

CU ★ PRESENTS

2020-21 Season
Digital program



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CU ★ PRESENTS is the home of performing arts at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Great repertoire, lavish scenery, amazing voices and outstanding value—
these are the hallmarks of the **Eklund Opera Program**.



As we gather, we honor and acknowledge that the University of Colorado's four campuses are on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, Pueblo and Shoshone Nations. Further, we acknowledge the 48 contemporary tribal nations historically tied to the lands that comprise what is now called Colorado.

Acknowledging that we live in the homelands of Indigenous peoples recognizes the original stewards of these lands and their legacies. With this land acknowledgment, we celebrate the many contributions of Native peoples to the fields of medicine, mathematics, government and military service, arts, literature, engineering and more. We also recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous peoples have developed in relationship to their lands.

We recognize and affirm the ties these nations have to their traditional homelands and the many Indigenous people who thrive in this place, alive and strong. We also acknowledge the painful history of ill treatment and forced removal that has had a profoundly negative impact on Native nations.

We respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. We honor them and thank the Indigenous ancestors of this place. The University of Colorado pledges to provide educational opportunities for Native students, faculty and staff and advance our mission to understand the history and contemporary lives of Native peoples.



An opera for our times

The College of Music's musical theatre students dive headlong into the humor and despair of *The Threepenny Opera*.

By Olivia Lerwick

When looking for a musical to produce this semester, director Justin Johnson needed to find a work that would both suit his students and also be available for livestream. He soon found a friend in the Kurt Weill Foundation, which has managed Weill's works since 1962.

“I always direct works that I believe have a lot of heart,” Johnson says. “The foundation didn’t initially suggest *The Threepenny Opera*, but I asked because I wanted to direct a work by Brecht and because I believe the show has a lot to say about society today.”

Playwright Bertolt Brecht saw the devastation of Germany after World War I and believed it was only made worse by the corruption and materialism of the government. He wanted to write works that highlighted these issues without making them overly sentimental or too easy for audiences to write off.

“Brecht didn’t want his audience to be comfortable,” Johnson explains. “He asks that harsh lighting be used and that stage hands and backstage be made visible to the audience during the performance. He even asks for actors to break the fourth wall and break character.”

All of this is done to remind the audience that what they’re seeing is make believe. To jolt them out of their emotions and into their heads. To make them think.

But however dark the story may be, Weill's score brings a sense of lightness and even fun to the show. Though COVID-19 restrictions made it impossible to have live musicians, Jeremy Reger, music director for *Threepenny*, spent over 100 hours transcribing the music into software that will provide the orchestrations during the performance.

“The cabaret style of the music makes it possible for people to take in the more disturbing parts of the show without being overwhelmed,” says Reger. “It also pushes the students to find vocal colors they may not have used before.”

For students, *The Threepenny Opera* is a challenging show, not just musically but in its stylized acting as well.

“Because of his desire to distance the audience, Brecht wanted his actors to be more performative, even caricature-like in their acting style,” Johnson explains. “This adds a layer of complexity to the acting because it's not miming nor is it realism, but a kind of believable exaggeration of real people and real feelings.”

Johnson adds that working with the students on this show has been an exceptional experience, especially given the important intersecting contexts of Brecht's message.

“This show focuses mainly on the harmful effects of wealth inequality and corruption, but you can't deal with those things without dealing with things like race, class and gender. Working on a show like this has been a learning experience for all of us, and I'm really proud of everything the students have accomplished.”

The Threepenny Opera is available to stream July 22-25. Tickets start at just \$10. **For more information or to purchase access, click here.**

Agrippina

An opera by George Frideric Handel

Friday, May 14, 2021

Composed by George Frideric Handel

Libretto by Vincenzo Grimani

Stage Director

Leigh Holman

Music Director

Nicholas Carthy

Scenic and Lighting Designer

Ron Mueller

Costume Designer

Ann Louise Piano

Technical Director

Ron Mueller

Assistant Director

Nnamdi Nwankwo

Assistant Conductor

Alaina de Bellevue

Production Assistant

Christie Conover

This production of *Agrippina* is presented in Italian, with English supertitles.

Saturday Cast

Agrippina

ROLE

Agrippina

Nerone

Pallante

Narciso

Lesbo

Ottone

Poppea

Claudio

Giunone

NAME

Erin Hodgson

Paul Wolf

Kyle Griffin

Gabrielle Razafinjatovo

Thomas Bocchi

Eli English

Shannon Paige Christie*

Alice Del Simone

Tyler Padgett

Kelly Riordan

The production with this cast will run approximately one hour and 20 minutes.

**Shannon Paige Christie prepared and rehearsed the role of Poppea but the historic snowstorm prevented her from performing.*

Sunday Cast

Agrippina

ROLE

Agrippina

Nerone

Pallante

Narciso

Lesbo

Ottone

Poppea

Claudio

Giunone

NAME

Sarah Cain

Alex King

Sam Bruckner

Kaisa Herrmann

Tyler Vinnola

Christine Marie Li

Alice Del Simone

Benjamin Morrow*

Tyler Padgett

Kelly Riordan

The production with this cast will run approximately one hour and 20 minutes.

**Tyler sang the recitatives for this production after the postponement of the filming due to the snowstorm and the unavailability of Benjamin to be present.*

Synopsis

Act I

Agrippina has just received word that her husband Claudio has died. ROMA Corporation is now without a CEO and Agrippina wants Nerone—her son from another marriage—to take the position. She exploits the love of Pallante and Narciso to set this plot in motion. Agrippina announces to the shareholders that Claudio is dead and Nerone is the new CEO. This arrangement is short-lived, however, once Lesbo, Claudio's assistant, arrives to announce that Claudio lives and has named Ottone the next CEO. Ottone reveals to Agrippina that he is in love with the beautiful Poppea, whom both Claudio and Nerone are also smitten with. Agrippina decides to use this to her advantage: She convinces Poppea that Ottone became CEO by offering her up in exchange to Claudio. Upset that Ottone could do such a thing, Poppea in turn convinces Claudio that Ottone is actually a traitor unfit for the CEO title.

Act II

During the celebration of Claudio's return, Claudio calls Ottone a traitor. Everyone shuns him, including Poppea, but upon seeing Ottone's pain, Poppea

meets with him and learns that he is innocent of any deceit. When she realizes that she has been taken advantage of by Agrippina, she plans her revenge. Pallante and Narciso also become aware that Agrippina is using them but still fall victim to her scheming when she drives them to make attempts on Ottone's life. Agrippina then convinces Claudio that Ottone is seeking revenge and makes him promise to make Nerone CEO.

Act III

Setting her own plans in motion, Poppea asks Ottone to hide in her office to overhear her conversations with Claudio and Nerone, whom she has called separately to her office. Nerone arrives to make his move on Poppea but is immediately forced to hide under the pretense that his mother could arrive any minute. Claudio arrives on the scene next, also in hopes of wooing Poppea. Poppea then convinces Claudio that it is Nerone that is the traitor instead of Ottone. Nerone comes out of hiding and Claudio chases him from the room. Nothing stands in the way of Ottone and Poppea now. Nerone runs to tell Agrippina of Poppea's plot. At the same time, Pallante and Narciso tell Claudio that Agrippina has been scheming to make Nerone the next CEO.

Claudio calls for Agrippina to explain as he doesn't know who to believe. With cunning, Agrippina convinces Claudio that she was acting in his best interest. Finally, Claudio summons Nerone, Ottone and Poppea to finally put an end to the turmoil. Nerone is named CEO, while Ottone and Poppea are allowed to marry. The goddess of marriage, Juno, descends from the heavens to bless the marriage.

Stage director's note

By Leigh Holman

At the time Handel wrote *Agrippina*, it was customary to depict the stories of ancient Roman emperors like Caesar, Agrippina the Younger, Nero and Poppea in plays and operas. In fact, just a few years ago, Eklund Opera presented *The Coronation of Poppea* by Monteverdi (written some 50 years before *Agrippina*). We have had a wonderful several years of digging into the depth of these characters.

Whereas the Monteverdi piece hails the powerful and manipulative Poppea as the prima donna, in Handel's piece she is the young, witty ingénue who seems to learn her manipulative strategies from the much practiced Agrippina. Both pieces—being somewhat

feminist for the periods in which they were written—depict women of great strength, intelligence, power and intuition. Both works represent an entertaining chess game, if you will, but only Handel’s infuses the game with loads of wit and comedy.

Our production embraces *Agrippina*’s timeless storyline, allowing history to marry what’s relevant to current audiences. Because of the powerful influence of Big Tech companies and their unforeseen influences on our daily lives—much like the political leadership of the Roman empire—the design team and I set the piece in a modern San Francisco tech software company. When the CEO of the company, Claudio (aka Caesar), is lost at sea in an airplane accident, his wife Agrippina begins to use her power to influence shareholders, executives and customers into making her son CEO. Though power, greed and manipulation win out for son Nerone, love is the ultimate victor. Like any classic story, the villains change for the good, or they at least get what they want so they can—by George—leave everyone else alone.

It’s a glorious plot, peppered with light and bright humor hidden in plain sight (aptly provided by

beloved tech nerds Narcisso and Pallante and Lesbos, a personal assistant). The small cast of characters sing together to provide a larger-than-life chorus of tech leaders and employees whose coffees keep them running at full speed across the 24-hour period of dramatic comedy. As a director, having the leeway to transform works (especially rarely known ones) into modern adaptations is a complete joy. It leaves room for creativity from those with the original vision and those (the actor/singers) who bring so many details and ideas to the table.

Handel is known for his “toe-tapping” music, but he also provides us with a few arias that dig deep into the soul and leave us with a dripping tear down the cheek. My favorite is Ottone’s “Voi che udine il mio lamento,” which depicts a forgotten, mocked and bullied man who appears to have lost the many friends who once loved him. The moment reminds us that love can sometimes be fleeting, and it promises to grab the heart of every audience member.

How lucky we are to have such talent in the College of Music. Singers with small, medium, and large voices who learn to move their voices with gorgeous agility and emotional timbre; with curious minds

excited to learn and execute the baroque style of singing; and all while utilizing the modern style of acting and making each note, each phrase, sing with beauty and feeling.

Music director's note

By Nicholas Carthy

Picasso once joked, “Good artists copy, great artists steal.” Nobody was more adept at borrowing/stealing than Georg Friederich Händel. True, most baroque composers repurposed both their own and others’ music: In Bach, for example, cantatas become partitas, violin concertos are reformed into keyboard concertos, and much of the great B-minor mass is based on earlier compositions. But when Bach did borrow, as in the four Vivaldi concertos that he transcribed for organ, he did at least acknowledge it. Händel, not so much. When accused of plagiarism of other composers’ melodies, he blithely remarked: “And why not? They don’t know what to do with them!”

In fact, over 90% of *Agrippina* is traceable back to earlier compositions. In a way, this was simply the way Händel thought of composition—not as an

art, but as a craft—and as such, building on earlier achievements, both his own and other composers’, was considered in his circle as pretty de rigueur. This magpie-like attitude also explains Händel’s immense curiosity and his ability to effortlessly integrate other styles into his writing. Born in Hannover in 1750 (the same year as Bach), Händel’s life can be roughly divided into three periods: Germany, Italy and England (where he wrote *The Messiah*).

Agrippina was written in Italy when Händel was 26, and it was a great triumph; the Italians feted him as the savior of the Italian baroque tradition. The fact that Vincenzo Grimani’s text—which deals with the politics of Ancient Rome—is easily one of the best and most powerful librettos that Händel ever set to music certainly helped.

The story, one of hunger for power and the lengths and depths that people are prepared to go to achieve it, is universal and extremely topical. *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*.

Music staff

Head Vocal Coach

Jeremy Reger

Vocal Coach

Mutsumi Moteki

Rehearsal Pianists

Alaina de Bellevue

Zerek Dodson

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College of Music alumna Claire McCahan and instructor Jeremy Reger demonstrate proper COVID-19 protocols during rehearsals and coaching.

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The Eklund Opera Program brings operas to life with incredible sets and costumes, while showcasing the College of Music's dedicated and skilled musicians. These productions provide opportunities for our students to study important literature and shine onstage in performance. Your gift helps empower the next generation of musicians and share the beauty of opera in our own community.

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May-July 2021

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