Emilio de' Cavalieri's 1600 *Anima e Corpo* is not only the 'first opera', it is also the earliest surviving example of musical Recitative and Continuo accompaniment. Cavalieri, an aristocrat who directed all kinds of artistic activity from jewellery and sculpture to organ-building, was certainly a musical pioneer, but he was also a thoroughly practical man of the theatre.

Eleven years earlier, directing the last rehearsals for the elaborate spectacle of the Florentine *Intermedi*, Emilio realised that the poetic, philosophical and polyphonic finale lacked theatrical impact. Working through the night, he and his girlfriend created an all-singing, all-dancing showpiece, *Il Ballo del Gran Duca*. Its catchy tunes, easy harmonies and strong rhythms made it Italy's greatest hit for the next century.

Our approach to this *Rappresentatione* (Show) similarly applies the latest insights from historical research (Andrew is Senior Fellow at the Australian Centre for the History of Emotions) to the practical questions of music-theatre for today's audience. In his *Nuove Musiche* (1601), Giulio Caccini declares the priorities to be text, rhythm and sound – in that order! Jacopo Peri, composer of the next opera in the year 1600, *Euridice*, explains that Cavalieri's Recitative is based on dramatic speech. Claudio Monteverdi and an anonymous 1630 guide for an Opera Director, *Il Corago*, similarly focus on text and rhythm, characterising *recitativo* as 'music for acting', 'in show style', 'story in music' and 'action in harmony'.

Since text is the priority, we began by translating Agostino Manni's Italian libretto into Russian, and re-fitting this to the music. Poet and dramaturg Alexey Parin worked together with assistant conductor Ivan Velikanov, literary scholar Katerina Antonenko and Andrew Lawrence-King to preserve Cavalieri's detailed 'word-painting'. Like a painter matching colour and form, the composer matches the meaning of each word to the sound of the music. Text and music alike are full of the strong contrast of *opposto*: good and bad, Soul and Body, high and low, heaven and hell.

This done, we worked through the whole text again, to reconstruct in the Russian language the varied rhythms of Italian verse, sometimes walking, sometimes dancing, and with the characteristic strong-weak cadence that propels the action forwards into the next line.

Rehearsals with the singers and musicians concentrated on these same historical, yet practical priorities of text (clear story-telling), rhythm (which the singers make for themselves, there was no stick-waving conductor in 1600!), and sound. The instruments are divided into four independent groups: cornetto and sackbuts (baroque trombones) represent nobility and seriousness; strings suggest the power of music and dance; reeds are martial; and the whole opera is led by the improvising orchestra of the continuo (harps, theorbos, harpsichord, organ, regal, percussion).

As Cavalieri recommends, we have added polyphonic music at the beginning, a Sinfonia by his Florentine contemporary, Malvezzi. Later in there show there is its *opposto*, an improvised baroque *Ciaccona*, associated in the early 17th-century with wild parties and dancing.

Manni's text considers Time according to Platonic philosophy: the present moment is the fleeting instant that connects past, future and all eternity. 17th-century music counts time by the perfect movement of the stars, by the pulse of the human heartbeat, and by the regular swing of a pendulum, or of the singers' hands. As we hear in Time's first speech, musical rhythm, theatrical action and audience reactions join hands and hearts to honour Cavalieri's drama: at once historic and for all time.