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Dispatches from the Fringe: bad girl 'Agrippina' is so good

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Irish Youth Opera's production of Agrippina

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Agrippina produced by Irish Youth Opera

Rating: ★★★★★

Handel's comedic opera "Agrippina" written in 1709 to a libretto by Cardinal Vincenzo Grimani, features historically accurate figures in a historically inaccurate farce full of political intrigue and sexual subterfuge. In Irish Youth Opera's production of "Agrippina" director Oliver Mears offers a modern take on Handel's masterpiece, in which the Senate gives way to the corporate boardroom where what is loved is power in a gorgeously directed, superbly performed production.

At the centre of this convoluted tale a devious and treacherous Agrippina is single-mindedly intent on usurping her husband, the lecherous emperor Claudio, and replacing him with her degenerate son, Nerone. Subplots abound, usually fuelled by sexual desire and promises of sexual favours, most often involving sex kitten Poppea, love interest of Ottone and lust interest of Claudio and

Nerone. Back stabbings, betrayals and power plays thrive in this fast moving production where every detail is lovingly attended to.

In an English translation by Amanda Holden, Irish Youth Opera's "Agrippina," co-produced with Northern Ireland Opera in association with the Irish Chamber Orchestra and Lime Tree Theatre, shows an embarrassment of talent all at the top of their game. The Irish Chamber Orchestra, under conductor Jonathan Cohen, vividly interpret Handel's music performing with verve and seamlessly shift between recitatives and arias. Designer Annemarie Woods marries the ancient and the modern with an incredible folding set where modern interiors are juxtaposed with Roman ruins just beyond the tall windows, perfectly complimented by Kevin Treacy's rich and evocative lighting design.

Baritone, Brendan Collins and mezzo-soprano, Dawn Burns as the traitorous advisors Pallante and Narciso, along with bass-baritone Padraic Rowan as Claudio's P.A. Lesbo were impressive throughout. Mezzo-sopranos Rachel Kelly as the reprobate Nerone, and Sharon Carty as the love struck Ottone deliver fine performances with two particularly outstanding arias. Bass, Alan Ewing as the swaggering Claudio was a sheer joy, as was his wonderful arietta. Soprano's Anna Devin as the devious Poppea, and Máire Flavin as the scheming, duplicitous and ruthlessly ambitious Agrippina, each ready to employ their considerable sexual charms to seduce weak minded men to their bidding were riveting throughout. Vocally each deliver impeccable performances, with Flavin's aria at the opening of Act Three being particularly noteworthy.

At one hundred and fifty five minutes, "Agrippina" is most certainly one of the longest shows of the Tiger Dublin Fringe. Yet Oliver Mears' impeccable direction ensures that not a single moment lags. Indeed not a movement, gesture or note is wasted. On more than one occasion Mears' fastidious attention to detail, as in the massage scene which exquisitely married movement, music and voice to hilarious effect, bordered on genius.

"Agrippina" is a delightful and entertaining production that captivates from the start. The ending may owe more to Tarantino than Handel, but it's very much in keeping with the playful spirit of this remarkable production and strikes the perfect chord. "Agrippina" wooed Venetians when first produced in 1709. With its incredible performances, inspired direction and innovative design Irish Youth Opera's "Agrippina" will most certainly woo audiences in 2015. Utterly enjoyable and not to be missed.

"Agrippina" co produced by Irish Youth Opera and Northern Ireland Opera, in association with the Irish Chamber Orchestra and Lime Tree Theatre runs at O'Reilly Theatre, Belvedere College as part of the Tiger Dublin Fringe till September 13th.

Performance begins at 7.30 pm

Tickets: €20/€26/€30

For further information visit [Tiger Dublin Fringe](#)

For information on Irish Youth Opera and on "Agrippina" in The Market Place Theatre, Armagh on

September 19th visit [Irish Youth Opera](#)



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