

Frady to guest direct BW's *Dido and Aeneas* at Red Space

by Daniel Hathaway



Baldwin Wallace Opera Theater will stage Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* at Red Space in downtown Cleveland on Wednesday and Thursday, October 23 and 24 at 7:00 pm, in a production directed by Kathryn Frady of Knoxville's Marble City Opera.

Frady returns to BW at the invitation of opera studies director Scott Skiba, after having directed scenes and sung in a premiere during Cleveland Opera Theater's {New Opera Works} Festival two years ago. "I love contemporary opera," she said in a recent telephone conversation. "This season, Marble City Opera is producing the world premiere of

Shadowlight by Larry Delinger and Emily Anderson. It's about Beauford Delaney, a famous artist who grew up in Knoxville. We're building a whole festival around the opera from January through May."

Dido and Aeneas, on the other hand, is a very old theater piece, perhaps having been first performed in London at a dancing school in the late 1680s. "*Dido* was Scott's idea," Frady said. "Originally, we were to have staged Menotti's *The Medium*, but casting issues made a switch necessary. But *Dido* is a great piece."

The story, drawn from Virgil's *Aeneid*, is well-known, though the [history](#) of Purcell's musical setting remains cloudy. What's certain is that the opera — or masque, or whatever category you file it under — is a favorite for the quality and accessibility of its music, whatever directorial decisions need to be made in terms of staging and plot support.

“Red Space is a non-traditional venue,” Frady said, “but there are lots of columns that help create the feel of a palace. We’ll use video projections for the ship, and two large pieces of fabric in association with Dido — those become her wedding veil at the beginning. Later she wears it as a skirt, and it becomes her shroud at the end.”

The chorus will play an active role. “In the opening act, they’ll sometimes act as statues that come to life like a Greek chorus. Baroque gestures will underline the emotions in what they sing,” she said. Frady is choreographing the dancing herself.

BW’s production will be accompanied by a one-on-a-part string orchestra conducted from the harpsichord by Jason Aquila, who has also prepared the chorus. The audience will witness the action from stadium seating.

The big question is why Dido dies after the famous aria that ends the work, before she is carried off by rose-strewing angels. Many productions follow Virgil’s story and end with the Queen of Carthage taking her own life by falling on Aeneas’ sword. “The reason is ambiguous,” Frady said, noting that the audience probably shouldn’t witness her death portrayed graphically. “I think she died of actual pain, but maybe she was pregnant and had a miscarriage.”

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