

5. Composer and writer

In this chapter I will briefly introduce Henry Purcell and Thomas d'Urfey, before writing about their working relationship. It proved difficult to find sources that say something about their work together, so my focus has been on the music we know they have made together rather than how the relationship between them was.

Henry Purcell



B. 1659, Westminster

D. 1695, Westminster

Purcell's uncle Thomas was the one who introduced him to music through organ playing, choral singing and composing. His first documented work was to King Charles the 2nd's birthday in 1670, when he was 11 years old. He has written many works for choirs, orchestras and string quartets, but also solo pieces with for example singers, piano and violin (Holman, 1995).

Thomas d'Urfey



B. 1653, Devonshire

D. 1723, London

He began his career as a magistrate, but went early on to writing plays, songs, poems and jokes. He was also an important contributor to the ballad opera. In his lifetime he wrote about 500 songs and 32 plays (Britannica, 2016).

Henry Purcell and Thomas d'Urfey collaborated on several works. Besides the comical stories about Don Quixote, Purcell also wrote pieces for d'Urfey's "Virtuous Wife" and "Cinthia and Endimion, or The Loves of Deities". They both had a love for the world the insane lived in. In the stories of Don Quixote, which I will focus on, there are several roles that can be perceived as insane. As the role description says, both Don Quixote himself, Altisidora and Cardenio are mad characters. As previously mentioned, it is believed that d'Urfey and Purcell found the inspiration for their "Mad Songs" from the institution Bedlam (Price, 1984). D'Urfey have included a whole collection called "Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy" which is

dedicated to what he himself describes as "Mad Songs". Here one finds "From Rosy Bowers," "Mad Bess/Bess of Bedlam" and several other pieces that deal with madness and Bedlam. One can here see that d'Urfey collaborated with several composers, but Purcell is well represented also in this collection.

When one sings Henry Purcell's music, it is not difficult to understand that he had great respect for the texts he worked with. Why Purcell and d'Urfey chose to cooperate, one cannot know with certainty. But, the fact that they became a duo that created exciting art together, can certainly be said. Purcell's melodies and d'Urfey's texts complement each other in a unique way. This is something I will look into through a textual and musical analysis of "From Rosy Bowers" and "Let the Dreadful Engines."