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Early Handel Operas Are Current Again

By JAMES R. OESTREICH

New York a hotbed of early music? No one would have said so 20 years ago (when some of us were saying [the opposite](#)) or even 10 years ago. But a remarkable shift has occurred over the last decade or so, thanks to a web of interlocking factors, including the formation of a curriculum in historical performance at the Juilliard School, the exponential growth of the music program at Trinity Wall Street, the enterprise of groups like [Tenet and the Sebastians](#) and the work of the service organization [Gotham Early Music Scene](#).

Even in the barren years past, there were always imported productions, so something like the superb concert performance of [Handel's opera 'Radamisto'](#) at Carnegie Hall in February — with the English Concert and star singers like David Daniels and Luca Pisaroni, conducted by Harry Bicket — came as no surprise. But a [second "Radamisto"](#) in the same year, and this one homegrown and fully staged? That was a surprise.

In November, Juilliard Opera combined forces with Juilliard415, the orchestra of the historical performance program, in a spare but effective staging of "Radamisto" in the school's Peter Jay Sharp Theater, directed by James Darrah and conducted by Julian Wachner, the moving force behind that surge in Trinity Wall Street's music program. Two singers — Mary Femeinar, soprano, and Virginie Verrez, mezzo-soprano — stood out in a generally fine cast of young performers.

It has been a big year for Handel not only in New York, where things are still wrapping up with the usual crop of "Messiah" performances, but also in Boston, which has long been used as a club to beat New York with when it comes to nurturing a thriving early-music scene. The centerpiece of the biennial Boston Early Music Festival in June was [Handel's first opera 'Almira'](#) in a lavish and wonderful production by Gilbert Blin at the Cutler Majestic Theater.

Notable Handel performances in New York included another exalted import, the dramatic cantata ['Aci, Galatea e Polifemo,' presented in October](#) at Alice Tully Hall as part of Lincoln Center's White Light Festival. Emmanuelle Haïm conducted her splendid period-instrument ensemble, Le Concert d'Astrée, and excellent singers: Lydia Teuscher, soprano; Delphine Galou, mezzo-soprano; and best of all, Laurent Naouri, baritone, as the monstrous one-eyed giant Polyphemus.

Oh, and it was also a big year for Monteverdi in New York, but I'm out of space. There will be more next year, when Tenet and its offshoot Green Mountain Project (named for Monteverdi) initiate a

new [Early Music Festival](#) in New York in June.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: December 29, 2013

An article on Dec. 15 about operas by Handel misspelled the surname of the director of a production of “Radamisto” by the Juilliard Opera and Juilliard415. He is James Darrah, not Darragh.