

Wendy Heller, *Music in the Baroque*  
Chapter 6: Opera in Venice and Beyond  
Study Guide

Anthology Repertory

Francesco Cavalli, *Giasone*, Act 3, scene 21: *Infelice, ch'ascolto?*

Repertory Discussed:

- Ex. 6.1 Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*: Act I, scene 3
- Ex. 6.2 Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*: Act II, scene 3
- Ex. 6.3 Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*: Act III, scene 8
- Ex. 6.4 Francesco Cavalli, *Giasone*: Act I, scene 2
- Ex. 6.5 Francesco Cavalli, *Giasone*: Act I, scene 14

General

- Opera spreads from Italian courts to the public theaters of Venice and then spreads throughout the Italian peninsula and opera
- Emphasis on visual spectacle
- Special circumstances of Venice influence the nature of public operas

Opera and the Venetian Republic

- System of governance shapes characteristics of Venetian musical theater
  - Republican form of government – oligarchy with an elected ruler with symbolic power- no court.
- Reputation of city as tourist destination because of her unique beauty and the famous Carnival
- Influence of “libertine” Venetian intellectuals, the Accademia degli Incogniti, involved in writing librettos
- Centrality of operas a means of expressing Venetian pride in all of these elements

The Venetian Opera Industry

- First public opera performance in Venice, 1637
  - By 1660, five opera theater; by 1678, nine functioning opera theaters.
- Importance of competition
- Financial support through patrician families, owners of opera theaters, investors, noble protectors, and an impresario.
- Tickets were sold and boxes rented – profit mattered.
- Seating different levels made it possible for different classes to attend without having to mix.

The Anatomy of an Opera: Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*

- Impressario: hires singers, librettist, and composer
  - Vocal casting: women used for female leads, castrati (usually) for male leads
- Librettist arranges the material into 3 acts, writes poetry that determines much of the dramatic structure
  - In this instance, first historical opera, based on Tacitus, Annals of the Roman Empire
- Composer usually follows cues from librettist regarding placement of aria and recitative; Monteverdi typically did not.
- Unusually treatment of morality and (im)morality in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*

Staging Venetian Opera

- Dance and set designs as key ingredients in visual spectacle
  - Giovanni Battista Balbi – most important choreographer of Venetian-style opera
- Stage machinery to enable rapid scene changes
  - Giovanni Torelli – most important stage designer and inventor of stage machinery

Cavalli's *Giasone*

- Francesco Cavalli – most important successor to Monteverdi
  - *Giasone* (1649), one of the century's most popular operas
- Increasing division between style of aria and recitative

Beyond *Giasone* and Venice

- Venetian-style opera spreads to other centers, often adapted to suit local tastes

Operatic Conventions in the Late Seventeenth Century

- Increasing complexity of plots
- Exponential growth of brief arias
- *Da capo aria*
- By the end of the century, some critics saw opera as failing to live up to the goals of its creators.