

***Dido, Queen of Carthage*, by Beyond Shakespeare, Audio Recording of Performance at
the White Bear Theatre, 12 December 2023**

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The White Bear Theatre, an award-winning fringe venue housed in a south London pub, may not seem the natural environment to stage Christopher Marlowe's dramatic tragedy (with possible contributions from Thomas Nash) of the battle-scarred Trojan, Aeneas, and the Carthaginian queen, Dido. However, by presenting their adaptation of the play as an audio recording, Beyond Shakespeare renders the need for a venue that offers a sense of locational verisimilitude redundant. Presenting the text purely as audio may even elevate the way the play is received. Indeed, Lois Potter argues that "a play of long poetic speeches rather than action (except for the multiple suicides at the end) may be better suited to radio or Zoom performance."¹ This is such a case with this iteration of *Dido*. The stripping away of the visual allows the listener to fully immerse themselves in the poetry of Marlowe's writing, beautifully conveyed, for the most part, by the company's cast of professional actors.

Recorded live in December 2023 and uploaded in full to YouTube in February 2026, this audio production joins a catalogue of productions that allows an early modern text to be experienced without the need to physically set foot in a theatre. After the technological innovations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic with the advent of Zoom theatre and other initiatives, the scope to experience drama in new and interesting ways continues to expand. 2024, for example, saw London's Donmar Warehouse mount its "binaural" production of *Macbeth*, in which theatregoers were given headphones in the theatre through which they would listen to the on-stage dialogue. This revolutionary technology allowed this iteration of the play to be experienced in a new, immersive way. Restricting the emphasis of the theatrical experience to sound alone, as Beyond Shakespeare does with its *Dido*, allows for a connection with the text unique to this aural medium. As Maire J. Steadman suggests, the "experience of solely hearing a well-acted and directed ... play is ... very personal and as a result very absorbing. Words, sounds, nuances become excitingly clear."² In the age of

¹ Lois Potter, "Online Productions of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*," *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 5 (2025): 198–205, (p. 199), <https://doi.org/10.7190/jms.5.2025>.

² Maire J. Steadman, "Audio Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare in the Media: From the Globe Theatre to the World Wide Web*, ed. Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier and Jörg Helbig (Peter Lang, 2004), 122.

streaming and social media, one may be forgiven for thinking audio recordings and radio dramas may be doomed to be consigned to the media wayside. However, this is far from the case. In 2025, for example, the *Guardian* published findings that audiobooks amassed “a record £268m” in sales in 2024.³ Audio streaming platforms such as Spotify and Audible continue to report record sales, with Audible’s growing catalogue of celebrity-narrated novels and plays continuing to draw customers to its platform.

Beyond Shakespeare’s creative producer, Robert Crichton, in the caption of the YouTube video of this recording of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, makes it clear that this is a *live* recording.⁴ Even listening to the performance retroactively in 2026 imbues the performance with a sense of liveness and, furthermore, plunges the listener into what Stephen Handel calls the “immediacy of the auditory world.”⁵ As with any live performance, therefore, there exists the possibility for mistakes to be preserved, irrespective of medium. There are minor instances of this in this *Dido*, one actor fumbling over the word “embraced,” the same actor later saying “lives” instead of “loves,” for example. However, from a technical perspective, the medium serves this play well, which, as Lois Potter reaffirms, is “largely focused on the poetry” of Marlowe’s text.⁶ Even with “some technical issues,” this is a clear and well produced audio adaptation of the play.⁷ Potter notes that “occasionally the sound quality lets it down,” but I did not find this a particular problem, even listening through a pair of good quality headphones, with the occasional hiss and crackle only adding to the production’s sense of liveness.⁸

Similarly, the use of sound effects, a common feature in radio drama, enhanced the sense of immersion one felt listening to the play. Perhaps it was because I was listening through a pair of powerful headphones that this effect was compounded, but the use of sound to create the aural imagery necessary for Iarbus’s fiery sacrifice to the gods in Act 4, or indeed Dido’s final destructive conflagration, created an aural immersion and intensified the drama in these moments. One could argue that these moments would be more potent

³ Ella Creamer, “UK audiobook revenue up by almost a third last year,” *Guardian*, 18 June 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jun/18/uk-audiobook-revenue-up-ability-multitask-publishers-association> [accessed 3 August 2026].

⁴ Beyond Shakespeare, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage* by Christopher Marlowe (Full Cast Audio Adaptation),” YouTube, 13 February 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQiz6HDEzsk&t=1032s>, caption.

⁵ Stephen Handel, *Listening: An Introduction to the Perception of Auditory Events* (The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989), xi.

⁶ Potter, “Online Productions,” 203.

⁷ Beyond Shakespeare, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage* by Christopher Marlowe (Full Cast Audio Adaptation),” caption.

⁸ Potter, “Online Productions,” 203.

experienced visually, but, confined to only sound, this allows the listener to conjure the imagery themselves, the sibilance of the flickering flames fuelling their own imaginations. The use of reverb during the dialogue of the gods effectively conveyed a sense of otherworldliness and helped differentiate these characters for the listener in a way a physical production could do with costume and setting.

Roel Fox's music, like the production's sound effects, is also a key ingredient in this audio mix. Subtle, yet powerful, the use of a guitar to underscore moments of emotional turmoil is effective. The harsh, discordant plucking of the guitar strings to indicate a god's interference in mortal affairs (Cupid's manipulation of Dido for instance) is particularly arresting; this, like the use of reverb when the gods speak, adds a sense of power to these immortal characters. There are some moments, however, when the sound mixing between dialogue and guitar could be more sophisticated. In Aeneas's dramatic monologue recounting the horrors of the Trojan war, the guitar rhythm builds in both speed and volume, mirroring Aeneas' speech becoming more emotional. Here, the guitar almost overpowers Aeneas' speech and, whilst conveying the emotional turmoil of the character, detracts from the power of the poetry.

Where this production truly sings, however, is in its casting. Sojourner Hazelwood-Connell is the only member of the cast to return from an earlier Zoom rendition and perfectly captures Dido's capriciousness and power, imbuing the character with a vocal command and presence that transcends the auditory medium. Likewise, Karim Kronfli's Iarbus is dignified and authoritative even in contending with romantic disappointment. His fiery sacrifice to the gods in Act 4 is one of the production's most powerful moments. The gods are also well cast, Sarah Blake (who also doubles as the Nurse) imbuing Venus with the necessary celestial qualities. So too does Liza Graham's Juno; Graham's American accent, coupled with the reverb, making her aurally distinct from the other characters, gods or mortal. Kit McGuire's Aeneas, however, failed to convince me. Aeneas, historically believed to have been in his mid-thirties during the fall of Troy, is not well served by the clearly much younger McGuire. McGuire delivers the text with skill and ability, but lacks the necessary charisma and authority needed for the "warlike" Aeneas.⁹ Simon Nader, who voiced Sergestus, displayed these qualities in his character and I wonder if the casting would have been better served if these two actors had exchanged roles.

⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, ed. Ruth Lunney (Manchester University Press, 2023), 2.1.78.

In the UK, we have the Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare's Globe, and the many, many other theatres across the country that prioritise the Bard of Avon over other Early Modern dramatists. Beyond Shakespeare's commitment to mounting productions by other writers of the period, regardless of medium, is to be commended and this *Dido* is one that highlights the power sound can have in isolation when presenting drama. As Stephen Handel observes, "listening puts [us] in the world," and listening to Beyond Shakespeare's *Dido*, *Queen of Carthage*, certainly put this listener into a part of the early modern world that is not often explored in the theatre, and perhaps should be.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Handel, *Listening*, xi.