

ETCETERA

Garden opera polish exquisite musical gem

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN OPERA
L'Incoronazione di Poppea
★★★★☆

A black and white stage and three black and white clad singers: the gods (Fortune, Virtue and Love) are staking their claims over their influence in the affairs of men.

Meanwhile, one man is staking his claim for the affections of the beautiful Poppea. In a thrilling and deliciously lustful scene, the lovestruck Roman Emperor Nerone (the excellent C N Lester) is pawing his way over the stockinged body of his paramour Poppea (a tour de force by the confident and sensual Clara Fournillier).

Nerone's wife Ottavia, (played by the supremely expressive Eira Sjaastd-Huse) is livid and Poppea's maidservant Arnalta

DAVID WINSKILL goes to watch the latest Hampstead Garden Opera production at Jackson's Lane and finds it enjoyable if immoral

warns that it's not going to end well.

Monteverdi's opera is no morality tale. The emperor and his mistress get their wicked way with each other - most of the time before our very eyes. The outcome represents a total triumph of wickedness, ruthlessness and the abuse of power, but the music is exquisite



Hampstead Garden Opera's L'Incoronazione di Poppea.

Picture: LAURENT COMPAGNON

and, notably in the interludes, its freshness belies its 370 years.

The eight-piece Musica Peotica is to be congratulated for a fine performance in an almost three hour work.

There is a striking absence of

men in the production, though nothing that Monteverdi would be unfamiliar with. All performances were excellent and mention must be made of Veronique Rapin's Ottone - a fine study of a tortured response to the slings and arrows

of Rome AD65.

The final, triumphant love duet between Nerone and Poppea (I gaze on you, I rejoice in you) is beautiful, finely delivered and rounded off a polished and highly enjoyable evening.