FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Boston Early Music Festival releases TENTH Baroque Opera CD, Handel’s Almira

Cambridge, MA – The Boston Early Music Festival has released its tenth Baroque opera recording, George Frideric Handel’s Almira, on the German label cpo (Classic Produktion Osnabrück). GRAMMY Award-winning Musical Directors Paul O’Dette and Stephen Stubbs lead an outstanding cast and the all-star Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra in Handel’s first opera. Originally presented at the June 2013 Festival, Almira tells a vivid story of intrigue and romance at the Court of Castile. Written when Handel was only 19 years old, Almira already illustrates the genius that would cement his legacy as one of history’s greatest composers.

“Every moment of Almira is a musical gem in its own right, but they are masterfully woven together to create a sweeping sense of drama from beginning to end,” say Musical Directors Paul O’Dette and Stephen Stubbs. “Experiencing the boundless imagination of this young composer’s first work transforms our image of Handel from the wealthy London impresario into something much more like our image of the young Mozart.”

In January of 2018, BEMF artists gathered in Bremen, Germany at the acoustically superb Sendesaal (former site of Radio Bremen) for the recording. The stellar cast features internationally recognized soprano Emőke Baráth in the title role. Returning cast members from the 2013 performances include brilliant soprano Amanda Forsythe as the princess Edilia; tenor Colin Balzer as the mysterious orphan Fernando; baritone Christian Immler as Almira’s guardian, Consalvo; and Zachary Wilder as Consalvo’s caddish son Osman. Completing the cast are tenor Jan Kobow as Tabarco and recent GRAMMY nominees baritone Jesse Blumberg as Raymondo and soprano Teresa Wakim as Bellante. Concertmaster Robert Mealy leads the 32-member BEMF Orchestra, while GRAMMY Award winner Renate Wolter-Seevers returns as Recording Producer, BEMF Opera Director Gilbert Blin serves as Drama Coach, and Kathleen Fay serves as Executive Producer for the CD.

In 1703, an 18-year-old George Frideric Handel set out for the cosmopolitan city of Hamburg to join the orchestra at the city’s flourishing opera house. After only a year with the company, Handel was invited to compose his own opera. The result, Almira, was a great success, combining German, Italian, and French influences into a crowd-pleasing spectacle of comedy, drama, and dance. The libretto by Friedrich Christian Feustking follows Almira, the newly crowned Queen of Castile, in her trials and follies in the quest for love. A cast of equally lovelorn characters join her to navigate duels, dungeons, jealousy, and misunderstanding, on their way to a joyously happy ending. With a dazzling parade of entertainment and delight which Handel would often borrow from during his later career, Almira already showed the genius that would make the composer a star.
ABOUT THE BEMF RECORDING PROJECT
With the goal of capturing the exceptional work of the Baroque Opera Project, BEMF initiated an effort to record its acclaimed Baroque Operas in 2005. This commitment to preservation has produced ten celebrated opera recordings and attracted the attention of the international community in the form of numerous awards and accolades, including a GRAMMY Award for Best Opera Recording for our 2014 CD release of Marc-Antoine Charpentier’s *La Descente d’Orphée aux Enfers* and *La Couronne de Fleurs* and five more GRAMMY nominations. BEMF recordings have also been nominated for—and won—ECHO Klassik nominations, Gramophone awards, the *Diapason d’Or de l’Année*, and *Gramophone Magazine*’s Recording of the Month. The Recording Project was expanded to include nonoperatic Baroque vocal works, with recordings of the chamber duets of Agostino Steffani (2017) and Johann Sebastiani’s *Matthäus Passion* (2018).

ABOUT THE BOSTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL:
Recognized as the preeminent early music presenter and Baroque opera producer in North America, the Boston Early Music Festival (BEMF) has been credited with securing Boston’s reputation as “America’s early music capital” (*The Boston Globe*). Founded in 1981, BEMF offers diverse programs and activities, including one GRAMMY Award-winning and four GRAMMY Award-nominated opera recordings, an annual concert series that brings early music’s brightest stars to the Boston and New York concert stages, and a biennial week-long Festival and Exhibition recognized as the “world’s leading festival of early music” (*The Times*, London). The 21st Boston Early Music Festival will take place from June 6–13, 2021, and will feature the fully staged North American premiere of Henry Desmarest’s *Circé*. BEMF’s Artistic Leadership includes Artistic Directors Paul O’Dette and Stephen Stubbs, Opera Director Gilbert Blin, Orchestra Director Robert Mealy, and Dance Director Melinda Sullivan.

Boston Early Music Festival is grateful for support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, National Endowment for the Arts, Constellation Charitable Foundation, WGBH Radio Boston, as well as a number of generous foundations and individuals from around the world.

For more information, images, or to schedule an interview, please contact Kathleen Fay at 617-661-1812 or email kathy@bemf.org.

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