

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 18, 2013



CONTACT: Kathleen Fay, Executive Director | Boston Early Music Festival
161 First Street, Suite 202 | Cambridge, MA 02142
617-661-1812 | kathy@bemf.org | www.bemf.org

BOSTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES 2013 FESTIVAL OPERATIC CENTERPIECE, HANDEL'S *ALMIRA*

Cambridge, MA – January 18, 2013 – The **Boston Early Music Festival** has announced plans for the 2013 Festival fully-staged Operatic Centerpiece *Almira*, the first opera by the celebrated and beloved Baroque composer, **George Frideric Handel** (1685–1759), in its first modern-day historically-conceived production.

Written when he was only 19, *Almira* tells a story of intrigue and romance in the court of the Queen of Castile, in a dazzling parade of entertainment and delight which Handel would often borrow from during his later career. One of the world's leading Handel scholars, Professor **Ellen T. Harris** of MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), has said that BEMF is the “perfect and only” organization to take on Handel's earliest operatic masterpiece, as it requires BEMF's unique collection of artistic talents: the musical leadership, precision, and expertise of BEMF Artistic Directors Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs; the stimulating and informed stage direction and magnificent production designs of BEMF Stage Director in Residence Gilbert Blin; “the world's finest continuo team, which you have”; the highly skilled BEMF Baroque Dance Ensemble to bring to life *Almira*'s substantial dance sequences; the all-star BEMF Orchestra; and a wide range of superb voices.

BEMF will offer four fully-staged performances of Handel's *Almira* from **June 9 to 16, 2013** at the **Cutler Majestic Theatre at Emerson College** (219 Tremont Street, Boston, MA, USA), followed by three performances at the **Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center** (14 Castle Street, Great Barrington, MA, USA) on **June 21, 22, and 23, 2013**; all performances will be sung in German with English subtitles. Tickets will be available through the Boston Early Music Festival Box Office starting June 1, 2012 at **WWW.BEMF.ORG** or **617-661-1812**; tickets will also be available through the Box Office at the Cutler Majestic Theatre at **AESTages.org** or **617-824-8000**.

“We are thrilled to mount Handel's pioneering opera in North America, in its first fully staged and historically conceived production in modern times,” states BEMF Executive Director **Kathleen Fay**. “BEMF's international team of directors is uniquely experienced in bringing Baroque opera to life, in lush, innovative, and truly breathtaking fully staged performances. *Almira* promises a rare glimpse at a very different Handel from the wealthy London virtuoso so familiar to modern audiences.”

Leading the BEMF *Almira* production will be: three-time Grammy-nominated **Artistic Co-Directors Paul O'Dette** and **Stephen Stubbs** (USA); **Stage Director and Set Designer Gilbert Blin** (France); **Costume Designer Anna Watkins** (United Kingdom); **Choreographers Caroline Copeland and Carlos Fittante** (USA); and **Lighting Designer Lenore Doxsee** (USA). Past collaborations by members of this artistic team have earned unprecedented critical acclaim, with the 2011 BEMF opera *Niobe, Regina di Tebe* by Steffani heralded as “the opera production I've been waiting for” (*The Boston Phoenix*) and “breathtakingly beautiful and dramatically compelling” (*City Journal*), and the 2009 sold-out run of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* declared “a magnificent, illuminating production” (*The New York Times*) and “theatrically vibrant and musically superb” (*The Boston Globe*).

Starring in the title role of *Almira* and making her Boston Early Music Festival début, will be soprano **Ulrike Hofbauer**. A native of Bavaria heralded for her “expressive passion” (*Basellandschaftliche Zeitung*), Ulrike Hofbauer specializes in Baroque vocal and operatic repertoire; her busy performance career includes regular collaborations with ensembles such as Collegium Vocale Gent, L’Arpeggiata, La Chapelle Rhénane, L’Orfeo Barockorchester, and Cantus Cölln – among others – and under the direction of such esteemed artists as Andrew Parrott, Andrea Marcon, Gustav Leonhardt, Philippe Herreweghe and Christina Pluhar.

In addition to Ms. Cangemi, BEMF has assembled another extraordinary and international cast of eight (8) vocalists, including two beloved BEMF artists in back-by-popular demand performances: soprano **Amanda Forsythe** (USA) as the princess Edilia; and tenor **Colin Balzer** (Canada) as the mysterious orphan Fernando. Ms. Forsythe performed the title role in BEMF’s 2011 production of Steffani’s *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*, and was praised by the *New York Times* for using “her shapely soprano to superb effect.” Mr. Balzer was also most recently featured in *Niobe*, earning acclaim from *Cleveland Classical* for his “stellar” performance. Completing the cast, will be: **Christian Immler** (Germany) as *Consalvo*; **Zachary Wilder** (USA) as *Osman*; **Tyler Duncan** (Canada) as Raymondo; **Valerie Vinzant** (USA) as Bellante; and **Jason McStoots** (USA) as *Tabarco*. Joining the cast of nine (9), will be the internationally acclaimed **Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra** and the **BEMF Baroque Dance Ensemble**, trained by **BEMF Ballet Mistress Melinda Sullivan**.

In 1703, an 18-year-old George Frideric Handel set out for the cosmopolitan city of Hamburg to start his musical career in the orchestra at the city’s flourishing opera house. Towards the end of 1704, the director of the Hamburg Opera, composer Reinhard Keiser, tapped Handel for an opportunity to compose his own opera. The result, *Almira*, was a great success with Hamburg audiences, combining German, Italian, and French influences into a crowd-pleasing spectacle of dance, comedy, and drama. Even at this young age, Handel shows the genius that would make him a star in Italy and London. Numerous musical ideas and passages from *Almira* would find their way into Handel’s later works. The libretto by Friedrich Christian Feustking is itself based on the libretto by Giulio Pancieri for a Venice production in 1691. It tells the story of Almira, the newly crowned Queen of Castile, and her trials and follies in a quest for love. A cast of equally lovelorn characters join her to navigate jealousies, duels, dungeons, and misunderstandings on their way to a joyously happy ending.

Described as “heaven...for early music fans” and “a concentrated celebration of everything from period-instrument recitals to Baroque opera” by *The New York Times*, the **Boston Early Music Festival** will also feature concert performances by the world’s leading soloists, chamber ensembles, and the Grammy-nominated BEMF Orchestra. Inspired by the operatic centerpiece, the theme for the 17th Festival will be **Youth: Genius and Folly**. The Festival’s Artistic Directors and distinguished artists will explore evolution and revolution in music that spans centuries. Alongside a full schedule of concerts and opera performances, will be dozens of **Fringe Concerts** presented by artists ranging from college collegiums to consummate professional ensembles; numerous informative **Symposia** and **Masterclasses**; and the world-famous **Exhibition**, North America’s largest early music trade show comprised of instrument makers, schools of music, publishers, societies of historical performance, and the **BEMF CD Store**.

The 2013 Boston Early Music Festival is presented with support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, ConstellationCenter, 99.5 All Classical Radio Boston, Harpsichord Clearing House, Zuckermann Harpsichords International, National Endowment for the Arts, The Gregory E. Bulger Foundation, and U.S. Trust/Bank of America Private Wealth Management. Dates, times, venues, artists, and programs are subject to change. For more information, images, press tickets, or to schedule an interview, please contact Kathleen Fay at 617-661-1812 or email kathy@bemf.org.

#####