Handel’s
AGRIPPINA
Libretto by Cardinal Vincenzo Grimani
Translation and vocal ornamentation by Beaumont Glass
Continuo realization by Sven Hansell

Don V Moses / conductor
Beaumont Glass / stage director
Margaret Womk / scenery and costume design
Mick Alderson / lighting design

JULY 25 & 27 1985 8 PM
HANCHER AUDITORIUM
THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATER

There will be one 20-minute intermission between acts.
THE PLOT

ACT I, SCENE 1: the terrace of Agrippina’s apartments in the imperial palace at Rome.

a. Agrippina has received a secret message with the news that her husband, the Emperor Claudius, was drowned at sea on his return from the conquest of Britain. She does her best to arouse ambition in her pleasure-loving son, Nero, and coaches him in ways to win the vote of the common people of Rome.

b. With the hint of sexual favors to come and the promise of political power Agrippina persuades Pallas, a member of the emperor’s staff, to help her cause by rousing support for Nero’s candidacy.

c. As soon as Pallas has left to carry out her wishes, she tries the same approach with the young freedman Narcissus.

d. Agrippina congratulates herself on her ability to manipulate men and maneuver events so that she will reach her goal, defying any obstacle.

ACT I, SCENE 2: the Capitol.

a. Nero is distributing alms among the poor to buy their votes.

b. Agrippina makes public the report of Claudius’s death and urges Rome to choose a worthy successor. Pallas and Narcissus shout out the name of Nero; Agrippina, satisfied by this token of public support, invites Nero to mount the imperial throne.

c. An unexpected visitor is heard. Lesbo, Claudius’s servant, rushes in with momentous news: the life of the drowning emperor was saved by the heroic bravery of Ochoc, one of the noble Romans who had accompanied the expedition to Britain. Agrippina is furious but hides her feelings.

d. Ocho himself enters and describes the storm, the shipwreck, and his rescue of Claudius. He discloses the hopes of Agrippina and Nero, Pallas and Narcissus, by announcing that Claudius intends to reward him by naming him the next Caesar. He asks the empress to intercede for him with the woman he loves, Poppea. This she promises to do; but her secret plan is quite the opposite.

e. Left alone with his thoughts, Ocho rejoices in his apparent good fortune.

ACT I, SCENE 3: Poppea’s boudoir.

a. Poppea, who is desired by Ocho, Claudius, and Nero, is at her mirror, trying to decide which jewelry will make her even more beautiful.

b. Lesbo comes to tell her that Claudius will come to her secretly tonight, before he makes his official triumphal entry into Rome tomorrow morning. Agrippina, who had sneaked into the room and found a hiding place, overhears their conversation and slips out of the room again, unseen. When Lesbo has gone Poppea muses on the mystery of love.

c. Agrippina reappears, this time openly, and tells Poppea that Ocho has betrayed her for the sake of his political ambitions and sold her to the lusts of the emperor in exchange for the promise of the throne. She urges her to take revenge by turning Claudius against Ocho by any means, fair or foul. Agrippina promises to hide nearby and to intervene if Claudius becomes too persistent in his efforts to seduce Poppea. When Claudius has gone, Poppea gives vent to all the fury of a woman scorned and swears to get even with Ocho.

d. The emperor Claudius arrives while Poppea is in her bath. He starts to woo her ardently. She tells him that Ocho is constantly molesting her and has forbidden her to see Claudius. At the same time she arouses the emperor’s desire for her to fever pitch and then abducts him and implicates him by the promise to punish Ocho and to annul his succession. Now Claudius claims his reward from Poppea. She holds him off as long as she can, wondering what can be keeping Agrippina from coming to her defense. Just as her virtue seems to be in imminent jeopardy, Lesbo dashes in with the report that Agrippina is coming and manages to persuade poor, frustrated Claudius to slip out by another door.

e. Agrippina assures Poppea of her sisterly love and loyalty.

f. Poppea reveals in the thought of her vengeance.

ACT I, SCENE 4: the Capitol.

a. Pallas and Narcissus have compared notes and realize that Agrippina has made the same obviously insincere promises to each of them. When Ocho appears, they make a point of flattering him. They are professional courtiers and are always trying to guess which side their bread will be buttered on. Everyone
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The summer 1985 European tour of the Opera Theater production of Handel’s 1709 work, Agrippina, was made possible by major gifts from Grain Processing Corporation and Bandag, Inc., both of Muscatine; and Sutherland and Judith Dows of Cedar Rapids.

The April 1986 appearance of Iowa’s Simon Estes in the title role of the UI production of Boris Godunov is being made possible by a major gift from Grain Processing Corporation.

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