

= L 'incoronazione di Poppea =

L 'incoronazione di Poppea ( SV 308 , The Coronation of Poppaea ) is an Italian opera by Claudio Monteverdi , with a libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello , 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 Poppaea , mistress of the Roman emperor Nero , is able to achieve her ambition and be crowned empress . 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 . Since the 1960s , the opera has been performed and recorded many times .

The original manuscript of the score does not exist ; two surviving copies from the 1650s show significant differences from each other , and each differs to some extent from the libretto . How much of the music is actually Monteverdi 's , and how much the product of others , is a matter of dispute . 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 . Details of the original cast are few and largely speculative , 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 .

In a departure from traditional literary morality , it is the adulterous liaison of Poppea and Nerone which wins the day , although this triumph is demonstrated by history to have been transitory and hollow . In Busenello 's version of the story all the major characters are morally compromised . Written when the genre of opera was only a few decades old , the music for L 'incoronazione di Poppea has been praised for its originality , its melody , and for its reflection of the human attributes of its characters . The work helped to redefine the boundaries of theatrical music and established Monteverdi as the leading musical dramatist of his time .

= = Historical context = =

Opera as a dramatic genre originated around the turn from the 16th to the 17th centuries , although the word itself was not in use before 1650 . Precursors of musical drama included pastoral plays with songs and choruses , and the madrigal comedies of the late 16th century . Monteverdi had already established himself as a leading composer of madrigals before writing his first full @-@ length operas in the years 1606 ? 08 , while he was in the service of Vincenzo Gonzaga , Duke of Mantua . These works , L 'Orfeo and L 'Arianna , deal respectively with the Greek myths of Orpheus and Ariadne . After a disagreement in 1612 with Vincenzo 's successor , Duke Francesco Gonzaga , Monteverdi moved to Venice to take up the position of director of music at St Mark 's Basilica , where he remained until his death in 1643 .

Amid his official duties at Venice , Monteverdi maintained an interest in theatrical music and produced several stage works , including the substantial Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda ( The battle of Tancred and Clorinda ) for the 1624 ? 25 carnival . When the first public opera house in the world opened in Venice in 1637 , Monteverdi , by then in his 70th year , returned to writing full @-@ scale opera . He may have been influenced by the solicitations of Giacomo Badoaro , an aristocratic poet and intellectual who sent the elderly composer the libretto for Il ritorno d 'Ulisse in patria ( The return of Ulysses ) . For the 1639 ? 40 carnival season , Monteverdi revived L 'Arianna at the Teatro San Moisè and later produced his setting of Il ritorno at the Teatro San Cassiano . For the following season he wrote Le nozze d 'Enea in Lavinia ( The marriage of Aeneas to Lavinia ) , now lost , which was performed at the third of Venice 's new opera theatres , Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo .

Another wealthy poet @-@ librettist in the Venice milieu was Giovanni Francesco Busenello ( 1598 ? 1659 ) , like Badoaro a member of the intellectual society Accademia degli Incogniti . This group of free @-@ thinking intellectuals had significant influence on the cultural and political life of Venice in the mid @-@ 17th century , and was particularly active in the promotion of musical theatre . Busenello had worked with Monteverdi 's younger contemporary Francesco Cavalli , providing the

libretto for *Didone* ( 1641 ) , and according to theatre historian Mark Ringer was " among the greatest librettists in the history of opera " . It is unclear how and when Busenello met Monteverdi , though both had served in the Gonzaga court . Ringer speculates that they drew joint inspiration from their experiences of the Gonzaga style of rule , " a mixture of artistic cultivation and brutality " , and thus developed a shared artistic vision .

= = Creation = =

= = = Libretto = = =

The main sources for the story told in Busenello 's libretto are the *Annals* of Tacitus ; book 6 of Suetonius 's history *The Twelve Caesars* ; books 61 ? 62 of Dio Cassius 's *Roman History* ; and an anonymous play *Octavia* ( once attributed to the real life Seneca ) , from which the opera 's fictional nurse characters were derived . The main story is based on real people and events . According to the analyst Magnus Schneider , the character of Drusilla was taken from Girolamo Bargagli 's 16th @-@ century comedy *The Pilgrim Woman* .

Busenello condensed historical events from a seven @-@ year period ( AD 58 to AD 65 ) into a single day 's action , and imposed his own sequence . He was open about his intention to adapt history for his own purposes , writing in the preface to his libretto that " here we represent these actions differently . " Thus he gave his characters different attributes from those of their historical counterparts : Nerone 's cruelty is downplayed ; the wronged wife Ottavia is presented as a murderous plotter ; Seneca , whose death in reality had nothing to do with Nerone 's liaison with Poppea , appears as more noble and virtuous than he was ; Poppea 's motives are represented as based on genuine love as much as on a lust for power ; the depiction of Lucano as a drunken carouser disguises the real life poet Lucan 's status as a major Roman poet with marked anti @-@ imperial and pro @-@ republican tendencies .

The libretto has survived in numerous forms ? two printed versions , seven manuscript versions or fragments , and an anonymous scenario , or summary , related to the original production . One of the printed editions relates to the opera 's 1651 Naples revival ; the other is Busenello 's final version published in 1656 as part of a collection of his libretti . The manuscripts are all from the 17th century , though not all are specifically dated ; some are " literary " versions unrelated to performances . The most significant of the manuscript copies is that discovered in Udine , Northern Italy , in 1997 by Monteverdi scholar Paolo Fabbri . This manuscript , according to music historian Ellen Rosand , " bristles with the immediacy of a performance " , and is the only copy of the libretto that mentions Monteverdi by name . This , and other descriptive details missing from other copies , leads Rosand to speculate that the manuscript was copied during the course of a performance . This impression is reinforced , she says , by the inclusion of a paean of praise to the singer ( Anna di Valerio according to Schneider ) who played the role of Poppea . Although its dating is uncertain , the manuscript 's affinity with the original scenario has led to speculation that the Udine version may have been compiled from the first performance .

= = = Composition = = =

Two versions of the musical score of *L 'incoronazione* exist , both from the 1650s . The first was rediscovered in Venice in 1888 , the second in Naples in 1930 . The Naples score is linked to the revival of the opera in that city in 1651 . Both scores contain essentially the same music , though each differs from the printed libretto and has unique additions and omissions . In each score the vocal lines are shown with basso continuo accompaniment ; the instrumental sections are written in three parts in the Venice score , four parts in the Naples version , without in either case specifying the instruments . Conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt , a leading Monteverdi interpreter , refers to the contemporary practice of leaving much of a score open , to allow for differing local performance conditions . Another convention made it unnecessary to write down detail that performers would take

for granted . Neither Venice nor Naples score can be linked to the original performance ; although the Venice version is generally regarded as the more authentic , modern productions tend to use material from both .

The question of authorship ? essentially of how much of the music is Monteverdi 's ? is a contentious one , which Rosand acknowledges might never be entirely resolved . Virtually none of the contemporary documentation mentions Monteverdi , and music by other composers has been identified in the scores , including passages found in the score of Francesco Sacrati 's opera *La finta pazza* . A particular style of metric notation used in some passages of the *L'incoronazione* scores suggests the work of younger composers . The most debated areas of authorship are parts of the prologue , Ottone 's music , the flirtation scene between Valetto and Damigella , and the coronation scene including the final " *Pur ti miro* " duet .

Modern scholarship inclines to the view that *L'incoronazione* was the result of collaboration between Monteverdi and others , with the old composer playing a guiding role . Composers who may have assisted include Sacrati , Benedetto Ferrari and Francesco Cavalli . Ringer suggests that Monteverdi 's age and health may have prevented him from completing the opera without help from younger colleagues ; he speculates about an arrangement resembling " the workshop of Rubens , who might design a painting and handle the important details himself but leave the more mundane aspects ... to younger apprentice artists . " The musicologist Alan Curtis believes that only a single collaborator was involved , and published his 1989 edition of *L'incoronazione* under the joint authorship of Monteverdi and Sacrati . The musical analyst Eric Chafe 's study of Monteverdi 's tonal language supports the collaboration theory and postulates that some of the sections in question , including the prologue , the coronation scene and the final duet , reflect Monteverdi 's intentions and may have been written under his direct supervision .

= = = Morality = = =

*L'incoronazione di Poppea* is frequently described as a story in which virtue is punished and greed rewarded , running counter to the normal conventions of literary morality . The musicologist Tim Carter calls the opera 's characters and their actions " famously problematic " , and its messages " at best ambiguous and at worst perverted " , while Rosand refers to an " extraordinary glorification of lust and ambition " . The critic Edward B. Savage asserts that despite the lack of a moral compass in virtually all the main characters , Busenello 's plot is itself essentially moral , and that " this morality is sustained by the phenomenon of dramatic irony " . 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 in reality 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 .

Seventeenth @-@ century Rome , under autocratic papal rule , was perceived by republican Venetians as a direct threat to their liberties . Rosand has suggested that Venetian audiences would have understood the *Poppea* story in the context of their own times as a moral lesson demonstrating the superiority of Venice , and that " such immorality was only possible in a decaying society , not [ in ] a civilized nation " . Rosand concludes that the opera 's broad moral compass places it first in a long tradition of operatic works that embraces Mozart 's *Don Giovanni* and Verdi 's *Don Carlos* . Music analyst Clifford Bartlett writes that " Monteverdi 's glorious music goes beyond Busenello 's cynical realism , and presents human behaviour in a better light " .

= = Roles = =

The score for *L'incoronazione* features 28 singing characters , including 7 ensemble parts , of which the two Amori may only have appeared in the 1651 Naples production . The original Venetian production evidently made use of extensive role @-@ doubling , allowing the opera to be staged with no more than 11 singers : two female sopranos , three male sopranos ( castratos ) , two

contraltos ( castratos ) , two tenors and two basses . Schneider has suggested the following reconstruction of the cast and the doubling plan from the 1643 premiere on the basis of an examination of , first , contemporary casting and doubling practices , secondly , the recently discovered correspondence of the impresario Marquess Cornelio Bentivoglio , and finally the libretto for *La finta savia* , which preceded *Poppea* on the stage of the Santi Giovanni e Paolo in the 1643 Carnival and was written for the same cast .

= = Synopsis = =

The action takes place in Imperial Rome around AD 60 , in and around *Poppea* 's villa and in various locations within the imperial palace .

= = = Prologue = = =

The goddesses of Fortune and Virtue dispute which of them has the most power over humankind . They are interrupted by the god of Love , who claims greater power than either : " I tell the virtues what to do , I govern the fortunes of men . " When they have heard his story , he says , they will admit his superior powers .

= = = Act 1 = = =

Ottone arrives at *Poppea* 's villa , intent on pursuing his love . Seeing the house guarded by the Emperor *Nerone* 's soldiers he realises he has been supplanted , and his love song turns to a lament : " Ah , ah , perfidious *Poppea* ! " He leaves , and the waiting soldiers gossip about their master 's amorous affairs , his neglect of matters of state and his treatment of the Empress *Ottavia* . *Nerone* and *Poppea* enter and exchange words of love before *Nerone* departs . *Poppea* is warned by her nurse , *Arnalta* , to be careful of the empress 's wrath and to distrust *Nerone* 's apparent love for her , but *Poppea* is confident : " I fear no setback at all . "

The scene switches to the palace , where *Ottavia* bemoans her lot ; " Despised queen , wretched consort of the emperor ! " Her nurse suggests she take a lover of her own , advice which *Ottavia* angrily rejects . *Seneca* , *Nerone* 's former tutor , addresses the empress with flattering words , and is mocked by *Ottavia* 's page , *Valleto* , who threatens to set fire to the old man 's beard . Left alone , *Seneca* receives a warning from the goddess *Pallade* that his life is in danger . *Nerone* enters and confides that he intends to displace *Ottavia* and marry *Poppea* . *Seneca* demurs ; such a move would be divisive and unpopular . " I care nothing for the senate and the people , " replies *Nero* , and when the sage persists he is furiously dismissed . *Poppea* joins *Nerone* , and tells him that *Seneca* claims to be the power behind the imperial throne . This so angers *Nerone* that he instructs his guards to order *Seneca* to commit suicide .

After *Nero* leaves , *Ottone* steps forward and after failing to persuade *Poppea* to reinstate him in her affections , privately resolves to kill her . He is then comforted by a noblewoman , *Drusilla* ; realising that he can never regain *Poppea* 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 2 = = =

In his garden , *Seneca* learns from the god *Mercurio* that he is soon to die . The order duly arrives from *Nerone* , and *Seneca* instructs his friends to prepare a suicide bath . His followers try to persuade him to remain alive , but he rejects their pleading . " The warm current of my guiltless blood shall carpet with royal purple my road to death . " At the palace *Ottavia* 's page flirts with a lady @-@ in @-@ waiting , while *Nerone* and the poet *Lucano* celebrate the death of *Seneca* in a drunken , cavorting song contest , and compose love songs in honour of *Poppea* . Elsewhere in the palace *Ottone* , in a long soliloquy , ponders how he could have thought to kill *Poppea* with whom he remains hopelessly in love . 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 . He then persuades Drusilla to lend him her clothes .

In the garden of Poppea 's villa , Arnalta sings her mistress to sleep while the god of Love looks on . Ottone , now disguised as Drusilla , enters the garden and raises his sword to kill Poppea . Before he can do so , Love strikes the sword from his hand , and he runs away . His fleeing figure is seen by Arnalta and the now awakened Poppea , who believe that he is Drusilla . They call on their servants to give chase , while Love sings triumphantly " I protected her ! "

= = = Act 3 = = =

Drusilla muses on the life of happiness before her , when Arnalta arrives with a lictor . Arnalta accuses Drusilla of being 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 is impressed by Drusilla 's fortitude , and in an act of clemency spares Ottone 's life , ordering him banished . Drusilla chooses exile with him . Nerone now feels entitled to act against Ottavia and she is exiled , too . This leaves the way open for him to marry Poppea , who is overjoyed : " No delay , no obstacle can come between us now . "

Ottavia bids a quiet farewell to Rome , while in the throne room of the palace the coronation ceremony for Poppea is prepared . The Consuls and Tribunes enter , and after a brief eulogy place the crown on Poppea 's head . Watching over the proceedings is the god of Love with his mother , Venere and a divine chorus . Nerone and Poppea sing a rapturous love duet ( " I gaze at you , I possess you " ) as the opera ends .

= = Reception and performance history = =

= = = Early performances = = =

L 'incoronazione di Poppea was first performed at the Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo , Venice , as part of the 1642 ? 43 carnival season . The theatre , opened in 1639 , had earlier staged the première of Monteverdi 's opera *Le Nozze d 'Enea in Lavinia* , and a revival of the composer 's *Il ritorno d 'Ulisse in patria* . The theatre was later described by an observer : " ... marvellous scene changes , majestic and grand appearances [ of the performers ] ... and a magnificent flying machine ; you see , as if commonplace , glorious heavens , deities , seas , royal palaces , woods , forests ... " . The theatre held about 900 people , and the stage was much bigger than the auditorium .

The date of the first performance of L 'incoronazione and the number of times the work was performed are unknown ; the only date recorded is that of the beginning of the carnival , 26 December 1642 . A surviving scenario , or synopsis , prepared for the first performances , gives neither the date nor the composer 's name . The identity of only one of the première cast is known for certain : Anna Renzi , who played Ottavia . Renzi , in her early twenties , is described by Ringer as " opera 's first prima donna " and was , according to a contemporary source , " as skillful in acting as she [ was ] excellent in music " . On the basis of the casting of the opera which shared the theatre with L 'incoronazione during the 1642 ? 43 season , it is possible that Poppea was played by Anna di Valerio , and Nerone by the castrato Stefano Costa . There are no surviving accounts of the opera 's public reception , unless the encomium to the singer playing Poppea , part of the libretto documentation discovered at Udine in 1997 , relates to the first performance .

There is only one documented early revival of L 'incoronazione , in Naples in 1651 . The fact that it was revived at all is noted by Carter as " remarkable , in an age where memories were short and large @-@ scale musical works often had limited currency beyond their immediate circumstance . "

Thereafter there are no records of the work 's performance for more than 250 years .

= = = Rediscovery = = =

After two centuries in which Monteverdi had been largely forgotten as a composer of opera , interest in his theatrical works revived in the late 19th century . A shortened version of Orfeo was performed in Berlin in 1881 ; a few years later the Venice score of L 'incoronazione was rediscovered , leading to a surge of scholarly attention . In 1905 , in Paris , the French composer Vincent d 'Indy directed a concert performance of L 'incoronazione , limited to " the most beautiful and interesting parts of the work . " D 'Indy 's edition was published in 1908 , and his version was staged at the Théâtre des Arts , Paris , on 5 February 1913 , the first recorded theatrical performance of the work since 1651 . The work was not received uncritically ; the dramatist Romain Rolland , who had assisted d 'Indy , wrote that Monteverdi had " sacrifice [ d ] freedom and musical beauty to beauty of line . Here we no longer have the palpable texture of musical poetry that we admire in Orfeo . "

In April 1926 the German @-@ born composer Werner Josten directed the opera 's first American performance , at Smith College , Massachusetts where he was professor of music . His production was based on d 'Indy 's edition . The following year , on 27 October , L 'incoronazione received its British première , with a performance at Oxford Town Hall by members of the Oxford University Opera Club using a score edited by Jack Westrup . In the 1930s several editions of the opera were prepared by leading contemporary musicians , including Gustav Mahler 's son @-@ in @-@ law Ernst Krenek , Hans Redlich , Carl Orff ( who left his version incomplete ) , and Gian Francesco Malipiero . Malipiero 's edition was used to stage performances in Paris ( 1937 ) and Venice ( 1949 ) . The Redlich edition was performed at Morley College , London in 1948 , under the direction of Michael Tippett .

Richard Strauss made reference to L 'incoronazione in the Act III music lesson scene of his 1935 opera , Die schweigsame Frau , completely recomposing the Act 2 , Scene 5 duet " Sento un certo non so che " in his own florid and late @-@ Romantic idiom as one of many uses of preexisting musical material to set an appreciably antique atmosphere by the standards of the time . In that scene , the duet is used as an excuse for the title role to flirt with her husband , in disguise as a singing teacher .

Until the 1960s performances of L 'incoronazione were relatively rare in commercial opera theatres , but they became increasingly frequent in the decade that saw the quatercentenary of Monteverdi 's birth . The 1962 Glyndebourne Festival anticipated the quatercentenary with a lavish production using a new edition by Raymond Leppard . This version , controversially , was adapted for a large orchestra , and though it was enthusiastically received it has subsequently been described by Carter as a " travesty " , and its continuing use in some modern productions as indefensible . A version by Erich Kraack was conducted by Herbert von Karajan at the Vienna State Opera in 1963 ; the following decades saw performances at Lincoln Center in New York , Turin , Venice and a revival of the Leppard version at Glyndebourne . The Venice performance at La Fenice on 5 December 1980 was based on Alan Curtis 's new edition , described by Rosand as " the first to attempt a scholarly collation and rationalization of the sources " . The Curtis edition was used by Santa Fe Opera in August 1986 , in a production which according to The New York Times " gave music precedence over musicology " , resulting in a performance that was " rich and stunningly beautiful " .

= = = Recent revivals = = =

The 350th anniversary of Monteverdi 's death , celebrated in 1993 , brought a further wave of interest in his works , and since that time performances of L 'incoronazione have been given in opera houses and music festivals all over the world . In April 1994 the Juilliard School in New York presented a version based on Curtis 's edition , with an orchestra that mixed baroque and modern elements . The New York Times 's Allen Kozinn wrote that this production had done well to resolve daunting problems arising from Monteverdi 's having left instrumentation and scoring details open ,

and from the numerous competing versions of the score . In 2000 the work was chosen by Opéra de Montréal as the company 's first venture into baroque opera , with a performance directed by Renaud Doucet . Opera Canada reported that Doucet had found " a perfect rhetoric for a modern crowd , creating an atmosphere of moral ambivalence that the courtiers of Monteverdi 's day would have taken for granted . " Less successful , in the critics ' eyes , was the innovative English National Opera ( ENO ) production directed by Chen Shi @-@ Zheng in October 2007 . According to The London Evening Standard critic Fiona Maddocks the cast was strong , but they all seemed to be playing in the wrong roles . For unexplained reasons much of the action took place underwater ; at one point " a snorkeller flip @-@ flops across the stage in a harness . " Seneca " wore green Wellington boots and pushed a lawnmower " . At the end of 2007 , in his opera review of the year , The Daily Telegraph 's Rupert Christiansen compared ENO 's production unfavourably with a punk musical version of the opera that had been staged during that year 's Edinburgh Festival .

In May 2008 L 'incoronazione returned to Glyndebourne in a new production by Robert Carsen , with Leppard 's large @-@ scale orchestration replaced by the period instruments of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment under Emmanuelle Haïm . The Organ 's reviewer praised the vocal quality of the performers , found Haim 's handling of the orchestra " a joy throughout " and declared the whole production " a blessed relief " after the previous year 's ENO staging . On 19 August the Glyndebourne singers and the orchestra , led by Haim , presented a semi @-@ staged version of the opera at the 2008 BBC Proms , at the Royal Albert Hall . Elsewhere the French @-@ based ensemble Les Arts Florissants , under its director William Christie , presented the Monteverdi trilogy of operas ( L 'Orfeo , Il ritorno d 'Ulisse and L 'incoronazione ) in the period 2008 ? 10 , with a series of performances at the Teatro Real in Madrid .

= = Music = =

Written early in the history of opera , L 'incoronazione di Poppea broke new ground in matching music to stage action , and in its musical reproductions of the natural inflections of the human voice . Monteverdi uses all the means for vocal expression available to a composer of his time ? aria , arioso , arietta , ensemble , recitative ? although Ringer comments that in this work the boundaries between these forms are more than usually porous . These elements are woven into a continuous fabric which ensures that the music always serves the drama , while maintaining a tonal and formal unity throughout . The characters have strong emotions , fears and desires which are reflected in their music . Thus Poppea 's and Nerone 's scenes are generally lyrical , sung mainly in the forms of arioso and aria , while Ottavia sings only in dramatic recitative . Seneca 's music is bold and compelling , while Ottone 's is hesitant and limited in range , " entirely inappropriate for anyone aspiring to be a man of action " according to Carter . Within this arrangement Monteverdi creates enough melodies to ensure that the opera is musically as well as dramatically memorable .

Monteverdi employs specific musical devices to signify moods and situations . For example , triple metre signifies the language of love for Nerone and Ottone ( unfulfilled in the latter case ) ; forceful arpeggios are used to represent conflict ; and the interlacing of texts , written as separate verses by Busenello , indicates sexual tension in the scenes with Nerone and Poppea , and escalates the discord between Nerone and Seneca . The technique of " concitato genere " ? rapid semiquavers sung on one note ? is used to represent rage . Secret truths may be hinted at as , for example , when Seneca 's friends plead with him to reconsider his suicide in a chromatic madrigal chorus which Monteverdi scholar Denis Arnold finds reminiscent of Monteverdi 's Mantuan days , carrying a tragic power rarely seen in 17th century opera . This is followed , however , by a cheerful diatonic section by the same singers which , says Rosand , suggests a lack of real sympathy with Seneca 's predicament . The descending tetrachord ostinato on which the final duet of the opera is built has been anticipated in the scene in which Nerone and Lucano celebrate Seneca 's death , hinting at an ambivalence in the relationship between emperor and poet . According to Rosand : " in both cases it is surely the traditional association of that pattern with sexual love that is being evoked . "

Arnold asserts that the music of L 'incoronazione has greater variety than any other opera by Monteverdi , and that the purely solo music is intrinsically more interesting than that of Il ritorno . The

musical peaks , according to commentators , include the final duet ( despite its doubtful authorship ) , Ottavia 's act 1 lament , Seneca 's farewell and the ensuing madrigal , and the drunken Nerone ? Lucano singing competition , often performed with strong homoerotic overtones . Ringer describes this scene as arguably the most brilliant in the whole opera , with " florid , synchronous coloratura by both men creating thrilling , virtuosic music that seems to compel the listener to share in their joy . " Rosand finds Nerone 's solo aria that closes the scene something of an anticlimax , after such stimulation .

Despite continuing debates about authorship , the work is almost always treated as Monteverdi 's ? although Rosand observes that some scholars attribute it to " Monteverdi " ( in quotation marks ) . Ringer calls the opera " Monteverdi 's last and arguably greatest work , " a unified masterpiece of " unprecedented depth and individuality " . Carter observes how Monteverdi 's operas redefined the boundaries of theatrical music , and calls his contribution to 17th @-@ century Venetian opera " remarkable by any standard " . Harnoncourt reflects thus : " What is difficult to understand ... is 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 . "

= = List of musical items = =

The table uses the numberings from the 1656 printed version of Busenello 's libretto , and includes the two act 2 scenes for which no music exists in the surviving scores . Typically , " scenes " comprise recitative , arioso , aria and ensemble elements , with occasional instrumental ( sinfonia ) passages . The boundaries between these elements are often indistinct ; Denis Arnold , commenting on the musical continuity , writes that " with few exceptions it is impossible to extricate the arias and duets from the fabric of the opera . "

= = Recording history = =

The first recording of L 'incoronazione , with Walter Goehr conducting the Tonhalle @-@ Orchester Zürich in a live stage performance , was issued in 1954 . This LP version , which won a Grand Prix du Disque in 1954 , is the only recording of the opera that predates the revival of the piece that began with the 1962 Glyndebourne Festival production . In 1963 Herbert von Karajan and the Vienna Staatsoper issued a version described by Gramophone as " far from authentic " , while the following year John Pritchard and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra recorded an abridged version using Leppard 's Glyndebourne orchestration . Leppard conducted a Sadler 's Wells production , which was broadcast by the BBC and recorded on 27 November 1971 . This is the only recording of the opera in English .

Nikolaus Harnoncourt 's 1974 version , the first recording without cuts , used period instruments in an effort to achieve a more authentic sound , although Denis Arnold has criticised Harnoncourt 's " over @-@ ornamentation " of the score , particularly his use of oboe and trumpet flourishes . Arnold showed more enthusiasm for Alan Curtis 's 1980 recording , live from La Fenice in Venice . Curtis uses a small band of strings , recorders and continuo , with a trumpets reserved for the final coronation scene . Subsequent recordings have tended to follow the path of authenticity , with versions from baroque specialists including Richard Hickox and the City of London Baroque Sinfonia ( 1988 ) , René Jacobs and Concerto Vocale ( 1990 ) , and John Eliot Gardiner with the English Baroque Soloists . Sergio Vartolo 's production of the opera at Pigna , Corsica , was recorded for Brilliant Classics in 2004 . A feature of this recording is the casting of a soprano Nerone in acts I and III , and a tenor Nerone in act II , to allow for the differing vocal requirements of the role in these acts . Vartolo accepts that " a staged performance would almost certainly require a different approach " .

In more recent years , videotape and DVD versions have proliferated . The first was in 1979 , a version directed by Harnoncourt with the Zurich Opera and chorus . Leppard 's second Glyndebourne production , that of 1984 , was released in DVD form in 2004 . Since then , productions directed by Jacobs , Christophe Rousset and Marc Minkowski have all been released



on DVD , along with Emmanuelle Haïm 's 2008 Glyndebourne production in which the Festival finally rejects Leppard 's big band version in favour of Haim 's period instruments , to give an experience closer to that of the original audience .

= = Editions = =

Since the beginning of the 20th century the score of L 'incoronazione has been edited frequently . Some editions , prepared for particular performances ( e.g. Westrup 's for the 1927 Oxford Town Hall performance ) have not been published . The following are the main published editions since 1904 . Years of publication often postdate the first performances from these editions .