

## **OPERA**

### **L'incoronazione di Poppea**

Usher Hall



"Concert performance" went the rather apologetic description in the International Festival brochure. This was far more than that – a fully staged production, in effect, minus scenery, but with props, costumes, and a wonderfully creative use of the Usher Hall's multi-level stage, co-conceived by conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner and Elsa Rooke, and evocatively lit by Rick Fisher. It made a simple but thoroughly convincing way of presenting Monteverdi's four centuries-old opera of a dark love that conquers all, and a magnificent conclusion to Gardiner's celebratory Monteverdi opera trilogy.

His compact English Baroque Soloists band – heavy on chitarroni, guitars, harp and harpsichords, but with strings and piping recorders supplying melodic contrast – was centre stage, the opera's action happening around and between the players. And the musicians produced a gloriously rich, supple tapestry of sound, alive to the singers' caressing lines. Gardiner had an exemplary cast, too, among them Gianluca Buratto as a solid, statesmanlike Seneca, Hana Blazikova crystal-toned and quietly manipulative as Poppea, and the remarkable countertenor Kangmin Justin Kim cascading up and down Monteverdi's elaborate vocal writing as Nerone.

The intense emotion of Poppea and Nerone's achingly beautiful closing duet made a spine-tingling conclusion to what's been a revelatory trilogy.

**DAVID KETTLE**