

## English Podcast: Händel and Purcell

Welcome to the *Música y Letra* Podcasts, the collaborative project created by the *EOI de Badajoz* and the group of Supplementary Piano students from the *Conservatorio Superior de Música de Extremadura*. Today is the English students' turn to talk about the music we are going to listen to. We are Antonia and Soledad, teacher Isabel's students.

We will start with some music by Georg Friederich Händel. In the background we can hear a movement from a Suite known as *Sarabande*. This piece has become very popular because it belongs to the Academy Award winning soundtrack of the film *Barry Lyndon*, directed by Stanley Kubrick.

Händel was a Baroque composer of German origin but later naturalised English. He is considered to be one of the most relevant figures of this period. While alive, he enjoyed a well deserved international fame. He was the first composer who focused his music on satisfying the audience tastes instead of those of the aristocracy,

He knew how to synthesise all styles: German, English, Italian and French of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, and his musical legacy comprises pieces belonging to all genres. He composed 43 operas, and he did not go further due to the high cost their performance involved. Maybe that is the reason why he specialised in composing oratorios for which there was no need to engage Italian soloists, the most esteemed at the time, nor expensive sets or flashy costume. Among the oratorios he wrote, *Messiah* is the most famous one.

A bit further along this British musical tour, let's focus our attention on another piece: **When I am laid in earth**. Dido's lament is perhaps the most acclaimed aria from the opera *Dido and Aeneas*, composed by Henry Purcell. Before Händel was considered one of the best British musicians (in spite of being born in Germany) Henry Purcell had quite a long musical career already, as you will learn below.

Purcell was a Baroque composer. He was born in the county of Westminster, England, in the mid 17th century and died at the turn of that century when at the peak of his career, at the age of 36. He started composing when he was 9, and at 21 he was named organist of the Chapel Royal, to later become a builder of the royal organs. That was when he turned one of the most relevant composers of the period, specializing in sacred music. He is the author of what is considered as the first English opera, *Dido and Aeneas*, which includes the famous *Dido's Lament* Aria.

This opera sings the story of an impossible love between Dido, queen of Carthage, and Aeneas, a Trojan welcomed in those lands after a wreckage. The drama unfolds because Aeneas must leave to regain Troy and Dido cannot bear to be separated from him. Although Aeneas makes up his mind and decides to stay, Dido, in despair thinking him gone, has already made a terrible decision, committing suicide. This is when she sings her last words to her loyal maid Belinda, right before dying, a scene that has truly become a favourite among sopranos.

The famous verses read:

When I am laid in earth, may my wrongs create  
No trouble in thy breast.  
Remember me, but ah forget my fate.