

L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA Monteverdi

Friday 10th and Saturday 11th March 2023. 7pm.

Marcio da Silva *Music Director*
Benjamin Riedel *Revival Stage Director*
Helen May *Academy Manager*

Predag Gosta *Harpsichord*
Marcio da Silva *Harpsichord/Organ*
Cédric Meyer *Archlute/Baroque Guitar*
Edmund Taylor, Chris McClain *Violin*
Pablo Tejedor-Gutierrez *Cello*
Paul Jenkins *Recorder*

Rachel Allen~# *Poppea*
Dima Bakri~ Julia Portela Piñón# *Nerone*
Juliet Telford~ Israel Romero# *Ottone*
Hazel Neighbour~# *Ottavia* / #*Virtu*
Oguzhan Engin~# *Arnalta* / *Liberto*
Jay Rockwell ~# *Seneca*
Margarita Maria Kevrekidou~ Tara Venkatesan # *Drusilla*
Ana Torbica~# *Amore* / *Damigella*
Youkyong Song~ Martina Ganchuk# *Fortuna* / *Valletto*
Helen May~# *Pallade* Martina Ganchuk Lucano ~#
~ Friday # Saturday

Welcome and thank you for joining us. **Ensemble OrQuesta Opera Academy** was founded by Marcio da Silva in 2014 and merged with the core company of Ensemble OrQuesta in 2022, becoming a registered charity in order to better fulfil its educational aims. EOOA is dedicated to the training of the new generation of opera singers. It 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. The carefully planned intensive programme culminates in two public performances. The exceptional quality of these academies—as reflected in consistently appreciative testimonials from participants—has earned EOOA a flourishing reputation as an outstanding international young artist programme. Some 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 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.

This production of *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* was most recently performed by Ensemble OrQuesta at The Arcola Theatre to open the Grimeborn Festival in July 2022. Here it garnered two five-star and six four-star reviews. It was **OFFIE** nominated for both Best Opera Production and Best Opera Performance, and, in January 2023, the Ensemble OrQuesta Company and Orchestra were named as one of three **OFFIE** Finalists for Best Opera Performance. It is a pleasure to be able to share this production with our audience here in East Sussex, and to give our young opera singers an opportunity to work alongside the skilled early music specialists of Ensemble OrQuesta Baroque in bringing Monteverdi's glorious music to life.

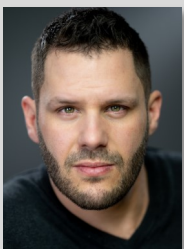
The Ensemble OrQuesta Trustees

Director's note on the original vision for this production: *Poppea* 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 as an academy in 2017. In 2019, it was our first ever opera production at The Cockpit in London. I have since devoted a great deal of 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.

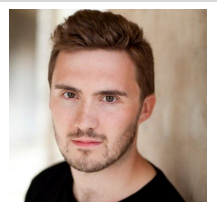
Poppea is often described as an opera that explores themes of ambition, love, and lust and this production has been hailed as creating a fusion that is 'sensual, dramatic, and compelling'. Yet, my aim is for the audience to feel the passion between the characters in a way that draws them in, rather than 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 stereo-types, as might seem to be the case with Drusilla and Ottone. 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, I hope, is distinctive but still true to Monteverdi's original intention. I hope you enjoy our performances.

Marcio da Silva

Music Director - born in Brazil, **Marcio da Silva** first 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 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



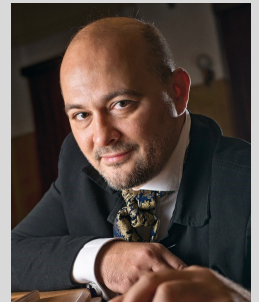
Revival Stage Director - Benjamin Riedel is a graduate of Rose Bruford College. Benjamin has worked as Assistant Stage Director for Ensemble OrQuesta for Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, 2019, Cavalli's *Xerse*, 2018 and Lully's *Armide*, 2017 and for Handel's *Alcina* at the Grimeborn Festival in August 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.





Alessandra Fasolo - Language coach. Italian mezzo soprano and language coach Alessandra Fasolo studied Classical Singing and Melodramatics at the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory of Music in Venice and the Francesco Venezzese Conservatory of Music in Rovigo, where she graduated with merit under the guidance of soprano Maria Gabriella Munari. As a singer, she has performed a range of principal roles including Meg Page in Falstaff, Tisbe in La cenerentola, Mamma Lucia in Cavalleria Rusticana, Die Dritte and Die Zweite Dame in Die Zauberflöte, Suor Zelatrice and Suor Infermiera in Suor Angelica, Maga Merlinia in the premiere of the modern opera La conchiglia di Visnù and Richiamo in the premiere of the modern opera Psicovalzer. Alessandra is currently a Professor of Italian and Language Coach at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the National Opera Studio. She has worked on a wide range of operas including Don Giovanni, Alcina, Xerse, L'incoronazione di Poppea, Così fan tutte, Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria, Le nozze di Figaro, Traviata. Forthcoming engagements include Il Barbiere di Siviglia, La Bohème and La liberazione di Ruggero dall'isola di Alcina.

Harpichordist - Predag 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.



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).



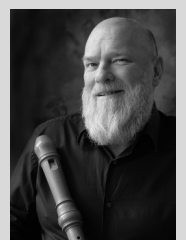
Violin I - Edmund Taylor Edmund is a violinist specialising in Historical Performance. He is the founder and director of the period ensemble Bellot Ensemble and performs regularly across the UK and Europe as a violinist and leader for other period instrument ensembles, such as Ensemble OrQuesta and the Armonico Consort, playing in venues such as the Royal Albert Hall and Southbank Centre. Edmund features as a soloist on the newly released Armonico Consort Signum Classics CD of the works of the Italian baroque composer Francesco Scarlatti. Edmund also enjoys freelancing in the realm of film and TV, having worked as a music support artist, recording artist, and music advisor on the films 'Emma and Napoleon and The Great' seasons 1 and 3, under the management of 'Music in Vision'.



Violin/Viola - Christopher McClain Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA Christopher began general music studies at the age of eight before deciding to specialize in viola at ten. After serving as principal violist of the Charlotte Symphony Youth Orchestra he finished both his high-school and Bachelor of Music Diplomas at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts followed by graduate studies at Boston University. During his university studies he explored music from the historical performance of violin, viola, recorder and viola da gamba to contemporary compositions culminating in many interdisciplinary collaborations with dancers, singers, actors and visual artists. Since relocating to London, UK in 2018 he has concertized in halls across the UK, Europe and the Middle East with ensembles including Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra as well as provided music for film and television.



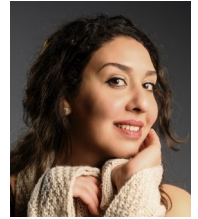
Recorder - Paul Jenkins. Paul studied Recorders and historically informed performance at the University of York, prior to becoming a chef, cooking in Toulouse, London, and Oxfordshire. He also has extensive experience as an educator working in Inner London Primary schools, specialising in music and combined arts. He holds an MA in Music and Education from the University of London Institute of Education, and he has worked as professional development consultant, project *animateur* and workshop facilitator for Lambeth Education and Hackney music service. Paul has also collaborated with English Pocket Opera Company, the British Film Institute, and the South Bank Centre Gamelan on outreach projects for Primary schools.





Poppea - Friday and Saturday: Rachel Allen. Hailing from the west coast of Canada, soprano Rachel Allen has been praised for bringing "great tenderness" and "seductive power" to her singing. Rachel is currently pursuing a Master of Performance at the Royal College of Music studying with Alison Wells. She is grateful to be supported at the RCM by the Robert Anderson Award, and by Help Musicians UK through an Ian Fleming award. Recent operatic roles include Valletto/Fortuna/Pallade (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Grimeborn), Morgana (Alcina, Grimeborn) and Bellezza/Semele/Hora Seconda (*L'Agisto*, Hampstead Garden Opera). As an ensemble singer, Rachel has performed with the Monteverdi Choir, Gabrieli Consort, the Queen's Chappell and in the chorus of Opera Atelier.

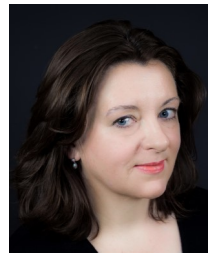
Nerone - Friday: Dima Bakri. Dima is the only Arab singer in the world specializing in European historical music and the first Palestinian mezzo soprano. First prize winner of the Vivaldi International music competition with Excellence Nomination and interpretation. Performances as soloist include: *Venus, Gli amori d'Apollo e di Dafne*, Cavalli, Venice. *Silvio, Zenobia regina de' Palmireni*, Albinoni, Venice. Haydn's *Theresienmesse*, Vivaldi's *Gloria Mass*, Orpheus Concert Tour, Nazareth, Haifa & Galilee (2018-19, 2019-20). Handel, *Cornelia, Giulio Cesare*, Venice. *Venezia Porta D'oriente, La musica e la via della seta*, Venezia. Festival Giovanni Morelli 2021, *Un cielo nascosto*, Venezia. *Moving Still*, Martha Gentilucci, premiere, Venezia. Giovanni Legrenzi, *Te deum*, 2022, Venice. Also several solo baroque recitals and many chamber music concerts.



Nerone - Saturday: Spanish mezzosoprano Julia Portela Piñón is currently a member of the Judith Neilson Young Artist Programme at Cape Town Opera, South Africa. Julia sang the role of Nerone for EO's performances at the Arcola Theatre in 2022. She is a recent graduate of the Opera School at the Royal Academy of Music, where she also holds a Master of Arts with Distinction and a Bachelor of Music in Performance. Operatic appearances include Tirinto in Handel's *Imeneo* (2022), cover of *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. Future roles include *Armeline* in Cape Town Opera's premiere of Viardot's *Cendrillon* (2023), *Ruggiero* in EO's revival production of Handel's *Alcina* (2024), and *Lisetta* in Haydn's *Il mondo della luna* at Teatro Colón in A Coruña, Spain (2024).



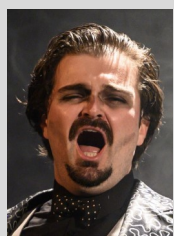
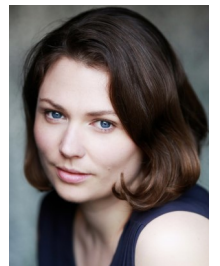
Ottone - Juliet Telford: Friday. Previously a choral scholar at Clare College, Juliet went on to hold senior positions in financial services in the City of London before returning to singing, undertaking a postgraduate diploma at Trinity Laban Conservatoire where roles included Madge in McNeff's *Banished* (premiere) and Arnalta in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Subsequent roles have included Orfeo (*Orfeo ed Euridice*), Miss Todd (*The Old Maid & the Thief*) and Sorceress (*Dido and Aeneas*) for *Handmade Opera*; *Suzy/Lolette (La Rondine)* & *Carmen* for *Mediterranean Opera Festival*; *Florence Pike (Albert Herring)* for *Miami Music Festival*; *Maddalena (Rigoletto)* and *Zita (Gianni Schicchi)* for *Camerata de Bardi*, *First Norn (Götterdämmerung)* and *Klytemenaestra (Elektra)* for *New York Dramatic Voices* and *La Zia Principessa (Suor Angelica)* for *Varna Festival*. She enjoys playing horrible old women, suspiciously small men, and ladies of questionable morals, which is just as well.



Ottone - Israel Romero: Saturday. Israel Romero is a Mexican born international countertenor and tenor based in New York City. He has recently performed the role of Nerone in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in Saluzzo Opera Academy and was part of the Opera Studio of the Berlin Opera Academy during the summer of 2022. He has performed diverse operas and musicals as well as contemporary music in NYC, Berlin, Milan and Mexico. He holds a Bachelor in Music in Voice Performance and a minor in Music Theatre from Montclair State University. He has performed in venues such as the Carnegie Hall in New York City and the Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City. As an educator he is voice teacher/coach and a language teacher. His students have appeared off Broadway, in regional theatres and on TV. He serves on the performing arts and world language faculty at The Hudson School in Hoboken, New Jersey.



Ottavia - Friday and Saturday: lyric soprano Hazel Neighbour is a recent graduate of the Royal Academy of Music opera studio where she studied with renowned soprano Nuccia Focile. She has worked for Glyndebourne, Mid Wales Opera, and the Grimeborn Festival and is an alumna of British Youth Opera, Dartington International Festival, and the Franz-Schubert-Institut. Roles include *Contessa Almaviva, Le nozze di Figaro, Micaëla, Carmen; Governess, The Turn of the Screw* and *Gretel, Hänsel und Gretel*. A passionate exponent of contemporary music, Hazel created the role of ATALYA in *The Butt*, adapted from the celebrated book by Will Self at the contemporary music festival Musiktheatertage Wien in Austria. Before studying singing, Hazel read Chemistry at Imperial College London. Hazel's upcoming role debuts include *Violetta Valéry, La traviata; Rosalinde, Die Fledermaus*, and *Mimì, La bohème*.

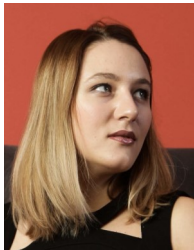


Arnalta/Liberto - Friday and Saturday: Oguzhan Engin was born in 1995 in Izmir, Turkey. He started his career in 2008 with the Karsiyaka Municipality Theatre Society. While continuing his music education at Isilay Saygin Fine Arts High School, he decided to pursue a career in opera. He began his studies at the Dokuz Eylul State Conservatory with tenor Aydin Ustuk. During his high school and university life, he took part in various choirs, and had the opportunity to work with Weiland Satter, Emma Kirkby, Prof Guzin Gurel, Burak Bilgili, Lacin Modiri, Roberto Scandiuzzi, Prof Dr Zibelhan Dagdelen, Assoc Dr Linet Saul. Assoc Dr Pinar Uzman Karacali. He continues his artistic career with various choirs and solo recitals.



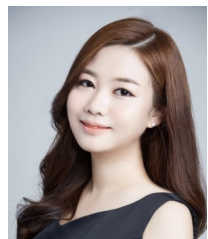
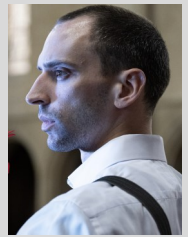
Drusilla - Friday: Margarita Maria Kevrekidou is a Greek coloratura soprano who was born in Thessaloniki. She studied classical singing at the University of Macedonia (Greece) and at the Akadémia umení v Banskej Bystrici in Slovakia. Recent roles include Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra), Iphise and Verité in Monteclair's *Jephté* (La Pellegrina Baroque Ensemble), and Premiere Pretresse in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* (Greek Opera). Other roles include Adele (Strauss) and Serpina (Pergolesi). Oratorio highlights include Beethoven's Choral Fantasy, Mozart's Coronation Mass, Pergolesi *Stabat Mater* and Rossini *Stabat Mater*, and Reimann *Pastoralmesse* in C. Margarita is a PhD researcher at the University of Macedonia in the department of classical singing and speaks English, German, Italian and Greek.

Drusilla - Saturday: Tara Venkatesan (B.S. Yale University, PhD Oxford University) is an Indian soprano and cognitive scientist. She studies how technologies, like VR and AI, impact music consumption and creation. Opera highlights include: Clori (lead) in *L'Egisto*, Galatea in *Acis & Galatea*, Cassandra in *La Didone*, Thalia in *La Morte d'Orfeo* (Yale Baroque Opera Project), Sandman in *Hansel und Gretel* (Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama), and Flore in *Cephale et Procris* (Ensemble OrQuesta). Oratorio highlights include: Peri in *Das Paradies und die Peri* and the soprano soloist in Haydn's *Nelsonmass* (Oxford Symphony), Rameau's *Quam Dilecta* (Wykeham Consort), and Handel's *Messiah* (American Baroque Orchestra).



Amore/Damigella - Friday and Saturday: Ana Torbica received her Master of Arts degree in singing and baroque viola from the Historical Performance Department of the Royal Academy of Music, where she was awarded the Christopher Hogwood Scholarship, the Royal Academy of Music Scholarship, and an award from the Johnathan Julian Fund. Ana's passion for early music was ignited through her involvement at the Belgrade and Austria Baroque Academies and the Dartington International Summer School. She has performed across the UK, Europe, and the USA with legendary musicians like Trevor Pinnock, Philippe Herreweghe and John Butt, as well as ensembles such as New Trinity Baroque, Ensemble OrQuesta, and Musica Poetica. Ana has won several chamber music and singing competitions and has been awarded grants from the Makris Music Society and the Macfarlane Walker Trust. In 2020 she was awarded the Best Young Artist Award from the Serbian Association of Musicians.

Seneca - Friday and Saturday: Bass Jay Rockwell is currently studying at the Conservatorio Superior de Música Valencia. Recent performances include *La Jalousie* in Ensemble OrQuesta's UK premiere of Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's *Cephale et Procris* at The Cockpit, London, *Le Fauteuil* and *L'Arbre* (*L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*) and *Bartolo* (*Le nozze di Figaro*) with Conservatorio Superior de Música Valencia, *Masetto* (*Don Giovanni*) with Ensemble OrQuesta Opera Academy, *Seneca* (*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*) with Saluzzo Opera Academy, and *Colline* (*La bohème*) with North Wales Opera Studio.

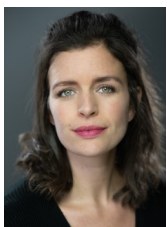


Fortuna/Valletto - Friday: Youkyong Song achieved a Bachelor's Degree in Voice and Master's degree in Music Education from Ewha Womans University in South Korea, and a Postgraduate degree in Vocal Performance at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp under the tutelage of Susanne Schimack. Roles include: Erste Dame in *Die Zauberflöte* (2010, Seoul), and Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (2020, Brussels). Upcoming roles include: Sandmann, *Hänsel und Gretel* and Zerlina, *Don Giovanni* (Vienna). Youkyong was awarded first prize in the 14th Sejong Orchestra Music Competition in 2016. She has participated in masterclasses given by Dame Emma Kirkby at the Dartington Summer Music Festival, a French baroque masterclass conducted by György Vashegyi, and a German baroque masterclass given by Bettina Pahn and Benno Schatner in HfK Bremen.

Fortuna/Valletto - Saturday, Lucano - Friday and Saturday: Swiss soprano Martina Ganchuk studied at the Zurich University of the Arts and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff. Martina will make her opera debut at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff singing Papagena in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and First Nursemaid in Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*. Martina is also active on the concert platform. Highlights include Shakespeare scenes at the Zurich Festival, Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Capriccio Baroque Orchestra, and Beat Furrer's acoustic theatre piece *FAMA*, about the resonance of memories and stories (composed in 2004), at Tonhalle Zurich. Baroque music is Martina's greatest love.



Pallade - Friday and Saturday: lyric 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. 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: *Aurora* (*Cephale et Procris*, Jacquet de la Guerre), *Mimi* (*La bohème*, Puccini); *Poppea*, *Nerone & Valletto* (*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Monteverdi); *Alcina & Morgana* (*Alcina*, Handel); Mozart's *Countess Almaviva* and *Barbarina*, (*Le Nozze di Figaro*); *Pamina* and *Erste Dame* (*Die Zauberflöte*); *Despina* (*Così fan tutte*); *Emilie* (*Les Indes Galantes*, Rameau); *Climene* (*L'Egisto*, Cavalli); *Galatea* (*Acis and Galatea*, Handel); *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).





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 **Sacconi**. 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 Nerone 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 significant 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. 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 following 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 librettist 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* – Monteverdi's significance and the breaking of 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'.

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. In *L'incoronazione* Monteverdi uses all the means for vocal expression available to a composer of his time. 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. 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**'.