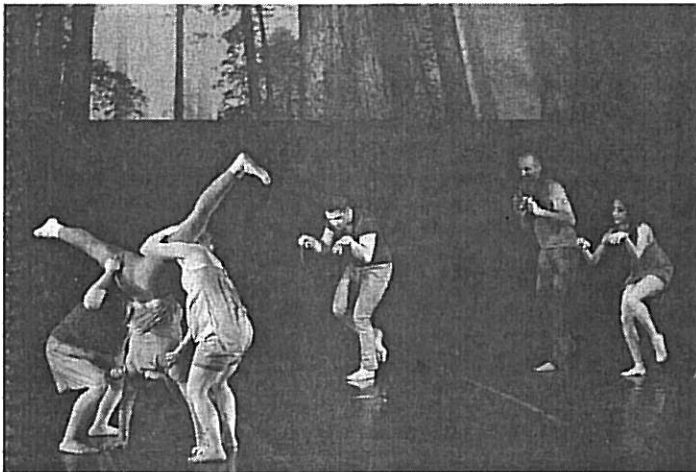


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Dido and Aeneas, Pursued by Paparazzi



DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A scene from Jody Oberfelder's version of Purcell's opera "Dido and Aeneas," commissioned by the Orchestra of St. Luke's.

For a modern-dance choreographer, "Dido and Aeneas" is not just a story from Virgil's "Aeneid" or a 17th-century opera by Purcell but, most frighteningly, a celebrated work by Mark Morris. None of this seems to have daunted Jody Oberfelder, who has created a fresh, imaginative and utterly charming version of this piece in collaboration with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the La Guardia High School senior chorus.

The piece was commissioned by St. Luke's for its arts education program, and from Monday to Wednesday it was performed before 6,500 New York City schoolchildren. On Wednesday evening it had just one public

performance, at La Guardia High School on the Upper West Side.

That's a pity, because Ms. Oberfelder's delightful production deserves to be seen more widely. She gives the classic story a contemporary twist by reincarnating Aeneas and Dido as a modern celebrity couple parted by the current incarnation of divine forces: the media and business interests. (In Virgil's tale, it's the gods who intervene; in Purcell's opera, it's a sorceress.) If this sounds contrived on paper, it doesn't come across as such, because Ms. Oberfelder lets the emotions inherent in the music and lyrics shine clearly through the dancing without any onstage self-consciousness.

The contemporary context is cleverly set up by a series of pro-

Dido and Aeneas

La Guardia High School

jected images (the "set concept" is by Juergen Riehm, the photographs by Jillian Patterson) that show celebrity magazine-style features, with paparazziesque snapshots and big headlines about the characters. ("What Shall Aeneas Do?" "His Fate Is Sealed!") The twist is that the words are mostly the lyrics from the opera, an ingenious shorthand version of surtitles that leaves us free to concentrate on Ms. Oberfelder's dances and the music, played beautifully by the St. Luke's ensemble.

Performed with great verve by her eight dancers, the choreography is mostly full of invention and wit, with breaking and acrobatics punctuating more conventional movement. The singers, all good, mostly remain unobtrusively on the side of the stage but occasionally interact with the dancers — to particularly moving effect when Dido (Rebekah Morin) and her singing counterpart (Adrienne Danrich) come together in the famous final aria with the refrain "Remember me, forget my fate."

Purcell wrote "Dido and Aeneas" for a girls' school, and so the teenage chorus, led by John Russell, seems particularly appropriate here, as does the giddy what-will-happen-next rush of the production. Love, lust, breakups. Some things never change.