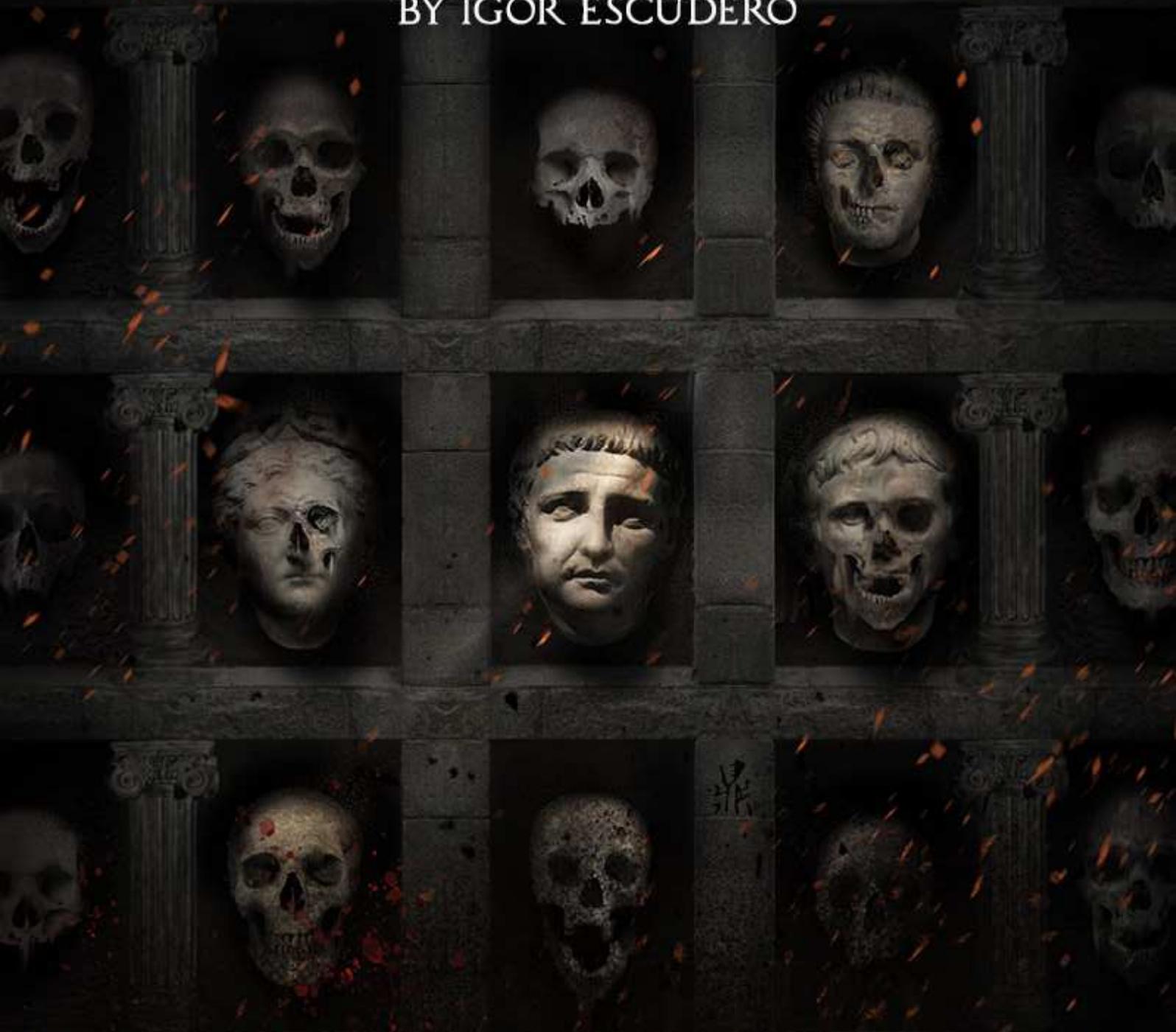


# THE OPERA TRILOGY

BY IGOR ESCUDERO



ROBERT GRAVES'S  
**I, CLAVDIVS**

& CLAVDIVS THE GOD

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P&M internacional  
I CLAUDIUS OPERA  
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## I, CLAUDIUS THE OPERA



Robert Graves approached the writing of his most famous work in a noticeable historicist way, by basing it in historical sources. He also gave his protagonist, Claudius, the role of narrator, strictly adhering to the methodical style that he would have presumably used had he written this story himself.

The music in this opera has thus been conceived in the same manner, by using some of the few melodies contemporary to this story that time has preserved and by trying to recreate the sound of that time through a modern orchestra.

**“This music moves at an intense rhythm catered to our own sensitivities as an audience used to jump from headline to headline in social media and hungry for a story that never stops”**



## MAIN ELEMENTS

The score makes use of the Greek modes in the way ancient Romans would have used them. Each of these Greek modes and their corresponding scales were thought to have a particular character, or ethos, that could deeply affect those who were listening to them. To their eyes, music was powerful enough to influence the emotions, behavior, morals and even the health of individuals and whole communities.

Each character in the opera *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* has been assigned two different musical modes, one corresponding to the individual façade they are trying to keep, the other showing their internal motivations and real goals. In addition to that, the composer has also made use of other less common scales to better tell the story. Caligula is one clear example of this, as the music changes from a Byzantine scale when he proclaims himself a God -an Eastern idea at the time- to the enigmatic scale at his most unstable moments.



Adding to these modal melodies and ideas, the composer has also utilized harmonies and textures most used during the 1930s and 1940s. Escudero felt it was really important for the opera to not only reconstruct ancient Rome from a modern perspective, but to also reflect the historical vision that Robert Graves and his contemporaries had of it at the time that he wrote the novels.

But even though the opera *I, Claudius and Claudius the God* conveys the sound of the distant past and the musical ideas of the interwar period, it does so through the lens of our own time. Its music moves at an intense rhythm catered to our own sensitivities as an audience used to jump from headline to headline in social media and hungry for a story that never stops developing and offering constant new twists.

Minds in the 21st century have grown used to the fast pace adopted by modern storytelling, clearly influenced by internet, TV and smartphones. By exposing us to a constant stream of information, social media has shaped our perception.

Dramatic structures in opera were conceived from a different perspective and were made for a different audience. If opera were to assimilate this new understanding of synergy and dynamism, it would undoubtedly awaken the interest of those who turn their backs to it, thus reaching also new heights.

Current efforts to modernize this art, based mainly in setting classic operas in contemporary locations and decontextualizing and reinterpreting old stories, do not really work. Managing to alter and bring these works up to date proves to be more and more difficult each day, specially when trying to mask outdated ideals and messages inherent to XVIII century mind-sets.

To that end, Escudero has guided the writing of a libretto that departs from what we know as classical opera structure. It tells a very complex plot with a myriad of turning points in an intense, dramatic way. Just as we cannot find in the music the usual construction of melody, accompaniment melody and orchestration, the story of *I, Claudius and Claudius the God* does not stop to prepare for an aria or a duet. Everything works in service to the plot, which is also served by lyrics written in a style almost meant to be said, not sung.



Escudero's music serves the story, not the other way around, as it is shown in how lyrics are not presented in intuitive melodies. Oppositely, they alternate between binary and tertiary rhythms in the style of ancient Rome, where each particular note used to last as much as the syllable that was composed for.

The end result, also influenced by how Escudero mostly avoids isorhythm, is organic and fluent, very difficult to categorize.



## THE INCEPTION

The opera *I, Claudius and Claudius the God* has been adapted from Robert Graves' (1895-1985) masterpiece novels *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God* (1935). They both became massively popular when first published and soon gained literary recognition. Today they are regarded as essential milestones of the historical novel genre.

After an unsuccessful attempt to adapt them into a film during the late 1930s, Robert Graves' work once again gained mainstream popularity when BBC Television produced the TV serial *I, Claudius*, which went on to win multiple awards and received widespread acclaim.

A clear vision of how to translate the novels to the stage prompted Igor Escudero to contact the Robert Graves Foundation and its president, William Graves, in 2014.



## CHARACTERISTICS

This opera must be regarded as an innovative project. Not just because of the complexity of its plot and the size of its cast, but also because of its innovative score. Since inception, the project was conceived with the aim of breaking new ground in terms of stage language and structures.

*I, Claudius and Claudius the God* tries to help in the development of a canon that opera productions have been following almost without changes since the XIX century and proposes also new musical challenges that go beyond a simple change of location or wardrobe.

It is vital to adapt to the new times and create a new opera canon for the XXI century, more in line with the speed that our minds nowadays process the world.

The internal structure, the dramatic synergy, the musical style and the rhythm of this opera try to benefit from the structures and tools of our modern audiovisual media which, undoubtedly, determine our modern forms of expression.

The three acts, or chapters, that form *I, Claudius and Claudius the God* are titled *Livia*, *Caligula* and *Claudius the God*, and have been conceived to be performed not only sequentially, but also separately.



## THE OPERA

The opera doesn't actually match contemporary standards. Such is its eclecticism that it combines ancient world's modes and melodies with the very origins of music and a tempered instrumental ensemble.

*I, Claudius and Claudius the God* is the most significant challenge Escudero has faced yet. Its difficulty stems from his obsession with renovation in opera, beyond plots and story lines. Escudero's concept includes renovation of rhythm, structure and musical form. In particular, the composer has risen to the challenge of giving up conventional opera canon, structures and methods to create new synergies. Accordingly, it's not just a coincidence that he decided to use such a literary masterpiece as a dramatic foundation.

Given that the story line covers seven decades in the History of Ancient Rome, it comes as no surprise the unusual number of characters -around 60- featured in the opera, which also makes use of other genres' means and narrative elements such as flashbacks and numerous shifts in location.



## THE PLOT

*I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* is told in three chapters, each one of them conceived as stand-alone operas and devised to be represented consecutively in one show. Each episode's title refers to the most significant character in it. Overall, they keep to Ancient Rome History timeline, though some flashbacks have been introduced to enhance the storyline.

The libretto is true to Robert Graves' novels: *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God* (1935), both based on reliable historical sources. These novels narrate the history of the Julio-Claudian dynasty throughout more than 70 years - from Augustus' new imperial government (23 B.C.) up until the death of Emperor Claudius (54 A.D.)

Claudius himself –a historian by choice- recounts the story of his family driven by a sense of duty. He wants to clear his name and also right the turbulent events he witnessed from childhood. Through his lifetime, he learned how to shield behind his so-called “foolish” nature, thus managing to survive to all those tragedies -either deliberate or fortuitous-, that surrounded his family for decades.

Even though he was deeply committed to the Republic values, his love for Rome compelled him to accept the role of emperor after his sudden designation in 41 A.D.. After that, historical sources portray his government as peaceful, prosperous and successful.



## LIVIA PART 1

After more than two decades of governing Rome, the great Augustus, first emperor and head of the Julio-Claudian family, has led the main world power to a golden era of wide expansion and social and economic growth. Yet, he wouldn't have accomplished those goals had it not been for Livia, his wife, who controls him and actually runs Rome from the shadows. Through the years she has been slowly getting rid of anyone who dared escape her control, no matter if family or not.

It's been foretold that the Julio-Claudian family will rule Rome for decades. This dynasty is a spring of heroes, but it also has its own black sheep: young Claudius. An extremely weak, crippled stutterer, at only one year of age he had already been close to death three times and had lost his father.

Despite his kindness, honesty and industriousness, Claudius is repudiated by almost everyone, even by his own mother. His brother Germanicus and his friend Postumus, who are both candidates to succeed Augustus as the leaders of Rome, are the only ones that love and respect young Claudius.

As Livia manipulates Augustus to name her son Tiberius as only heir to the throne so she can continue to rule Rome through him, Claudius, who dreams of becoming a historian and has no political aspiration, must learn to survive in a nest of vipers.



## CALIGULA PART 2

Following Livia's death, Emperor Tiberius' depravity is out of control. From his retreat in Capri, Tiberius –who has left Rome in the care of Sejanus, his right hand and leader of Guard- has ruined everything Augustus and Livia gave so much for to accomplish.

Rome hopelessly sinks into a dark age, marked by corruption and non-stop executions of citizens. They find solace in knowing that Tiberius' life is close to an end, and that Caligula - the late Germanicus' son- has been chosen to succeed him. High expectations are held for him. However, Claudius knows all too well that his nephew, Caligula, shares nothing of his father's virtuous nature.

When Caligula finally occupies the throne, he couldn't be more blessed: the treasure is at its best and the people adore him. But after just a few months, the people of Rome grow tired of his excesses and eccentricities. When love gives way to hatred, Caligula wastes no time in showing his true colours. As the treasure gets empty, Rome plunges into a reign of terror, even worse than that of Tiberius.

With the only support of his old friend Herod and the intelligent prostitute Calpurnia, Claudius –who has become Caligula's personal fool- learns to tread the fine line of the emperor's personality. One false move will mean death.



## CLAUDIUS THE GOD PART 3

Emperor Caligula has been murdered by his own captain of the Guard, Cassius. His death has left a power vacuum in Rome that the Senate, devoid of any ability to govern on its own after decades of humiliations and the submission, tries to fill by naming a new emperor: Claudius.

New to a position of power, Claudius proves wrong everyone who thought him a fool. For years, he devotes himself to work tirelessly to rebuild everything that his predecessors destroyed. He undertakes social and economic reforms, and also huge public works. Leading an army on the battlefield for the first time in his life, Emperor Claudius manages to annex and pacify Britain, making it a new Roman province. All of his actions have one purpose only: to erase the Julio-Claudian dynasty mark on Rome and to give to the Senate the tools to function on their own. Time is close when Claudius will reveal his true intentions: to restore the Republic.

However, on his way to building a future new Rome, Claudius faces challenges he could not have anticipated. In Jerusalem, his good old friend Herod, who believes himself the incarnation of the messiah, plans a general uprising in the East.

And at home, Claudius doesn't realise that the person he trusts the most is the one who most likely will betray him: his own wife Messalina.



## THE CAST

This opera features 56 different characters ideally performed by a cast of 16 singers who play from one to five parts each subject to a carefully planned system of cross-substitutions.

### PROTAGONISTS

Claudius (adult)  
Livia  
Caligula (adult)

### MAIN CHARACTERS

Claudius (young)  
Augustus  
Calpurnia  
Messalina  
Herod Agrippa

### SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Tiberius  
Medullina  
Antonia  
Germanicus  
Postumus  
Livilla  
Cassius  
Mnester  
Agrippinilla  
Britannicus  
Xenophon  
Athenodorus  
Sentius  
Vitellius  
Sibyl

### OTHER CHARACTERS

Briseis  
Caligula (young)  
Libo's widow  
Sejanus  
Silius (father)  
Macro  
Engineer  
Narcissus  
Aulus Plautius  
Silius (son)  
Guards  
Consuls/Senators  
People of Rome  
German guards

### EXTRAS

Caius  
Lucius  
Urgulanilla  
Freedmen  
Slaves  
Agrippina  
Drusilla  
Lesbia  
Urgulania  
Ex-consuls  
Vinicius  
Noblemen