found surprising. I just didn't quite enjoy how unorganised some rehearsals were.

The only major point I would make about the Dido experience was that both the score and the story had been preset a little before the rehearsals . I know in this time period this is inevitable but it seemed to me that particularly the musical elements could have been more broadly explored . The use of Purcell 's instrumentation and the extensive use of the baroque continuo/figured bass without really moving beyond those confines was I think limiting . Could we have explored other sound worlds /colours ? More chordal exploration based on the bass lines?

1) Changing the plot direction didn't work for me. It's a bit like that 'just a minute' round called 'one song to the tune of another'. One story to the words of another was just a daft.

2) Unnecessary additions to the score - one of the first things to learn when you improvise, ornament or edit any score is that any additions must be sufficiently interesting to justify their existence. Most of the time I felt like the whole point of the production was to insist on being different. Additions or alterations rarely felt like they had arisen out of genuine artistic feeling, more to justify the agenda. It was a welcome break when we reached the unmolested sections; Purcell (for me at least) is a composer who appreciates subtlety, this reinvention for me lacked any kind of restraint. Novelty is not the same as originality, think of a highlighter pen and a permanent marker - if you use one to draw on an essay then the key points get shown up in attractive colours, use the other and you can't read them any more.

3) 'Freedom' - Personally the times I felt most free to play properly were the sections where Purcell had been left alone. It was almost like watching the orchestra wake up; people started phrasing, concentrating on blend, thinking about sound quality, communicating with each other, making music. I guess it's a personal thing but certainly I don't feel that i need to change the notes, rhythms, dynamics, articulation, harmony, mood, tempo and emotional direction of a piece in order to be musically emancipated; for me that misses the point of musicianship entirely, and you could really feel that in the middle of the orchestra.

*Footnote! - I'm not against changing scores on principal and I think there is a sympathetic and musically satisfying way of doing it; a little out of fashion perhaps but still valid. My favourite example is probably Busoni's Chaconne transcription - all of the departures from the Bach original are in keeping with the original composition process and are used to clarify harmony or add commentary on the original, it feels like a conversation between the two composers. There's arguably a lot more Busoni in that piece than there is Bach, but it's true to the feel of the original with an updated means of delivery, which if you read his writing on aesthetics is what he was after.

In no order: organisational issues (though these are perhaps inevitable in a project like this, especially with a cover cast); human resources/recruitment issues due to low/no fees (though it can be explained by the simple law of supply and demand I was particularly uncomfortable with the male chorus being remunerated and the female chorus not); the quantity of rehearsal for the fee.

21. What did you most enjoy about working on 'Dido &...'?

17 responses

1. Lovely people to work with 2. A clearly very talented and motivated creative team who I am sure will go on to great things 3. The performances

1. Fantastic colleagues

2. The ability to try new and interesting performance ideas in a none-judgemental environment

3. The way the show developed over the three nights - changing things and watching the audiences' reactions.

4. Dancing like I was in a boy band.

5. The costumes.

6. The positive reaction from the audience.

7. Doing something different with a story which, in its traditional format, I find quite dull.
8. Great music making.
9. Trusting my colleagues - to get a positive and beautiful response from everyone else on stage when we all try something new.
10. Opportunities to work with excellent opera professionals to, hopefully, expand my career in the future.
11. PROBABLY A LOAD OF OTHER THINGS WHICH I CAN'T THINK OF RIGHT NOW.

Creative freedom - life-changing eye-opening experience

Freedom of the performances

The people, the concept, the music, the choreography, the costumes

Working with movement director

The performance space

The creative aspect, the helpful fun atmosphere

The people were great and it was a lot of fun.

1. The premise of the production, as a theatre maker I have always longed for an opera production in which the same creative and artistic license was used to offer a new version of a well known opera.
2. The artistic team. A wonderfully creative, imaginative, insightful and ambitious bunch!
3. The other performers.
4. The opportunity to be involved in something innovative and imaginative in an industry which is brimming with unoriginal productions.

I enjoyed the excitement of creating something truly new in a work that is so familiar. The production was upbeat and the cast and production team all enthusiastic and fun to work with.

Working with a great team in a very collaborative manner.

I really enjoyed the fact that everyone, singers and instrumentalists alike, were encouraged to come up with their own ideas.

I loved how dedicated every performer was to the performance and how dedicated the creative team were – was a great family feeling and made me more enthusiastic about the performance and what we were doing. I think this really came across in the performances.

Everything pretty much? I loved grappling with new ways to tell the story, changing the ending, developing new contexts for the music.

1) Lovely cast and crew

2) Layout of the hall - not a minor point, it really affects the atmosphere. The audience clearly felt relaxed and comfortable which is how it should be. Classical concerts too often feel deathly serious and a bit cold, which doesn't sell the scene well at all.

3) The talk, up to a point - I think it might have been better as a preconcert for logistical reasons but I can see why the audience would prefer it afterwards. I like it when audiences feel free to contribute, I much prefer introductions to programme notes for example.

In no order: the chance to express my views of the work within a supportive environment; the opportunity to work with an exciting company and to meet collaborators from different fields; the good relationships with the rest of the cast and team, in particular an excellent relationship with the conductor.

22. What do think you could transfer from this experience with 'Dido &...' to your normal professional music-making?

17 responses

Possibly the sense of play - sometimes, in the professional world, one loses sight of that. I felt that was achieved more in performances than in rehearsal and very much enjoyed on the last performance, being given the liberty to do at least one big gesture. That was very freeing.

Don't take the score too literally.

Don't be afraid to try new things.

Be brave with vocal colour.

EVERYTHING is up for grabs in interpretation.

Everything!

I think I could be braver in my performances

I think the physical nature of some of the choreography helped my release parts of my voice actually. I have made a resolution since Dido to get a bit fitter so that I can feel more "present" on stage and so that if I need to move around at speed I am still able to sing effectively.

A more free and creative interpretive approach in my preparation

Finding interpretations that is true me as a performer that is also in accordance to the composer.

to question the meaning of the music further

Push yourself and become a thinker not a just a doer

1. Not being afraid to question whether the perceived 'correct' way of doing something is the way that I should do it.
2. Placing more value on what I have to offer creatively.

I think a greater sense of "what if...?" when approaching my music making, rather than singing a standardised version by default.

More respect for the importance of collaboration.

I have learnt that I don't need to take everything as gospel. It's very unlikely that I would choose to change a score as much as this, however I know that I can take my interpretations further than I usually do.

It has certainly made me more aware that music doesn't necessarily have to be performed according to Gospel, that we as performers have the right and opportunity to interpret works however we wish. It has shed a new light to how I perceive music from a performance aspect and I will definitely apply this new attitude to some of my repertoire.

Everything, but these practices were pretty much part of my outlook and way of working already!

Very little I wouldn't be employed! It's all a bit like a battery farm in orchestras these days. BBC phil get grumpy if the conductor keeps them past 3pm, so any attempt to actually think about the process wouldn't go down well, it's all about minimum risk and minimum effort. It's depressing, but when the money is tight and 20 mins of broadcastable finished product from a 3h recording session is considered leisurely, it's hardly surprising people play like they're on the defensive. I quite regularly do concert orchestra work where there simply isn't the time to even run the programme once, so you just top and tail everything then hope it hangs together. Certainly any attempt to discuss the musical interpretation of a piece in question would be professional suicide.

As a performer, I will spend more time in my own preparation thinking more creatively about how to interpret a work, in particular being suspicious of any 'right' way of doing things. As a composer, it has encouraged me to be more creative, particularly in terms of polystylism.

23. Anything you would like to add:

13 responses

Note

I was really struck by the seminar that I attended and the explanation of the process that Ella and Leo went through in terms of what they did with the score and story. I feel, as a performer, that knowing about that straight off would have been really enlightening and useful, and it would be great if that was considered as a starting point for rehearsals for future productions, as that sort of information is gold dust for performers!

In general I think that this was one of the most enjoyable and interesting productions I've been in for a long time.

I think we could have gone a lot further - why not alter the music? The words? It would still be Purcell, but with a truly modern twist.

Extended vocal techniques could have been introduced - sprechgesang, multiphonics, overtones, undertones, yodelling, ululation, screaming, and screeching could all have add something new to the opera.

The thing I found slight frustrating was that I think we imagined that by changing the story, placing it in a modern context, introducing controversial subjects such as drag queens and modern dancing, we had achieved a radical opera. These days there are plenty of companies who push the boundaries of what the stories, contexts and movement of shows mean, but we could have truly radicalised Dido by developing the text itself and the way we sing/play it.

When's the next one...!

I had a lovely time being part of this production! Thanks

I enjoyed working on this project. I was a little apprehensive at first as to know how the performances might be received by the audiences but It was an interesting process and would be keen to work on a similar project in the future

Thank you

More projects like this please! And a mixture of academic and commercial venues would be great, so that this work can reach a wider audience.

To date this has been the most creatively satisfying production that I have directed. I really loved every minute of it and especially having the time to develop it over the year.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to perform this wonderful re-imagining of Purcell's work – I honestly didn't think I would enjoy it as much as I have! I am overjoyed that I got to be a part of this amazing company and really relished every rehearsal. Thank you again!

This whole project seemed to me to have enormous use and resonance for the wider music and theatrical community. As Dan and I discussed a little too these issues and preoccupation are far from just part of a musical preoccupation but the whole idea that from the youngest age we are told what to think, conditioned to play, be educated, how to think is one that preoccupies most forward thinking educationalists and thinkers right now. The first principles education model tells us that we must look at things from the bottom up. Makes us ask fundamental questions, questioning agreed ways of working, conditioned thinking, trying to see things afresh and make them relevant, vibrant for the now. We have a huge received body of classic work in the Opera world which of course should be performed again and again because of it seems to have some power to speak to us now. The works of Monteverdi although over 400 year old now shine and throb with such a fiery soul; as to feel just composed. But this does not mean we have to keep them in aspic, perform them as though there were museum pieces. We of course have to ask ourselves are we just trying to update them musically simply to make a point artistically or make them some how relevant to a younger 'hipper' audience. Surely we might say 'do we need to update the music if its that good and seems to speak to us whatever age?' I think for me it must be an organic process from the start. It has to come from an artist imperative, from enquiry, from needing to say something deep and fundamental about a piece. Should we not be allowed to strip a piece bare to let a new piece emerge? One that was previously hidden? These are tricky issues. Will publishers and agents let it happen. Will audiences and funding bodies approve. Its a process that needs courage and real artistic integrity and insight. and the fundamental question 'Do we need to do this? What are we saying when we do this? Is it necessary at all? How does this release and free the piece of music or stage work into a new life which is as valid as its old life...?' It has to come from collaboration on a deep level. In many senses it cannot be preset but involve all side of the the performing and production team. That includes the musicians in the band, conductor, singers, director etc. This process was certainly in evidence on Dido & as the results certainly show but I do believe that the process has to and can go much further. This is a huge and exciting first step on a voyage of discovery. Putting the performer at the heart of the creative process on level footing with the composer not just to recreate but to creative anew.

This is a massive and fascinating discussion so I'm sorry to have to do it on paper. I made my points as quickly as i could and there are so many interesting tangents i had to ignore! I love that somebody is thinking about the aesthetics of performance today but for me this was a bit of an artistic dead end. Would love a chat tho! All best.

The idea of being creative with a score in this way is an excellent one. I do think though that we could have gone further with the musical interpretation in terms of syntax rather than just language - for example, if Act 2 was really set in a club we could have had an electronica-style accompaniment, and for the jazz numbers an actual jazz trio rather than harpsichord. I also think that the gender/queer theory ideas were dealt with in a simplistic way, rather than fully integrating them into the retelling. In terms of future projects, I realise the idea is to slay sacred cows but I do think some kinds of music work better with this approach than others; in particular I think Baroque music, with its stylistic range and often simple (therefore robust) music is particularly apt. I would be very interested in approaching some Monteverdi/Cavalli in this fashion - perhaps L'Incoronazione di Poppea, which has similar gender play and, with often just a voice and bass line, the chance to be really very creative indeed.