

# Perfume Polytechnic

Exploring olfaction in perfume, art, science & life.

## Smell and Sound 1: A Scented Opera. Perfumer Sarah McCartney scents Handel's *Acis and Galatea*

Posted on November 9, 2015 by FeministConfessional

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*Smell and Sound* is a new series on Perfume Polytechnic, exploring the relationship between smell and sound, including multi-sensory projects created in this field. As a classically trained musician and composer who is also a perfume enthusiast *and* a synaesthete, I am interested to explore the junctions and interconnections between the senses of hearing and smell, and between the art forms of music and scent. Multi-sensory art that engages people in new, corporeal ways is being embraced by artists, perfumers, and even multi-national companies (<https://perfumepolytechnic.wordpress.com/2015/09/07/design-age-dulux-colour-forecast-2016-with-room-fragrances-by-fleurage/>). People are interested more and more in the interconnectedness of things, including creative modalities. As a composer and olfactory blogger, a creative cook, felter, knitter and textile addict, I am often looking for new ways to combine my creative skills. This series is a result of my personal research and will inform my own creative practice in the months and years to come. As always on Perfume Polytechnic, I want to share what I learn *with* you. I hope you find this topic as fascinating as I do.

Sarah McCartney of 4160Tuesdays

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([https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/sml\\_wp\\_20140713\\_11\\_46\\_47\\_pro-2.jpg](https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/sml_wp_20140713_11_46_47_pro-2.jpg)).

*Sarah McCartney*

Perfumer, author and classically-trained musician Sarah McCartney is no stranger to multi-sensory work that involves scent. The 4160Tuesdays perfumer has worked with BitterSweet (<http://www.bittersuite.org.uk/bio/>), an organisation that hosts multi-sensory classical music concerts. For one concert that Sarah was involved in, the Phaedrus ensemble played Debussy's String Quartet in G in a multi-sensory performance involving touch, movement, taste, smell (Sarah's scents) and sound. This video featuring snippets of the performance and the audience's reaction is fun, uplifting and moving. Please spend a few minutes watching it:

## Debussy's String Quartet in G - BitterSuite Trailer



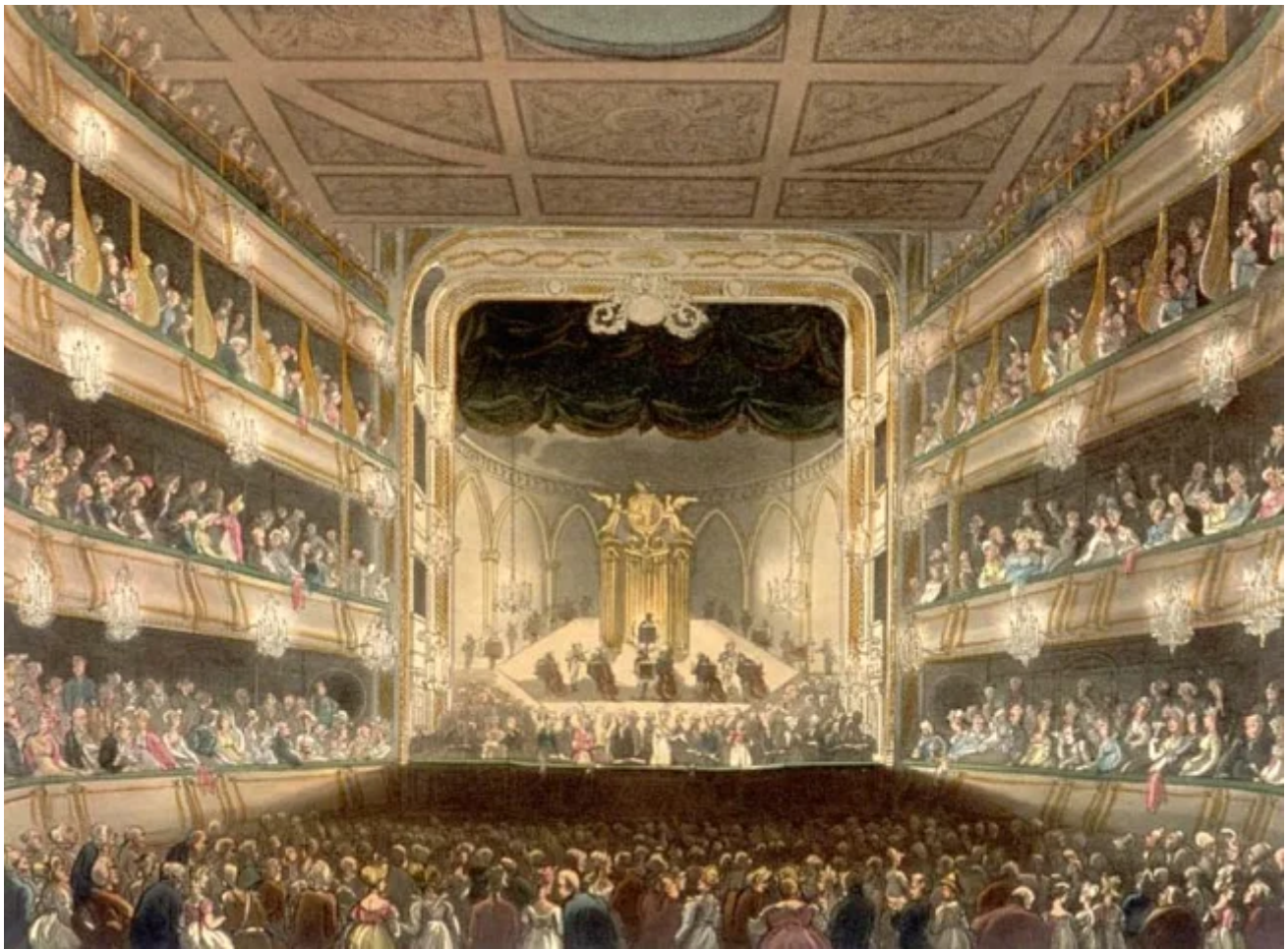
Sarah has also worked with poet Claire Trévien (<http://www.clairetrevien.co.uk/>), to scent her one-woman show *The Shipwrecked House*. Sarah created the scent of a house and the sea for the show and you can read here about some of the creative processes she used (<https://livetheatrenewcastle.wordpress.com/2014/10/24/the-shipwrecked-house-the-scents/>) while making the scents for *The Shipwrecked House*.

Sarah has worked on other multi-sensory arts projects as well, and you can read about them all over at the 4160Tuesdays website (<http://www.4160tuesdays.com/arts.html>).

## A Scented Opera: Handel's *Acis and Galatea*

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[https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/covent\\_garden\\_theatre\\_edited.jpg](https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/covent_garden_theatre_edited.jpg).  
*A drawing of Covent Garden (the Royal Opera House) in London. Created in 1808, just before the building burnt down and got rebuilt. This is how an 18th Century opera house looked. Public domain.*

Last Monday, November 2, perfumer Sarah McCartney scented a performance of Baroque composer George Frideric Handel's opera *Acis and Galatea* at St John's Smith Square. This might seem an odd concept to modern-day opera-goers, who are used to sanitised spaces often scented with little more than the pleasant perfumes of patrons. However, it's important to remember that going to the opera in Handel's day was a smelly business: accidentally, because of the repulsive smells that abounded in Handel's pre-sanitised 18th Century London, *and* intentionally: pleasant smells and fragrances were used to mask and detract from the repulsive smells of everyday life and the unwashed.

Sarah McCartney of 4160Tuesdays says:

*"A few years ago I read about the way early music was scented and wanted to give it a try, bearing in mind that people's exposure to smell has changed completely over the last 150 years.*

*In Handel's time scents abounded – from animals, lack of public hygiene, both personal and civic, and from expensive perfumes used by wealthy individuals and establishments, including the church.*

*An opera would have been intensely scented, both accidentally and on purpose.*

*Posies drowned out the stench of the street; dried flowers and incense created a suitable atmosphere, the wealthy powdered their hair and clothes with costly iris root, and kept deterred fleas and moths with patchouli.*

*People generally assume that naturals are safer, but in fact it's the other way round.*

*For this project I'm using pure synthetics to avoid even the slightest possibility of any kind of allergic reaction.*

*Rather than aiming for an authentic 18<sup>th</sup> century fragrance – which 21<sup>st</sup> Century audiences would find completely intolerable – I have created three light background scents to alter the mood, literally changing the atmosphere."*

Source: St John's Smith Square website (<http://www.sjss.org.uk/events/la-nuova-musica-1>).

If you want to read more about the opera and how Sarah's scents were received by the audience, have a read of Sarah's fascinating blog post [Greek Gods & Monsters](http://www.4160tuesdays.com/blog/read_135300/13-greek-gods-monsters.html) ([http://www.4160tuesdays.com/blog/read\\_135300/13-greek-gods-monsters.html](http://www.4160tuesdays.com/blog/read_135300/13-greek-gods-monsters.html)). It's so comprehensive and interesting that I decided to link to her post rather than write anything else about the project myself.

Sarah was also interviewed on BBC Radio 3 about the project, and you can listen to the broadcast online (and download it if you're in the UK) for a limited period. The broadcast expires on Saturday the 28th November, so get your skates on! You can hear extracts from Handel's opera as well as listen to Sarah and musicians from the performance speak about the project. Click here to access the broadcast (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06kcn56>), and listen from the start of the program.

I hope you've enjoyed reading about Sarah McCartney's multi-sensory work as a perfumer and finding out about her recent, scented version of Handel's Opera *Acis and Galatea*. Stay tuned for more interesting posts in the new *Smell and Sound* series, which I will publish regularly over the next few months.

POSTED IN SMELL AND ART, SMELL AND SOUND | TAGGED 17TH CENTURY SMELLS, 4160TUESDAYS ACIS AND GALATEA, 4160TUESDAYS BLOG, 4160TUESDAYS PERFUMER, BBC RADIO 3, BITTERSWEET MULTI-SENSORY CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS, CLAIRE TREVIEN THE SHIPWRECKED HOUSE, CLAIRE TREVIEN THE SHIPWRECKED HOUSE SARAH MCCARTNEY, HANDEL ACIS AND GALATEA 2 NOVEMBER 2015, HANDEL ACIS AND GALATEA SCENTED, HANDEL ACIS AND GALATEA ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE, HANDEL ACIS AND GALATEA ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE PERFUME, HANDEL ACIS AND GALATEA ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE SARAH MCCARTNEY, HANDEL ACIS AND

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