

the PROGRAM17
JUNE*Saturday*

8 PM

HANDEL & HAYDN SOCIETY
ORCHESTRA AND CHORUSIan Watson, *harpsichord and director**Pre-concert talk with Dr. Elizabeth Seitz, 7 PM*

THE FAIRY QUEEN

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)/Anonymous text based on
Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*Music from Act I
Music from Act II
Music from Act III

:: INTERMISSION ::

Music from Act IV
Music from Act VHANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY
Harry Christophers, Artistic Director

VIOLIN I

Aisslinn Nosky †
*Concertmaster Chair funded
by Rhoda & Paul Joss*Susanna Ogata
Assistant Concertmaster
Fiona Hughes

VIOLIN II

Christina Day Martinson *
Associate Concertmaster
Dr. Lee Bradley III Chair
Adriane Post

VIOLA

Jenny Stirling *
*Chair funded in memory of
Estah & Robert Yens*
Anne Black

CELLO

Guy Fishman *
Nancy & Richard Lubin Chair
Sarah Freiberg

OBOE & RECORDER

Priscilla Herreid *
*Chair funded in part by
Dr. Michael Fisher Sandler*
Meg Owens

HARPISCHORD

Ian Watson

THEORBO

Simon Martyn-Ellis

† Concertmaster

* Principal

GLOVSKY
*Counselors-at-Law*Festival
Corporate Partner*The artists continue on the next page*

Handel & Haydn Society Chorus

The H+H Chorus is endowed in perpetuity by Jane and Wat Tyler.

SOPRANO

Sarah Brailey
Margot Rood
Sonja DuToit Tengblad

TENOR

Jonas Budris
Stefan Reed

BASS

Woodrow Bynum
Sumner Thompson

ALTO

Katherine Growdon
Emily Marvosh

Underwritten by Nancy and Richard Lubin.

Thanks to Anne and David Gergen, season sponsors of Guy Fishman, cello.

The Handel and Haydn Society is funded in part by the
Massachusetts Cultural Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

This concert is sponsored in part by the generosity of Bill and Susan Wagner.

Notes ON THE PROGRAM

BY
Teresa M. Neff

THE FAIRY QUEEN

Henry Purcell (b. Westminster, September 10, 1659;
d. City of Westminster, November 21, 1695)

Composed 1692; 100 minutes (version to be performed this evening)

Love Unbound

The son of a member of the Chapel Royal, Henry Purcell (1659-1695) spent most of his life there, first as a young singer and an assistant to the king's instrument keeper, helping to maintain the keyboard and wind instruments. At 16, he was appointed composer-in-ordinary for the violins and in 1682 he became organist for the Chapel Royal, a post that included singing as well.

Purcell composed most of his dramatic music in the early 1690s. With the re-opening of theaters after the Restoration of the monarchy, English theater developed its own unique style in which additional scenes with music (masques) augmented spoken plays. Using *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare, Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, expounds on love and marriage, with allusions to William and Mary, even as it references London's ever-expanding world-view.

The Fairy Queen, first performed in London at The Queen's Theater, Dorset Garden in 1692, was a great success. An unknown librettist adapted Shakespeare's play for seventeenth-century tastes and provided the scenarios and texts for the masques. Purcell did not set Shakespeare's text; he provided music for the masques that are interpolated into each act of the play. For the first performance, only the last four acts contained masques; a masque episode for Act 1 and two songs were added for a 1693 revival. Original stage productions of *The Fairy Queen* were lengthy, estimated at some four hours, because they included both Shakespeare's play and the additional scenes. Today, it is common to perform only the masques in either concert or staged productions.

The Fairy Queen follows the action of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a tale of lovers, townsmen, and fairies who all find themselves in the woods outside of Athens on the same night. In Act 1, Hermia and Lysander

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want to get married; however, Hermia's father, Egeus, objects. He wants his daughter to marry Demetrius and asks the Duke to enforce an old law that allows the father to choose his daughter's husband. To make matters more complex, Demetrius, who was engaged to Hermia's friend Helena, now claims to love Hermia. Because the Duke rules that Hermia must marry Demetrius the next day, Hermia and Lysander decide to run away together that night; they tell Helena, who then tells Demetrius.

As a surprise for Hermia's wedding celebration, and to curry favor for themselves, some townsmen decide to stage a play. They agree to practice that night in the woods.

Titania, the Fairy Queen, comes to the same woods to get away from her husband, King Oberon. They have had an argument over her wish to keep an Indian Boy, the son of one of her ladies.

Against this backdrop, Purcell sets the duet "Come let us leave this town" with a rushing bass line and close imitation between the soprano and bass. The fairies hold the realm of the forest at night and the incursion of human beings into their world becomes represented by the entrance of the Drunken Poet. The worlds collide as the poet becomes part of the action and is punished for his literary "crimes." As the chorus helps to drive the poet away to sleep off his indulgences, Titania holds the sleeping Indian Boy. She leaves in a rage when she discovers that Oberon has sent Puck to watch them.

In Act 2, Titania and Oberon, upon meeting in the forest, accuse each other of faithlessness. Oberon says he will be faithful if she gives him the boy. When Titania refuses, Oberon promises revenge. He enlists the help of Puck to administer a potion which, when put on the eyelids of anyone who is asleep, causes them to fall in love with whomever they see when they wake. Initially, Oberon intends to use this potion only to embarrass Titania; however, after witnessing an exchange between Demetrius and Helena, he tells Puck to use the potion on Demetrius as well.

Titania and her fairies celebrate the night with song and dance in the masque for Act 2. When Titania commands that she be sung to sleep, the airs of Night, Mystery, Secrecy, and Sleep are presented. Night, in languid tones, brings a sense of repose while Mystery's air provides a contrast in tempo and mood. Secrecy's "One charming night," accompanied by recorders and pizzicato strings, is truly enchanting, while Sleep's halting air turns to a gently falling line at the word "softly."

After Titania falls asleep, Oberon puts his plan in motion. Having been lost in the woods, Lysander and Hermia are so tired they, too, fall asleep. Puck, thinking the sleeping man is Demetrius, puts the potion on Lysander's eyes.

In Act 3, Helena finds the sleeping Lysander and Hermia while looking for Demetrius. When she wakes Lysander, he falls in love with her. She is very confused by this turn of events and runs away with Lysander in pursuit. Hermia then wakes from a nightmare, and realizing she is alone, runs away as well.

The tradesmen now come to rehearse their play. Puck watches their rehearsal without their knowledge, and, remembering Oberon's orders that the first thing Titania must see when she wakes is a hideous creature, turns one of them, Bottom, into an ass. Just as Oberon hoped, Titania wakes, sees Bottom, and falls in love. Neither of them realizes how Bottom has changed.



The Fairy Queen Titania awakens to her new love, Bottom, transformed through a magic potion into an ass in a portrait by the Swiss painter Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741-1825)

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BY
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Henry Purcell
Oil portrait of Henry Purcell
by the German artist John
Closterman (1660-1711)

Oberon is quite pleased with his trick. With the arrival of Lysander and Helena, Oberon realizes that Puck used the potion on the wrong human and tells him to fix his mistake.

With airs about love's "pleasing pain," the masque for Act 3 reflects on the pursuit of love. A Nymph sings "When I have often heard," a plaintive air about a lover's resolve never to be deceived by empty promises. In the duet and chorus, "A Thousand ways we'll find," Purcell constructs tightly woven imitative passages to signify a unity of purpose as the evening's celebrations conclude and Titania leads Bottom away.

In Act 4, Oberon and Puck correct the earlier mistake by placing potion on the sleeping Demetrius, so that he will fall in love with Helena. An argument between Helena and Lysander wakes Demetrius, who immediately falls in love with Helena. Hermia enters, and discovering Lysander's betrayal, blames Helena. Helena, for her part, is thoroughly confused and decides that neither of the men is being honest. Although Puck enjoys all the bickering, Oberon orders him to set things right, so Puck leads them all through the forest until, exhausted, they fall asleep. Oberon, having found the Indian Boy, now releases Titania from the effects of her potion. Bottom is himself again and Titania remembers the events only as a dream.

As the humans sleep, the fairies greet the dawn of a new day with a masque that includes the four seasons, a parallel construction to the four solos and chorus that ushered in night and sleep in Act 2.

With the sunrise, the Duke and Egeus have come to the forest to hunt. They find the sleeping humans and can hardly believe the story that Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, and Lysander relate. In the course of their explanation, the truth emerges: Hermia and Lysander are in love, as are Helena and Demetrius. The Duke reverses his earlier pronouncement, and the two couples return to town for their wedding celebrations. Bottom, too, has awakened, but before he can tell his companions about his dream, they whisk him off to town so that they can present their play for the weddings.

The fairies present the final masque, which complements the masque of Act 3 by celebrating the joys of true love. Music for Juno, the goddess of marriage, opens this entertainment, which equates love and marriage with the hope and innocence surrounding the creation of the world itself and includes direct references to co-regnants, William (orange trees) and Mary (a Chinese garden and characters). With this sense of unbounded love, Hymen, the god of marriage, appears to proclaim that the flame of his torch, once extinguished by mistrust and deception, will burn with true love.

No matter how complicated the plot, the facility of Purcell's music is fresh and engaging. In its attention to the English language, musical emphasis of both individual words and broader scenes, economy of musical material, and ultimately, in Purcell's imaginative score that entertains and evokes an array of emotions, *The Fairy Queen* captivates.