FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Boston Early Music Festival presents “Looking Back at Orpheus” with streaming broadcasts of Monteverdi’s Orfeo and Charpentier’s La Descente d’Orphée on Thanksgiving weekend

Cambridge, MA – The GRAMMY Award-winning Boston Early Music Festival Chamber Opera Series returns on Thanksgiving weekend with “Looking Back at Orpheus,” featuring two broadcasts of chamber opera productions inspired by the Orpheus legend. Presented free-of-charge on BEMF’s YouTube channel (youtube.com/bostonearly/), this will be the first time the Boston Early Music Festival has publicly shared complete archival video of their critically acclaimed productions. The two-night streaming event includes the June 2015 performance of Monteverdi’s Orfeo and the November 2011 performance of Charpentier’s La Descente d’Orphée aux Enfers and La Couronne de Fleurs and will follow a two-week marathon of new video content being created for this special event. Other highlights include documentaries on the making of each production, video lectures, and a 30-minute excerpt from BEMF’s 2017 fully-staged production of Campra’s Le Carnaval de Venise, featuring an Orpheus-themed “opera-within-an-opera” attended by the characters of the larger story.

“Since 2008, the BEMF Chamber Opera Series has become a highly anticipated feast during Thanksgiving weekend as well as a thrilling opening to the Boston Holiday arts season with eye-catching presentations of operatic masterpieces,” says BEMF Executive Director Kathleen Fay. “As theatres and concert halls remain silent in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, we are determined to maintain this cherished tradition. Further, we are committed to compensating over 70 BEMF artists – directors, singers, instrumentalists, dancers, and scholars – who participated in these unique productions and brought them to life. Thanks to generous contributions from many BEMF fans, our broadcasts will be freely available to all.”

Both productions are led by BEMF’s GRAMMY Award-winning Musical Directors Paul O’Dette and Stephen Stubbs, Stage Director Gilbert Blin, Concertmaster Robert Mealy, and Choreographer Melinda Sullivan, and feature the all-star BEMF Vocal and Chamber Ensembles with gorgeous costumes designed by Anna Watkins. GRAMMY Award-winning tenor Aaron Sheehan has the distinction of playing the role of Orpheus in both Chamber Opera productions as well as in the excerpt from Campra’s Le Carnaval de Venise. Monteverdi’s Orfeo will be broadcast on Friday, November 27, 2020 at 8pm while the Charpentier double bill will be broadcast on Sunday, November 29, 2020 at 3pm. Each broadcast will remain available until Thursday, December 10, 2020. These broadcasts will be freely available, but donations will be encouraged and sincerely appreciated. Patrons can visit BEMF.org/support to learn more about making a tax-deductible contribution to BEMF.
MONTEVERDI’S ORFEO
Widely regarded as the first great opera, Claudio Monteverdi’s Orfeo features one of opera’s most adored stories, in which the heroic Orfeo endures the tragic death of his beloved Euridice, and travels to the underworld to plead for her return. Breathtaking in its beauty and variety, this masterpiece defined an art form still in its infancy, with rich instrumental colors, dramatic word painting, and a virtuosic opulence of tone and texture. This broadcast will feature archival video of BEMF’s June 2015 production, where Orfeo was presented alongside Monteverdi’s Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria and L’incoronazione di Poppea as part of a groundbreaking presentation of all three of Monteverdi’s surviving operas. Tenor Aaron Sheehan (Orfeo) and soprano Mireille Asselin (Euridice) lead an outstanding cast featuring GRAMMY-nominee Teresa Wakim (Proserpina), bass-baritone Matthew Brook (Charon), and baritone Marco Bussi (Plutone), alongside dancer Carlos Fittante and 18 instrumentalists from the BEMF Chamber Ensemble and Dark Horse Consort. Lighting Design is by Lenore Doxsee and videography is by Kathy Wittman of Ball Square Films with audio by GRAMMY Award-winning sound engineer Antonio Oliart Ros of WCRB Classical Radio Boston.

CHARPENTIER’S LA DESCENTE D’ORPHÉE & LA COURONNE DE FLEURS
Two miniature masterpieces by the great French Baroque composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier were featured in BEMF’s original November 2011 Chamber Opera Series production that The Boston Globe praised for its “zest and polish in equal measure”. La Descente d’Orphée aux Enfers tells the famous story of Orpheus descending into the underworld to rescue his beloved Euridice using his musical charms, ending just as the pair begin their ill-fated escape. La Couronne de Fleurs, based on a text by Molière, depicts a musical contest in tribute to Louis XIV: shepherds vie for a crown of flowers from the goddess Flora for the most beautiful and eloquent aria. BEMF’s 2014 studio recording of these works won a GRAMMY Award for Best Opera Recording. The cast of 9 singers is led by tenor Aaron Sheehan (Orphée) and is joined by 4 Baroque dancers and 10 instrumentalists of the BEMF Chamber Ensemble. Videography is by Kathy Wittman of Ball Square Films with audio by recording engineer Frank Cunningham of World Premier Recordings.

MORE NEW VIDEOS AND ASSOCIATED EVENTS
The two streaming broadcasts will represent the culmination of a marathon of new video content and special virtual events where audiences can engage with BEMF artists. Highlights will include new documentary features showcasing the productions’ development from rehearsals to the stage, additional performance excerpts, discussions with BEMF artistic leadership, and more. Audiences who join us for the premiere of each broadcast can chat with special guests while they watch along.

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 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 five 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 weeklong Festival and Exhibition recognized as the “world’s leading festival of early music” (The Times, London). 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.

The Boston Early Music Festival is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, National Endowment for the Arts, Constellation Charitable Foundation, and WCRB Classical Radio Boston, as well as a number of generous foundations and individuals from around the world.

For more information, please contact Kathleen Fay at kathy@bemf.org.

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