Purcell - King Arthur (Lewis), The Indian Queen (Mackerras) [2004]

King Arthur, or The British Worthy (1691) - original version *1.Overture - Air - Overture*
Act 1
2.Woden, first to thee (Bass) 3.The White Horse Neigh'd aloud (tenor) 4.The Lot is cast (soprano) 5.I call ye all (Tenor) 6.'Come if you dare' (tenor)
Act 2
7.Hither this way (Philidel) 8.Let not a Moon-born Elf (Grimbald) 9.Come follow, follow, follow me (Philidel) 10.How blest are Shepherds (Shepherd) 11.Shepherd, shepherd, leave Decoying (Shepherdesses)
Act 3
12.What ho (Cupid) 13.What Power art thou (Genius) 14.Thou Doting Fool (Cupid) 15.No part of my Dominium (Cupid) 16.'Tis I that have warm'd ye (Cupid) 17.Sound a Parley (Cupid, Genius)
Act 4
18.Two Daughters (Syrens) 19.How happy the Lover (Tenor)
Act 5
20.Trumpet Tune - Ye blust'ring Brethren (Aeolus) 21.Symphony - Round thy Coasts (Pan and Nereide) 22.For Folded Flocks (Countertenor, Tenor and Bass) 23.Your Hay it is Mow'd (Comus) 24.Fairest Isle (Venus) 25.Dialogue: You say, 'Tis Love (Soprano and bass) 26.Symphony - Our Natives (Chorus) 27.Chaconne
Elsie Morison, Heather Harper, Mary Thomas – sopranos John Whitworth – countertenor David Galliver, Wilfred Brown – tenors John Cameron – baritone Hervey Alan, Trevor Anthony – basses The St Anthony Singers Orchestra of the Philomusica of London Sir Anthony Lewis - conductor, 1958

The Indian Queen, Z. 630
Prologue
1.First Music - Second Music 2.Overture 3.Wake Quivera, wake
Act 2
4.Symphony 5.I come to sing great Zempoalla's story
Act 3
6.Ye twice the hundred deities - By the croaking 7.Symphony - Seek not to know 8.Trumpet Overture 9.Ah, how happy are we 10.I attempt from Love's sickness to fly
Act 4
11.They tell us that your mighty powers
Act 5

12.While thus we bow
April Cantelo – soprano Wilfred Brown, Robert Tear, Ian Partridge – tenors Christopher Keyte – bass English Chamber Orchestra The St Anthony Singers Sir Charles Mackerras -conductor, 1966

King Arthur was originally based on a poem written by Sir John Dryden in celebration of the second half of King Charles II's reign. In commercial terms, it was Purcell's most successful work. Dryden's text is rich and beautiful, and Purcell's setting is lively and refined.

The topics chosen for the poetry and masques often included fairies, love, evil spirits, and heroism. The opening act of King Arthur includes gods, as the pagan Saxons make sacrifice, and heroics. "Come if you dare, the trumpets sound" is heroic military music sung by a heroic tenor, with drum rhythms as part of the melody. The vocal chorus imitates military drums in their rhythmic enunciations, and the trumpets blast victory music.

Act Two has two main musical episodes, the first of which is all about fairies. In a foggy mist of music the sprites sing a song that imitates the lightness of spirits flitting through the dusk. It is followed by "We brethren of the air," a peaceful exhaling phrase that gently breathes forth fairy dust. The second is a masque celebrating the bucolic life. The gentle pastoral "How blest are the shepherds" has an almost religious beauty to it. The bawdier side of country living is struck up in "Shepherds leave decoying" and "Come, shepherds, lead up a lively measure." The songs get quicker and wilder as the scene progresses, and are punctuated at the end with a lively hornpipe, Purcell's favorite dance.

The masque of Act Three is pure fantasy. The Frost Scene, as it is called, features Cupid descending in a vast machine accompanied in the orchestra by a French symphony. Cupid, a soprano, calls forth the Genius of Winter in a powerful recitative. The Genius rises slowly in an extremely extended melodic line, because he is frozen stiff, to cold trembling strings. The Genius is a rich bass voice accompanied by brilliant and icy chromatic harmonies, prefiguring Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Cupid and the Genius have a duet, and the Cold People all sing and dance of the wonders of love. This scene ends with a lively hornpipe also.

In Act Four, Purcell had the opportunity to write for two sopranos, which he loved to do. Two sirens, in a lyrical tour de force, accompanied only by continuo, invite Arthur skinny-dipping.

Water nymphs and sirens also sing the passacaglia "How happy the lovers." The final masque of Britannia, has been much maligned as being dramatically incoherent and beside the point. However, it closes out the semi-opera wonderfully. As Britannia arises, a symphony composed in a florid Baroque style accompanies her. "Your hay is mow'd" is sung by Comus and three peasants. It is a comic, rustic romp. In stark contrast is the beautiful "Fairest Isle" sung by none other than Venus in an aria inspired and heavenly. A grand dance and chorus ends the act as the Britons and the Saxons unite as one people. --- Rita Laurance, Rovi

The Indian Queen was originally a play written by Sir Robert Howard in collaboration with his brother-in-law Sir John Dryden, first performed in 1664. It wasn't until 1694 that Thomas Betterton, the impresario of United Company decided to turn it into a musical. The Indian Queen has much less music than Purcell's other operas, and it is thought that perhaps he wrote less music because all the actors and singers had walked out of the company prior to its first performance. Purcell composed 16 vocal numbers to the play, and 22 instrumental pieces.

The opening poem is about the imminent takeover of Mexico by the Spanish; a dialogue between an Indian boy and girl, it becomes a statement of protest to the coming war.

The masque of "Fame and Envy" makes up most of the music for Act Two. "Fame" begins by proclaiming the greatness of Zempoalla, saying her wonders cannot be matched. "Envy" rises up scornfully singing "What flatt'ring noise is this...?" In a jauntily evil piece, all the snakes of "Envy" hiss dramatically at "Fame," whose music is all innocence and lyricism. "Fame" eventually wins the argument and sends "the fiends of hell" back whence they came. In Act Three, music is introduced in an incantation scene. Queen Zempoalla's soothsayer Ismeron opens with the recitative "Ye twice ten hundred deities," and then has an extended solo while he calls forth the God of Dreams. On the words "Pants for breath," slight panting pauses occur in the solo line, as Ismeron tries to get his breath and move on. When he asks the God of Dreams to rise, the music slowly and gradually rises chromatically to a grand climax. Then it falls gently back on the words "lull thee in thy sleep." The God of Dreams eventually rises accompanied by an obbligato for solo oboe. Act Three also includes an overture and canzona in free fugato style, featuring a solo trumpet matched and in harmony with the violins. The work is expansive and brilliant and full of imitative invention. The spirits, to a rather sad melody over a moving bass, sing about how happy they are that they do not suffer from human passions. "I attempt from love's sickness to fly" is one of Purcell's most beautiful and famous arias, capturing the Queen's despair and longing.

The final scene to which Purcell added music is when Zempoalla is about to sacrifice all her prisoners to the gods. There are three numbers: a chorus for the crowd of people at the ritual sacrifice; a priest has a recitative, to which the chorus responds; and a solemn and sad procession follows. All lend importance to the dramatic content of the moment.

Henry Purcell died before he had a chance to finish the opera. There was another masque composed for the play by Daniel Purcell, celebrating the wedding of Orazia and Montezuma. It is very often omitted, as it isn't as musically fine as the rest of the opera. --- Rita Laurance, Rovi

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