VICTORIAN
OPERA

THE CORONATION OF POPPEA

EDUCATION RESOURCE

Victorian Opera respectfully acknowledges the people of the Eastern Kulin Nation, the Traditional Owners of the unceded land upon which we work and create.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent and their continuous connection in Caring for Country.

We reflect on our shared responsibilities to honour and respect this land and its stories, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

CONTENTS

SYNOPSIS

In a prologue, the goddesses Fortune and Virtue clash over who is superior and a third goddess, Love (or Cupid), asserts their pre-eminence. Ottone, the former lover of Poppea, is devastated when he finds out she is having an affair with Nero. Nero and Poppea are besotted with each other, and he promises to make her Empress. Poppea's servant Arnalta cautions her about the dangers of dealing with royalty. Nero's wife, Ottavia, laments her lot. She rejects the advice of her servant Nutrice to have an affair herself, as well as the philosophical consolations of Nero's mentor, Seneca. After Poppea rejects Ottone he pledges himself to Drusilla, a woman on Ottavia's staff. Nero and Seneca clash over the limits of his power and his desire to marry Poppea. After Poppea suggests that Seneca is usurping Nero's power, Nero decides that Seneca must die. A captain of Nero's guard, Liberto, conveys the order that Seneca should take his own life and Seneca accepts his fate.

In Act Two, Nero and Poppea are more openly together and celebrate their love. Ottavia orders Ottone to kill Poppea and Drusilla lends him her clothes as a disguise. After Arnalta sings Poppea to sleep, Ottone attempts to murder her, but the Goddess Love intervenes. Drusilla and Ottone confess to the conspiracy and Nero banishes them as well as Ottavia. Nero and Poppea are married and she is crowned Empress.

CAST

MEECHOT MARRERO
Poppea

SAMUEL DUNDAS
Nerone

MARGARET TRUBIANO
Ottavia

DAVID GRECO
Seneca

JEREMY KLEEMAN
Ottone

RACHEL JOYCE
Drusilla

LOUIS HURLEY
Arnalta

DOUGLAS KELLY
Liberto

BAILEY MONTGOMERIE
Nutrice

MIA ROBINSON
Amore

ALESSIA PINTABONA
La Fortuna

AMELIA WAWRZON
La Virtu

CREATIVE TEAM

CHAD KELLY

Conductor

SAM STRONG

Director

ANNA CORDINGLEY

Set & Costume Designer

MATT SCOTT

Lighting Designer

AMY CATER

Intimacy Coordinator

VICTORIAN OPERA CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

ABOUT THE WORK

The Coronation of Poppea, or *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, was the last opera that Claudio Monteverdi composed before he died. It is set to a libretto written by Giovanni Francesco Busenello, a 17th century lawyer, poet and librettist from Venice, Italy.

This opera was the first of its kind to be based on the lives and events of real people from history; prior to this, stories at the centre of opera were taken from mythology. Busenello drew from several sources (Tacitus's *Annals*, Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars* and Cassius's *Roman History*) to piece together his own version of events, condensing that which took place over several years into a single day. He also played around with character depictions, heightening or lessening the traits of each character compared to those of their historical counterparts. For example, Nero's brutality is restrained, Ottavia is depicted as a murderous plotter, Poppea's actions are based on genuine love as much as on a lust for power and Seneca is represented as more noble and virtuous than the historical figure.

The Coronation of Poppea was first performed during the carnival season of 1643 in the Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. It was revived again in Naples in 1651 but was then forgotten until a score was rediscovered in the 19th century. Two surviving copies of this opera exist: one was discovered in Venice in 1888 and the other in Naples in 1930 - both can be dated back to the 1650s. Each score notates the vocal lines, the *basso continuo* accompaniment and some of the instrumental sections, written in three parts in the Venice score and four parts in the Naples score. Details of which instruments to use are missing, however leaving instrumentation open was common practice for this period as it allowed for performances to cater to their local conditions.

This opera deals with themes that are still very prevalent today, making it an important work for the stage. Love, lust and desire are major themes throughout this work illustrating how irrational we become at the hands of lust and how the intensity of desire can drive us to insanity. It also explores themes around ambition and what lengths people will go to, to get what they want, the people they'll use and betray, and the lies they'll tell to serve their own agendas.

This opera sees Poppea and Nero prevail, ruthlessly eliminating the people who stand in their way of their desire and ambitions of power. To some extent, parallels can be drawn in today's world where we see brutality go unpunished on a daily basis and the ambitions of those in power rewarded. Despite being written in the 17th century, The *Coronation of Poppea* remains a contemporary work and serves as a reminder of what can happen when we give in to the power of love, lust and desire and are careless in our ambitions.

THE COMPOSER - CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), an Italian composer from the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods, is considered one of the greatest contributors to music innovation and widely acknowledged as one of the most important developers of modern-day opera.

Born in Cremona, Italy, Monteverdi's talents in music composition were made obvious from a young age. By the time he was 15 he had had his first two books of madrigals published by one of the most famous Venetian printers of the time. At the age of 23, he moved to Mantua to take up a string position for Guglielmo Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua. Monteverdi became the Director of Music for the Duke of Mantua in 1602, and within his first five years in the role introduced the Gonzaga Court to the newest genre, staged opera. His first opera *L'Orfeo* was staged in 1607 and was quickly followed by *L'Arianna* in 1608.

Dissatisfied with the House of Gonzaga, he took up the position of Director of Music at St Mark's Basilica in Venice in 1613. Despite his lack of experience as a church musician, he took the role very seriously, composing a large amount of church music and establishing daily choral services. When Venice opened its first public opera houses in 1636, Monteverdi, who was by then well into his 70s, took an active role in being involved. He wrote four operas in three years, of which only two survive: *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria (The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland)* and *L'Incoronazione di Poppea (The Coronation of Poppea)*. Unlike his time in Mantua, he was held in high esteem by his Venetian employers who offered him gifts of money and granted him leave to visit his hometown in the last few months of his life. He died in 1643 after a short illness and was buried in the Church of the Frari in Venice, where a monument to him remains today.

Throughout his career, Monteverdi demonstrated a strong interest in how music could align to the mood and emotion evoked in text. His first major influence was the Italian madrigalist Luca Marenzio whose madrigals he studied as a young man and who is credited with developing this very technique: that is, evoking the moods and images suggested by the text in the music. Giaches de Wert, a modernist Flemish composer and his Director of Music in Mantua, was another major influence. Wert's style was highly emotional, unmelodious and difficult to sing but it exactly matched the mood of the verse as well as the natural declamation of the words. This influence saw a complete change in direction for Monteverdi, which became evident in his next published book of madrigals. Over time however, he managed to find a better balance between the meaning of the verse and how the music matched, and his madrigals began to reflect the essence of a text rather than focussing on the minute details.

His disregard for compositional rules meant he became the figure head of the avant-garde group. He became well-known when G.M. Artusi, an Italian music theorist, composer and writer, publicly attacked and criticised Monteverdi's music in his famous 1600 treatise on the imperfection of modern music. Monteverdi responded in his fifth book of madrigals, outlining two terms he had coined that were tied to the diversity of musical taste during that time. The first which he called *prima prattica*, or first practice, referred to the "older style of composition, in which the traditional rules of counterpoint superseded expressive considerations". The second practice, or *seconda prattica*, "sought to put music in the servitude of the text by whatever means necessary, including 'incorrect' counterpoint, to vividly express the text".

As opera developed as an art form, Monteverdi became more interested in the expression of human emotion and how the characters in his operas could be recognised as everyday humans who experienced change of mind and mood. He used dissonance, instrumental colour and the singer's virtuosic ability to create a heightened emotional state and structured his compositions so that there was as much of a musical throughline as there was a dramatic one, matching the dramatic climaxes with musical ones.

Monteverdi's contributions to the development of music continue to be an important historical marker in contemporary discussions around the emotional impact of music and the development of harmony and opera. With his compositions, the polyphonic and contrapuntal textures characteristic of the Renaissance made way for a more expressive and dramatic approach that became associated with the Baroque era.

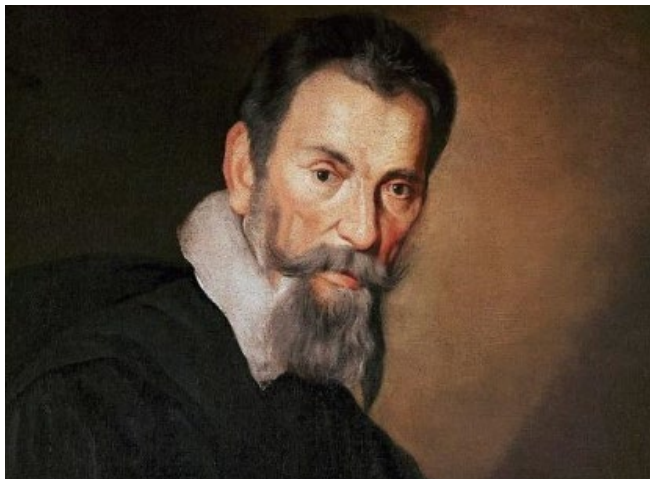


Image 1: Claudio Monteverdi

WHAT IS OPERA?

Opera as a European art form has been in existence since the 1600s and became especially popular in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Today there are many styles of opera performance, but they all have one thing in common – an opera is a play that is sung.

The predominant languages of opera are Italian, French, German and English.

The main difference between opera and music theatre is amplification: music theatre is usually amplified with the use of microphones, where opera is not. In addition, music theatre usually includes spoken dialogue as well as music and dance. Opera, on the other hand, uses recitative; a singing style designed to imitate natural speech.

WHERE DID OPERA COME FROM?

The roots of opera can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks who lived over 2,000 years ago. The advances in society that this sophisticated civilisation developed included the invention of a city-state (*polis*) resulting in a golden age in culture, music, art, poetry and drama, including beautiful sculpture, remarkable architecture and the creation of classical poetry, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. Ancient Greece had a profound influence on the discovery and advancement of science, physics, maths, astronomy and geometry, producing the influential philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. These philosophers approached the big questions of life often in a genuine scientific way, daring to question and challenge traditional conventions and prejudices of their age. The Ancient Greeks also loved the theatre, with playwrights including Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides writing enduring works that have informed the future dramatic structures of playwriting.

In the following thousand years, much of the knowledge and skills Ancient Greece had established was lost, particularly in the sciences and arts. For example, the art in what we refer to as the Middle Ages had lost some of the scientific application that had made Greek art and sculpture so lifelike. From about the 1300s, Italian scholars set out to rediscover many of the Ancient Greeks' innovations. This period was called the Renaissance, which translates literally as "rebirth". Founded in Florence, it marked a period of enlightenment and the rediscovery and study of culture, philosophy, art, architecture and science. Highly influential artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Raphael and Donatello, along with philosophers, writers and mathematicians including Galileo, Shakespeare, Erasmus and Copernicus contributed a wealth of knowledge during this era.

One art form the Renaissance scholars were particularly interested in was Greek theatre. The texts had survived time, but the performance practice indications had been lost. Scholars knew from writings by philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato that the plays were accompanied by music and this helped raise the emotional impact of the works. But how? What did the music do? How were the lines sung?

A group of thinkers and musicians from Florence called the Florentine Camerata met regularly to determine how the musical accompaniment might have sounded and supported the text. They invented a new art form in which the dialogue in a play would be sung. They decided to call the new art form 'Opera', which simply means 'a work'. The first truly successful opera was called *L'Orfeo*. It was composed by Claudio Monteverdi and is still performed today.

BAROQUE OPERA

Opera was one of the most popular art forms throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, also known as the Baroque (1600-1750) and early Classical (1750-1820) periods, beginning in Italy and then gaining popularity in Germany, France and England.

The Italian composer Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) is credited with developing the earliest form of opera that became popular throughout Italy in the 17th century. In his operatic compositions, he introduced new forms and styles that not only developed the work of the Florentine Camerata, but also conveyed the drama, expressiveness and atmosphere presented in the text.

Two characteristics of opera that were quickly established and that still appear in opera today, are the use of recitative – passages used to drive the plot forward, sung in a style that imitates the inflections of speech – and aria – a song in which characters express their emotions in a more structured melodic style. During the Baroque and Classical periods, the recitative had two basic forms: *secco* (dry), sung with a free rhythm and accompanied by harpsichord or cello in the continuo style; or *accompagnato* (accompanied), where singers would be accompanied by an orchestra. Meanwhile, the aria provided singers the opportunity to demonstrate their virtuosity.

The two main forms of opera that were established during the late Baroque and early Classical periods were *opera buffa* (comic opera) and *opera seria* (tragic or serious opera). The two forms were initially featured alongside one another in individual operas but were eventually separated into their own forms as the comedic elements of opera became more popular with audiences. The separation of the two forms was further helped along by the first reform movement of opera, sponsored by the Arcadian Academy in Rome and associated with the poet Pietro Metastasio. From this point on, *opera seria* became more elevated in tone and highly stylised in form while the comedy previously featured in operas of the early Baroque period now became reserved for *opera buffa*.

VOICE TYPES AND SINGING STYLES

There are seven voice types in opera, each of which is defined by the range of notes they can sing and their vocal quality.

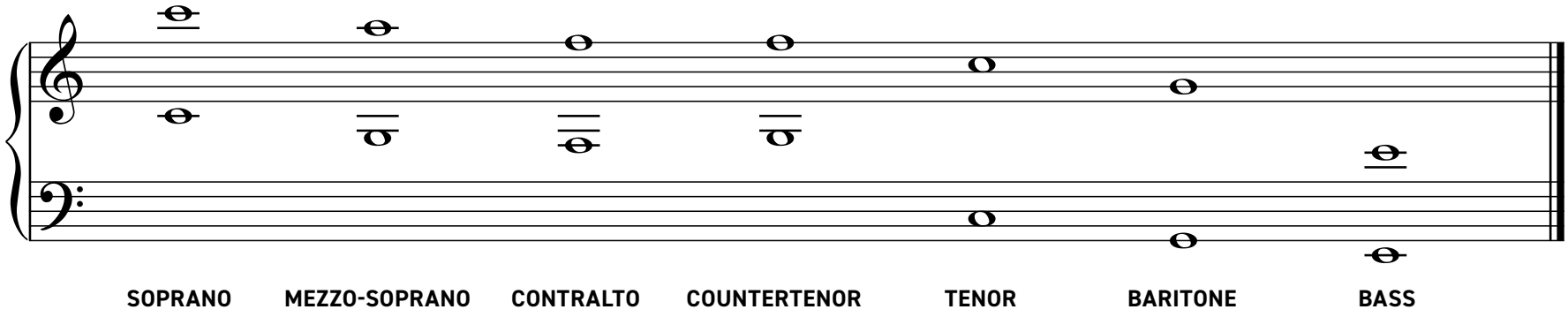
There are three female operatic voice types, although most operas only have soprano and mezzo soprano roles:

- **SOPRANO** – the highest sounding female voice with a vocal range from middle C up to the C two octaves above.
- **MEZZO-SOPRANO** – slightly lower than the soprano with a vocal range from the G below middle C to the A two octaves above.
- **CONTRALTO** – the lowest sounding female voice and rarely used in opera today. The vocal range for this voice type is from the F below middle C to two F's above middle C.

There are four male voice types, although the countertenor voice is usually only used in operas from the Baroque period:

- **COUNTERTENOR** – the highest sounding male voice with almost the same vocal range as a mezzo soprano; the G below middle C to a high F one octave above.
- **TENOR** – a high-sounding male voice. The vocal range for this type is roughly from the C below middle C to the C above.
- **BARITONE** – the middle sounding male voice with a vocal range from the second G below middle C up to the G above.
- **BASS** – the lowest sounding male voice which has a vocal range from the E two octaves below middle C to the E just above middle C; however, some bass singers can sing lower.

Below is a diagram that illustrates where each voice type sits on a music stave.



There are further categories of voice defining the kind of voice quality and the type of music they can sing. The composer will consider voice types to highlight the different characters – for example, to differentiate between a King and an everyday person, or a Princess and a Witch.

A few of these are:

COLORATURA

A very high range with the ability to sing complicated parts with agility.

DRAMATIC

A heavy sounding, powerful voice.

LYRIC

An average sized voice with the ability to sing long, beautiful phrases.

HELDENTENOR

The 'heroic tenor', a very big role that requires a powerful sound.

INTERVIEW WITH A SINGER
SAMUEL DUNDAS

How long have you been a singer and what made you want to pursue it as a career?

I've been a singer for nearly 20 years, professionally, I started in my late teens. My motivation to do it as a career was somewhat unconventional in the sense that I did it because I could. The logic behind that goes back to when I left school. I had this talent that people could see in me that I couldn't see in myself, and I felt a responsibility to live up to their expectations and their investment in that.

Was there anything else you wanted to do with your life?

No, nothing else. It was that thing where I started singing when I was 16, and it actually saved me from a lot of stuff at school, bullying and those sorts of things, and gave me an identity I hadn't felt before, something special. All of a sudden, I had a special skill. By the time I got to Year 12, I wasn't overly interested in study. I talked about joining the army because my dad had gone through it - he thought that was a terrible idea. I had a scholarship to the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music before I left school so, I didn't invest too much time in my exams and went off and did that. I hated every second of it though. I tried to move to WAPPA [Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts] halfway through my first year at Melbourne but failed the dance audition and would still fail the dance audition today. So, I finished my degree because when I started, I was committed and I was on scholarship too.

I finished my degree in 2004, but by then I just wanted to work in bars and be a normal early 20-year-old, go traveling and do all those things, so singing was percolating but not really happening and I had no internal drive. Merlyn Quaife was my teacher and because she had joined the board of the new Victorian Opera she got me an audition with Richard Gill, and it went from there.

Did you move overseas to work at all?

I never did and I'm an outlier in the sense of being someone who stayed and had their career here. Often the key opportunities in my life actually happened or became available because the person who was meant to do it went overseas to have a "legitimate" career.

Which then let you have a legitimate career.

It's one of those circumstantial things. The spot I got in the Victorian Opera Developing Artist Program was Derek Welton's until he decided to go overseas. Then at the end of my two-year tenure, Laurence Meikle was meant to take over, he went overseas and so I jokingly said I'd come back for a third year, and they said, okay. Then that led to doing *Don Giovanni* here in 2009. Then Christopher Tonkin was assumed to take the Young Artist spot at Opera Australia, and he went overseas and so I walked into that. You have to capitalise on the opportunities that come your way, but certainly, those circumstances allowed me to stay here.

You've been cast as Nero in this production. Have you sung this role before?

I haven't, it's a debut. I haven't sung a lot of early music. It's a thing for lyric baritones, there's not a lot of repertoire that suits. Baritones were a little bit bassier back then and often a lot of these roles sit a bit too low. This role was originally written for countertenor. It's actually thanks to Elena Kats-Chernin's rewriting that a baritone gets a guernsey.

Have you found anything challenging about the vocal part?

Yes, stylistically it's pretty difficult. It's obviously a very nuanced style and I feel that's been a steep learning curve. The fortune again of this production is that because it's been updated and allows for musical interpretation and improvisation, it gives it a bit of flexibility. I think it'll be interesting to see what Chad [Kelly; the conductor] wants to do with it in the room. You come in with the basic structure in your head, the language, the character, then I think there'll be some exploration of the music and the style in the room.

INTERVIEW WITH A SINGER
SAMUEL DUNDAS

Tell us a little bit about your character.

I am playing the Emperor Nero, who was one of the great, horrible Roman emperors. He was known for his brutality, he was very insecure and murderous. He rose to power as a child and then, as so many of them did, decided to clear the decks. I think he wanted to kill his mum, his first wife and his stepbrother. I consider myself to be a good person in life, so it's always a challenge to play these characters, but I think there's a bad guy in us all, and it's just about how you access them or how locked away they are. Baritones play the bad guys all the time, so I've probably had more experience at it than I care to think.

How do you prepare for a role you're going to play? Walk us through your process.

It's mainly the notes off the page, the language off the page, they're the fundamental building blocks. As I age and as I have different time allocations I have to learn in a different way. When I was younger and I had lots of time to learn things I could take my time, while now I find myself needing to be far more deliberate. I think my musicality and musicianship has come a long way too so my ability to see clues helps. It learns a bit quicker now which is great. Then once you've got it off the book, dramatically you find those things in the room. The language and the historical context informs a lot of those decisions. Then realistically, it's as much about reacting to the other person in the moment or in the context of the scene that really informs the dramatic choices that you make.

Do you do any character development before you go into the room?

Yes, historical characters you're going to go and research, but I've always found it's very easy to get lost in the biographical when playing characters from literature and history. I think sometimes it's more about understanding the emotions in the moment, because really, you're only playing two hours of these people's lives, and a very situational two hours. Sometimes I think my emotional language is often taken from film and television, and my own life.

This opera features some challenging themes, and in the end, the villains essentially prevail. How do you think this work will resonate with today's audiences?

Aren't the villains prevailing right now? It's interesting. I think back to the times in, let's say, the cultural norms of the good guys winning. Through television, we've seen that array in things like Game of Thrones and Breaking Bad. TV shows are far more willing to kill off the good guys but, I guess in those shows we get resolution. In opera it's probably far more normal for the bad guys to win.

I think so many of the things that we portray in opera run contrary to the way that we are or at least want to live our lives in society, to the things that we want to represent. I think we need to see the many operas that challenge that as a sign of how far we've come and a sign of how far we have to go and so I think audiences should come to opera to be challenged. We need to raise these issues as a method of talking about them rather than just coming for a night of entertainment.

In the lead up to this, not knowing what Sam Strong, the director, was going to do with it, I was thinking, "This is amazing. At the end of the piece, everyone just gets sent off into exile. That's lovely. All of these people who have done these dastardly things get sent off and it's all going to be okay". Unfortunately, I'm not sure that's how it's going to work out in this production. Having done a few productions this year that really challenge the social, racial and cultural norms, like *Madam Butterfly* for example, the thing I keep coming back to is that we should continue to do them, but we should continue to do them in as informed a way as possible so that when we come up against the issues we're not just blindly flipping over them. We're looking into them, we're investigating them, we're hopefully uncovering ways that we can use what we recognise as negative as a way to evolve.

INTERVIEW WITH A SINGER
SAMUEL DUNDAS

Have you worked with any of the other members of the cast and creative team before?

I haven't worked with Sam [Strong], but we met the other day. He's obviously got some great ideas and is so enthusiastic and I think that's the type of collaborative environment I like to be in. I've worked with Jeremy [Kleeman]. I haven't worked with Meechot [Marrero]. It'll be a pleasure to work with a lot of the young artists who are coming into the show as it's a great opportunity to be able to collaborate with and to potentially educate and motivate in this area, so I really look forward to that. I've been around the company for a very long time, so coming back to Victorian Opera is always really special because I know so many of the people, not only on the performative floor, but in the background, in the office and the different facets of the business. I really enjoy coming back here because of that.

What's been your favourite role to play in your career so far?

I think Marcello's been my favourite character from *La Boheme*. For me, I think it's the perfect opera, dramatically and musically. As someone who really tries to focus on the drama and the storytelling of what we do, I think it sits in a particular part of the canon where Puccini really focused on that. Obviously, the ideals and the themes that *La Boheme* deals with is very universal, and to have done that role over 13 years, your own life and experience informs that. It's probably that weird thing of being in my 40s, getting close to saying goodbye to him, I'm not a young bohemian anymore. It's such a pleasure to sing that role that you don't want to say goodbye, but there is also this idea that maybe you've found everything that exists for him. There's this nice feeling of thinking, okay, it's time to give it back and let someone else come and take the reins and impart their interpretation.

Are there any roles you'd love to play that you haven't had a chance to yet? I'm sure there'd be a few.

No, it's actually a pretty short list, to be honest. Eugene Onegin is and has always been number one. I covered it twelve years ago; I covered it at the start of this year and I'm about to go and do it in Perth. So that feels like a real box to tick.

Most of the roles I want to do are probably musical theatre rather than opera. We're all show tune lovers, opera singers. What we do is great and amazing and very relevant and they wrote some great tunes, but the show guys wrote some amazing stuff as well. So, things like Sweeney Todd, Javert [from *Les miserables*] those sorts of characters would be amazing.

What are some of the rewards and challenges of being an opera singer?

I probably don't focus on the rewards enough. I probably don't have a normal relationship to the craft in the sense of seeing it as this thing that I've always wanted to do and roles I've always wanted to sing and houses I've always wanted to sing in. Because it was something that came to me and I spent a really long time, even by the time I was at Opera Australia, riding on these natural gifts and not taking a lot of responsibility or understanding the responsibility one should take for talent. I've often felt like a bystander. I had that realisation or that sliding doors moment of I either do something with this and take responsibility and take ownership of it or I go and do something else, and so I took responsibility.

It's rewarding in the people that I've met, the people that I've worked with. I don't look at what I've done and think, oh man, that was so rewarding. It was a lot of work and a lot of personal investment and at times personal torture. I haven't always had the healthiest relationship with this job. I'm learning, I'm doing a lot of work in mental health and on my own mental health, community mental health in order to find a healthier, more proactive relationship to this. I'll probably retire and sit down and think it was really rewarding in ways that I've never conceived. It's a hard career; it's a hard job. That's not to turn people off. Challenge is the world we live in and understanding how to face those challenges in the support you can get, the motivation you need to find in yourself to push through the challenges and go and get what you want, I think it's a really important part of being an artist.

INTERVIEW WITH A SINGER
SAMUEL DUNDAS

As musicians we're constantly taught to be critical of ourselves in order to get better and that has a way of taking over at times if you don't check it. Mental health and wellbeing is often put on the back burner and we don't talk about it enough. It takes the spotlight off what the rewards might be.

One thousand per cent. The criticism thing's really interesting especially having done quite a bit of teaching, particularly at the tertiary level. I did a masterclass the other day where I come up with a multitude of catch cries that have been born out of my experience, often the negative parts of my experience. My need to formulate strategies and codes to live by that give me a sense of ownership and control is very important because so much of this job and the work that we get is not in our control.

One particular one is that the difference between criticism and critical feedback is literally interpretation. I don't think as human beings, we're overly good at criticism. I'll happily put my hand up as someone who doesn't always take criticism well. But in this job, I've learned that every time you sing, whether it's in a coaching or performance, you should be open to not just the good stuff. In fact, you should be more open to people having advice or critical feedback, because that's how we grow and it's up to you to be able to see that as an opportunity to develop rather than seeing that as someone knocking you down.

Now, there is a certain bracket of criticism that will always be criticism, and we have to learn how to keep those voices at bay, particularly so they don't inform our critical voice because that's again a big part of how we grow, it has to be a healthy relationship to that. We need to be able to encourage young singers, young anyone, to understand that growth comes from understanding your lesser parts and the drive of your best parts should motivate the desire to bring all parts to the best possible potential.

What advice would you give to any young singers looking to pursue a performance career? Is there anything you didn't know when you were younger that you wish you did?

From my own experience, I'd say mentors are incredibly important and mentors across the skill sets. I was able to avoid the disciple thing and whilst I had really poignant, important mentors, like Richard Gill, Richard Mills, Tony Legg, and great singing teachers, I was always able to not drink the Kool-Aid too much. I owe a lot of responsibility to those guys because my mentors were really able to keep me on a path that I couldn't see for myself. They really recognised something in me that I couldn't and were able to gently cajole that. Reflectively, I can look at that experience and offer that it's really important to have mentors, but it's also really important that you have the strength of character to take control of your own journey. Because sometimes we can rely on others thinking that they will get us to where we need to go, but ultimately the buck stops with us, particularly around practice. It's terrible for a business model as a teacher to say, "Well, if you don't practice, don't come back". Because the teacher doesn't make you better. You make yourself better by taking what the teacher gives to you, and you reinforce that in the practice room.

Things I wish I'd learned. I came to opera as naive as you could be. I'd seen one opera in my life, and I just had a voice that sang this music. I didn't know who any singers were. I knew the basic composers, but I didn't know any repertoire, I didn't know anything. And again, because I lived off of my natural talent, I never had that internal drive to be so inquisitive. I think to some degree, I often wonder whether I wasted a lot of time in my early 20s and school age not being more informed. During COVID, I had to turn myself into a musician because I realised that I hadn't really done music theory and those sorts of things. COVID gave us all some space to address some things and recognise some things, and I think for me it was an opportunity to address some shortcomings that proved quite beneficial. That self-awareness, that ability to reflect, that ability to courageously look for your less developed skill sets and say, "all right, well, what do I need to do to improve this?" Understanding your vulnerabilities is your greatest strength.

INTERVIEW WITH THE CONDUCTOR CHAD KELLY

In our interview for *The Coronation of Poppea*, Chad Kelly discusses his role as conductor, Monteverdi's legacy and building on Elena Kats-Chernin's orchestration of the work.

Is this your first time conducting Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*?

Yes, it is. I've been a long-time lover of Monteverdi's music and the legacy that he's left imprinted on the entire world of opera and storytelling through music. So, when the invitation came through from Victorian Opera, I jumped at the chance.

Why do you think it's important for a work like this, which is thematically challenging, to continue to be staged for contemporary audiences?

The themes that resonate so strongly, in my opinion, are the way that lust and power and also a lust *for* power are all married together and how that can corrupt the human condition. You can throw love in there as well, which is an equally powerful human force. These themes are something we can always relate to, but especially in today's world. There are also themes of power. Power that wasn't earned, but power that was bestowed upon someone. It just so happens that that person, Emperor Nero, happened to be a maniac. So, when people are propelled into positions of power and they're driven crazy with it, it can have some real terrifying consequences for all those wrapped up in that story.

Monteverdi is credited with so many innovations in music, especially establishing opera as a genre. Can you speak to that and the legacy he left?

Monteverdi's vision and his legacy is probably the most important starting point in the world of opera. He is credited with inventing the art form, the genre. Now, of course, it wasn't yet called opera, this was a retrospective term given. But what it was, was something Monteverdi's followers or disciples, if you will, described as the *seconda prattica*, the second practice. The *prima prattica* [first practice], which it's distinct from, was very much a rules-based, multi-voice, predominantly sacred music where text was often unintelligible and was limited to this almost mathematical, celestial rules-based order, which was of course supposed to reflect the rules of the heavens. Monteverdi believed in *prima le parole e poi la musica*, which translates as, 'first the words and then the music', and this is a real distinct switch that saw the music as a servant to the story, and it was a servant to the words.

I wouldn't describe the performance of Monteverdi, the singing of Monteverdi as actual singing. I would describe it more as a declaimed, stylised, heightened way of speaking. This is something that I'm looking very much forward to exploring with our wonderful cast. We've already had a number of sessions where we've explored how to make the voice an expressive, sometimes ugly instrument as a way of really getting to the essence and the meaning at the heart of some very difficult themes and some very colourful text.

INTERVIEW WITH THE CONDUCTOR CHAD KELLY

What do you think drew Monteverdi to compose the music for a story like this?

Quite often composers in the 17th century writing opera were focused primarily not on immediate human stories that were familiar to them, like relationships between people, but rather they delved backwards into history, so that they would concern themselves with these higher, more abstract type of concepts of what it is to be human. So quite often they are telling myths and legends and stories of age-old emperors and empresses rather than what someone might do at the weekend and how that might happen. It's this very, very grandiose, glorified set of characters that we often find in those works. But with Monteverdi, it's the joy and the unique approach that he takes to find the human within those seemingly abstract and historical figures. He finds the human condition within them.

What type of compositional techniques do we see in this work that Monteverdi uses to represent the themes?

At its essence, it is just this stylised, declaimed way of speaking, which you could call singing. To accompany the voices, rather than having orchestral instruments which would in theory potentially limit the flexibility and the freedom of the voice to tell the story, they had what's known as a continuo group. So, a group of musicians playing from a bass line with the voice line and they would colour the text, they would colour the emotions with the way that they played, with the figurations that they played, even the chords that they played. They were very much also part of this idea of putting the words first and their role is to colour the words and give them meaning. This accompanying group, the continuo group, that's the first thing, it gives the singer the flexibility to act and to speak in whichever way they need to tell the story.

Certainly, in the writing for the voice, there are moments where on the page it looks extremely simple and foursquare you might describe, but actually we know from historical treatises that it was anything but. We have people writing out demonstrations of what expressive tools the voice can employ to really get to the heart of things and so sometimes things might sound a little ugly, a little harsh, sometimes things might rush, sometimes things might drag and be drawn out. There's this real kind of ebb and flow. It's not supposed to sound like natural speaking, it's supposed to feel like this really, really stylised heightened form of speaking.

Is the continuo group playing what's notated in the score or is a lot of it improvised?

It's nearly all improvisation. All this continuo group are given is a baseline and a vocal line. From that, they are able to discern a number of different possibilities of what the harmony might be. There's lots of choices to be made and that's part of the rehearsal process. But once we've made certain choices about what the harmonic language might be, there is complete free rein for us to improvise and extemporise, to react and turn on a dime, to really be invested with the here and now and the presence of performance.

This production uses Elena Kats-Chernin's orchestration, originally created for Komische Oper Berlin. Why has this orchestration been chosen for Victorian Opera's production?

We actually know from modern scholarship that not every note of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* is actually by Monteverdi. He had a number of his assistants and disciples who would contribute. So, it's a bit of a collaborative process, although of course it's Monteverdi's overarching vision. In that respect, we're being quite historically accurate to adapt and reorchestrate music of the past to help tell the story for today. Elena Kats-Chernin was commissioned to do a trilogy of these re-orchestrations, *L'Orfeo, Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria [The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland]*, and in fact, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. I think it's a really strong statement from Victorian Opera to employ this revised, reimagined version. It is in keeping with that kind of brilliant innovative programming that Victorian Opera is blessed to have at the moment.

INTERVIEW WITH THE CONDUCTOR CHAD KELLY

Have you made further changes to what Elena did? If so, why?

Elena's original version was in German, and it was also very much in collaboration with the commissioner, which was the Komische Oper and their director, Barry Kosky. In that sense, her original reorchestration or reimagining of it was very much specific to a time and a place in a company. For us it's being true to a new reimagining of it with a new company in a new place. I chatted with Elena and she was happy for us to have freedom with which to approach her score. I would quite often run ideas by her and she's a very collaborative colleague in that her answer is always, "Great, let's try it", which is always refreshing.

One of the aspects which we're doing differently to the version that we have in the Komische Oper, quite apart from the language being restored to the original Italian, is this continuo group, which I've already mentioned. In Monteverdi's day, it would have been a number of keyboard instruments, harpsichords and chamber organs, and also a number of other plucked strings like a baroque harp, theorbos, chitarones and different types of guitars, a really rich assortment of instruments, but very specific to that time. The essence of Elena's reimagining is a feel of almost jazz or funk. She's really lent into the dance-like rhythmic qualities which are inherent in the music as well. We've gone a step further. Instead of having a harpsichord and chamber organ, we're having a modern-day piano and synthesizer. While we are using a theorbo, the part is being doubled on a rock guitar and a jazz guitar as well. So, we're really creating potentially a world that you could have heard in the 1970s or the 1980s in a funk band or in a South American Latin jazz band. We're really leaning into that inspiration from Elena and taking it to its full extent and this has actually inspired very much the period and the style of production as well. I don't want to reveal too much, but the creative team have very much lent into the sort of 70s, 80s sound world and in fact also the dynamics of power and love and lust. That of course finds itself in many iconic films, which I know has been at the forefront of the inspiration for the production.

Do you think using a different orchestration to allow a work to be more contemporary changes its identity as a Baroque work?

I believe it doesn't. Some people, listeners might go and think this isn't Monteverdi, but actually I think the way that we perform it will be very much in the spirit of the way Monteverdi himself would have performed it. I'm pretty sure that had he experienced another 450 years of music, he would be very much thrilled with what we're doing with it.

What does your role as conductor involve?

I am one of the chief continuo players, so as well as conducting, I myself will be at one of the keyboards, improvising and extemporising and leading from the keyboard. That is a very specific skill and it's very much specific to this type of repertoire, which I'm really looking forward to. I'm looking forward to the freedom of exploring textures and colours and figures with my continuo colleagues.

As conductor, how do you prepare for a work like this?

With the slight rearranging and slight tweaking, because we are adapting Elena's work and in fact Monteverdi's work, we've been through a series of adaptations and realisations. There's actually been quite a lot of work, certainly with Sam, the director, we have been collaborating about which bits we choose which bits we might cut to help tell the story that we want to tell. There was actually a lot of work that took place over six months ago, really getting into the heart of things.

Similarly, on a practical level, I'm having to help prepare the scores for my fellow continuo colleagues and also for the other orchestral musicians. I can use the work that we do in the rehearsal room and help put that into the orchestral material so that we're all singing from the same hymn sheet as it were. So there's an awful lot of work that happens before the actual performances.

INTERVIEW WITH THE CONDUCTOR CHAD KELLY

You touched on briefly there about how you work with Sam. Do you work with the rest of the creative team? How does that relationship work if you do?

The best thing about opera, or the thing that I enjoy most about opera, is that it's a complete collaboration between every facet of storytelling. Whether it be the ushers at the front door, whether it be people selling drinks behind the bar, the stage managers behind stage, the people who paint the sets, the people who make the costumes, the people who colour it with the lighting, of course the orchestra, of course the cast. But, for an opera to be successful, it needs a real collaboration and continuity between the designer, the director and the conductor. That's something that I enjoy taking part in. Not all conductors are like that, and not all directors are like that so it's always nice to have a team put together where everyone is trying to strive to tell the right story and the same story.

What first inspired you to want to become a musician?

I'm afraid I'm a nepo baby, both my parents are musicians. I was brought up in a very musical household, but that wouldn't have been enough. Probably the main musical formative years came singing in a cathedral choir. Singing in a choir is probably the best and the most instructive and wholesome musical education anyone can have. I'd encourage you all.

Where does your interest in historically informed performance practice come from?

Well firstly the music. I grew up playing and singing music of a distant past and I was blessed that I had a wonderful choir master who's also an organist and he pointed me along the path to learning how the music works. You can only truly find out how the music works if you know how the music was played and viewed and how people who are playing it viewed and played it. We're not trying to recreate performances of the past, that's not what we're trying to do. It's about having an awareness of the expectations of the past to help inform us to provide something that's true and essential to the music today.

What advice would you give to any musicians interested in conducting or building a diverse career in music?

Watch every rehearsal that you can, if you're a conductor. Rehearsals are the most interesting things in an orchestral setting, in a conductor setting. Seeing the dynamics at play, seeing how people respond, seeing how people react. A diverse career in music is, well, the clue is in the word diverse. Exposing yourself always to things that you're maybe not sure of or not initially interested in. Certainly, I wasn't always interested in opera and gradually fell into it and fell in love with it.

Be proactive in exposing yourself to new things and sometimes things that might feel unsafe or even things that you do not like initially. Persevere and sometimes there's always something to be found.

ORCHESTRATION

The orchestration for *The Coronation of Poppea* consists of 25 musicians and is made up of the instruments listed below.

INSTRUMENT FAMILY	INSTRUMENT		
Woodwind	Clarinet	Tenor Saxophone	
	Alto Saxophone	Baritone Saxophone	
Brass	Trumpet		
	Cimbasso		
Percussion	Castanets	Ride cymbal	Glockenspiel
	Woodblock	Bass drum	Vibraphone
	Triangle	Side drum	Shakers
	Cowbell	Bongos	
Strings	Violin	Harp	
	Viola	Electric Guitar	
	Cello	Acoustic Guitar	
	Double Bass	Theorbo	
Keyboard	Synthesizer		
	Piano		

Included in this orchestra are two instruments that emerged with the development of opera across the centuries: the theorbo and the cimbasso.

THEORBO

The theorbo or *tiorba* in Italian, is a string instrument from the lute family. It can be over six feet long and commonly has 14 strings, seven of which are fretted and seven bass strings. It is made distinctive by the neck extension that accommodates for a second peg box to be attached, allowing for long, thin strings that enable the sound in the lower register. Otherwise, the theorbo looks just like a lute. It has a tear-drop body and a bowl back, a neck with frets and a flat soundboard with a long bridge.

It was created in the late 16th Century specifically to accompany the new style of singing that was emerging with the invention of opera. Composers used it in the *basso continuo* part, notating a single bass line and providing a variety of figures that would indicate which harmonies were most appropriate to use to fill out the accompaniment. Theorbo musicians of the time where adept in improvisation, creating expressive accompaniments that matched the mood and expression singers used in their performances.

Image 2: Theorbo

CIMBASSO

The cimbasso is a lower brass instrument that has the sound of a trombone but the register of a tuba. It was commissioned by the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, who disliked the sound of the tuba but needed an instrument that could provide that lower end of the register, in a nice round tone. After its creation, Verdi used the instrument in his operas *Otello* and *Falstaff*. It was also adopted by his contemporary, Giacomo Puccini, who used it in his opera *Turandot*.

Cimbassos usually have four to six valves, a bell and a cylindrical bore, that is a cylindrically shaped tube that defines the flow of air and vibrations through the instrument to produce sounds. The shape of the bore changes an instrument's timbre.

Today the cimbasso is used across film and video game soundtracks as the use of loud, low-brass sounds has gained popularity with composers across these genres.

Image 3: Cimbasso. Photo by Jonathanischoice

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR SAM STRONG

***The Coronation of Poppea's* director discusses the influence behind the creative concept of Victorian Opera's production, as well as his preparation process ahead of rehearsals and how he became a director.**

What does a director do?

I think a director brings together all of the elements and the contribution of a production into the most effective whole. That includes contributions that are coming from singers or performers or contributions coming from designers of various types, and obviously one of those contributions is the text and the music. But my job is to synthesize all of the elements into the best version.

You're predominantly a theatre director. How often do you get to direct opera?

The short answer is I don't get to direct opera as often as I would like. Historically, it's been a matter of scheduling. Luckily, I've tended to be quite well booked with plays and drama so I haven't got to do as much opera as I would have liked. But that's not because I don't love the art form and it's also not because I don't love directing opera. I particularly love the challenge of directing opera, so I'm particularly delighted to be able to direct this one.

The previous opera that I did for Victorian Opera, was a double bill of two new operas and most of my work as a theatre director has been on new stories or new plays. I'm a dramaturg as much as a director, so it made sense for me to be working on new operas as well. I bring those skills in storytelling and developing stories, in particular new stories, to bear on the new stories of the operas.

How does directing for opera differ to directing for theatre? Do you take a different approach?

One of the key differences in directing theatre versus directing opera is the presence of the conductor and that's a wonderful thing about opera. Directing theatre can be a slightly lonelier enterprise because you might not have the playwright around, they may be dead or unavailable to be in the room. But as a theatre director, for better or for worse, you are the end of the decision-making process. Whereas, in opera, you get to share that exercise with a conductor and it's so delightful to be able to share responsibility. But even more than that, it's amazing to be able to let the conductor lead the musical side of the exercise, as they should. It's brilliant to get to share the decision-making challenges and to broaden out the collaboration on an opera.

How familiar were you with *The Coronation of Poppea* before being invited to direct it?

I was passingly familiar and I knew enough about it to know it's status and reputation and the position that it occupies in the canon of operatic works. What I wasn't familiar with was the Elena Kats-Chernin re-orchestration, and so my first point of contact when I was considering the work was to hear Elena's version. I think when you're given the opportunity to direct any version of *The Coronation of Poppea*, whether it's Monteverdi's or Elena's re-orchestration, you immediately say yes. It's such an extraordinary opportunity and it is such an extraordinary work. On one level, of course I was delighted to be in conversation about directing the opera and even if I pretended not to be an immediate yes, was probably an immediate yes. But I think what's been beautiful about the experience is the more time I have spent on and with the work, the more I've fallen in love with it. I've fallen in love with the music obviously, but I've fallen in love with the story, particularly the contemporary nature of the story. You might say it was love at first sight with *The Coronation of Poppea*, but that relationship has only deepened and intensified over time.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR SAM STRONG

What are some of the themes that this work deals with?

Well, love, unsurprisingly, is one of the core themes of *The Coronation of Poppea*, and I think specifically lust as well. I think one of the things that struck me about this work even before I was thinking about directing it was how unique its exploration of desire is. The intensity of desire that these characters experience and the variety of desires. Everyone in this opera wants to have sex with everyone else and are not just driven by it, they're driven mad by it. One of the key points of distinction around *The Coronation of Poppea* is that it depicts the irrationality of lust and how potent and extreme a force it can be in people's lives. That also is one of the things that makes it feel really contemporary, as I was saying, both the intensity of those appetites, but also the variety of those appetites as well. One of the phrases I've been using is that these people are sexually omnivorous, where their appetites extend to anything and everything. So, love and lust are absolutely a theme.

I think ambition is another theme and the lengths that people will go to achieve what they want. I think what is amazing about this work is that it is so brazen and candid about the lust that it depicts, about the ambition that it depicts and how it does feel very contemporary. It always strikes me as odd that this work is written when it was written, because it feels so contemporary in the intensity of its lust. It feels so contemporary in the flagrant, bold ambition that it represents as well and in how cruelly people treat one another in this opera. It feels very nasty and nasty in a way that makes it feel like a kind of play written in England in the early 2000s or something where people are just really awful to each other. But all those things are what make it feel really contemporary.

How do you think audiences will react to that? Because, as you say, they are very modern themes that audiences can all relate to and which make this work relevant today. Do you hope that they'll react in a certain way?

One of the things that still delights me about being a theatre director is on one level your entire job is about controlling how people react to your work and to put in place things that encourage them to focus their gaze in a particular way or to have a particular emotional reaction at a particular moment. Everything that you do is on one level about controlling response. But at the same time, the delightful thing about the art form is that people's responses can evade your control. People will have their own set of responses to it.

I hope that people will be surprised by how contemporary *The Coronation of Poppea* feels. I think they might also be surprised by the pace of the storytelling as well, and that's something that we have taken even further in this version. But it's very much true of the original. What we've done with this particular production is taken the contemporary spirit of the original that has been taken further in Elena's version and we're taking it yet further still. We're sort of unleashing something that is present in the original. It will probably be *The Coronation of Poppea* that audiences know in its intensity and its extremity, but it will probably also be a *Poppea* that might surprise them in just how contemporary some of those things feel and how immediate the opera feels.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR SAM STRONG

As the director, how does the music score influence decisions you make around direction?

Fundamentally and frequently, and that's part of the collaboration with the conductor. Obviously, one of the things that I'm bringing, particularly as a director of performance in theatre, is making sure that there's a strength of performance and an authenticity of performance. I'm also making sure there's a clarity of story as well. But that process has to work hand in glove with music. I think if you're reading it against the grain of music, it's not going to be particularly interesting or successful. What's been a lovely collaboration, particularly with Chad on this exercise, is that we've been talking about music and story together the whole time.

What type of conversations have you and Chad had? How does his knowledge of music inform what you would do as it a director and vice versa?

So, to go backwards, some experience I've had with opera is that music is sacred. You can't necessarily shift or change it, or even if you can, you might not want to. We're taking the opposite approach in this, where there are, of course, some things that will always be in there, but we're also unafraid to edit and trim. Elena Kats-Chernin's version has already done an enormous amount of story work. Her adaptation has removed some characters, it's removed some story points, it's re-attributed some things from some characters. Elena has already started that work, and we've taken it a little bit further.

But Chad and I might have a conversation, for example, where I might say, "I'm interested in taking out this character and this character's storyline, can that work musically?" Then Chad will come back and say, "Yes, that can work musically", or "That will work musically if we do this or that". Or vice versa, there might be a conversation where Chad might say, "This thing has overstayed its welcome, or this particular moment happens three times and we only need it to happen once. How does that work for you story-wise?" And I can say, "That's great, that works really well for me story-wise". So, we've come at it from our individual specialisations, me on story, Chad on music and it's been a very collaborative process where we're working together to create a powerful, compressed, exciting version of the opera.

Talk us through your preparation. Beyond your work with Chad, what work have you done ahead of going into the rehearsal room?

There are multiple levels to that preparation. One level of preparation has been around working on an edited score with Chad. Taking Elena's score and then working on some further edits has been a really big part of the pre-production exercise.

The second part - and these two things aren't necessarily consecutive in that they happen at the same time - has been working with the set and costume designer, Anna Cordingley, on the world of it, on the design. We're building a coherent world for this opera and Anna is very good at this. We knew very early on that we wanted to have a more literal rather than abstract world. Another part of the pre-production is that we are, Anna and myself, working on the world of it, the look, costume, sets, et cetera.

Then probably the last part of that is what I do just as a director or as an artist to get into the world of it and that's not so much academic research as it is broadly diving into the world of *The Coronation of Poppea* or things that might be adjacent to the world of Poppea, and that took two forms in this particular period. I read a lot of Ancient Roman history just to get a sense of the world of Nero and the ridiculous extremities of Ancient Rome and how we might find a contemporary version of that. I also went on quite a deep dive into gangster movies as a genre. It was one of the things that Anna and I came up with relatively early and particularly the kind of Brian De Palma film *Scarface*. As a contemporary equivalent it has the danger - you can be killed at any time - it has the sex - everyone's driven by desire - and it has the excess of Ancient Rome. We were looking for contemporary equivalent worlds that might capture that essence of Ancient Rome that underlies the opera and the story and that sent me down a bit of a gangster path. So musical preparation, design preparation, and research preparation.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR SAM STRONG

What's your process when you're inside the rehearsal room? How do you like to work?

Opera is slightly different to theatre in this way in that opera tends to move slightly faster than theatre. Theatre can sometimes be a bit more exploratory where you're discovering things in the rehearsal room and you tend to have a luxury of a tiny bit more time. But often my process in a rehearsal room is to try and forget all of that preparation that I've done, knowing that it will of course come out anyway, and really respond to what's happening in front of me. My main job as a director is to look through the eyes of a first audience and to create the work in that way. I've got a lot of baggage around all the preparation work that I've done, all of the ideas that we might have about how we're going to bring things to life, but I've found the most effective result is often to park all of that and be much more responsive to what's happening in front of you.

Do you work collaboratively with the singers as well?

Absolutely! I learned very early in my theatrical life that the version of a show that was in my head, solely in my head, was never as interesting as the version of the show that was happening from great performers in front of me. Part of the art form is to synthesize those contributions of those performers and the team members into the most effective whole. And when that's working well, that's a process that's really organic and improvised and responsive. I'm not the type of director that works out the production in their head and then executes it. I'm the version where I'm working with and editing and distilling and synthesizing what's around me and that's always more effective. I think that there's a bit of a myth that directors do all this pre-production and work it all out beforehand and generally, that's not as successful as being really agile and working with what you have in front of you.

When studying drama, students are taught to develop skills around the elements of drama and how they work together to create dramatic meaning and action. How do you incorporate these elements in a professional setting? Do you make active decisions about these elements or are they just addressed naturally in the rehearsal process?

I think as a director, you will tend to utilise different elements intuitively. I don't necessarily think, I'm going to do this with light or the combination of light and sound at this point will have this effect. Generally, that's how someone might talk about it or analyse work when they're watching it so it's retrospective. When you're creating it, you tend to get better as a director at just knowing what levers to pull to achieve certain things.

You might feel, for example, that shortening the queue to go to black will make people be more shocked and you will know that the pulling of that lever will have that effect. And, you are doing that, but the art form is about knowing which lever to pull at what time. The art form is a much more intuitive felt art form than an intellectual thought art form. You might retrospectively analyse something and go, the fact that we slowed that fade down means that we get to sit with that character for longer, therefore, we get more access to their emotions, therefore, we understand their journey more and feel more. But in the moment, that's often an intuitive choice about how to better tell a story.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR SAM STRONG

It's interesting that you have to teach it from one perspective and to become aware of these elements, but then it flips and as you say, becomes intuitive and something that's retrospective.

Yeah, absolutely and you get better at that by watching it and watching other people do it, but you also get better at that by doing it and trying it out. Part of that exercise is legitimate trial and error, where you think I'm going to try this thing, but it didn't have the effect that I thought it was going to have. Or I thought everyone would laugh there, but they didn't so I've got to rethink what I do and pull a different lever or pull the lever in a different way.

You've talked a bit about your relationship with Chad and Anna and how you work together in the creative team. Does that evolve during the rehearsal period and performances? If so, in what way?

I think it depends a little bit on which discipline you're talking about. With design, there are particular timelines that you need to hit for the set to be built on time, for example. So that process, in some ways, by definition, has to happen in advance of when you're in a rehearsal room. Sometimes the art form there is to leave yourself enough room to move so you don't box yourself into a particular outcome. There are some things that are set, like the score for example, which is prepared by Chad well in advance. In fact, that process almost came first.

But then there are other things that you can do in a room. I think that's one of the key differences for me between directing opera and directing theatre is that opera is a slower moving ship. I mean that in a non-pejorative way, but just getting things into singer's bodies, the difficulties of changing music, all of that means that you're less able to make really big changes late in the process than you are in theatre, where you can potentially rewrite a scene or get someone to add something in a preview, for example. Opera is a slightly less agile art form than drama in that way.

When did you all start working on this production?

Oh, we're probably coming up to about a year.

Do you remember when you knew you wanted to be a director?

I think high school. Two things happened to me in high school. One was I watched a production of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*. I watched people I know transform into something else and I thought, oh, that's amazing. I fell in love with acting and actors at that point. I also fell in love with what a well-told story could do to a room full of people. I felt the impact of a plot on a collective and went, I want to be part of this. That was the first thing, watching it.

The second thing was I started directing pretty much straight off the bat with peers. I got a bunch of my mates together and directed a show. I think I was hooked from the outset at being present for all parts of the process. So, the moment where you pick the play or text off the shelf through to when it goes on and being present in all of those parts of the journey. I got hooked on both of those things. The effect of various forms of theatre on people and the kind of process of making it when I was probably 16.

Finally, what advice would you give to anyone interested in becoming a stage director?

I think, and it's not unrelated to what I just said, there is no substitute for doing it. One of the best pieces of advice that I was ever given was one of the most spectacularly literal, which is the best way to learn how to direct plays is to direct plays. I think that's true of most operas, the best way to learn how to direct operas is to direct operas. I think there's a lot said for getting in there and doing it at whatever scale, at whatever level and in whatever format. If you want to direct, just do it.

But then I think the other side of it is you can learn an enormous amount from watching it, from watching shows. Whatever form that exists in, whether that's screen, musical theatre, opera, drama, be as voracious as you possibly can in the consumption of stories. I add literature to that mix as well. Any story that you consume, will make you a better director. Do as much as you can and watch and read and see as much as you can.

WHO'S WHO IN THE CREATIVE AND TECHNICAL TEAMS

There are two teams that are responsible for creating the world of an opera. The creative team develop the concept of the work and design and manage the creation of the set, props and costumes, while the technical team ensure the production runs smoothly during rehearsals and performances.

The name and description of the roles within each team is outlined below.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

The **Director** of a production is responsible for deciding where the singers will stand and how the action in the production will be staged. They have a concept in mind of how the story should unfold and what they want the singers to do. Sometimes they have to be flexible as the direction needs to accommodate the requirements of individual artists and characteristics of the space they have available.

The **Conductor** works in collaboration with the director to develop the overall concept of the work being staged. Together, they ensure that the important aspects of the music and text are equally conveyed in the development process during the rehearsal period. The conductor is also responsible for rehearsing the orchestra in orchestral readings and leads the stage orchestral rehearsals, so they can make any necessary adjustments to properly balance the voices with the orchestra in the theatre space.

The **Set Designer** designs the scenery for the production. For smaller operas, the designer might devise a clever way to adapt one main set piece to convey the different scenes of an opera, while for large-scale operas, they may design a different set piece for each act. When designing the set, set designers need to take into account passages of time within the story and how practical and safe it is for the singers and actors using it.

The **Costume Designer** is responsible for designing the clothes or costumes singers wear on stage throughout a performance. This includes designing concepts for ready-made styles and drawing designs for original creations. Not only do they need to consider how the costumes correspond to the set and lighting designs, but also the actions the singers will need to perform on stage within their role, and how their costume might affect their ability to sing to their full capacity.

In theatre and opera, the **Lighting Designer** is responsible for creating the lighting, atmosphere and time of day around the action taking place on stage. The lighting design can completely alter the way an opera looks, regardless of the set and costume designs.

The **Wardrobe Supervisor** oversees the costume department and works together with the designer to bring the costumes to life. They will source fabrics to use when costumes need to be created from scratch, source hats, shoes and any other accessories from their list of suppliers and oversee costume fittings throughout the creation process.

All the designers mentioned above work closely together, but most importantly with the Director to ensure that the world they are creating aligns across the company. Depending on the size of the production, the conceptual design part of the process can begin two years before an opera is staged!

This goes to show how much planning is required before an opera is ready to begin rehearsals, let alone be performed.

THE TECHNICAL TEAM

The **Head of Production** or **Production Manager** is the head of the technical team and is in charge of hiring and organising the casual staff needed to bump-in and bump-out the set, the stage management team, as well as the designers and wardrobe and make-up teams. They also keep track of spending to make sure that all the above-mentioned elements are kept within budget.

The **Stage Managers** manage the stage throughout rehearsals and performances. They work backstage and ensure that all the cast are on stage when they need to be, the props are kept in order and are also responsible for calling different cues, for example, when the lights need to change or when set pieces are flown in or out, throughout the show. Their job is the most important during each performance.

Mechanists are the people who quite literally put together the set before a performance season and pull it apart at the end. The head mechanist oversees any extra builds or adaptations to the set or props that are discovered during the rehearsal process. Mechanists can also work during performances to operate special elements of a set or help with particularly elaborate scene changes.

Photos: Casey Horsfield

PLANNING AND CONCEPTION

Step 1: The company's Artistic Director chooses the work as part of the company's annual season and suggests who they think the appropriate director, conductor, designers and cast could be.

Step 2: The CEO determines the production's budget and then, if it works within the overall season, takes it to the company's Board for approval.

Step 3: Once approval has been granted, the CEO sends out invitations to members of the creative team and the cast to work out availability and interest, negotiate their fee and once secured, distributes their individual budgets.

Step 4: Members of the creative team come together to present their concept in what's called a white-card presentation to the company's Artist Director, CEO and Head of Production.

Step 5: The Head of Production acquires quotes on how much the sets and costumes will cost to build and, if it falls within budget, the design concept can be approved. If not, the creative team will need to come up with a new concept, and the white-card presentation and costing process begins again.

The director and conductor are normally approached 12-18 months in advance so that they have enough time to develop their concept. Once these members of the creative team are on board, the design team is approached.

Singers can be contracted up to a year in advance as their schedules can get busy.

PRE-PRODUCTION

This stage of the process begins four to six months before performances. During this period:

- The music team begin coaching the singers on their parts to ensure they are singing each note correctly. They also look at the singer's diction and pronunciation of the words so that the audience will understand what's being sung.
- The wardrobe supervisor, along with the costume designer, begins to buy material needed to make the costumes and invites the cast in for fittings at different points throughout the costume creation process.
- The set is built by specialist set builders. During the building process, the set designer and head of production or production manager make sure everything is running on time and to budget.

REHEARSAL PERIOD

Rehearsals begin in the rehearsal room between four – six weeks prior to the first performance, depending on the size of the work being performed. The first few days of the rehearsal period focus on the music, as the conductor takes the singers through the entire score. For the remainder of the rehearsal period, the director and conductor work together with the cast and stage management team to bring their concept to life before moving into the theatre.

AT THE THEATRE

Bumping in the set

When the set is installed in either the rehearsal room or on stage at the theatre, the process is called a 'bump-in'. Similarly, when the set is taken out of either of these venues, the process is called a 'bump-out'. Depending on the size of the production, this process can take several days.

Once the set and lighting is installed, the cast, creative team and orchestra rehearse the work to practise in the performance space, which usually differs quite a bit from the rehearsal space.

The rehearsal process inside the theatre commonly takes place in the following order:

Orchestral reading

There are usually between two and four orchestral readings, depending on the scale of the work. This is the first time the orchestra comes together with the conductor, to rehearse and prepare the work. While these rehearsals sometimes take place at the theatre for smaller orchestras, larger orchestras will rehearse at a separate location.

Sitzprobe

The sitzprobe is quite literally a sitting down rehearsal. It's the first time the cast come together with the orchestra and sing through the opera without having to wear their costumes or perform any of their actions.

Piano technical rehearsal

This rehearsal is for the stage managers to have the chance to run through the opera without the cast to make sure all the lighting cues and cast entrance and exit cues are correct. This rehearsal is led by the conductor and accompanied by a piano.

Piano dress rehearsal

The piano dress rehearsal is the first dress rehearsal for all the cast, stage management and any other crew to run through the production. The cast is dressed in their costumes and are accompanied by the piano only.

Stage orchestral rehearsals

The stage orchestral rehearsal is the first time the cast and orchestra come together to rehearse the work on stage. The cast is usually in costume and will perform all their actions. For larger shows, there are usually two of these rehearsals. This rehearsal is run by the conductor and focuses on balance between the cast on stage and the orchestra, which is in the orchestra pit. The director is also on hand to make any adjustments to the blocking that might not translate from the rehearsal room onto the stage.

General rehearsal

The general rehearsal is the final run through of the opera before its first performance. The cast is dressed in their costumes with full make up and is accompanied by the orchestra. Sometimes, a small audience is invited to attend these rehearsals, which gives the rehearsal more of a performance feel.

INTERVIEW WITH THE SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER ANNA CORDINGLEY

Set and Costume Designer, Anna Cordingley talks to her designs for *The Coronation of Poppea* and how the work's themes influence the design, as well as how she became a designer.

Can you explain the role of the set and costume designer.

Some people might say it's about translation, but I think that's a simplification, even though there are some wonderfully maverick translators, and I'm thinking about Anne Carson and others who make translation an absolute art form. So I don't necessarily believe the set and costume designer and the other creative team collaborators (the music director or conductor, the director, the lighting designers and so on) have a key job that entails considering how on earth they'll take this precious jewel and translate it to be relevant, accessible, interesting, compelling, challenging, whatever it might be for a contemporary audience. That is not the first job. I would say the role of a set and costume designer is not about translating, it's about embarking upon something new, and considering, how do we want to play with this? What is the new world we can create around this provocation? And then our role is to give those new ideas form, share them with our production, construction and manufacturing teams and get them up on stage, contributed to and inhabited by brilliant performers and given life! All in one holistic piece of scenography. It's a big job!

Have you seen a production of *The Coronation of Poppea* before?

I have, I've seen a few of them. In fact, my students did one last year, so it feels quite front of mind, which is its own challenge. I'd rather have a lovely fresh and open mind without the instant recall of "Oh, that's that scene". But you just can't help this scenario with opera, or with works that live so firmly in the canon. So often, of course, you've seen them. Particularly with these works that have been around for many hundreds of years. And they've hung around for a reason, you know, they are such compelling things for us to return to. The best strategy I find is to see them, appreciate them, and then park them in a little part of my brain and try not to go there too often.

Tell us about your designs for this production.

Well, my director, Sam, and I have done so much work together across the years. A little bit of opera, yes, but mostly coming of age stories. Mostly rambling pieces of theatre and sometimes pieces of music theatre that have been real adventures on stage. I'm thinking of a Kate Mulvaney's adaptation of the children's puzzle book *Masquerade*, there was a mainstage Jasper Jones, a *Storm Boy*, the Colin Thiele piece, with puppetry work by Dead Puppets Society, and all of these examples have travelled around our capital cities. Maybe it is Sam's natural impulse or maybe it's the alchemy of the two of us, but looking for the adventure within the stories seems to be how we begin together. You could look at *The Coronation of Poppea* and look to determine some transpositional era in which it unfolds, but Sam didn't do that, and I didn't do that. Instead, we looked first for the adventure and the journey within the libretto. We found *Scarface* as our *in*, as our site for adventure and the scenario that makes it so dangerous and daring. And it is really; the story of Nero just is dangerous, daring, the highest of high stakes. Power, greed, corruption and deceit. And in a way, the gruesomeness is up against the really saccharine, really beautiful and completely anachronistic music, but the horror of this time and of Nero's actions really mean that our *Scarface* thread feels solidly founded. It also allows for this adventure that we find so compelling together.

How do the themes of this opera inform your design?

Yes, love and jealousy and betrayal. The design needs to invite space for them all to play out, in a conceivable way, in a graspable way for people who love opera and know opera, but also for people who don't. I think it helps that there's a familiarity in this Scarface-y aesthetic, in this kitsch world of the 1970s and 80s that's not so far from our own in that we've at least accessed that excess and kitsch via Hollywood and via pop culture. I can imagine many more abstract renditions that might read as more alienating for new audiences, so at least this [design] is one that can be seen, grasped, and you're in.

INTERVIEW WITH THE SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER ANNA CORDINGLEY

Talk us through your design process. Where do you begin and how do you get to the final design?

I start with two reads of the text, really. One that you hope is not going to be interrupted, where you can sit down in an unbroken fashion - and it happens less and less that way - but you hope you can just do one straight and glorious read through because you never get that first impression again. And even if I've seen the opera, it's different to sit down with a text or with the libretto or the score. Then the second time I'll go through it again, but with an Excel spreadsheet (believe it or not) and I'll make a really business-like and practice (well, it's compelling to my brain!) reductive extraction, a design extraction about who's on stage when, what time of the day or night a scene is taking place, what the primary plot points are, if anyone is drinking water or has a gunshot wound or a fight or anything that might inform a need or inform where I might go with the design and what the design needs to cater for. Do characters come on and off? Some of those decisions will be directorial decisions and we won't know that degree of inner-opera language yet, but you can hazard a guess. That document, that extraction, becomes like an index where you can buzz straight to that third scene where you know there's that troublesome little exchange and at the end of it, she's got to come out in a nightie or whatever it might be. It's extremely useful forever after!

Once that's done then I'll start to live in the image collecting phase or world building phase, which is joyful. It's where I'll start to build the aesthetic and the visual language, the spatial language, and that'll be informed by all of those dreams that I've had after the first read, whatever those subconscious floods of images have been and wherever they'll have taken me. But it'll also be informed by my director's dreams, and their subconscious floods, and sometimes you can be really shocked, impressed, disappointed, all kinds of things at the images that come back to you [from them]. But that's part of the beautiful thing. It's not my design; it's *the* design or our design and we have to find the world together. There are other people who'll be in that mix too. It might be that the lighting designer - and in this case, the lighting designer is Matt Scott who is such a fantastic collaborator - he was in that alchemy early on and contributing to the world building.

So, we'll throw images at one another for a while and then you'll see what sticks, what people are responding to, and the scenographic world gradually becomes stronger and stronger. You can start petering them [the images] out to different forms, particularly with costume design to consider that maybe this is the way I'd like to treat the muses or the echelon of performer, or character who is subservient or whatever it is, or maybe this is a good reference for this specific part of the opera.

Then I'll start to draw. I'll start to sketch with a pencil and then scan and colour them digitally and then move into three dimensions. We're given some structured intervention points from the companies and Victorian Opera is beautifully supportive with this, whereby they'll bring along a team of really enthusiastic production people but also marketing people and education people and of course the artistic directors. All of those collaborators sit around at these points (preliminary presentations, final presentations) and hear you talk quite freely about the world and your rationale for the interpretations, while they're also looking for some real-world parameters and compliance. Ultimately, whatever we create will have to be built on budget, it will have to be installed in the Palais in time and those pragmatic concerns have to be humming along in your head at the same time as all the lucid dreams.

A photo of the set model box, illustrating what the set will look like at a smaller scale.

INTERVIEW WITH THE SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER ANNA CORDINGLEY

When you're designing for opera, do you have to have a good understanding of the music score? How does it feed into your design?

I play the music endlessly while I'm drawing. I think it features in a subliminal kind of way. Sometimes you want all of your elements to be in harmony with one another, all telling the same story, and sometimes you can be really Brechtian, and enjoy them all being at odds with one another. You can use that as a device: anachronism. This opera uses that device, in a way, because its action is so grotesque, but the musical language is simply so beautiful. I nevertheless listened and listened and listened. Sometimes if the opera project is epic enough or protracted enough, I'll drift away from the source material. For example, and this is not technically an operatic example, but a few years ago I designed an *Amadeus* for Sydney Opera House's fiftieth birthday celebration, and we performed little vignettes from *Don Giovanni, The Magic Flute* and *Idomeneo* within and around the full Peter Schaffer text. It was such a massive show, and I was working on it for so long that I really needed a pause on Mozart. He'd been playing too long, supporting all of my drawings for months on end, and so I moved to whatever else. Electronica. Depeche Mode. But I think that I could feel that manifest in the designs. They were a bit Mozart and a bit Depeche Mode. So, you've certainly got to be careful with the influences you let in.

When you're designing both the set and costumes for something, do you prefer to start with one over the other or do they evolve together?

That's such a good question. Mostly my brain requires me to build the world first and address the population, the moving parts and the specific characters. It's the space first for me, and then the people in the space, but I can also think of exceptions to this pattern. For one Daria Fo play called *Elizabeth Almost by Chance a Woman*, which I created aeons ago for Malthouse Theatre, I did the inverse. Because the world was Elizabethan-esque and we had Elizabeth the First as the protagonist, and the costumes were always going to be so absolutely ludicrous, it needed to start from the figure out. Costumes and bodies first, space later. So, there will be occasions where, if the performance is right or the text is right, I'll absolutely go costume first.

Do you prefer to do one over the other?

I think I must prefer space and plane and world first. They do happen in tandem though, in that they'll refine together. In a way, preferencing space first might also be me buying myself time. Often the casting process hasn't necessarily been resolved for everybody while I'm designing and so, it might be a deliberate kind of pushing back of decisions which are better made with performers and personalities in mind. It's so much better for everyone if you can be designing for a real human in mind, a real figure and form and real ideas to collaborate with because every single costume design is a collaboration. I mean, pieces of set and prop, yes, to a degree, you're collaborating with your maker and people have to use the props to support a scene, but actually wearing and living a character is entirely different. The costume is an extremely intimate collaborative artwork, really.

Knowing that Sam Dundas is playing Nero and Meechot Marrero is playing Poppea, how does that then change the design in your mind or influence it in a way?

Lots of research on at least the persona that's represented online, for a start. If I haven't met the performers, and I haven't met Meechot yet, I'll be looking to the way Meechot has chosen to self-represent, because that's a suggestion about what styles or fashion forms she may be comfortable in. While comfort is not everything, you can bet that your performer is going to have a far better time onstage and will be able to concentrate on their music and their creative output if they are not distracted by discomfort. Maybe it is everything. I would never, ever die on the hill of a costume if it made a performer uncomfortable.

So, I will absolutely be taking whatever little kind of crumbs of clues about the way a performer is going to carry themselves with as much confidence as possible. It helps when, of course, you've worked with people before and you just know. Often though, once trust and respect has been built and it runs in all directions, then performers might wear the most sculptural, unusual, extravagant things and go to extraordinary lengths to see an idea through. I believe you build up to those possibilities though. I'd never expect to start there.

INTERVIEW WITH THE SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER ANNA CORDINGLEY

Have you taken any inspiration from the period this opera was originally composed in, the Baroque period?

Not in terms of formal aesthetics, no. Well, here's something that you *could say* is a nod to the Baroque: the excess of ours, perhaps. The excess of Miami at this part of the late 20th century is more than a little bit Baroque and Rococo. Overblown in its kitsch-ness. The forms those bold Miami architects and designers were quoting, and their iconoclasm was quite classical, or neoclassical. But there's a lot of gild stuff in there, which is Baroque and the sheer amount of it certainly was.

Are you also responsible for makeup design? How does that evolve?

The answer here is different for different companies and different scales of production. Over in film land, they would be completely appalled to imagine that the costume designer would also be doing the makeup. But working on both is quite normal for stage designers and live performance costume designers. I do my best, having never really trained in makeup and having a passable understanding. To be honest, the beautiful thing about having a tech period and a dress rehearsal period is that you do have this scope for testing and trialling and experimenting. And taking on board, of course, all of your performers' wishes and desires, knowing that ultimately, if you're sitting in the back row at the Palais, it is quite far away and that's a hard thing for them to ever really gauge in a dressing room.

What are some of the technical considerations that go into designing the set and costumes?

The time required to install something, and the space required to travel something. It's not only how this environment might fit on the stage at the Palais, but it's how it packs up into a truck, how many trucks are needed to get there and how long it takes to de-install from where it was built and then reinstall. Thankfully, you're always kind of tussling and wrestling with those quandaries with your production manager. In fact, your production manager is a little bit like a genie on one shoulder, and your director might be on the other. They're certainly not in opposition, but they're both your genies, they're special, important collaborators, those ones.

You've spoken a little bit about your relationship with Sam, the director. It'd be great to know a bit more about how your relationships work with other members of the creative team and how you work together. Take Chad Kelly, for example...

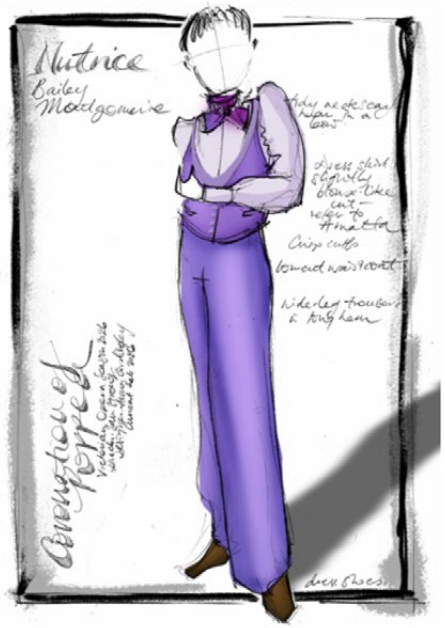
Lovely, Chad. I hear a lot about Chad from Sam, but at this point, we're not exchanging so much directly. This will change as we get closer to the rehearsal period and as soon as I start to do things that are, well, a little bit noisy and possibly a little bit annoying for Chad. If I put a series of bangles on the wrist of one of the principals, for example, and they're really animated, then I'm sure that I'll be hearing about that because it would be a distraction. Often our points of exchange will be around problems and problem-solving. All those technical concerns, blood, liquids, wigs around mics, et cetera, these are conversations that a designer will be having with everyone, particularly with their music director.

Often when they're in music rehearsals, that's when I'm running around resolving props, sourcing with the assistant stage management team or the set building team and checking out some examples; fittings take up a lot of the rehearsal time as well. But I'll prioritise being in rehearsals where there's some blocking going on or full runs are happening.

INTERVIEW WITH THE SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER ANNA CORDINGLEY

Do you remember when you knew you wanted to be a designer? If so, can you tell us a little bit about that?

Yes, I knew I wanted to be a designer when I was eight and I had gone along to see a production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. And I learned this later when I did a little bit of research as an adult about this production, I think that year, which would have been 1990, the then Victorian Opera shared a set that Stephen Curtis had designed at the Playhouse in the Arts Centre with Melbourne Theatre Company. Melbourne Theatre Company did the Beaumarchais play, which was directed by [Jean-Pierre] Mignon, maybe, and the opera was directed by Barry Kosky. I think I saw the opera, but either way, it was on the set that Stephen Curtis had created, and it was so funny and silly and I just loved it. And that was that. I thought, well, if you get to do that as a job, and you can be that clever and give people such joy, then that's what I want to do. I went along with my dad, the tickets were free, so we weren't sitting together. He had some words to the people who were sitting either side of me and asked them to look out for his eight-year-old. He told me he was "Just down there if you need me". I was in the front row of the circle and that feeling of being so grown up and seeing this show and sitting in this fantastic seat, I just loved it. So all of that mixed together into a real feeling of excitement and freedom, and a resolve that this is what I want to do with my life.



What advice can you give to anyone interested in pursuing a career as a designer in the performing arts?

My advice would be that ***this is very fun***. It can be, of course, taxing, but then everything can be. If you really want to do this, then you find a way. I think that ***how emotionally or laboriously taxing*** these jobs are in live performance can be depends very much on your frame of mind and how wedded you are to your own ideas. They're collaborative art forms and things will get thrown out. Ideas might be overcome or replaced, superseded. The ideas will grow and shift and change and you can't be rigid. In a way, you can make life a lot easier for yourself by being very happy to shift and adapt and keep looking for the right thing in the moment.

GLOSSARY

BASSO CONTINUO

Often simply called continuo, a musical accompaniment style where only a continuous bass line is provided in the music score that musicians use to improvise chords and harmonies.

COMPOSER

The person who writes the music.

CONDUCTOR

The person who interprets, directs and cues the orchestra or musical performance, coordinating the musicians and singers and keeping the time through the technique of hand movements.

CONTRAPUNTAL

Music that has two or more independent distinct melodies that are played at the same time but have the same harmonic function.

COUNTERPOINT

Two independent musical ideas that are played at the same time.

DESIGNER

The person who designs the overall look of the production, including the sets, costume, props and lighting.

DIRECTOR

The person who is in charge of the artistic features of the production.

DISSONANCE

A combination of musical notes that, when played together, create instability in the harmonic function and create musical tension.

HARMONY

The chordal (vertical) structure of a musical composition, in contrast to the linear (single melody line) structure.

INSTRUMENTAL COLOUR

The sound that's produced when different instruments play together.

MADRIGAL

A secular (not sacred) vocal musical composition that originated in Italy during the 14th century. Madrigals feature melodies that closely, sometimes literally, match the lyrics and their corresponding emotions. They are often sung without instrumental accompaniment.

MODERNIST

An artist or thinker who deliberately goes against traditional or conservative conventions in favour of experimentation, abstraction and new forms of expression.

ORCHESTRA

A large ensemble of instruments divided into four main sections: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.

GLOSSARY

ORCHESTRATION

The utilisation of the instrumentation of an orchestra in the writing of a composition.

POLYPHONIC

A textural term that refers to two or more independent melodic lines that are played or sung at the same time. It literally means “many sounds”.

REHEARSAL

Where the performers and the director establish and refine the dramatic and musical interpretation of the production.

SCALE MODEL BOX

A scale miniature of the set design made from foam core and card.

SCORE

The document where all the parts of a work, both instrumental and vocal, are notated.

SYNOPSIS

A summary of the story.

TIMBRE

The unique quality of a sound that distinguishes it from other sounds.

VIRTUOSIC

A style of writing that displays or is characterised by exceptional technical skill.

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