

**Handel's Divas**  
**London Handel Festival celebrates the women who inspired and sang**  
**Handel's music**



**London Handel Festival 2019 launches with *Berenice* at the newly-reopened  
Linbury Studio Theatre at the Royal Opera House**

**27 March – 29 April 2019**

The 2019 London Handel Festival takes 'Handel's Divas' as its theme and will explore the lives of the famous women singers – the divas of their day who were associated with Handel and for whom he wrote many of his most famous roles.

The divas (a term not coined until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at first entirely complimentary) played an important role in Handel's choice of subject and the development of his musical style. He sought particular female singers, first in Italy and later in Britain, to embody the female roles in his hugely successful operas and oratorios. The 2019 London Handel Festival will pay tribute to the women who inspired and gave life to his music (and occasionally caused opera riots amongst their rival

supporters in London, filling the gossip pages of London newspapers at the time), by presenting a number of show-stopping performances or Handelian masterpieces and lesser-known works, oratorios, recitals and operas, talks and walks.

Samir Savant, Festival Director of the London Handel Festival, said:

*"It is impossible to enjoy Handel's music without thinking of the great women who were his inspiration and whose careers he nurtured - his "divas". The 2019 London Handel Festival will explore the lives of these women, who were amazing role models in their day, attracting devoted fans and huge fame, but often with complicated personal stories behind their public acclaim. Our rich variety of performances will showcase many of the roles Handel wrote for his divas, and we are thrilled to be making our debut at the Royal Opera House as part of their Linbury Studio season with *Berenice* which has not been performed there since Handel's day."*

A highlight of this year's festival is the new staging *Berenice*, a co-production between the London Handel Festival and the Royal Opera House. Sung in a new English translation by Selma Dimitrijevic, it is directed by Adele Thomas and Laurence Cummings, Musical Director of the London Handel Festival, conducts the London Handel Orchestra. The cast features Rachael Lloyd, James Laing, William Berger and Jette Parker Young Artists Jacquelyn Stucker and Patrick Terry. *Berenice* is one of the two **main shows inaugurating the new Linbury Studio Theatre**, which announced its 2019 programme yesterday after two years of heavy building works as part of a major redesign of the iconic Covent Garden venue. *Berenice* hasn't been performed at the Royal Opera House since May 1737, when it premiered at what was then called Covent Garden Theatre in London.

Sarah Crabtree, Creative Producer for the Royal Opera House, said:

*"The Royal Opera House has a rich history of staging Handel's music, with a number of the composer's operas and oratorios having premiered on this site at the first Covent Garden Theatre, including *Berenice*. It is fitting that the opening Season of the new Linbury Theatre includes a collaboration with the London Handel Festival, and I very much look forward to welcoming Laurence Cummings and the musicians of the London Handel Orchestra to the Royal Opera House."*

Before the main Festival begins, a wealth of events will form part of a **Festival Prelude**, including ***Alcina with La Nuova Musica*** and an insight discussion on divas with leading voice experts. The annual performance of ***Messiah*** is now a firm fixture in the Christmas calendar. **Simon Williams** will conduct the Choir of St George's, the London Handel Orchestra and star soloists.

Other major events of the Festival include the rarely-heard oratorio ***Athalia*** with **Anna Devin** taking the lead role, also conducted by Laurence Cummings and performed by the London Handel Orchestra. London Handel Festival Associate Director Adrian Butterfield presents the **serenata *Aci, Galatea & Polifemo at the Wigmore Hall*** and continues his **series of Chandos Anthems** at St Lawrence in Little Stanmore, the church for which Handel wrote them.

Baroque ensemble **Festival Voices** make their London Handel Festival debut with **Handel Remixed**, an evening of music by Handel and his contemporaries featuring a brand new version of *Dixit Dominus*, reimagined for **live performers and DJ** by electronic music producer **Nico Bentley** and the **Pencil Collective**.

The London Handel Festival welcomes for the first time **Le Concert de l'Hostel Dieu** from Lyon with a lesser-known programme of ***Handel & Porpora***, and welcomes back **Opera Settecento** who will present the pasticcio opera ***Venceslao***. The **London Early Opera** and **Early Opera Company** both

present programmes focused on specific Handelian divas, including the famous “**Rival Queens**” – Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni.

Continuing the London Handel Festival’s mission to explore Handel in context by presenting works by his contemporaries, and to nurture and encourage young and unknown talent, as Handel himself did, the London Handel Festival launches a new “festival within a festival”, **Baroque Feast**, which will promote three emerging groups of young musicians – with tickets just £15.

As usual, these performances will be alongside the usual packed calendar of intimate chamber music recitals, lunchtime concerts, walks and talks and the annual international **Handel Singing Competition**, now in its 17th year.