



Dear Trustees of the Marchus Trust

We are writing on behalf of Ensemble OrQuesta to extend our thanks to you for the grant that you gave us to support our performances of *L'Incoronazione di Poppea at the Arcola Theatre*, during the Grimeborn Opera Festival from July 26th to July 30th, 2022.

This was our fifth appearance at the festival, and it was an honour to have been asked to open the festival this year. We undertook six performances of the opera: 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, July at 7:30pm, and 30th July at 3pm. Intensive rehearsals took place in the eight days preceding the performances at St Margaret's Church in Putney, with our stage and music director Marcio da Silva offering skilled coaching in all aspects of performance, stagecraft, musical style, language, and vocal technique to our young artists.

The project involved eight young professional singers at the onset of their careers, 5 early career early-music instrumentalists, and an early career assistant director. Because we had received your support for our young artists, we were able to use other funds to bring in an additional early music specialist, the eminent Predrag Gosta, on the harpsichord, and a specialist lutenist to support the work of our instrumentalists.

Our production manager worked extremely hard on publicity pre-, during, and post- production. This was important in terms of extending our audience base, increasing our press impact, and maximising publicity for our young artists. Our extended support team ensured that the programme, website information, and flyers were of a professional standard.

We thought you might like to access various things about the production to see the importance we place on **high standards** in all aspects of our work.

There is a page on our website which gives all the original **information** about our production [here](#).

There is also a page which includes the **full reviews** of the production [here](#).

If you would prefer to access just some **sample quotes** from the reviews you can find these [here](#).

The **programme** for the production can be downloaded as a **pdf** [here](#).

The **programme** can also be viewed as a **Flipbook** if you prefer, [here](#).

Photos of the production can be viewed [here](#).

Impact: audience.

We were pleased with the number of tickets sold overall. On the first night audience was 69% of capacity. Other performances averaged around 55% capacity, apart from the Saturday afternoon performance which sold just 30% of capacity. We believe strongly in the importance of the Grimeborn festival. It is increasingly recognised as an important event in the cultural calendar as it offers access to innovative and creative opera performances at reasonable prices in an unusual and intimate performance space where the close proximity of audience and performers enables a deep engagement with both music and drama.

The first performance was extremely well attended by reviewers (19% complimentary tickets), which gave us an excellent boost in the press - the production received outstanding reviews (see further below). A limited number of complimentary tickets were given for subsequent performances (1%-5%) to supporters or potential sponsors.

From the increase in our mailing list and from feedback received we know that we reached a range of new audience members with this production. The Arcola Theatre team were very enthusiastic about our production run and the positive feedback from audiences.

Impact: young artists.

1. As noted, the intensive rehearsal period included coaching for young artists in all aspects of stagecraft, language, technique, musical style, and vocal technique as needed. The presence at many rehearsals of an early music specialist on the harpsichord and a specialist lutenist ensured an opportunity for our young artists to embed their understanding of the music of the period and feel secure in all aspects of the baroque style.

2. Since we were able to secure the attendance of a strong quota of high-profile reviewers at our first night and they were so favourably impressed by what they saw, this resulted in excellent reviews and first-rate exposure for our young artists.

Young Artist Feedback:

We asked our young artists for feedback following their experience. We have collected points under four headings and then have included their 'summary' comments in full.

Musically:

"thank you for the really useful help with how to sustain singing during difficult movement"; "invaluable support with how to put in the right ornamentation"; "thank you for all the help with my Italian"; "I really appreciated the opportunity to practise with the lute and harpsichord".

Dramatically:

"I found your creativity and imagination inspirational"; "you really helped me to know how to move more naturally"; "I couldn't have done that scene without your careful support"; "I really liked the way you got me to convey internal emotion with minimal external movement"; "Our love scenes worked because you showed us exactly what to do and when to do it – you were so clear and so supportive in showing us how to move in a way that would draw the audience in without alienating or shocking them – we couldn't have done it without you!"; "You really helped me to learn how to pace my movement to match the music without making it look too obvious".

Professionally:

"It's just so much fun to work with this team of young artists"; "I really had to learn how to build up my stamina gradually and be careful with my voice – you were so good at reminding us to pace ourselves"; "I learned a lot about building a media profile from watching Helen doing all the EO posts – she is so on it!".

Personally:

"This production run really challenged me – there was a lot of music to remember, and I didn't want to let the rest of the team down."; "Getting great reviews has really raised my confidence"; "I feel proud of what we achieved – it was so much fun, and I want to do it again!".

Summary comments in full:

"Learning L'incoronazione di Poppea under the musical direction of Marcio da Silva was an amazing opportunity. Musically it enlarged my understanding of playing harpsichord and organ in the specific style of venetian opera at Monteverdi's time. It was great to communicate with the other musicians, share expertise and create further contacts. It was just one more of all the splendid experiences working together in an amazing team, having a great rehearsal and performance in a great atmosphere, and of course performing at the Grimeborn Festival at the Arcola Theatre. I will look forward to many more of these projects and hope for large support to make this possible. Ensemble OrQuesta is offering people jobs and opportunities where every day feels like a benefit."

"Working with Ensemble OrQuesta at Grimeborn has been my first step into the professional world. With them and the opportunities they offer me, I get the necessary experience and visibility we need as artists. I am so lucky to work with them and their incredibly loving and talented team."

"Taking part in Poppea was a hugely valuable experience for me as a young artist: the exposure with reviews and mentions in national newspapers and websites will be very useful for my career progression. I have also gained insights into the workings of an early Baroque masterpiece, especially with regards to ornamentation."

"Performing the roles of Ottavia and Virtù for Ensemble OrQuesta was a fantastic experience. This is the first Monteverdi opera I've done, and I've been totally converted. I really love the style and am very keen to do more baroque opera. I found it to be almost like performing Shakespeare with the text leading the music. Working with Marcio and the team was truly inspiring, it was one of those experiences where I've come away having realised that there is so much more to learn."

"I view Ensemble OrQuesta's Grimeborn festival participation as a huge opportunity to expose baroque music to new audiences in an intimate setting with intimate staging. Often baroque music is performed in a way that showcases it if it were a museum exhibit - a relic of the past to be enjoyed purely from an academic perspective. Ensemble OrQuesta's productions do the opposite - expose audiences to the raw beauty, emotion, and drama of baroque compositions so that audiences fall in honest love with the music regardless of its academic implications. Yes, audiences can still show up for academic fulfilment, but they leave with a much deeper appreciation of the music and the wonder it can evoke."

"Performing in Ensemble OrQuesta's production of L'incoronazione di Poppea has been a fantastic opportunity to work with inspiring musical colleagues, realising the dramatic direction of Marcio da Silva. I was given the opportunity to explore a new role (Drusilla) and work with new colleagues in this truly authentic opening

production of the 2022 Grimeborn Festival. Performing this work has given me great exposure, and mentions in the press, in addition to helping me grow as a performer and musician.”

“Being back on the Arcola Theatre, was very emotional. I have forgotten the impact that the close audience can have on you, especially on the first evening, when we knew that the media was there to judge us. Working with Marcio, is always a pleasure, as he is pushing the team to the edge of perfection at all levels. Personally, this chance brought me good mentions for my performance and my voice, which is reassuring me that I am on the right track. After Covid, this was the second opera that I performed on full stage, and it was important to me to work with a team that helped me to regain my confidence in a supportive way. I really hope to work again with Ensemble OrQuesta in the future.”

We were delighted to receive such positive feedback from our Young Artists. We were also thrilled to be reviewed in highly positive terms by Fiona Maddocks of The Observer alongside BBC Proms 14 and 16. Her ★★★★★ review declared: ‘All 10 singers impressed, the cast led superbly by Helen May (Poppea) and Julia Portela Piñón (Nerone).’ Full review [here](#).

Some highlights:



The poster features a black and white photograph of two performers, a man and a woman, in a dramatic scene. The man is looking up and to the right, while the woman is looking towards him. The background is dark with some architectural elements visible.

arcola theatre

EO Ensemble OrQuesta
GRIMEBORN

TUESDAY 26TH JULY 19:30
WEDNESDAY 27TH JULY 19:30
THURSDAY 28TH JULY 19:30
FRIDAY 29TH JULY 19:30
SATURDAY 30TH JULY 15:00
SATURDAY 30TH JULY 19:30

Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea



arcola
theatre

EO Ensemble
OrQuesta



Plays to See



The Reviews Hub



The Observer



The Stage



The Spy In The Stalls



London Living Large



Broadway World



A Young(ish) Perspective

Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea

**Our 2022 Grimeborn
production at The Arcola
Theatre was Monteverdi's
L'Incoronazione di Poppea**

EO Ensemble
OrQuesta

★★★★★ 'Ensemble OrQuesta's approach, which offers an accessible and enjoyable way to enjoy the less familiar conventions of early opera, seems to me increasingly valuable. I hope that every seat is filled for the short run of this wonderful production.'
Owen Davies, Plays to See, 28.07.22

★★★★½ 'Helen May as Poppea and Julia Portela Piñón as Nerone are wonderful as the lovers. Both have exquisite voices and are utterly convincing in their erotic passion.'
Jane Darcy, The Reviews Hub, 27/07/2022.

★★★★ '...passionate and skilfully directed'
Inge Kjemtrup, The Stage, 28/07/22

★★★★ 'Controversial, mysterious, and highly sensual... while most theatres are currently packed with escapist fare, this dark and delicious production, redolent with lust and ambition.. is a wonderful alternative.'
Franco Milazzo.
Broadway World. 27.07.2022

★★★★ 'a scalding, compelling spectacle, sure to enrapture both opera veterans and newcomers alike.'
Rachel Wood,
A Young(ish) Perspective. 28.07.22

★★★★½ Key to the power of this production is da Silva's imaginative vision and his dynamism as director and conductor.'
Jane Darcy, The Reviews Hub, 27/07/22

★★★★ 'Grimeborn gets off to a smouldering start.. The capacity audience, attentive despite heat and hard seats, cheered.'
Fiona Maddocks, The Observer, The week in classical, 30/07/22.

★★★★ '..the singing of the whole cast is quite sublime... a night of splendid music'
J.C. London Living Large, 28/07/22

★★★★½ 'Ensemble OrQuesta's small band of musicians play with terrific verve and energy, shifting effortlessly from the extremes of poignant melancholy to the wildly bacchanalian.'
Jane Darcy, The Reviews Hub, 27/07/22

★★★★ The energy of the musicians is a delight to watch.'
Dominica Plummer,
The Spy in the Stalls



Our publicity for our Young Artists: **post-production.**

'Marcio da Silva's Ensemble OrQuesta has done Poppea before. Indeed, I reviewed a performance at The Cockpit in February 2019 which impressed me very much – with Helen May as a splendid Nero. In this production.. she sings the title role and is even better as the lascivious and ambitious courtesan – her duets with Julia Portela Pinon as Nero are as close to deserving an 18 rating as any opera staging I have seen. The two of them provide a blend of voices that is well matched to the sometimes complex music and never better than when they sing the final *pur ti miro* duet.'

PLAYS TO SEE OWEN DAVIES ★★★★★

'..the cast led superbly by Helen May (Poppea) and Julia Portela Piñón (Nerone). Monteverdi's music..ebbs and flows, In generous, pulsating waves, culminating in the ecstatic *Pur ti miro, Pur ti godo*... The capacity audience, attentive despite heat and hard seats, cheered.'

THE OBSERVER FIONA MADDOCKS ★★★★★

'Helen May as Poppea and Julia Portela Piñón as Nerone are wonderful as the lovers. Both have exquisite voices and are utterly convincing in their erotic passion.'

THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

'Subject to Love's machinations, politically ambitious Poppea, played beautifully by soprano Helen May, catches the eye of the nefarious Emperor Nerone.. Despite their questionable motivations, the chemistry between Poppea and Nerone is palpable,professing their love with a blistering eroticism from which it is impossible to look away.'

A YOUNG(ISH) PERSPECTIVE RACHEL WOOD ★★★★★

'Helen May as Poppea reveals the calculating interior behind the seductive facade.'

THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'Helen May as Poppea and Julia Portela Piñón as Nerone are strong leads, and the singing of the whole cast is quite sublime.'

LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

EO Ensemble
OrQuesta

GRIMEBORN 2022



Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022



EO Ensemble
OrQuesta

GRIMEBORN 2022

'All ten singers impressed... the cast led superbly by Helen May (Poppea) and Julia Portela Piñón (Nerone).'

THE OBSERVER FIONA MADDOCKS ★★★★★

'...the nefarious Emperor Nerone (Nero), portrayed with an impressive performance by mezzo soprano Julia Portela Piñón.'

A YOUNG(ISH) PERSPECTIVE RACHEL WOOD ★★★★★

'...[Helen May] her duets with Julia Portela Piñón as Nero... the two of them provide a blend of voices that is well matched to the sometimes complex music and never better than when they sing the final *pur ti miro* duet.'

PLAYS TO SEE OWEN DAVIES ★★★★★

'Helen May as Poppea and Julia Portela Piñón as Nerone are strong leads, and the singing of the whole cast is quite sublime.'

LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

'As Nerone, the warm-voiced Julia Portela Piñón vividly portrays the lustful ruler with a heart of ice...'

THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'Helen May as Poppea and Julia Portela Piñón as Nerone are wonderful as the lovers. Both have exquisite voices and are utterly convincing in their erotic passion.'

THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022



'Kieran White (singing three roles) once again shows what a magical tenor voice and a flair for comedy can bring to the small role of Poppea's servant Arnalta.'

PLAYS TO SEE OWEN DAVIES ★★★★★

'...the minor characters, well handled by Rachel Allen and a scene-stealing Kieran White, stir up trouble.'

THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'... both roles captivatingly performed by Kieran White – bringing a welcome lightening to a long work of almost unbearable intensity.'

THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

'There are some outstanding voices among the rest of Ensemble OrQuesta, in particular tenor Kieran White who manages three very different roles as Arnalta, Nero's male lover Lucano, and the messenger Liberto.'

THE SPY IN THE STALLS DOMINICA PLUMMER ★★★★★

'Tenor Kieran White has fun with his role as Arnalta, providing comic relief...'

A YOUNG(ISH) PERSPECTIVE RACHEL WOOD ★★★★★

'Kieran White has an excellent fluent tenor and strong dramatic presence that brings the music to life. His portrayal of the nurse Arnalta – a comic travesty role but with an achingly beautiful lullaby – was brilliantly done. You would barely realise that it was the same performer when he sings Nero's macho drinking buddy Lucano.'

MARK ASPEN PATRICK SHORROCK ★★★

'There is so much fine singing that once again I hesitate to pick out individuals, but Hazel Neighbour as Ottavia fills her brief moments in the spotlight with glorious singing and righteous indignation.'

PLAYS TO SEE OWEN DAVIES ★★★★★

'The betrayed Ottavia (Hazel Neighbour, radiating fury) is bent on bloody revenge...'

THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'For Ottavia, Nerone's spurned wife, love has curdled into vicious hatred. Hazel Neighbour in slinky evening dress is clearly a dangerous woman.'

THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

'The British-Irish soprano Hazel Neighbour gives a fiery performance as the Empress Ottavia who, even when she sees the writing on the wall, fights hard to retain her position.'

BROADWAY WORLD FRANCO MILAZZO ★★★★★

'There are some outstanding voices among the rest of Ensemble OrQuesta... Soprano Hazel Neighbour commands the stage with her Ottavia.'

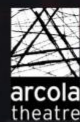
THE SPY IN THE STALLS DOMINICA PLUMMER ★★★★★

'Anna-Luise Wagner put in superior performance as Amore, as did Hazel Neighbour as Virtu/Ottavia.'

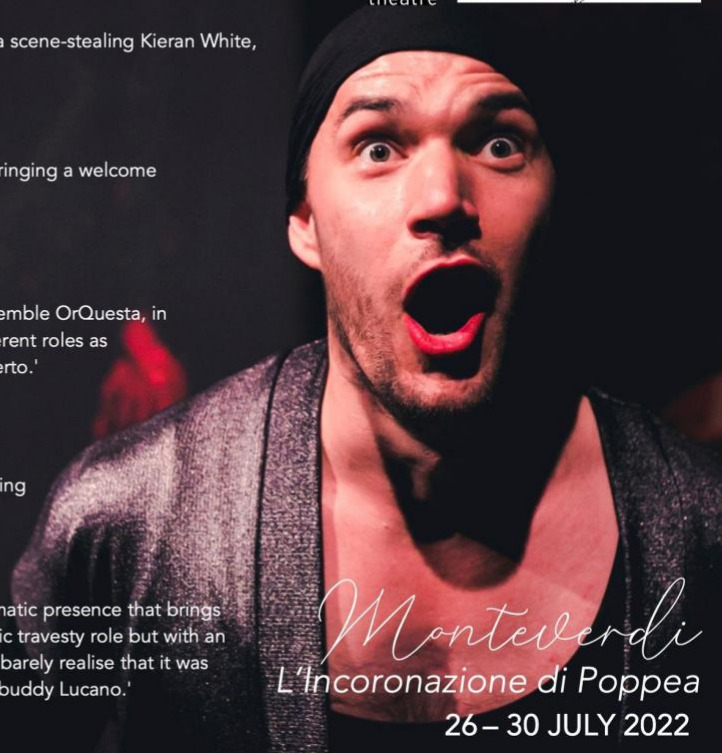
LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

'Ottavia (a wonderfully vehement Hazel Neighbour) certainly display a degree of pomposity and petulance respectively... they get some wonderful vocal opportunities, which Palcu and Neighbour make the most of.'

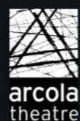
MARK ASPEN PATRICK SHORROCK ★★★



EO Ensemble OrQuesta
GRIMEBORN 2022



Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022



EO Ensemble OrQuesta
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Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022

'US-born countertenor Eric Schlossberg plays the crest-fallen cuckold Ottone to perfection: we buy into not just his despair but his elation of (very) new love with Drusilla.'

BROADWAY WORLD FRANCO MILLAZZO ★★★★★

'The nobleman Ottone (incisively depicted by Eric Schlossberg) both loves and fears Poppea...'

THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'Eric Schlossberg was a compelling Ottone...'

LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

'His best scene is the one in which turns his affections to the besotted Drusilla (Poppy Shotts). He may sing of faithful love but he just can't look her in the face.'

THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

'da Silva assigns his countertenor Eric Schlossberg to the role of Ottone. All three singers are both competent singers and actors—a necessity for an opera staged in an intimate space like the Studio at the Arcola.'

THE SPY IN THE STALLS DOMINICA PLUMMER ★★★★★



EO Ensemble Orquesta
GRIMEBORN 2022



Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022



EO Ensemble Orquesta
GRIMEBORN 2022

'There are a number of other Ensemble Orquesta stalwarts – particularly Poppy Shotts and Anna-Luise Wagner – who shine in small roles and the overwhelming sense is of a group of performers who have bought into da Silva's approach to baroque opera.'

PLAYS TO SEE OWEN DAVIES ★★★★★

'The nobleman Ottone (incisively depicted by Eric Schlossberg) both loves and fears Poppea, whose servant Drusilla (the talented Poppy Shotts) rightly regards her mistress as her rival for his affections.'

THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'We were particularly taken by Poppy Shotts portrayal of the ever hopeful Drusilla...'

LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

'His [Ottone] best scene is the one in which turns his affections to the besotted Drusilla (Poppy Shotts). He may sing of faithful love but he just can't look her in the face. Drusilla herself adores him, but her love doesn't stop singing with unnerving triumphalism of the death of Seneca.'

THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022





EO Ensemble OrQuesta
GRIMEBORN 2022



Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022

'There are a number of other Ensemble OrQuesta stalwarts – particularly Poppy Shotts and Anna-Luise Wagner – who shine in small roles'
PLAYS TO SEE OWEN DAVIES ★★★★★

'Amore, vibrantly embodied by Anna-Luise Wagner, presides over this Roman Love Island'
THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'A gloriously smug and haughty Love'
A YOUNG(ISH) PERSPECTIVE RACHEL WOOD ★★★★★

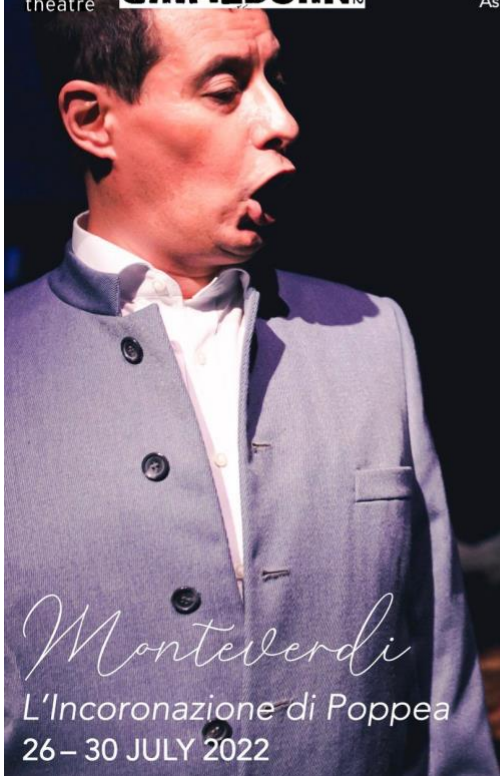
'Damigella (played by German soprano Anna-Luise Wagner who also plays Amore, the goddess of Love) gets very handsy with Ottavia's page Valletto.'
BROADWAY WORLD FRANCO MILAZZO ★★★★★

'Anna-Luise Wagner put in a superior performance as Amore'
LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

'Outstanding as Love and Damigella. I wish she had had more to do.'
MARK ASPEN PATRICK SHORROCK ★★★



EO Ensemble OrQuesta
GRIMEBORN 2022



Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022

'Grimeborn gets off to a smouldering start... All ten singers impressed...'
THE OBSERVER FIONA MADDOCKS ★★★★★

'As Seneca, Romanian bass baritone Gheorge Palcu is phenomenal. Whether wasting words on the Emperor or committing himself to his execution against the wishes of his family, Palcu's words seem to come from the very bottom of his soul.'
BROADWAY WORLD FRANCO MILAZZO ★★★★★

'There are some outstanding voices among the rest of Ensemble OrQuesta... noteworthy is bass baritone Gheorghe Palcu as Seneca—a performance of great gravity and precision... It takes both energy and courage to take on L'Incoronazione di Poppea, and the entire company demonstrates convincingly that it has ample supplies of both.'
THE SPY IN THE STALLS DOMINICA PLUMMER ★★★★★

'Bass baritone Gheorge Palcu plays the role of the philosopher contemplating his end with great dignity, his voice particularly suited his aria about the joys of solitude.'
THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

'The philosopher Seneca is the only character floating about this turmoil. His warnings to Nerone serve only to hasten his own demise. True to his Stoic philosophy, Seneca calmly takes the news of impending death in a reflective aria – a moment strongly performed by Gheorghe Palcu.'
THE STAGE INGE KJEMTRUP ★★★★★

'We were particularly taken by Poppy Shotts portrayal of the ever-hopeful Drusilla and Gheorge Palcu's stoic, bordering on pompous, Seneca.'
LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

'Seneca (Gheorghe Palcu with some stunningly deep, secure and unwobbly low notes)... certainly display a degree of pomposity... They get some wonderful vocal opportunities, which Palcu and Neighbour make the most of.'
MARK ASPEN PATRICK SHORROCK ★★★



EO Ensemble
Orquesta
GRIMEBORN 2022

'His group of musicians playing baroque instruments is similarly accomplished... Ensemble OrQuesta's approach, which offers an accessible and enjoyable way to enjoy the less familiar conventions of early opera, seems to me increasingly valuable. I hope that every seat is filled for the short run of this wonderful production.'

PLAYS TO SEE OWEN DAVIES ★★★★★

'Grimeborn gets off to a smouldering start.'
THE OBSERVER FIONA MADDOCKS ★★★★★

'Ensemble OrQuesta's small band of musicians play with terrific verve and energy, shifting effortlessly from the extremes of poignant melancholy to the wildly bacchanalian. Paul Jenkins on recorder is lively throughout and Edmund Taylor's zestful violin playing is mesmerising.'

THE REVIEWS HUB JANE DARCY ★★★★★½

'With his musical hat on, da Silva's direction is spot-on in the main... The baroque instrumentation using harpsicord, archlute, baroque guitar and a couple of violins adds depth and resonance in the intimate Arcola space... this dark and delicious production, redolent with lust and ambition, is a wonderful alternative.'

BROADWAY WORLD FRANCO MILAZZO ★★★★★

'Marcio da Silva's production... is a dark and sensual delight. Ensemble OrQuesta masterfully breathe new life into this popular, controversial baroque opera, while remaining faithful to its original score and spirit.... The live orchestra... forms the heart of the production, their vivacious performances filling the space with truly exquisite music.'

A YOUNG(ISH) PERSPECTIVE RACHEL WOOD ★★★★★

'... a night of splendid music....'

LONDON LIVING LARGE J.C. ★★★★★

'The period instruments of the orchestra never overwhelm the voices, or the studio space, and are cleverly tucked away under a platform that allows the audience to both see as well as hear them. The energy of the musicians is a delight to watch.'

THE SPY IN THE STALLS DOMINICA PLUMMER ★★★★★

Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022



EO Ensemble
Orquesta
GRIMEBORN 2022

'Grimeborn gets off to a smouldering start.'
THE OBSERVER FIONA MADDOCKS ★★★★★

The Observer

★★★★★

Plays to See

★★★★½

The Reviews Hub

★★★★

The Observer

★★★★

The Stage

★★★★

The Spy In The Stalls

★★★★

London Living Large

★★★★

Broadway World

★★★★

A Young(ish) Perspective

'When a stage director, music director, lighting designer, recorder player, guitarist, organist, and percussionist are all one person, you begin to regret your own misspent youth. These talents are combined in the figure of Marcio da Silva, the Brazilian founder of Ensemble OrQuesta, a group of young artists who perform baroque opera. His drive and focus informed the group's powerful staging of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, the opening event in that annual box of pleasures, Grimeborn opera festival. In the confined space of the Arcola theatre, the direction, wisely, is kept simple and formal. Props are a plinth-like bed, a chair and a chalkboard to notch up deaths in ancient Rome... All 10 singers impressed, the cast led superbly by Helen May (Poppea) and Julia Portela Piñón (Nerone).'

THE OBSERVER FIONA MADDOCKS ★★★★★

Monteverdi
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
26 – 30 JULY 2022



The whole production was judiciously managed by our core team, with attention to health and safety and the well-being of performers. We are pleased to report no incidents of virus transfer. All aspects of budgeting were prudently handled and monitored, and the project came in within budget.

We would like to thank you whole heartedly for your generous support of the work of Ensemble OrQuesta. It has made a meaningful difference to us. We are extremely proud of this production and delighted at the achievement of our young artists. We believe that we made a tremendous impact in terms of increasing the audience and appeal of early music, as demonstrated by the excellent reviews of our work, the increase in our mailing list and followers on social media, and the strongly positive feedback from the Arcola Theatre.

With our renewed thanks.
The Trustees of Ensemble OrQuesta.



arcola
theatre

EO Ensemble
Orchestra

L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA

Monteverdi

26th–30th July 2022. 7.30pm
30th July, 3pm.

Marcio da Silva *Stage/Music Director/Lighting Design*
Benjamin Riedel *Assistant Stage Director*
Laura Hensley *Stage Manager*
Helen May *Production Manager*

Predrag Gosta *Harpsichord*
Kieran Staub *Harpsichord/Organ*
Cédric Meyer *Archlute/Baroque Guitar*
Edmund Taylor, Kirsty Main *Violin*
Nathan Giorgetti *Cello*
Paul Jenkins *Recorder*

Marcio da Silva *Recorder/Baroque Guitar/Organ/Percussion*

Helen May *Poppea*
Julia Portela Piñón *Nerone*
Eric Schlossberg *Ottone*
Kieran White *Arnalta/Lucano/Liberto*
Hazel Neighbour *Ottavia/Virtu*
Gheorghe Palcu *Seneca*
Poppy Shotts *Drusilla*
Anna-Luise Wagner *Amore/Damigella*
Rachel Allen *Valletto/Fortuna/Pallade*
Marcio da Silva *Littore*

Peter Mondell
PRODUCTION DESIGNER

www.ensembleorquesta.com

Welcome and thank you for joining us.

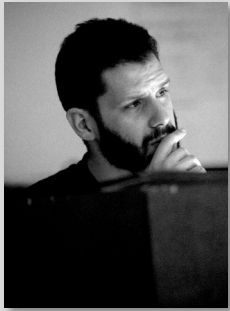
Founded in **2013** by Marcio da Silva, **Ensemble OrQuesta** brings together young artists who are dedicated to performing baroque opera in all its richness and diversity to the highest of standards. We are passionate about presenting creative and musically authentic interpretations of both well-loved and lesser-known baroque operas to as wide an

audience as possible. We offer opportunities for young singers and specialist instrumentalists to develop their skills and collaborate to deliver performances of the highest artistic quality. We look for ways to share our work interactively with school children and with adults by developing outreach initiatives. We enjoy bringing professional productions to Off West End theatres in London, especially to this Opera Festival, and to the Cockpit Theatre, Marylebone.

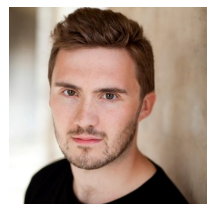
Marcio also runs **Ensemble OrQuesta Opera Academy**. This gives talented young singers the opportunity to perform complete roles in fully staged productions, in the original language, with professional ensemble accompaniment. Singers benefit from ten days of intensive tuition and training from the EO team of specialists, being coached on style, acting, language, technique, and movement. Many of the singers who now perform in Ensemble OrQuesta's professional productions first worked with Marcio during an opera academy, and many of our new productions underwent the first stage of their development during these intensive courses. The increasing success of these academies has lured singers from all over the world: Ireland, France, Canada, USA, Brazil, Romania, Hong Kong, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Japan, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Sweden, Israel, Greece, Austria, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Argentina, and across the UK. In 2021 EO became a registered charity, we embarked on our first tour – to the Théâtre Basse Passière in Normandy – and we were delighted when our production of Alcina was featured in The Guardian, having been chosen as No 4 in their list of the [Top 10 Classical Music Performances of 2021](#).

Emerging from the pandemic we have worked hard to attract grants and new sponsors and we extend our thanks to **Angel Early Music** and to the **Marchus Trust** for their support of *L'Incoronazione*. We hope to diversify and develop our work further during the 2022-23 season and we welcome feedback and new names on our mailing list. Please sign up if you are interested in finding out more about our dynamic new plans. **The EO Trustees.**

Stage/Music Director - born in Brazil, **Marcio da Silva** studied singing, and choral and orchestral conducting at the Conservatoire de Toulouse. He also gained extensive experience in opera, beginning as a child soloist at Palacio das Artes in Belo Horizonte, and then as a tenor and baritone at the Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse, and the Théâtre des Champs Elysees and the Théâtre du Chatelet in Paris. He received his Bachelor of Music degree in orchestral conducting from the Hochschule für Musik, Freiburg, Germany, before moving to London to undertake a Masters in orchestral conducting at the Royal College of Music. During this time, he was one of three conductors to take part in the London Symphony Orchestra Conducting Master Class with Sir Colin Davis and was one of the three finalists at the Princess Astrid International Conducting Competition. As a guest conductor Marcio has conducted orchestras in Poland, Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, Turkey, Norway, Brazil and Kosovo. Marcio was Music Director of Woodhouse Opera from 2012 until its final season in 2018, and he is the founder of the Ensemble OrQuesta. In these roles he has conducted and directed over 30 fully staged productions of operas ranging from less regularly performed works such as Lully's *Armide*, to popular works such as *Carmen*, *The Magic Flute* and *La Bohème*. In 2021 he stage and music directed Cavalli's *L'Egisto* for Hampstead Garden Opera. From 2012-22 he was music director of the Grange Choral Society, and he is currently music director of the Billingshurst Choral Society and Hastings Philharmonic Choir, Artistic Director of the Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra, and conductor of HPO Singers and HPO Songbirds. Fluent in seven languages and an experienced vocal coach, Marcio also performs regularly as a soloist, most recently as Marcello, *La bohème*. www.marciodasilva.com



Assistant Stage Director - Benjamin Riedel is a graduate of Rose Bruford College. Benjamin has worked as Assistant Stage Director for Ensemble OrQuesta for Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, 2019, Cavalli's *Xerse*, 2018 and Lully's *Armide*, 2017 and for Handel's *Alcina* at the Grimeborn Festival in August 2021. Benjamin also works as a deviser and performer including for shows entitled 'Today is my One Hundredth Birthday' and 'One Man and his Dog'. These have been toured to a number of fringe venues.



Stage Manager - Laura Hensley is an emerging theatre director who graduated from Bristol Old Vic's MA in Drama Directing in 2020. Since graduating, Laura has directed Martin Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies* for Rose Bruford College, where she also completed her undergraduate degree in European Theatre Arts, and is currently working on developing scripts with new writers for fringe theatre. Laura has experience as an actor, dramaturg, and workshop facilitator as well as directing, and she is particularly interested in working with young people, family, and community audiences. Her first production with Ensemble OrQuesta was *Don Giovanni* in 2017, and she has worked regularly with the company ever since.



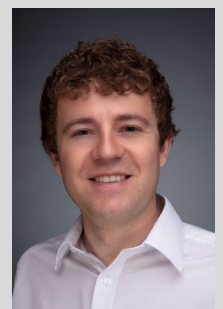
Production Manager - Helen May has wide range of experience in administration, music production and music publicity and media. Helen has worked as production manager for Ensemble OrQuesta for both professional productions and opera academies since 2017 coordinating operations across a range of disciplines including stage management, costumes, props, and make-up, and liaising with team members regarding surtitles, programmes, venues, health and safety, and compliance. This is the 23rd production that she has managed for EO.





Harpsichordist - Predrag Gosta has built a reputation as one of the leading early music and baroque opera specialists. He has appeared at major music festivals in USA, Europe and Russia, collaborating with early stars such as soprano Evelyn Tubb, violinists Bojan Čičić and Adrian Butterfield, flautist Rachel Brown, harpsichordist Steven Devine, lutenist Michael Fields and many others. He conducted early operas such as Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* and *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Handel's *Orlando* and *Acis & Galatea*, and Mozart's *Lucio Silla* and *Mitridate* for opera companies in America, Switzerland, Germany, Bulgaria and Serbia. He is the founder and artistic director of the acclaimed period instrument ensemble *New Trinity Baroque*, the principal conductor of the *Makris Symphony Orchestra* and the *Gwinnett Ballet Theatre* in Atlanta, USA, and artistic director of the *Belgrade Early Music Festival*, *Belgrade Baroque Academy* and the *New Belgrade Opera* in his native Serbia. He appeared in concerts and recorded with orchestras such as the *London Symphony Orchestra* (2 CD albums), the *Makris Symphony Orchestra* (3 CD albums), the *St. Petersburg Symphony Orchestra* and the *Russian National Orchestra* in Moscow, the *National Philharmonic* in Washington DC, etc. He also published ten albums with *New Trinity Baroque*. As an educator, Gosta served on the faculties of the *Emory University* in Atlanta and the *Belgrade Baroque Academy*. He studied voice, harpsichord and conducting at *Trinity College of Music* in London and *Georgia State University* in Atlanta and is currently finishing his doctoral research at the *Faculty of Music and Christ Church, University of Oxford*.

Harpsichord/Organ - Kieran Staub is a Northern Irish German pianist, harpsichordist and conductor. He was born in Germany in 1992. He began his musical career at an early age being awarded several prizes at *Jugend Musiziert* (Young Musician of the Year) and gaining his first qualifications in organ and choral conducting at the *College for Church Music* in Rottenburg. In 2011 he began his degree for teacher training in music and mathematics in Freiburg. From 2015 he studied orchestral conducting under the guidance of *Scott Sandmeier*, *Massimiliano Matesic* and *Lutz Köhler* at the *State College of Music* in Freiburg, qualifying with first class honours. Since 2019 he has been a lecturer for aural training at the *HfM Freiburg*. During his studies in Freiburg, he distinguished himself working at the *Opera School* and the *Theater* in Freiburg. He coached and assisted several productions for at the *HfM Freiburg*, the *Theater Freiburg*, the *Festival International de Música de Canarias* and worked for the *Lotte Lehmann Week / Academy* and *La Palma Música*. Kieran founded the orchestra '*con.espressione*' and since 2016 he has been the *Principal Conductor* of the *Chamber Orchestra Landwasser*. Since 2019 he has been an *Associate Conductor* with *Ensemble OrQuesta*. He has conducted *Alcina*, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, *La Calisto*, *Euridice*, *The Flood*, *Spring Awakening*, *The Addams Family*, *Shockheaded Peter* and premières of *The Cabalist of East Broadway*, and *Malina* at the *HfM Freiburg*, the *Freiburg Theater*, the *Wilhelma Theater Stuttgart*, the *Arcola* and the *Cockpit Theatre*, London. 2021/2 includes work at the *Landestheater Linz* (AT) as a pianist and conductor.



Archlute/Baroque Guitar: Born in Geneva, **Cédric Meyer** holds two Master's degrees from the *Haute Ecole de Musique de Lausanne* as well as a *Post-Graduate Performance Certificate* from the *Schola Cantorum Basiliensis*. Performing as soloist as well as within diverse ensembles, he has been notably invited by numerous festivals and concerts series in Switzerland, UK, France, Italy, Bulgaria, and Brazil. In 2016, Cédric joined *Ensemble OrQuesta* as musician, member of the artistic team, and musical editor. In 2021, the *Valais Canton* awarded Cédric an artistic research grant for his project on medieval lutherie and its implications for musical interpretation and performance practice. An accomplished luthier, Cédric is dedicated to handcrafting his own lutes for performance. In addition to his activities as a performer, Cédric teaches classical guitar at *L'Ecole de Musique de Pully* (CH).

Violin I - Edmund Taylor is a violinist specialising in historical performance. After training at *Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance*, Edmund founded the period instrument ensemble *Bellot Ensemble*, to give talented soloists the opportunity to perform early music concertos, as well as to perform a variety of repertoire from the renaissance to the classical period. Edmund has directed his group in such venues as *St George's Hanover Square* and the *Chapel of St Peter and St Paul*, alongside choral directors such as *Ralph Allwood MBE*, as well as working closely with singers such as the award-winning *Julien Van Mellaerts*. In 2019 the *Bellot Ensemble* gave the UK premiere of *Telemann's* reconstructed '*Erklingt Durch Gedoppelt Annehmliche Töne*' Cantata. Edmund performs regularly across the UK and Europe as a violinist and leader for other period instrument ensembles and has a particular passion for operatic works from the Baroque period. He is also a music lecturer at *CityLit* in central London, and is co-founder of the charitable initiative *healingnotesmusic*.



Violin II - Kirsty Main graduated from the *Royal Northern College of Music* with a *BMus* in violin performance. She specialised in historical performance during her Masters (*MMus, Merit*) at the *University of Glasgow* in conjunction with the *Royal Conservatoire of Scotland*. Kirsty was a *Britten-Pears Young Artist* on baroque violin where she co-led a performance of *Handel's Theodora* at *Snape Maltings*. She regularly plays with *Eboracum Baroque*, *Newcastle Baroque*, the *Bellot Ensemble*, the *Zimmermann Band* and as leader of the *Kellie Consort*. She is also a member of *Convivio* who have recently performed at *Handel* and *Hendrix* in London and for the *Faversham Music Society*. Other recent engagements include those with, the *Scottish Ballet orchestra*, the *Scottish Festival Orchestra*, *Opera Dei Lumi*, the *Broen Ensemble*, the *London Contemporary Music Festival Orchestra*, and the *New Generation Festival Orchestra*. Kirsty performs regularly with the *Cairn String Quartet*. www.kirstymain.com

Director's Note:

Poppea is one of my favourite operas. It was one of the first baroque operas that I came to know well and I remain fascinated by the beauty, simplicity, and dramatic power of its music and the exquisite interplay between text and musical line – these are at the centre of this production. I first fell in love with the opera in 2015 when I created this production in partnership with Woodhouse Opera. We performed it in Brazil the same year and aired it again at the John McIntosh Arts Centre in Fulham in 2017. In 2019, it was our first ever opera production at The Cockpit. I have since devoted a great deal of my time to early opera, editing and directing works by Caccini, Cavalli, Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, Purcell, Handel, and Rameau, but *Poppea* still stands out from the others.

Poppea is often described as an opera that explores themes of ambition, love, and lust and this production has been hailed as creating a fusion that is 'sensual, dramatic, and compelling'. Yet, my aim is for the audience to feel the passion between the characters in a way that draws them in, rather than shocking or disturbing anyone simply for the sake of it. We aim to create credible characters that are conflicted human beings – individuals with both good and evil in them, rather two-dimensional stereotypes, as might seem to be the case with Drusilla and Ottone.

For those who have seen our production before it is worth noting that some elements of interpretation have changed – such alterations emerge as they might have done in Monteverdi's day, as musical episodes take on a different shape with new voices, or as different characters interact in a distinctive way. For example, Arnalta is embracing more of her comical side for this outing. Also, since Lucano is performed by our tenor Kieran White rather than by a soprano, Lucano's infamous duet with Nerone has complex gender fluid overtones. Whilst the staging to the key scene remains almost untouched, additional details are included to suggest which of our 'male' characters is the victim.

The suggestion in the libretto that Nerone pardoned both Ottone and Drusilla does not sit easily within our storyline. Thus, not only Seneca but Ottone, Drusilla, and Ottavia are also killed. I have relied on (alleged) historical facts to create a new twist to this production and its ending - this has also influenced the opening. The result, we trust, is distinctive but still true to Monteverdi's original intention. We have worked hard to do justice to this unique masterpiece which has been so important in the path and development of Ensemble OrQuesta - we hope you enjoy our performances.

Marcio da Silva



Poppea - Soprano **Helen May** graduated from the Royal Academy of Music with a Master of Arts in Vocal Performance (Distinction) and a DipRAM for outstanding final recital performance, having benefitted from the support of the William Gibbs Trust and the Josephine Baker Trust. In 2020 she was nominated for an OFFIE Award for best opera performance for her role as Calisto in Cavalli's *La Calisto* at The Cockpit Theatre. Her recent performance as Emilie in *Les Indes Galantes* was described as 'superb, with the flexibility of tone and dramatic power that holds an audience rapt' (Plays to See, Feb 2022). Helen has undertaken lead roles for Woodhouse Opera, Hampstead Garden Opera, Royal Academy Opera, Ensemble OrQuesta, Barefoot Opera, Bury Court Opera, London Opera Players, and Oxfordshire Contemporary Opera. Roles have included: Mimi (*La bohème*, Puccini); Mozart's Countess Almaviva, (*Le Nozze di Figaro*); Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*); Despina (*Così fan tutte*); First Lady (*The Magic Flute*); and Barbarina (*Le Nozze di Figaro*); Emilie (*Les Indes Galantes*, Rameau); Climene (*L'Egisto*, Cavalli); Alcina (*Alcina*, Handel); Galatea (*Acis and Galatea*, Handel); Morgana (*Alcina*, Handel); Nerone and Valletto (*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Monteverdi); Diane (*Hippolyte et Aricie*, Rameau); Giannetta (*L'elisir d'amore*, Donizetti); Woodpecker (*Cunning Little Vixen*, Janáček); cover Jenůfa (Jenůfa, Janáček), Nimue (*Merlin*, premiere, Keith Beal); and cover Aurora (*Aurora*, premiere, Noah Moseley). Recent oratorio highlights include, Brahms *Ein Deutsches Requiem* and Verdi *Requiem*. Future engagements include Mozart *Requiem*, Schubert *Mass in G*, and in recital, Alban Berg - Sieben Frühe Lieder. www.helenmaysoprano.com

Nerone - Spanish mezzo soprano **Julia Portela Piñón** recently graduated from the Opera School at the Royal Academy of Music, where she held a Master of Arts in Performance with Distinction and a Bachelor of Music in Performance. Prizewinner at the Kammeroper Schloss Rheinsberg International Competition (2020) and the Marjorie Thomas Art of Song Prize (2017), Julia was preselected for the Round 2 of Neue Stimmen (2021) and the Preliminary Round of the Montserrat Caballé International Singing Competition (2021). This summer she is one of the finalists at the Certamen Nacional "VIII Estepona CREA-2022" Lírica in Spain. Operatic engagements include Tirinto in Handel's *Imeneo* (2022), cover Komponist in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* (2022), Concepcion in Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* (2021), Zita in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* (2021), Dido in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (2021) and Puck in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2020) with Royal Academy Opera. Concert highlights include Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* with Audentia Ensemble (Ryan Bair), Bach's *B minor mass* with the Academy Baroque Orchestra (Masaaki Suzuki) and Elgar's *Sea Pictures* with the City of Cambridge Symphony Orchestra (Robert Hodge). Julia has appeared at the Oxford Lieder Festival and the New Generation Festival in Florence and will perform *Dorabella* in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* at the Vienna Opera Festival. This autumn, Julia is selected for the International Opera Workshop Waiblingen, where she will perform with the Württemberg Philharmonic Orchestra (Vlad Iftinca). www.juliaportelapinon.com





Ottone - US-born countertenor **Eric Schlossberg** is excited to be returning to the role of Ottone with Ensemble OrQuesta. He is a regular performer with the ensemble, having also performed the roles of Endimione (La Calisto), Elviro (Xerse), and Sorcerer (Dido and Aeneas). Other roles include Nerone & Arnalta (L'incoronazione di Poppea), Tolomeo (Giulio Cesare), L'umana fragilità/Pisandro (Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria), Damon (Acis and Galatea), the title roles in Handel's Admeto and L'enfant et les sortilèges, and the man who is obsessed with his cat in the US premiere and 2019 revival of Robin Haigh's The Man Who Woke Up. Eric recorded the Alto part for the first CD of Ivan Lukacic's full *Sacrae cantiones* in Split, Croatia's 4th century cathedral. He was also a featured soloist with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestras as a part of the iSing International Young Artists Festival. Eric read Computer Science at Princeton University. He is currently completing a Masters in Human-Computer Interaction at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, where he is studying the intersection of live-music performance and virtual reality. Eric also works as an epidemiological researcher for the MIT Media Lab and the Harvard School of Public Health.

Arnalta/Lucano/Liberto - British tenor **Kieran White** continues to enjoy success in the UK and is also establishing himself as a sought-after artist in mainland Europe. Recent engagements include work with many of the leading ensembles in the UK and Europe including Amsterdam Baroque, Netherlands and Edvard Grieg Kor, Norway. He also performs regularly with the Monteverdi Choir under Sir John Eliot Gardiner and with Denmark's Copenhagen Soloists. He is particularly associated with repertoire from 16th, 17th and 18th Century. Operatic engagements include Castor et Pollux with Warsaw Chamber Opera, Damon *Acis & Galatea* for Dorset Opera, Oronte *Alcina* for the Arcola Theatre (London) and the Théâtre Basse Passière, Normandy, Arnalta *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* at the Cockpit Theatre, the title-role Egisto in *L'Egisto* for Hampstead Garden Opera and Ruggiero in Caccini *La Liberazione di Ruggiero* for the Brighton Early Music Festival. Upcoming engagements include returning to Warsaw Chamber Opera as the title-role Castor in Castor et Pollux. Kieran graduated from The Royal Academy of Music achieving a Masters with distinction. Whilst at the Academy he held a Kohn foundation scholarship as a soloist in the Bach Cantata Series. He is presently a student of renowned haute-contre Jean Paul Fouchecourt. In 2022 Kieran was awarded 1st place at the Aria Borealis Bødo Baroque Competition and in 2021 2nd place at the Froville International Baroque Singing Competition. www.kieranwhitetenor.com.



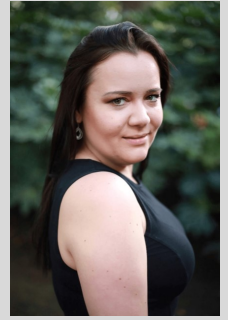
Ottavia/Virtu - British-Irish soprano **Hazel Neighbour** is a graduate of the Royal Academy Opera school where she was generously supported by the Maria Callas Award, the Gerald Finzi Scholarship and the Josephine Baker Trust. She graduated from the Royal College of Music with distinction in her Master of Performance. Hazel is delighted to be making her role and company with Ensemble OrQuesta. Her recent operatic highlights include Mimì (Young Artist/cover) for Mid Wales Opera's new production of *La bohème*, performing in the live rounds of the Salzburg Grandi Voci 2022 competition, and Glyndebourne Chorus in 2021. Other notable roles include Erste Dame in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, L'Ensoleillad, Massenet's *Chérubin* and the Fox, Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* for Royal Academy Opera; The Governess in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* for Dartington International Festival; and The Bride in Judith Weir's *The Vanishing Bridegroom* for British Youth Opera. Also an exponent of contemporary music, Hazel created the roles of Atalya and Native Judge in *The Butt*, adapted from the celebrated book by Will Self, at contemporary music festival Musiktheatertage in Vienna. Highlights of Hazel's concert experience include A Sea Symphony by Vaughan Williams at Dorking Halls, Berg's Sieben frühe Lieder and Mozart's *Vesperae solemnes de confessore* at West Road Concert Hall in Cambridge. Upcoming engagements include her role debut of Rosalinde in Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* for the Weimar Lyric Opera Studio and soprano soloist in Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* with Woking Choral Society. www.hazel-neighbour.com



Seneca - The Romanian bass baritone **Gheorghe Palcu** completed his undergraduate studies at the Conservatorio Statale di Musica Jacopo Tomadini Udine, in Italy. He pursued further study through masterclasses with Teresa Berganza, Sonia Prina, Viorica Cortez, Leontina Vaduva, Alessandro Corbelli, Grace Bumbrey and others. His operatic roles include Don Alfonso and Gulielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Leporello and Masetto in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Figaro and Count in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Dulcamara in Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'amore*, Colline, Alcindoro and Benoit in Puccini's *La Bohème*, Don Magnifico and Alidoro in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, and Don Bartolo in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Gheorghe is completing his Masters degree at CSM Cork, Ireland. Recent engagements include Handel's *Messiah* and the role of Colline in Puccini's *La Bohème* in Hamburg for the Bergerdorf Music Festival.



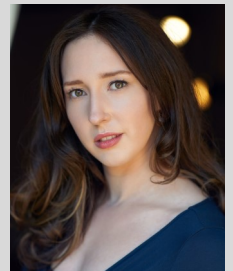
Drusilla - Poppy Shotts is a graduate of the Royal College of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Her performances at the 2021 Grimeborn Festival awarded her an OFFIE nomination for Best Opera Performance, and a special mention in The Guardian. A 2018 Lies Askonas Finalist, National Mozart Competition and Royal Over-seas League Semi-Finalist, and 2019 Somerset Song Prize Finalist, Poppy was Highly Commended in the 2018 RCM Lieder Competition, and joint winner of the RCS Governor's Chamber Music Prize. Poppy was the soprano soloist for the 2020 Naxos recording of Massenet's *Visions* with the RSO. Further solo concert experience includes *Peer Gynt* with the RPO at the Cadogan Hall, and as recurrent soprano soloist with St. John's Chamber Orchestra. Poppy recently did the voice work for the digital horror opera *CROCODILE*, which has been picked up for future TV broadcast by Sky Arts. Opera credits include *Fiordiligi* (*Così fan tutte*, St. Bartholemew's Orchestra), *L'amour/Zaïde* (Ensemble OrQuesta, Cockpit Theatre), *Oberto* (*Alcina* - Ensemble OrQuesta), *Madame Goldentrill* (Pulp Rocket Theatre), *Marcelina* (Ensemble OrQuesta), *Barbarina*, (RCM Opera School), *Susanna* (Matchbox Opera), *Dew Fairy* (St. Magnus Festival), *Erste Dame* (2018), and *Abigail Williams* in *The Crucible* (2019) with Berlin Opera Academy. Poppy joined the chorus of Scottish Opera in 2020. Having performed in the 2021 Scottish Opera production of *Falstaff* and 2022 production of *Don Giovanni*, Poppy will return to perform in their 2023 production of *Carmen*. www.poppyschotts.com



Amore/Damigella - German soprano **Anna-Luise Wagner** recently completed a Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge, researching seventeenth-century opera singer, writer, and courtesan Margherita Costa. Alongside her studies, Anna worked as dramaturg and translator on high-profile opera productions in Germany, Austria, Italy, and the US. She also founded Marginalia, an interdisciplinary performance collective bringing academic research to life on stage. As a soprano, onstage highlights include *Belinda/Dido and Aeneas* (Hampstead Garden Opera), *Fatime/Les Indes galantes* (Ensemble OrQuesta), *Susanna/Le nozze di Figaro* (Hampstead Garden Opera), *Dema/L'Egisto* (Hampstead Garden Opera), *Clorinda/La Cenerentola* (Random Opera), *The Artist/Joanna Ward's hunger* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe), as well as several roles with Cambridge University Opera including *Cleopatra/Giulio Cesare*, *Micaëla/Carmen*, *Adina/L'elisir d'amore*, title role/*Sāvitrī*, and *Despina/Così fan tutte*. She also created the title role of Green Opera's *Fillu*, a Lieder-opera telling the love story of Eugenie Schumann, daughter of Clara and Robert, and the Austrian soprano Marie Fillunger. Upcoming roles include title role/*Partenope* (Hampstead Garden Opera & Festivals Malta) at the Teatru Manoel in Valetta.



Valletto/Fortuna/Pallade - hailing from the west coast of Canada, soprano **Rachel Allen** is praised for bringing "great tenderness" and "seductive power" to her singing (Opera Going Toronto). Rachel is currently pursuing a Master of Performance at the Royal College of Music studying with Alison Wells where she is a Robert Anderson Award holder. She is grateful to be supported by Help Musicians UK as an Ian Fleming Award holder and by the British Columbia Arts Council. Rachel received her Bachelor of Music at the University of Toronto, studying on exchange at the Royal Northern College of Music in her final year. Recent operatic credits include *Morgana* in *Alcina* (Grimeborne/Ensemble Orquesta) and *Bellezza, Semele, and Hora Seconda* in *Cavalli's L'Egisto* (Hampstead Garden Opera). As a member of the Victoria Conservatory of Music Opera Studio, Rachel performed as *Susanna* in *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Hermia* in *The Fairy Queen*, and *Belinda* in *Dido and Aeneas*. In scenes performances during her studies she has appeared as *Agnès* (*Written on Skin*), *Adele* (*Die Fledermaus*), *Cleopatra* (*Giulio Cesare*) and *Tytania* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). As an ensemble singer, Rachel performs regularly with the Monteverdi Choir, and has sung with the Gabrieli Consort, Theatre of Early Music, and chorus of Opera Atelier. Recent concert appearances include *Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's* cantata *L'isle de Délos* and *Bach's* Easter Oratorio at the RCM, *Bach's St John Passion* with The Phoenix Singers, and *Messiah* with Ensemble OrQuesta. She looks forward to performing a recital with baroque flautist Soile Stratkauskas this summer on Vancouver Island, and *Beethoven's* *Missa Solemnis* with the Monteverdi Choir in the BBC Proms.



Ensemble OrQuesta are grateful to **Angel Early Music** and the **Marchus Trust** for supporting these performances of *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*.



THE MARCHUS TRUST

We are a Registered Charity: No 1194030. If you would like to support EO young artists for future productions, donations can be made to our Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) [account](#) via our website: www.ensembleorquesta.com. Thank you!



Claudio Monteverdi was born in **1567** in **Cremona**, Lombardy, the oldest of five children. During his childhood, he was taught by Marc'Antonio Ingegneri, the *maestro di cappella* at the Cathedral of Cremona, as a member of the cathedral choir. He also studied at the University of Cremona. His earliest compositions – motets and madrigals – were published in 1582 and 1583. From **1590** he worked at the court of Vincenzo I of Gonzaga in **Mantua**, successively as a vocalist and viol player, music director, and court conductor, becoming *maestro della musica* in 1601. In 1610 he moved to **Rome**, hoping to present his music to Pope Paul V. His Vespers were printed the same year, but his planned meeting with the Pope never took place.

In **1612** Vincenzo Gonzaga died and was succeeded by his eldest son Francesco. Heavily in debt due to the profligacy of his father, Francesco sacked Monteverdi who spent a year in Mantua without any paid employment. By **1613**, Monteverdi moved to San Marco in **Venice** where, as conductor, he quickly restored the musical standard of both the choir and the instrumentalists which had declined due to the financial mismanagement of his predecessor, Giulio Cesare Martinengo. In **1632**, Monteverdi became a priest.

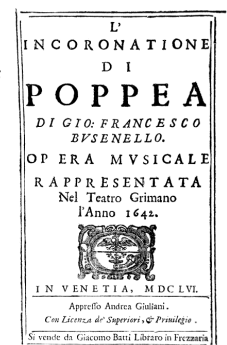
During the last years of his life, when he was often ill, he composed three final masterpieces, two are extant: *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (**1641**), and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (**1642**) which is considered a culminating point of Monteverdi's work. He died in Venice, at the age of 76.

L'incoronazione, with a libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello, was first performed at the Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice during the **1643** carnival season. One of the first operas to use historical events and people, it describes how Poppea, mistress of the Roman emperor Nero, achieved her ambition to be crowned empress. It differed from Monteverdi's other operas because it highlighted the baser natures of humans, rather than the lofty natures of the gods.

The original manuscript of the score does not exist; two surviving copies from the **1650s** ('Venice' and 'Naples') show significant differences from each other, and each differs to some extent from the libretto. It is now commonly accepted that *L'incoronazione* as it survives combines the work of various composers, although opinions vary on the precise nature of that mix. Some of the music is almost certainly by **Cavalli**, and some by Francesco **Sacriati**. Analysis suggests that the music of the final scene and the music for Ottone may have been written by a different hand, whether working under Monteverdi's direction or not. But a fair amount of the music rings true to the style of late Monteverdi, and even the final love duet, 'Pur ti miro, pur ti godo', is close to music written by him.

None of the existing versions of the libretto, printed or manuscript, can be definitively tied to the first performance at the Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo, the precise date of which is unknown and there is no record of the opera's initial public reception. Despite these uncertainties, the work is generally accepted as part of the Monteverdi operatic canon, his last and perhaps his greatest work.

Following its 1643 premiere the opera was revived in Naples in **1651** but was then neglected until the rediscovery of the score in 1888, after which it became the subject of scholarly attention in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



L'incoronazione is frequently described as a story in which virtue is punished and greed rewarded, running counter to the accepted conventions of literary principles, raising the classic moral dilemma of not-so-nice characters singing beautiful music. It is the adulterous liaison of Poppea and Nerone which wins the day, although this triumph is demonstrated by history to have been transitory. In Busenello's version of the story all the major characters are morally compromised.

From their knowledge of Roman history, audiences in Venice would have recognised that the apparent triumph of love over virtue, celebrated by Nerone and Poppea in the closing duet, was hollow, and that not long after this event Nerone kicked the pregnant Poppea to death. They would have known, too, that Nerone himself committed suicide a few years later, and that others - Ottavia, Lucano, Ottone - also met untimely deaths. In staging the work today, productions are sometimes historicised or sometimes highly abstracted rather than being grounded in a specific time and place.

The original synopsis

Prologue

The goddesses Fortune, Virtue and Amore argue over which of them holds greater power over humankind. Amore claims to be master of the world and declares that once they have heard her story, they will abandon their claims.

Act I

Poppea's palace

Ottone arrives at the palace of his beloved Poppea ('E pur io torno qui, qual linea al centro') with intentions to pursue his love, only to discover that Poppea and Nerone lie within together. His love song turns to a lament. He sees Nerone's soldiers outside, asleep. The soldiers are aroused and complain about their job and the decline of Rome ('Sia maledetto Amor, Poppea, Nerone'). They feel sorry for Empress Ottavia being so badly treated.

Nerone enters with his mistress: they take a sensuous farewell as Poppea emphasises her love for him ('Signor, sempre mi vedi') and seeks to guarantee their marriage. She is left alone with Arnalta, who warns her to be careful of the empress's wrath and to distrust Nerone's apparent love for her. But Poppea, arrogantly confident of his affection, dismisses her warnings., for Amore and Fortuna are on her side ('Per me guerreggia Amor e la Fortuna'). Arnalta is left to grumble at his mistress's folly ('Ben sei pazza, se credi').

City of Rome

The scene changes to focus on Ottavia who despairs at her humiliation ('Disprezzata regina') while her nurse (Nutrice) suggests that she should take a lover ('Se Neron perso ha l'ingegno'). Seneca, Nerone's former tutor, addresses the empress with flattering words, and is mocked by Ottavia's page, Valletto, who threatens to set fire to the old man's beard. Left alone, Seneca reflects on power and the transitory nature of life ('Le porpore regali e imperatrici'). The goddess Pallade appears to warn him of his impending death. Seneca welcomes the news.

Nerone enters and confides in Seneca that he intends to repudiate Ottavia and marry Poppea ('Son risoluto insomma'). Seneca urges reason: such a move would be divisive and unpopular. Nerone is angered by this. Poppea tries to calm him ('Come dolci signor, come soavi') but warns that Seneca claims to be the power behind the imperial throne. When Seneca persists in urging reason, Nerone furiously dismisses him.

After Nerone leaves, Ottone emerges and confronts Poppea over her infidelity ('Ad altri tocca in sorte'). He unsuccessfully attempts to rekindle Poppea's affections for him. Arnalta feels sorry for the poor man ('Infelice ragazzo!'). He tries to come to his senses ('Ottone, torna in te stesso') but when all else fails he vows revenge. He is then comforted by Drusilla, a noblewoman. Realising that he can never regain Poppea's affections, he offers to marry Drusilla, who joyfully accepts him. But Ottone admits to himself: 'Drusilla is on my lips, Poppea is in my heart.'

Act II

Seneca's villa

Seneca praises stoic solitude. The god Mercury warns him again of death which the philosopher accepts happily ('Oh me felice, adunque'). Libertu enters with Nerone's command that Seneca must die by the end of the day and is impressed by the philosopher's calmness ('Mori, e mori felice'). Seneca gathers his famigliari around him; they try to persuade him to remain alive ('Non morir Seneca'), but he is determined. 'The warm current of my guiltless blood shall carpet with royal purple my road to death.'

City of Rome

At the palace Ottavia's page Valletto flirts with Damigella, a lady-in-waiting. Nerone and the poet Lucano celebrate the news of the death of Seneca with wine and song ('Hor che Seneca è morto), praising Poppea's beauty ('Son rubini pretiosi').

Ottone ponders how he could have thought to kill Poppea with whom he remains hopelessly in love ('Sprezzami quanto sai'). He is interrupted by a summons from Ottavia who, to his dismay, orders him to kill Poppea. Threatening to denounce him to Nerone unless he complies, she suggests that he disguise himself as a woman to commit the deed. Ottone agrees to do as she bids, privately calling on the gods to relieve him of his life. Drusilla delights in her love for Ottone ('Felice cor mio'), and Ottavia's nurse wishes she were in his place ('Il giorno femminil'). Ottone explains to Drusilla his plans for Poppea and persuades her to lend him her clothes.

In her chamber Poppea rejoices in Seneca's death ('Hor che Seneca è morto') and prays for Amore to support her; Arnalta then lulls her to sleep ('Oblivion soave'). Amore watches overhead, proclaiming her power to protect humankind ('O sciocchi, o frali'), as Ottone enters dressed as Drusilla and tries to kill Poppea. Amore prevents the deed; Poppea wakes and gives the alarm as Ottone escapes. Amore boasts of her success ('Ho difeso Poppea').

Act III

Drusilla joyfully anticipates Poppea's death and the life of happiness before her ('O felice Drusilla, oh che sper'io'), but Arnalta identifies Drusilla as Poppea's assailant, and she is arrested. As Nerone enters, Arnalta denounces Drusilla, who protests her innocence. Threatened with torture unless she names her accomplices, Drusilla decides to protect Ottone by confessing her own guilt. Nerone commands her to suffer a painful death, at which point Ottone rushes in and reveals the truth: that he had acted alone, at the command of the Empress Ottavia, and that Drusilla was innocent of complicity.

Nerone banishes Ottone while praising Drusilla as a model of womanly behaviour. Drusilla asks to go into exile with him. Ottone accepts the punishment with glad heart ('Signor, non son punito, anzi beato'). Now that Ottone has implicated Ottavia in the affair, Nerone has the excuse he needs, and he banishes her too. He and Poppea rejoice that the way is now clear to their marriage ('Non più s'interporrà noia o dimora'). Ottavia enters and, in a lament, bids a halting farewell to her home and friends ('Addio Roma, addio patria, amici addio'). Arnalta revels in the exaltation of his mistress as empress of Rome ('Oggi sarà Poppea').

In the throne room of the palace the coronation ceremony for Poppea is prepared. Nerone crowns Poppea ('Ascendi, o mia diletta') and the consuls and tribunes pay homage. Amore proclaims her triumph to the approval of her mother Venere ('Io mi compiaccio, o figlio').

Nerone and Poppea sing a final ecstatic love duet ('Pur ti miro, pur ti godo').

Monteverdi and opera – 'un sol vero'

More than half of Monteverdi's operas are lost to us. The three on which we build his current reputation – **L'Orfeo** (1607), **Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria** (1640), and **L'incoronazione di Poppea** (1643) are strikingly different.

Ritorno and *L'incoronazione* were one and three in a trilogy of Venetian operas written by Monteverdi in his twilight years. The middle 'ghost' opera – *Le Nozze d'Enea e Lavinia* – is much talked of in written sources but did not survive. Fans of Monteverdi may already have dipped into the research of American musicologist **Ellen Rosand**, which greatly enhances our understanding of *L'incoronazione* and its place in this trilogy.

One of the most distinctive aspects of these three operas is that their librettos were written specifically for Monteverdi as part of an effort to lure him back to music theatre, from which he had been conspicuously absent for some time. In 1640 the nobleman **Giacomo Badoaro** prefaced his libretto to *Ritorno* with an open letter explaining that he had embarked on his libretto for the sole purpose of tempting the composer out of his operatic retirement. Until now, he explains, the emotions Venetian audiences had seen portrayed on stage had left them cold and unmoved, because they were warmed by a painted sun; only the great master Monteverdi, *the true sun*, radiates sufficient heat to really ignite the passions.

Yet opera in Venice was flourishing in 1640. From **1637** the **Teatro di San Cassiano** and a succession of newly constructed theatres had resounded to the success of operas produced by **Benedetto Ferrari**, **Francesco Manelli**, and **Francesco Cavalli** in a burst of frenetic activity. Monteverdi – in his seventies, in religious orders, and in position as maestro di capella – seemed initially reluctant to join the commercial stampede.

But the sight of the new librettos did serve to galvanise Monteverdi – he responded with a surge of activity, ultimately producing three new operas in three years. *Ritorno* was an immediate success: ten crowded and enthusiastic Venetian performances, performances in Bologna, and unheard-of re-runs the following year. Another personally conceived libretto was then sent to Monteverdi by an aristocratic fan: the libretto for **Le Nozze** – most probably written by **Michelangelo Torcigliani** – was based on the Aeneid, just as *Ritorno* had been based on the Odyssey, and was a sequel to it, purposefully continuing its grand narrative.

Operas of the time often sought to convey profound political messages by dramatic means. Ellen Rosand points out that recognising the placing of *L'incoronazione* as the third opera in the Venetian trilogy enhances understanding of its message. *Ritorno* contains a Greek story which follows from the destruction of Troy, *Le Nozze* contains a Latin story that deals with the founding of Rome, *L'incoronazione*, tells of downfall following the moral weakening of the Roman Empire whose greatness will live again in the magnificent republic of Venice.

The *Nozze* libretto articulates **the Venice myth** – 'I see with the passing years a city proudly raise its wings to the stars.' Thus, *Ritorno* to *L'incoronazione* is a Troy-Rome-Venice mythic history. In choosing these three librettos Monteverdi was following the cultural mainstream of Venetian opera at the time. In 1641, for example, four out of five operas performed in Venetian theatres were based on Homeric and Virgilian themes, peddling different stages of the Venetian genealogical myth.

The concept of the trilogy does not falter because the constituent librettos were written by different authors. The three librettists were part of a coherent intellectual group and were well-known to each other. The libretto for *L'incoronazione* was written by Francesco Busenello. Badoaro and Busenello were life-long friends, and Badoaro was also friends with Torcigliani. All three were members of the *Accademia degli Incogniti* – the most important literary academy in Venice where aristocratic writers debated moral, social, and political issues in weekly meetings and in written publications. The group were strongly patriotic and committed to the welfare and fame of the republic, and many wrote operas.

Both Badoaro and Torcigliani emphasised Monteverdi's role in shaping their original librettos – they commented that they concentrated on the affections and avoided abstruse thoughts and concepts in deference to Monteverdi's wishes. Of the trio of librettists, Busenello was by far the more skilled dramatist, already having two operatic texts to his credit. However, despite his experience, he too attended carefully to Monteverdi's preferences. Although Busenello makes no specific mention of modelling the text to suit Monteverdi he must have done so, since this libretto differs markedly to his two previous librettos and two later ones written for Cavalli.

Yet despite their efforts the many alterations and revisions which Monteverdi made on the different texts shows that each of the librettists did not always present material that matched Monteverdi's exacting standards. Monteverdi was a skilled musical dramatist - fastidious textual selections balanced with nuanced melodic lines and rich harmonic choices ensured vivid characterisations and resonant human interactions.

***L'Incoronazione* – breaking new ground?**

Written when the genre of opera was only a few decades old, the music for *L'incoronazione* has been praised for its originality, its melody, and for its reflection of the human attributes of its characters. The opera broke new ground in matching music to stage action, in its musical reproductions of the **natural inflections** of the human voice, in **the use of the violin** to mirror and match the new flexibility of vocal writing, and in the attempts to notate new metrical and rhythmic relationships.

Monteverdi was certainly valued as a composer in his own time, although he was not dubbed a genius. Contemporaries praised him for his 'variety of output', for his 'musical way of moving some particular emotion in the breasts of men' (Matteo Carbeloti), and for his ability to outshine his contemporaries. It is also true to say that the progressive trajectory model tracked in later 'great' composers is apparent in Monteverdi's musical development - Cremona (1567-90), Mantua (1590-1612), and Venice (1613-43). However, along with other contemporaries, Monteverdi indulged in imitations, emulations, the re-working of 'derived' material, day-to-day collaborations, cross-borrowings, and skeletal scoring that relied heavily on improvisational practice. It cannot be proved that Monteverdi wrote all the music within the scores we study and hear - he clearly didn't. Yet, despite lively debates about authorship, *L'incoronazione* is treated as 'Monteverdi's'.

How do we evaluate Monteverdi's significance?

Monteverdi's own perception is interesting. He stated in a letter of 23 October **1633** that 'I would rather be moderately praised for the new style than greatly praised for the ordinary.' This suggests an awareness that he is breaking new ground, though as a contracted employee tied to social constraints, his would surely be an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary pathway. We do know that he was sensitive to his position in the compositional world, both from his attention to the work of his contemporaries and more directly his attempts to articulate and justify his own ideas in various 'manifestos' issued over a period of more than thirty years.

In *L'incoronazione* Monteverdi uses all the means for vocal expression available to a composer of his time - aria, arioso, arietta, ensemble, and recitative. The boundaries between these forms are flexible, with elements being woven into a continuous fabric so that the music always serves the drama, while a formal tonal unity is maintained. The musical style is sensuously melodic, brimming with closed forms, and offering a more realistic portrayal of characters than heretofore. Each character has strong emotions, fears, and desires which are reflected in the variety of their music. Outstanding musical peaks include the final duet (despite disputes regarding its authorship), Ottavia's Act 1 lament, Seneca's farewell and the ensuing madrigal, and the thrilling florid synchronous coloratura of the Nerone-Lucano duet which is often performed with strong homoerotic overtones. The drama includes tragic, romantic, and comic scenes (new for opera at that time). The combination of all these attributes established Monteverdi as the leading musical dramatist of his time.

In his observations about this opera Nikolaus Harnoncourt expressed astonishment at: 'the **mental freshness** with which the 74-year-old composer, two years before his death, was able to surpass his pupils in the most modern style and to set standards which were to apply to the music theatre of the succeeding centuries.' Mark Ringer calls the opera a unified masterpiece of '**unprecedented depth and individuality**'.

Modern productions: dramatic techniques

We face a dilemma when presenting performances of early operas. Sources such as descriptions of singers indicate that 17th-century acting was more presentational than naturalistic. Until the 20th-century, few opera goers seemed to care about 'acting' as we know it today. 19th-century ears were more focused on the beauty of the voice, and only a minimum of skill was required or expected in conveying a character.

Yet the idea that an opera singer should just 'park' and 'bark' is passé. George Bernard Shaw's famous dictum that the best way to see an opera is to sit at the back of a box, put your feet up on a chair, and close your eyes has been replaced by the desire to see opera as theatre. Influenced in part by Stanislavsky's 'Method', audiences expect a unification of singer and role in opera.

There is no doubt that the rich characterisation of Monteverdi's operas invites a non-historically informed 'Method' style. However, opera singers tend to be encouraged to find a balance between inner drama and outer qualities of tone quality and intonation. This is one reason why Ensemble OrQuesta favours a minimalist approach to interpretation, design, and delivery. Our productions are creative but both music and drama are stripped down to enhance access to the essence of musical authenticity and artistic expression.

Modern productions: the vocal sound

In terms of vocal sound, it is not easy to be certain about the style of singing in early operas since there is no tangible source of evidence. Notated texts, the composition of musical lines, and the acoustic aspect of performance venues can give us some indications. The emphasis on *trilli* and *gropi* requires a great deal of vocal agility, especially in lower parts of the range, which is not fully commensurate with the bel canto emphasis on legato and upper-voice clarity. The strongest and loudest part of the range in bel canto must be the top: any Rossini or Verdi aria will place the musical climax on a long-held high note. Earlier dramatic music usually requires agility throughout. In bel canto the voice floats over the smoothly changing harmonies. Modern harmonic voice leading is sometimes evident in Monteverdi's music, but he was writing mostly within a system of modal, rather than triadic, harmony. Monteverdi's dramatic music is music of rupture: his characters often move quickly from one idea to another, and the harmonic language follows accordingly.

The English 'early music tradition' has tended to encourage a tighter throat position, placement far forward in the 'mask', and the control of vocal tone required for choral blend. **William Christie's** French revival style is based on the bel canto style, with precise rhythms, minimal vibrato but with the sound blossoming with vibrato on longer notes. Yet neither of these should be viewed as the only 'acceptable' way of singing early music. Close analysis of the treatises of the time seems to show that the most striking change in technique is that in the 17th-century the larynx was generally raised when singers sang higher, rather than lowered as it has been in classical singing since the late 18th-century. Some suggest that early opera singers may have sounded more like modern folk singers than modern opera singers.

Overall, as research and understanding has deepened an increasing pluralism of influence has emerged and a more liquid concept of how the music of composers such as Monteverdi 'ought' to sound. To take one example, note the difference in vocal sound in a choir such as **The Sixteen** from its inception in the 1980s to the present day - the use of a much freer vibrato is clear. Singers such as **Joyce DiDonato** demonstrate this current 'multi-influential' technique in singing early opera. Her performance of Ottavia's 'Addio Roma', for example, is text-based and dramatic in a way Monteverdi's contemporaries might recognise, but she also draws on her 'grand opera' voice in the middle section, giving it a sonic quality, with extra emphasis on consonants and an acceptance of sacrificing beauty for dramatic intensity. Soprano **Danielle de Niese** has worked with major early music conductors such as William Christie and Emmanuelle Haïm, and in her interpretations of Monteverdi's *Poppea* and Handel's *Cleopatra* she freely employs the pitch bending and chestier vocal production of singers like Laura Nyro or Audra McDonald. Some singers of this repertoire also incorporate elements of jazz into their singing techniques, such as migration between chest- and head-voice within the same phrase, and less controlled vibrato.

Thus, it can be contended that a pluralist musical world means that there is no single 'right' way to sing anything, and certainly not 'early music'. Our current cultural landscape of liquid authenticity in vocal sound allows fullness of vocal tone and legato technique where the musical lines permit, or where the dramatic intentions of the composer suggest. Purists who expect or indeed insist on a constrained choral sound when attending an early opera may feel indignant when hearing multi-influential technique, but there is little of substance to support their ire. All EO singers are carefully coached by our experts in the nuances of baroque style and all have years of vocal training to their credit. But the dramatic intensity that Monteverdi created should also come across powerfully at the heart of their performances - we hope that we can hold you spell bound and that, as in 2019, we can 'conjure up a passionate affair out of 400 year old words and music'. ([Owen Davies](#)).

'Handel stripped down and brilliant', Ensemble OrQuesta, Arcola Theatre. (Fiona Maddocks, The Guardian)

No 4: The top 10 classical music performances of 2021.

EO Ensemble
OrQuesta

**Our 2021 production
at Grimeborn was
Handel's *Alcina***

'..a rich exploration of Handel's
opera with strong music
performances and an appreciable
contemporary treatment.'
Gaurav Singh Nijjer, 25/08/21
★★★★ North West End

'In a top-quality cast, Poppy
Shotts calls for special mention in
the small role of Oberto'
★★★★ Fiona Maddocks, 28/08/2021

'The instrumental ensemble might
have been small, but it certainly
was not lacking in punch and
drama. From the first notes of the
overture this was a strongly
characterful account of the score.'
★★★★ Robert Hugill, Planet Hugill

★★★★ '..we should applaud and
appreciate both the outstanding
creativity and the musical
authenticity of Marcio da Silva's
invaluable company.'
Owen Davies, Plays to See, 01/09/21

'The balanced and talented cast
produced an array of characterful
performances which drew us into
the drama.'
★★★★ Robert Hugill, Planet Hugill

'..the work is packed with dazzling
arias, many sung by Alcina, here
superbly sung by Helen May,
with Laura Fleur outstanding as
the knight, Ruggiero.'
★★★★ Fiona Maddocks, 28/08/2021

'The ensemble of performers and
musicians deliver a compelling
performance that captures our
attention all throughout...'
Gaurav Singh Nijjer, 25/08/21
★★★★ North West End

'And da Silva's programme notes –
this time available only online – are
once again better than anything
that the Royal Opera offers.'
Owen Davies, Plays to See, 01/09/21