

ARMONICO CONSORT and ORCHESTRA OF THE BAROQUE

7.30pm St Peter's Parish Church

The Fairy Queen by Henry Purcell
Director Thomas Guthrie
Musical Director Christopher Monks

Armonico Consort:

Anna Bolton, Hilary Brennan, Elin Manahan Thomas Soprano
Timothy Travers-Brown Counter tenor
Kevin Kyle, Mark Wilde Tenor
Thomas Guthrie, William Townend Bass
Jacob Isaac, Fiona Watkins Dancers
James Frith, Lisa Whitmore Aerialists

Orchestra of the Baroque:

Thomas Guthrie Director
Kelly McCusker, Leader
Veronique Matarasso, Violin 2
Jennifer Bennett, Viola
Catherine Rimer, Cello
Christopher Monks, Harpsichord
Richard Fomison, Ross Brown, Trumpets
Sarah Balls, Timpani

Designer Roger Butlin
Associate Director, Lighting Designer
and Stage Manager Jeffrey Pufahl
Deputy Lighting Designer and Stage Manager Sam Fraser
Original Production Choreography Bruce Tetlow
Revival Production Choreography Fiona Watkins
Puppets and Costumes Mandarava
Original Production Costume Assistant Elsa Threadgold
Set Builder and Crew Nagasiddhi
Assistant Stage Manager Luke Upperton
Project Manager Esther Jackson

'The Fairy Queen' was first performed in London in 1692 and revised the following year. It is not a true opera but, being a mixture of song, masque, pantomime and dance, a so-called semi-opera, a style to which Purcell (1659-1695) turned his attention, to great acclaim, in the last five years of his life. The anonymous libretto is a loose adaptation of Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and, whilst Purcell's music is sheer delight, the series of individual scenes without the inclusion of any of the play's original text makes the work notoriously difficult to stage. Titania, Oberon and Puck are all here along with the appearance of a drunken poet, the comic Coridon and Mopsa, the authoritative Phoebus, a copious number of diverse fairies and, above all, a lot of magic in the air.

Director's Note:

'Love shall fill all the places of care'

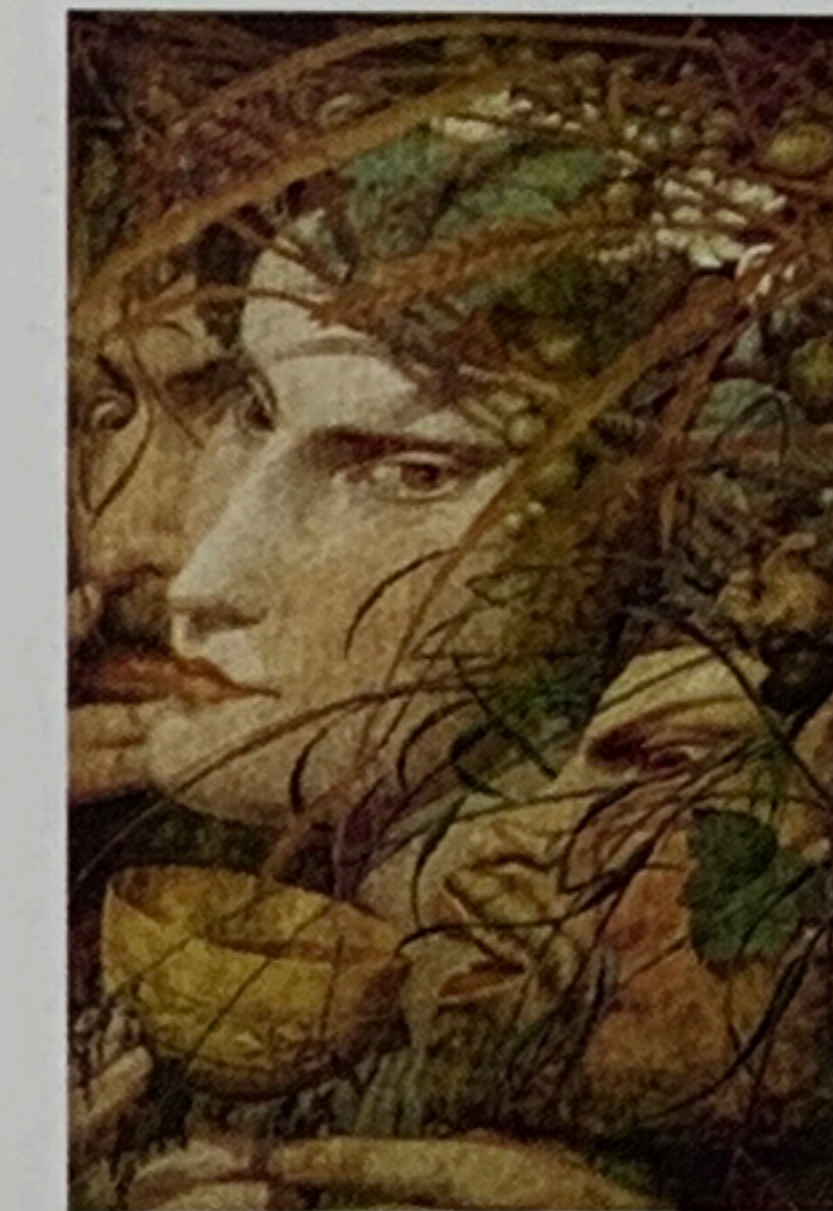
'Lovers and Madmen have such seething Brains,
Such shaping Phantasies, that apprehend
More than cool Reason ever comprehends.'
'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Act V, scene 1

Purcell's 'Fairy Queen' is a musical fantasy based on the ideas and characters in Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. The score is full of stage directions such as 'in the distance swans are seen swimming under the bridge of the left hand river' and 'twelve oaks form an avenue.' The scene is expected to change every minute. Added to this, the masques that make up the opera were designed to be performed in between the acts of the play. All in all, an immensely long and expensive evening.

Nowadays we are happy to hear the music on its own. Indeed, the music is so extraordinary, vivid and powerful that it ranks alongside some of the greatest operatic music ever written. But there are problems that have to be overcome. With no story that makes narrative sense, a world must be created where the wide variety of events suggested in the opera are possible, and the whole can flow, if not logically, then with some theatrical integrity. A visual framework must be found that lets the music speak.

Half way between our own time and that of Purcell there was another man who expended his creative energies fantasising on

Bacchanalian Scene by Richard Dadd



the world of Shakespeare and of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. The painter Richard Dadd is known for the arresting Shakespearian fantasies he produced in the latter part of his life. Having exhibited as one of the Victorian fairy painters, his career took an unexpected change when he was committed to mental institutions after killing his father in 1843. But while in Bedlam, encouraged by an enlightened doctor to paint as much as he liked, and no longer subject to commercial demands, he developed a unique style. Paintings such as 'The Fairy Feller's Masterstroke' (housed in the Tate) and 'Oberon and Titania: A Contradiction' are from this period. Dense and intricate, at times thickly overlaid with detail, at others simple and pure, but always fantastical and imaginative, they describe a world for the eyes that mirrors the one Purcell created for the ears.

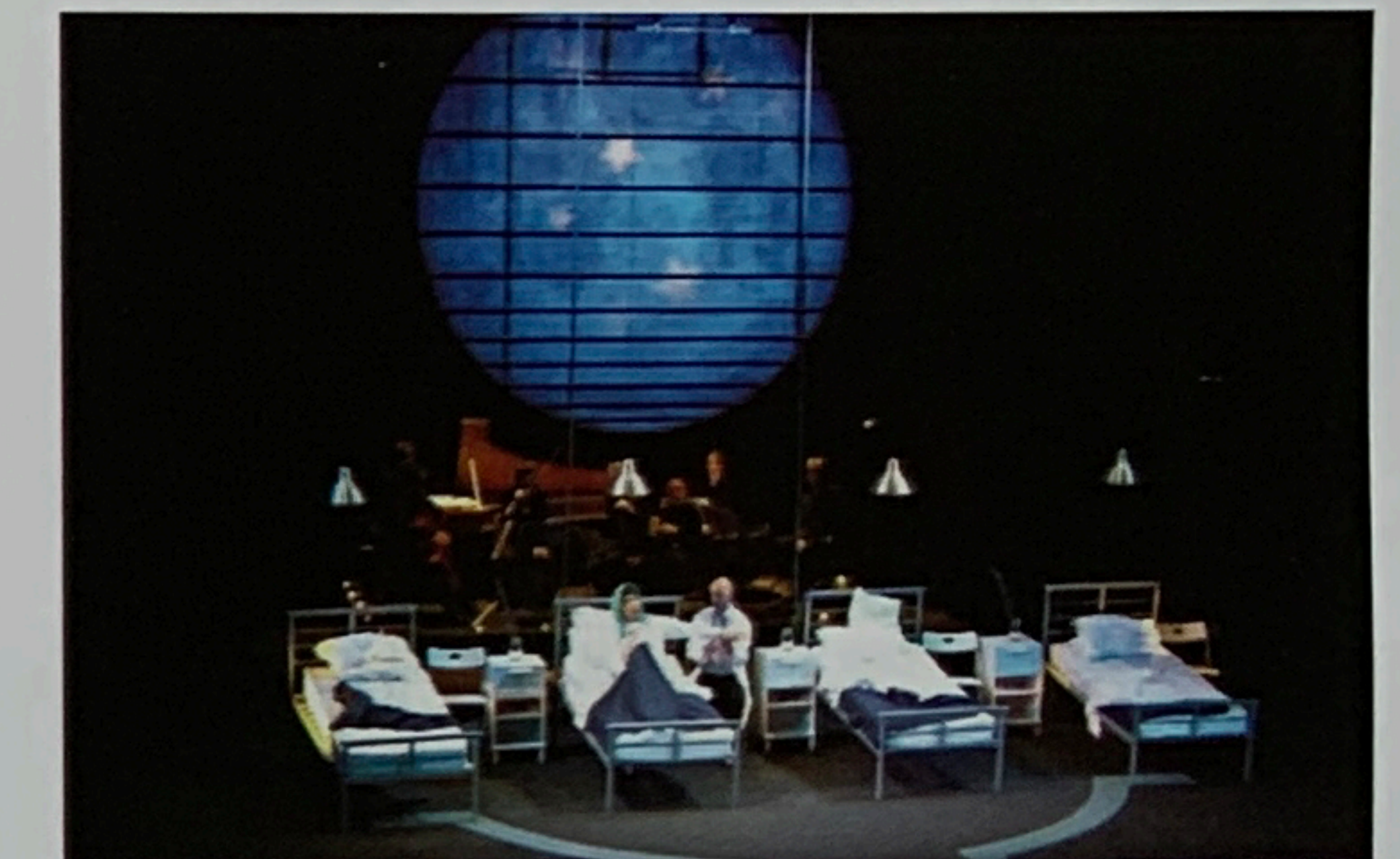
Tonight's production is set in Richard Dadd's inspired, unhinged world. Fed fat on Shakespearian fantasies, it is inhabited by earthy Bottom characters, mischievous Pucks, ethereal fairies, fellow mental patients, benign doctors, and figures from his own paintings, such as the transvestite Crazy Jane. Here is a man who invites us to leave behind our rational preconceptions and enter a world of imagination and childish wonder. A devotee of Egyptian religions, he worships the god of the sun. Above all, he longs to bring peace and resolution to his fevered mental state. He yearns for wholeness, for a marriage of the paradoxes of his personality, and of life itself. The symbolism of such a marriage is represented in our production by puppets, echoing the symbolism of Purcell's Chinese man and woman, and based on faces in Dadd's painting, 'Bacchanalian Scene'.

For me both Dadd and 'Fairy Queen' represent the need for marriage within us all, whether we are actually 'married' at all, or even inclined to it. The marriage in 'Fairy Queen' is a union not between characters we have come to know and feel for, as it is in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', but at a deeper level a marriage of mind and heart, of heaven and earth, fairy and mortal, lost and

found, inward feeling and the outward expression of that feeling. It concerns us all because we are in a relationship with ourselves as well as with the world around us: a marriage that none of us can escape.

Thomas Guthrie

Christopher Monks was organ scholar at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and studied under David Hill at Winchester Cathedral. He has conducted some of the UK's most notable



orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and his own Orchestra of the Baroque. As Artistic Director of Armonico Consort Christopher also directs its extensive outreach programme and is passionate about bringing innovative musical interpretations to a wide public.

