



MARK MORRIS  DANCE GROUP

DanceOn! Digital Dance Lab

Dido & Aeneas

Resource Guide

40th Anniversary Digital Season 20/21

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Welcome to Dance On! MMDG's Digital Dance Lab,

a three-part dance series that brings three of Mark Morris's most acclaimed works, *The Hard Nut*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed il Moderato* directly into your home. Utilizing MMDG's inclusive and culturally responsive arts education approach, each session includes a 20-minute movement lesson, led by an MMDG dancer and accompanied by live music, an interactive guide, and is designed for participants and their families with and without disabilities.

This interactive resource guide aims to provide students with deeper engagement and insight into Mark's take on the baroque opera *Dido and Aeneas* and contains child-centered activities to further explore the concept of character development through dance.

We hope you enjoy!

Sarah Marcus, Director of Education

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Learning Objective

In this Digital Dance Lab, participants will learn how the arts can help us learn about ourselves and tell our stories by studying the Mark Morris Dance Group's *Dido and Aeneas*. Participants will have the opportunity to learn about the dance and its characters, think about how characters support good storytelling, embody some of the movement from this work, and explore how they might express their own identities through the medium of dance.

About the Artform: Modern Dance

Dance is defined as: "To move rhythmically usually to music, using prescribed or improvised steps and gestures." There are many styles of dance and ways to move the body. The dance form performed by the Mark Morris Dance Group is called MODERN dance.

What Is Modern Dance?

Modern dance developed in the 20th century primarily in the United States and Germany. Along with modern art, it was a rebellious response to the traditional style of classical ballet. The earliest modern dance innovators pushed the boundaries and limitations previously set by traditional schools of dance. American pioneers include Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis.

Mark Morris creates original dances much as the pioneers of modern dance once did. His company, the Mark Morris Dance Group, is an ensemble that only performs dances that he creates. Many modern dance companies perform dances by several choreographers. Dance companies that perform dances by choreographers' other than their founders are called repertory companies.

Who is Mark Morris?



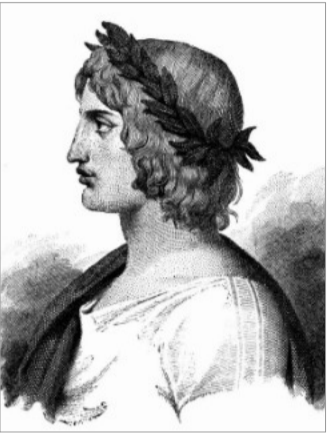
CHOREOGRAPHER

Mark Morris is the founding Artistic Director of and choreographer for the **Mark Morris Dance Group**, an internationally renowned touring company he founded in 1980. In addition to choreographing over 150 works for his company, Mark was a dancer in the company and in later years conducted the orchestra for *Dido and Aeneas*.

In the work we are studying today, *Dido and Aeneas*, Morris cast himself in the dual role of Dido and the evil Sorceress that plots the Queen's demise. This role is one of his most acclaimed. "As he said at the time," biographer Joan Acocella wrote in 1993, "he wanted to expand the expressiveness of male dancers; he wanted to give them what women had. But, artistically, the more important fact was that the gender switch—plus the combining of the heroine and villainess roles—shot the show into a mythic territory, beyond realism and beyond conventional morals." Morris continued to perform the role, opposite Guillermo Resto as Aeneas, until 2000.

In recent years, Mark Morris has taken on the role of conductor. He has been conducting performances of *Dido and Aeneas* since 2008, when he first conducted the **MMDG Music Ensemble** and the George Mason University singers as part of an engagement in Fairfax, Virginia. Since then, he has conducted performances in Urbana, Illinois (Pacific Symphony Orchestra and the University of Illinois Chamber Singers); in Boston, Massachusetts (Orchestra and Chorus of Emmanuel Music); and in the company's Russian debut in Moscow (MMDG Music Ensemble and Trinity Choir). Recent performances conducted by Morris at Cal Performances, Berkeley (Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Chorale) and at the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center, New York (MMDG Music Ensemble and Trinity Choir) featured mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe singing the roles of Dido and Sorceress.

Who is Virgil?



POET/AUTHOR of *Dido and Aeneas*

15 October 70 BC–21 September 19 BC

Virgil is a poet from Ancient Rome. Virgil was regarded by the Romans as their greatest poet, and his reputation endures to this day. His most well-known work is *The Aeneid*, a 12-book poem that tells the story of Aeneas, the Roman legend and founder of Rome. "Virgil's poetry is known not only for the music and diction of his verse and for his skill in constructing an intricate work on the grand scale but also because he embodied in his poetry aspects of experience and behavior of permanent significance." (*Britannica*)

Who is Henry Purcell?



COMPOSER of *Dido and Aeneas*

10 September 1659 – 21 November 1695

Henry Purcell is an English composer from the baroque era of music. While the premiere date of the opera is unknown, the opera was composed no later than July of 1688. *Dido and Aeneas* is an opera in a prologue and three acts, with the libretto by Irish poet Nahum Tate. "The story is based on Book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It recounts the love of Dido, Queen of Carthage, for the Trojan hero Aeneas, and her despair when he abandons her. A monumental work in Baroque opera, *Dido and Aeneas* is remembered as one of Purcell's foremost theatrical works." (Price, Curtis, "Dido and Aeneas", Grove Music Online, ed. L. Macy [accessed 31 December 2005])

"A tour de force of late 20th century artistic storytelling...that smashes and rewrites stylistic boundaries. When everyone joined together—musicians, singers, dancers—it proved, yet again, that you didn't need a movie screen to make a blockbuster."

Los Angeles Times



Dido & Aeneas

About *Dido and Aeneas*

This study guide will introduce you to *Dido and Aeneas*, a dance choreographed by Mark Morris for his company, the Mark Morris Dance Group. *Dido and Aeneas* is a dance adaptation of Henry Purcell's 1689 eponymous opera, based on Virgil's famous tale of Aeneas's affair with Dido, the Queen of Carthage, on his way to founding Rome.

As Director of Dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, Belgium, Mark Morris presented this opera with singers stationed in the pit and with the stage reserved exclusively for dancing. The unique combination of baroque vocal music and modern dance underscored Morris's gift for storytelling and his remarkable ability to shape music and words into movements.

Synopsis

Scene 1: The Palace

The Trojan war is over. Aeneas and his people have found themselves in Carthage after a treacherous sea voyage. His destiny, as decreed by the Gods, is to found Rome, but he has become obsessed with Dido, Queen of Carthage. Her sister and confidante, Belinda, and other optimistic courtiers urge her to enjoy her good fortune, but the young widow Dido is anxious. Aeneas arrives to ask the Queen, again, to give herself to him. Belinda notices, with relief that Dido seems to be capitulating. Dido and Aeneas leave together. Love triumphs.

Scene 2: The Cave

The evil Sorceress summons her colleagues to make big trouble in Carthage. Dido must be destroyed before sunset. Knowing of Aeneas's destiny to sail to Italy, the Sorceress decides to send a Spirit disguised as Mercury to tell him he must depart immediately. Since Dido and Aeneas and the rest are out on a hunt, the witches plan to make a storm to spoil the lovers' fun and send everyone back home. The witches cast their spell.

Scene 3: The Grove

Dido and Aeneas make love. Another triumph for the hero. The royal party enters and tells a story for Aeneas's benefit. Dido senses the approaching storm. Belinda, ever practical, organizes the trip back to the palace. Aeneas is accosted by the false Mercury with this command: "Leave Carthage Now." He accepts his orders, then wonders how to break the news to Dido. He is worried.

Scene 4: The Ships

Aeneas and the Trojans prepare for the journey. The Sorceress and her witches are quite pleased to see that their plot is working. Once Aeneas has sailed they will conjure an ocean storm. They are proud of themselves.

Scene 5: The Palace

Dido sees the Trojans preparing their ships. Aeneas tries to explain his predicament and offers to break his vow in order to stay with her. Dido is appalled by his hypocrisy. She sends him away and contemplates the inevitability of death. "Remember me but forget my fate." Dido dies.

World Premiere March 11, 1989

Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie
Théâtre Varia

Opera Roles: The characters of in the Opera are also sung by vocalists. They are called opera singers and each singer has a voice type that describes the range their voice can sing in. Just like the dancers in the work, the singers also play multiple roles.

Role	Voice
Dido / Sorceress	mezzo-soprano
Belinda / First Witch	soprano
Second Woman / Second Witch	mezzo-soprano
Aeneas	baritone
Sailor	tenor
Greek Chorus	

About the Designers

Scenic Design	Robert Bordo
Costume Design	Christine Van Loon
Lighting Design	James F. Ingalls

Movement Lesson

Led by MMDG Dancer, Domingo Estrada, Jr. and accompanied on percussion by Parker Anderson.

Accessibility: Closed captioning and seated modifications are provided throughout the movement lesson.

WARM-UP

Explore MOTIFS and CHARACTER TRAITS

- Plies in PARELLEL, FIRST, and SECOND POSITIONS to warm up the legs
- Find the RHYTHYM

INVESTIGATE

Character Movements in SPACE & MOOD

- Movements to explore the characters of JUPITER (JOE), Roman God of Sky and Thunder, AENEAS, Trojan Prince, and SORCERESS, an evil witch.
- WEIGHT SHIFTS—mimicking the waves of the sea. Dancers will explore moving through space with character moves.

EXPLORE

Scene 4 The Ships

- Using rep movements Scene 4: The Ships using character movements to tell the story
- Using those movements dancers will incorporate PATHWAYS.
- Using those movements dancers will incorporate changes in TEMPO and EFFORT
- Using a MOOD to the CHARACTERS Add a feeling to each movement—happiness anger, fear, hope etc.

ELABORATE

Personal Expression

- Dancers will review movements to show characters, mood, and setting
- Dancers will think about their personal identities—how do these characters, mood, and setting speak to the individual?
- Dancers will create their own movement sentence based on their personal identities. What makes you, you? Dancers can play with levels, time, space, effort.

REFLECT

Cool Down, Stretch, and Recall

- While stretching, dancers will be led through a guided reflection: Dancers learned the main characters of the opera and story of *Dido and Aeneas*.
- Dancers explored character development, mood, and setting to support a story.
- When watching the MMDG Dido and Aeneas Digital Content to see how Mr. Morris creates characters, with using the same dancer for two roles!
- Dancers will recall they learned real moves that can be seen in the Mark Morris Dance Group's performance of *Dido and Aeneas*.

For older participants

Facilitate a discussion or writing assignment that address the role dance plays in their lives.

Example prompts include:

1. Describe a style of dance that you enjoy doing and explain why;
2. Describe the role dance plays in your culture (American or other);
3. Write a poem or a short story that can be set to movement or a tableau.

Vocabulary Words

Bass	Mezzo-soprano	Setting
Character	Modern Dance	Shape
Choreographer	Mood	Soprano
Composer	Motifs	Space
Conductor	Opera	Stage
Costume Design	Parallel Position	Tempo
Effort	Pathways	Tenor
First Position	Repertory	Transitions
Levels	Scenic Design	
Lighting Design	Second Position	

Digital Content & Discussion Session

Explore *Dido and Aeneas* Digital Content:

The Palace
The Grove
The Ships

This discussion will give students the chance to reflect upon their experience with the performance material and to articulate their responses and interpretations. The discussion will allow participants to note how ideas and characters can be expressed through dance and music.

Lead the class on a reflection of their experience.

These questions can also be used as prompts for participants to think about prior to beginning the Lab and in addition to as a guide for post-activity discussion:

- How do the dancers use their bodies and facial expressions to set the mood without words?
- What was the music like? How did it help to convey the mood?
- How do the costumes help explain the story?
- What was your favorite part of the performance? Why?
- Did any parts of the dance surprise you? Why?
- How would you describe what you saw to a friend?

Further Information and Resources

markmorrisdancegroup.org

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